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An Unmistakable Trace of Colour:
Racializing Children in Segregation-era Cape Town, 1908-1933

On the 19th September 1933 the case secretary of the Cape Town Society for the Protection of Child Life wrote to the city's resident magistrate regarding a girl named Jessie Cavill.[1] Jessie was then in an industrial school in the Transvaal; her step-mother, Mrs Marsland, had applied for her release and the Society had instigated police investigations into Marsland's character and home circumstances in order to establish whether Jessie should be returned to her care. In her letter to the magistrate, the case secretary summarised the police investigation. Besides noting the basic economic circumstances of the home – Marsland was earning £5 a month working at a boot factory, her husband £8 a month as a handyman – the Secretary also mentioned Marsland's three other children: Eileen, Harold, and Margaret. While both the girls were living at home, Harold was at an orphanage on the outskirts of Cape Town. In the margins of the letter a hand-written pencilled annotation emphasised the fact that the orphanage was a 'coloured institution', while a second annotation indicated that Eileen was attending a 'European school'. The letter concluded:

> Some of the children are passing as European but others are classed as Coloured…in view of the fact that Cavill has been brought up in European surroundings the girl would not stand the

[1] The research that went towards this essay was enabled by a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) grant: AH/L004801/1. Earlier versions of the paper were given at the Transgressing Racial Boundaries conference at the University of Cape Town in November 2014 and at the Southern African Historical Association Biennial Conference at Stellenbosch in June 2015. I am grateful to Bodhi Kar and Deborah Posel for their help in convening the first of those events, to participants for their discussion and to Peter Anderson, Will Gould, Giles Jackson, Jean Smith and Kim Wagner – as well as to the journal's three anonymous reviewers – for their comments on the paper.

> same chance in life if she returned to the family and mixed with colour, and we beg, therefore, to recommend that Cavill should not return home.[3]

Mrs. Marsland's request to have her step-daughter returned to her was subsequently refused. At the foot of the Secretary's letter, however, further hand-written annotations by Society staff continued to query the racial status of Marsland's children. 'How can it be,' asked a Miss England, 'that some are treated as coloured and some as European?' 'The family is mixed,' responded a Mr. Rude. 'One child' he went on, 'was decidedly coloured'. Squeezed into the remaining empty space at the very bottom of the page, Rude continued: 'Both parents would have passed for European. I think the colour is on the father's side. The girl has a European appearance'.

In emphasising her European upbringing and recommending that she be prevented from returning home, the Society set Jessie on her future life course as a white South African. Yet the confusion over her racial identity points to the failure of racial categories to contain the essentially transgressive quality of family relations. Rude's statement that the family was mixed conceded the fact of one particular family's racially ambiguous character at the same time as it posited the family as a sealed and finite social unit. Long before the apartheid state embarked on its endeavour to classify South Africa's population into fixed and permanent racial groups, Cape Town's society for the Protection of Child Life – the first and most influential child welfare organisation in South Africa – was at work racializing the city's population. Many thousands of other Capetonians, who during the early years of National Party rule were in their thirties and forties, had been constituted as 'white' or 'coloured' some twenty or thirty years before.

[3]Cape Town Archives Repository, 1 (CT) 54, M. L. Becher, SPCL, to Magistrate, 19 September 1933.

This essay explores how this process worked. The emergence of an international child welfare movement around the turn of the twentieth century, we know, was intimately bound up with the racial politics of European imperialism.[4] Despite a now extensive historiography, however, historians have for the most part failed to consult what are perhaps the most illuminating sources that we have for shedding light on this history: the many thousands of case records generated by charitable institutions and government departments dedicated to the welfare of children.[5] What they reveal is an encounter, between agents of child welfare on the one hand and the worlds that they sought to transform on the other – and between racial knowledge formulated, as it were, from above and the racialisation of everyday life on the ground. To the discourses, ideologies and institutional histories that we already know much about, the case records allow us to populate this history – with children themselves, their families and the wider social networks of which they were a part.

I

Miscegenation in Cape Town

[4] Margaret Jacobs, White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Materialism and the Removal of Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940 (Lincoln NE, 2009) Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, Child, Nation, Race and Empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1914 (Manchester, 2010); Ellen Boucher, *Empire's Children: Child Emigration, Welfare and the Decline o*f the British World, 1869-1967 (Cambridge, 2014); Shirlene Robinson and Simon Sleight, eds. Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World (Basingstoke, 2016); Christina Firpo, The Uprooted: Race, Children and Imperialism in French Indochina, 1890-1980 (Honolulu, 2016); David M. Pomfret, Youth and Empire: Trans-colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia (Stanford, 2016).

[5] Histories that do use case records, albeit in an American context, include Linda Gordon, Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence (London, 1989) and E. Wayne Carp, Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption (Harvard, 1998).

Across the European colonial empires race worked not simply to justify the domination of certain groups of people over others but to constitute people as belonging to groups to begin with.[6] Yet the construction of race was always unstable. This is because, however much it varied across time and space, racial differentiation always relied upon a range of other indices for computing difference. In colonial Africa these included ideas around mental, moral and physiological capacity, ideas that connected limitations in human ability and behaviour to limitations in social, economic and political status.[7] At the same time, race was held to be physically self-evident, amenable to easy identification with reference to bodily characteristics – skin colour and hair texture being the most often cited. Race was constructed in terms of colour and character – or surface and substance in the words of Clifford Geertz.[8] In ideal terms, these two dimensions were compatible and consistent: problems emerged

[6] Race figures in some form and with varying degrees of analytic attention in almost every work of imperial and colonial history. Major contributions include Edward Said, Orientalism (London, 1978); Paul B. Rich, Race and Empire in British Politics (Cambridge, 1986); Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge (Princeton, 1996); Catherine Hall, Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867 (Cambridge, 2002); R.J.C. Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (London, 2005); Tony Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire (Basingstoke, 2006); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men*'s Countries and the International* Challenge of Racial Equality (Cambridge, 2008); Thomas McCarthy, Race, Empire and the Idea of Human Development (Cambridge, 2009); Jonathan Glassman, War of Words, War of Stone: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar (Bloomington, 2011).

[7] Megan Vaughan, Curing Their Ills: Colonial Medicine and African Illness (Stanford, 1991); Saul Dubow, Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa (Cambridge, 1995); Helen Tilley, Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950 (Chicago, 2011); Erik Linstrum, Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire (Harvard, 2016).

[8] Clifford Geertz, 'Culture War', in Available Light: Anthropological Topics on Philosophical Topics (Princeton, 2000).

when people failed to behave as their skin colour suggested that they should. Hence the intractable nature of debates over the 'decivilised white man' or the 'detribalised native'.[9]

Whereas this underlying disparity – between the theory of race and its social practice – was for contemporaries a problem to be corrected, for historians it has presented a germane and productive analytical space. Because the gap between prescription and practice was endemic, colonial regimes were forever at work attempting to craft afresh their racial taxonomies within the 'intimate frontiers' of colonial lives.[10] Yet racial knowledge was never

[9] On the former, see Linda Colley, Captives: Britain, Empire and the World: 1600-1850 (London, 2003); Thomas Muller, *Colonial Cambodia's 'Bad Frenchmen':* The Rise of French Rule and the Life of Thomas Caraman, 1840-85 (London,2006); Harald Fischer-Tiné, Low and Licentious Europeans: Race, Class and *'White Subalternity' in Colonial India* (Delhi, 2009); Sarmistha De, Marginal Europeans in Colonial India, 1860–1920 (Kolkata, 2008); Patrick Brantlinger, Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians (Ithaca, 2011), ; *Satoshi Mizutani, The Meaning of White: Race, Class and the "Domiciled" Community in India, 1858*-1930 (Oxford, 2011); John Strachan, 'From Poverty to Wretchedness: Albert Camus and the Psychology of the Pieds Noirs', Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, xiv (2013). For the South African context, see Robert Morrell (ed.), White But Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 188-1940 (Pretoria, 1992); Philip Bonner, 'South African Society and Culture, 1910-1948' in Robert Ross, Anne Mager and Bill Nasson (eds.), The Cambridge History of South Africa, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2011), ii; Neil Roos, 'Alcohol Panic, Social Engineering and Some Reflections on the Management of Whites in Early Apartheid Society, 1948-1960', The Historical Journal, lviii (2015). The classic theoretical treatment of the figure of the 'detribalised native' remains Homi Bhaba, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', October, xxviii (1984).

[10] On intimate frontiers, see Albert L. Hurtado, Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender and Culture in Old California (Alberquerque, 1999) and Ann L. Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule (Berkely, 2002). Scholarship exploring the South African state's attempted control of racial subjectivities includes Karen Jochelson, The Colour of Disease: Syphilis and Racism in South Africa, 1880-1950 (Basingstoke, 2001); Susanne M. Klausen, Race, Maternity and the Politics of Birth Control in South Africa,

simply imposed from above. The knock on the door announcing the arrival of a Society inspector, as with the return of the police car to its place across the street: these were aspect of day to day life, not intrusions into it. Nor did people merely put up with the attentions of welfare workers or the CID. Often they prompted or guided their investigations. Children, parents, relations and friends, not to mention antagonists and rivals, all contributed to the history of a case.

Racializing children, therefore, reflected both the agency of local informants and the mediating work that investigators performed in seeking out and recording information. Writing of the 1932 Carnegie Poor White Commission, Grace Davie stressed the importance of commissioners' intuitive understanding. Commissioners knew the value of everyday knowledge and sought to incorporate into their own writing those 'unconscious or unspoken' ways by which people were sorted – and sorted themselves – into groups.[11] In order to process a case as a case, however, welfare workers had to channel those unconscious or unspoken forms of knowledge into unequivocal racial categories. This essay proceeds from this basic contradiction, between the category 'Coloured' and the suggestion of colour – and between the idea of race as clear and unambiguous and a social terrain that was anything but.

1910-39 (Basingstoke, 2004) and Tiffany F. Jones, Psychiatry, Mental Institutions and the Man in Apartheid South Africa (New York, 2012).

[11] Grace Davie, Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A History of Human Science, 1855-2005 (Cambridge, 2015), 86. For the global significance of the Carnegie Commission, see Tiffany Willoughby Herald, Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability (Oakland, 2015); Edward John Bottomley, 'Transnational Governmentality and the "poor white" in Early Twentieth Century South Africa', Journal of Historical Geography, liv (2016)

The suggestive power of a touch or trace of colour resonated in colonial societies globally but its configuration in what follows was particular to the Cape.[12] Founded in the mid-seventeenth century by the Dutch East India Company, the initial function of the Cape settlement was as a refreshment station, servicing ships sailing from Europe to East Asia. Cape Town quickly grew, however, into the commercial hub for an expanding settler colony. Its economy was based, crucially, on the labour of slaves, imported from East Africa, Madagascar, India and East Asia and numbering over 36,000 by 1834 when emancipation was enacted, as well as indentured Khoesan peoples from Cape Town's immediate interior.[26] From the beginning of the colony settler men had sex with slave and Khoesan women. It is principally this deep history of racial mixing – what contemporaries understood as 'miscegenation' – that made attempts by the state in the twentieth century to forge clear and unambiguous racial categories so difficult to achieve.

By that point, the Cape had been taken over by the British and many of the Dutch descended settlers (or Boers as they were known), had migrated north to establish

[12] For other contexts see Owen White, Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895-1960 (Oxford, 1999); Lucy Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', Gender and History, xvii (2005); Martha Hodes, 'Fractions and Fictions in the United States Census of 1890' in Ann L. Stoler, ed., Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History (Durham, NC, 2006); Damon Salesa, Racial Crossings: Race, Intermarriage, and the Victorian British Empire (Oxford, 2011); Carina E. Ray, Crossing the Colour Line: Race, Sex and the Contested Politics of Colonialism in Ghana (Ohio, 2016)

[26] From a considerable literature, see Robert Ross, Cape of Torments: Slavery and Resistance in South Africa (London, 1983); Nigel Worden and Clifton Crais (eds.), Breaking the Chains: Slavery and its Legacy in the Nineteenth Century Cape Colony (Johannesburg, 1994); Pamela Scully, Liberating the Family: Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the rural Western Cape (Oxford, 1997); Wayne Dooling, Slavery, Emancipation and Colonial Rule in South Africa (Scottsville, 2007); R. L. Watson, Slave Emancipation and Racial Attitudes in Nineteenth-Century South Africa (Cambridge, 2012).

independent republics across the Orange and Vaal rivers. In 1910 a united South African state joined the two British colonies, the Cape and Natal, with the two Boer republics. The problem of establishing racial boundaries had been exacerbated, meanwhile, by the effects of rapid industrialisation during the final third of the nineteenth century. The discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1867 and the world's largest deposits of gold in the Transvaal in 1886 brought many thousands of new immigrants to Cape Town. A high proportion were single men: the majority had sailed from Britain but others came from elsewhere in the British imperial world – from Latin America, the United States, Australia and New Zealand – and from across continental Europe.

Many of these men were transient, lacking skills, capital and social connections. Without family networks in Cape Town, a significant proportion married, cohabited with or had children with local women, some of whom were recognised by authorities as white but others of whom were perceived as 'Coloured' to varying degrees.[27] Successive waves of economic depression, compounded by the effects of the South African War (1899-1902),

[27] The changing profile of Cape Town's population, and in particular the high proportion of single, British immigrant men is evident from the Society's case records but is corroborated by William Beinart, Twentieth Century South Africa (Oxford,1994); 73-74; Vivian Bickford Smith, Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: Group Identity and Social Practice, 1875-1902 (Cambridge, 1995); Vivian Bickford Smith, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden (eds.), Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History (Cape Town, 1999); James Belich, Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo World (Oxford, 2009); 379-82; Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, Migration and Empire (Oxford, 2010), 122-36; Charles van Onselen, Showdown at the Red Lion: The Life and Times of Jack McLoughlin, 1859-1910 (Johannesburg, 2015).

forced a new awareness of the impoverished state of recently urbanised 'poor whites'.[28] As the population of Cape Town increased, from 45,000 in 1875 to 170,000 by 1904, so did the disquieting effect of racially mixed urban slums.[29] In 1902 Cape Town's black African population was removed from the city on the grounds of sanitation but in the old working class districts that followed the line of the railway from the city centre through its industrial zone towards the southern suburbs, racial mixing – including social and sexual intercourse, residential integration, marriage and cohabitation – in fact increased.[30]

The rise of eugenicist thinking at the start of the new century added a further dimension to white South Africans' anxieties around miscegenation. To Cape Town's bourgeoisie, colour represented contamination – not difference itself but a threat to the very logic by which difference was upheld .[31] It was at the same moment, however, in the early years of the

[28] Colin Bundy, 'Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape before Poor Whiteism' in W. Beinart, P. Delius and S. Trapido (eds.), Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in rural South Africa, 1850-1930 (Johannesburg, 1986).

[29] John Western, Outcast Cape Town (London, 1981), 33; Bickford Smith, Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice, 131.

[30] Maynard W. Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909', Journal of African History, xviii (1977),; Deacon, 'Racial Segregation and Medical Discourse in Nineteenth Century Cape Town', Journal of Southern African Studies xxii (1996); Nigel Worden et al., Cape Town: The Making of a City (Cape Town, 1998), 227.

[31] Susan Klausen, ' "For the sake of the race": Eugenic discourses of feeblemindedness and motherhood in the South African Medical Record, 1903-1926', Journal of Southern African Studies, xxi (1997); Gareth Cornwell, '"A Teaspoon of Milk in a Bucketful of Coffee": The Discourse of Race Relations in Early Twentieth Century South Africa', English in Africa, xxxviii (2011), 21-22; Saul Dubow, 'South Africa: Paradoxes in the Place of Race', in Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics (Oxford, 2010); Rebecca Hodes, 'Kink and the Colony: Sexual Deviance in the Medical History of South Africa, c. 1893-1939', Journal of Southern African Studies, xli (2015).

twentieth century that the term 'Coloured' emerged as a bureaucratic descriptor for a racial group.[32] The category, 'Coloured', therefore, invoked a racial category at the same time as the idea of colour gestured towards the porous nature of the boundaries that enclosed it. What is more, a Coloured identity was accepted by many people of mixed race background and used as the platform for mobilising political claims. Coloured opposition to racial segregation rejected the inferior status of Coloureds vis a vis whites but accepted their superior status in relation to black Africans. In doing so, many Coloured people entrenched the emerging racial typology. In order to distance themselves from blacks and identify with whites, Coloureds used the seemingly non-racial criteria of respectability as the means to improve their social status.[33] Incorporating ideas of temperance, thrift, religious devotion and sexual propriety, respectability was close to the idea of character then guiding British-imperial notions of moral virtue.[34] It was also closely related to bourgeois ideas of the family. Respectability, affectionate parenting and conformity to the normative standards of modern family life provided the means for defining race but offered scope for evading it too. Coloureds of decent social standing 'passed' as white. The least respectable people in Cape Town, as the report into the 1895 Destitute Children's Relief Act put it, were 'the degraded whites'. 'They

[32] Thieven Reddy, 'The Politics of Naming: The Constitution of Coloured Subjects in South Africa' in Zimitri Erasmus (ed.), Coloured by History: Shaped by Race: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town (Cape Town, 2001).

[33] Mohamed Adhikari, Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community (Athens, Ohio, 2005); Adhikari, (ed.), Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa (Cape Town, 2009).

[34] On respectability in Cape Town, see Andrea Badham, 'The Badge of Respectability: Anglicanism in turn-of-the century Woodstock', Studies in the History of Cape Town, xi (1988). On character, see Peter J. Cain, 'Character, "Ordered Liberty" and the Mission to Civilise: British Moral Justification of Empire, 1870-1914', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, xl (2012)and Peter J. Cain, 'Empire and the Languages of Character and Moral Virtue in Later Victorian and Edwardian Britain', Modern Intellectual History, iv (2007).

were lower than the coloured people' the report explained.[35] That Act defined destitute children as being 'of European parentage' but when character, colour and class failed to coincide the problem emerged of how racial recognition was to be achieved. 'The Act reflected thinking that privileged 'poor whites' amongst the underclass,' as Valtrees Malherbe put it, 'but who was white?'[36] 'We sometimes have two teachers in the same school who cannot agree as to whether a child is European,' observed the superintendent-general of education in 1894.[37] In Cape Town to a far greater extent than any other South African city there existed what John Western termed, 'a continuum of race' with no unambiguous break between White and Black.[38]

II

MAKING RACIAL CHILDREN

It was the need to convert a racial continuum into a set of concrete racial categories that both energised and confounded the Society's day to day work. Founded at a public meeting at Cape Town's City Hall in April 1908, the ostensible reason for the Society's inception was the urgent need to combat high levels of infant mortality, an issue which affected both Coloured and European children alike. Jasper Anderson, the colony's chief medical offer, did much to advertise the relevant statistics: as many as 199 per thousand European and 334 per

[35]Report of the Select Committee on the Destitute Children Relief Bill (Cape Town, 1895)51-2; Graham Watson, Passing for White: A Study of Racial Assimilation in a South African School (Tavistock, 1970).

[36] Vertrees C. Malherbe, 'Family Law and "The Great Moral Public Interests" in Victorian Cape Town, c.1850-1902', Kronos, xxxvi (2010).

[37] Report of the Select Committee on the Destitute Children Relief Bill (Cape Town, 1895), 4.

[38] Western, Outcast Cape Town, 35-37.

thousand Coloured infants were dying before they reached twelve months of age.[39] Like other proponents of child welfare, Anderson claimed that the work he envisaged was non-racial: in the proposed Society's work, no distinction would be made 'as regards race, colour [or] creed'. It is a sentiment that should not be too quickly dismissed. Writing on child welfare in South Africa has tended to see it as part of the larger project to uplift 'poor whites' but one only need sample the Society's case records to see that more children classed as 'Coloured' were dealt with by the Society than those classed as 'European'.[40] Child welfare work in South Africa was not a white preserve. In part this reflects the fact that the figure of the child, as an embodiment of human innocence, contained a universal appeal – as did the good mother, the faithful, hard-working father and the happy and wholesome home. At the same time, because family relations were loaded with powerful moral meaning, the family offered compelling grounds for constituting race. Society workers spoke not of 'the good mother' but the 'good coloured mother'; reports of undesirable home environments combined languages of sanitation and morality with intimations of racial mixing. 'I do not think it a suitable home for Katie', wrote one lady visitor, 'too crowded and in a very damp situation – and the child is white and does not look well nourished.'[41] The idiom of the family articulated race but

[39] 'The Cry of the Children', Cape Argus, 29 April 1908; 'Child Life Protection Association Formed', Cape Times, 1 May 1908.

[40] Of a sample of 800 case files, 465 children (58%) were classed as 'Coloured'. Linda Chisholm, 'Class, Colour and Gender in Child Welfare in South Africa, 1902-1918', South African Historical Journal, xxiii (1990); Sarah E. Duff, Changing Childhoods in the Cape Colony: Dutch Reformed Church Evangelicalism and Colonial Childhood, 1860-1895 (Basingstoke, 2015); Sandra Swart and Jennifer Muirhead, '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, viii (2015); 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.

[41] 1 (CT) 72, 34/30, Katie Dott, Inspection Report, 25 July 1930.

qualified it too. ‘She is almost a black woman’, wrote a welfare worker of one mother, ‘but appears sensible and kind’.[42]

Judged from its public face, however, the racial logic guiding the Society’s work was clear. ‘Every South African,’ Jasper Anderson argued, ‘wished to see South Africa peopled with a strong, energetic and virile race:

> …and with the splendid climatic conditions, [the] wide expanse of territory and the possibility of leading a life more in the open air than in Europe there was no reason why this should not be so. But, to obtain the result, it was necessary to commence with the children from birth, and keep from them, as far as possible, all harmful influences. The future of the race would depend upon the care and thought bestowed upon the physical, mental and moral training of the children.[43]

Such a clear statement of settler ideology found concrete application in endeavours to combat the informal adoption and fostering of European children by coloured people. As another speaker at the City Hall meeting declared:

> There was a duty upon every man and woman who brought a child into the world to maintain it and to protect it – not to throw it away amongst the coloured people for a miserable pittance… but to maintain it as a man’s own offspring, according to its means…. [I know] of cases where little white children were living as slaves to coloured people and as slaves to Mohammedans – unkempt, unwashed, partially clothed and partially fed.[44]

As Prinisha Badassy has shown, the early impetus towards child welfare work in South Africa was motivated to a significant extent by anxieties over what was known as ‘baby

[42] 1 (CT) 12, 23/21, Mabel C. Elliott to Resident Magistrate, 21 March 1921.

[43] ‘Child Life Protection Association Formed’, Cape Times, 1 May 1908.

[44] Ibid.

farming' – the informal care of children by women outside the children's biological kin.[45] In Natal and the Transvaal, as well as at the Cape, blue eyed, fair haired infants were discovered in the care of African, Asian and Coloured people. European children 'farmed out' to Native or Coloured women signaled a kind of racial capitulation. Case work confirms the Society's worry over miscegenation but it also reveals the particular ways in which the family became racially encoded. This is because constructions of race were achieved to a great extent through what Christopher J. Lee has termed a 'genealogical imagination'.[46] Parenting was decisive not simply because, as Stoler argued, it determined the cultural competence by which racial classifications were made but because it opened on to the primary symbolic and metaphorical terrain on which race was apprehended: the family tree.[47] Case files are valuable in this respect because they describe both an individual child's life and the deeper history of that child's family background. By intervening into children's lives case work was directed to the future but it depended entirely upon reconstructions of a family's past.

A different picture emerges here, therefore, from the kind of racial common sense that guided the classification of South Africa's adult population. In twentieth century South Africa, as Deborah Posel has argued, classification was made largely on common sense assumptions around lifestyle and appearance. Investigations into a person's background or ancestry, Posel suggested, were unnecessary and impractical. Instead, racial classification derived from the ordinary, immediate experience of how people looked and lived. As the 1938 mixed marriages commission stated, 'where a person is not manifestly white, or

[45] Badassy, 'This Sinister Business in Babies'. See also Sandra Burman and Margaret Naude, 'Bearing a Bastard: The Social Consequences of Illegitimacy in Cape Town, 1896-1939', Journal of Southern African Studies, xvii (1991).

[46] Christopher J. Lee, Unreasonable Histories: Nativism, Multiracial Lives and the Genealogical Imagination in British Africa (Durham NC, 2014).

[47] Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power, 5-6; Hodes, 'Kink and the Colony'.

manifestly coloured, his true classification is generally determined…by his associations and general mode of life.'[48] Such common sense assumptions, however, could not so readily apply to children, especially the children of the poor. At the social margins that circular colonial logic equating race with privilege and power did not apply. Children growing up in the impoverished, racially mixed neighbourhoods of District Six, Woodstock and Salt River – the parts of town, significantly, where the Child Life Society was most active – had no easily intelligible mode of life or associational culture from which a clear racial designation could derive. Race, here, was far from self-evident. And yet, only after a child had been decisively categorised as 'European' or 'Coloured' could an intervention proceed. This was for two, quite prosaic, reasons. First, in line with developing segregationist thinking, institutions for children – schools, reformatories, orphanages and children's homes – were, across Cape Town, racially exclusive. Before a child could be admitted, its racial identity had first to be established. Second, government grants, provided first to foster mothers and, from 1921, to any parent or guardian judged needy and deserving, were pegged to a racial scale, set at £2 a month for European children and £1 for Coloureds.[49] Only when a child had been classified as belonging to one of these two racial groups could money be disbursed.

That segregated aspect to welfare provision was consistent with the segregation of South African society more broadly. In the years after Union in 1910, the segregation of municipal services and recreational amenities went on alongside state efforts to buffer white workers from Black and Coloured competition.[50] It was a process that demanded thousands

[48] Deborah Posel, 'Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth Century South Africa', African Studies Review, xliv (2001) 87-113.

[49] Amendment Act No. 26 of 1921 to the Children's Protection Act of 1913.

[50] Bill Freund, 'South Africa: The Union Years, 1910-1948 – Political and Economic Foundations' in Ross, Mager and Nasson (eds.), Cambridge History, 211-253.

of subjective 'on the spot' decisions be made as to who was white and who was not. All involved a process of detection – for the presence or absence of colour. While the Society's case work followed the same logic – that race could be clearly identified and plainly stated – its content betrayed the complexities and contradictions that the pursuit of that logic entailed. History Sheets, drawn up for all children placed into institutional care, included an entry for 'race' and in much of the correspondence sent between the magistrate and Society staff a child's racial status was entered at the head of the page, besides its name, age and place of abode. These entries were typically uncertain. Classifications worked out in theory could not be straightforwardly ascertained in practice. Entries were offered in the interrogative voice. Abandoned babies judged to be one race were later found to be another. In many cases, a child's racial classification changed over the course of a case file.[51] On other occasions, 'European' was crossed out by hand and replaced with 'Coloured' or 'Mixed'.[52] Frequently, the space beside 'race' on a history sheet was left entirely blank. Notes in the margins queried whether a child was Coloured or European.[53] And caveats were frequently (though parenthetically) made as to a child's racial status. 'The mother is coloured, but the child has a European appearance', wrote a CID detective of eight year old Mary Fraser. 'The father is a

[51] 1 (CT) 6, 105/20, Henry Children; 1 (CT), 6, 101/20 Harriet van Beck; 1 (CT) 24, 65/23, Peggy Sands; 1 (CT) 38, 173/25, Baby Philip; 1 (CT) 39, 207/25, Barlow family.

[52] 1 (CT) 3, 118/19, Thomas Human; 1 (CT) 14, 130/21, Josephine Fisher; 1 (CT) 24, 81/23, Roy and Leonard Blight; 1 (CT) 29, 6/24, Cox family; 1 (CT) 43, 139/26, James Smith; 1 (CT) 43, 147/26, Hester and Cornelia Blignaut.

[53] 1 (CT) 15, 15, 187/21, Catherine Baptiste; 1 (CT) 18, 38/22, Alice Young; 1 (CT) 20, 121/22, Rose Hermanus; 1 (CT) 27, 246/23, Anne van Rooyen; 1 (CT) 42, 109/26, Dinah Gericke.

1 (CT) 50, 213/26, Bertie Cockburn.

European,' noted a probation officer in regard to brothers William and Alfred Pound, 'the lads are not but could be placed as mixed'.[54]

At first, investigations into children's lives were conducted informally. The 1895 Destitute Children's Act (consolidated after Union with the 1913 Children's Protection Act) allowed for children to be removed from their homes but for the first six years of the Society's life, the job of visiting children and reporting on their home conditions was the job of just one female sanitary inspector, supported by a team of volunteers. Yet it quickly became apparent that case work formed the mainstay of the Society's endeavours and in 1914 a thirteen-strong committee to investigate and supervise cases was established.[55] Four years later the Society petitioned the South African Ministry of Justice to appoint a dedicated magistrate to deal with all cases involving children. Wilshire Hamer, the man then responsible for implementing the Children's Protection Act in the Cape Peninsula, was duly selected. Each week, Hamer met with Society staff to discuss individual cases. Depending on the perceived racial status of a child, and on the character and competence of its guardians, Hamer and the Society's case committee selected from a series of possible actions. Financial support enabling a child to remain at home was considered preferable to a child being taken into institutional care but was disbursed only when a home environment was found to be healthy and its occupants respectable. If a family or a home was seen to be in some way lacking a child could be forcibly removed and either adopted, placed with foster carers or sent to one of the various reformatories and children's homes that were proliferating across Cape

[54] 1 (CT), 30, 66/24, William and Alfred Pound, Joseph de Kock, Probation Officer, to CT Magistrate, 7 May 1924.

[55] University of Cape Town Archives and Manuscripts, BC 1149: Lady Buxton archive, A1: History of the Centre.

Town at this time.[56] Children could also, under the Society's direction, be apprenticed to a master, typically up-country, until they reached eighteen years of age. Case work such as this demanded ongoing surveillance of children beyond an initial investigation as well as continued judgements as to the deserving status their parents and guardians. Many of these records comprise long, complicated narratives, often spanning several years, in which not just children's lives but those around them were chronicled and described.

In the ten years after 1919, when Hamer was appointed as the child's magistrate (and the moment at which the Society's case records come on stream) more than 3,000 individual case records were compiled. In almost every case documentation was generated by a remarkably small coterie of personnel, comprising Hamer, the Society's case secretary and a CID Detective named Edwin Davis.[57] Although their writings were supplemented by others, it was principally in the work of these three individuals that knowledge of Cape Town's children was generated.

In order to carry out their investigations, this small group relied largely on local informants: on neighbours, landlords and – most often – family members themselves. To these people, the abstractions of scientific racial theory, like the more convoluted politics of

[56] By 1928 there were fourteen institutions in Cape Town certified under the Children's Protection Act that accommodated poor, neglected or destitute children. On institutional care, see Linda Chisholm, 'The Pedagogy of Porter', Journal of African History, xxvii (1986) and Chisholm, 'Gender and Deviance in South African Industrial Schools and Reformatories for Girls, 1911-1934' in Cherryl Walker, (ed.), Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945 (Cape Town, 1990).

[57] Between 1919 and 1933 there were four case secretaries at the Child Life Society: Mabel Elliott, M. McLoughlin, G.M. Tawke and M. L. Becher. All were English-speaking women. Between 1919 and 1924 a minority of police reports were made by a second police detective, Detective Hennessy (PCC No. 5004) but Davis carried out the vast majority of police investigations undertaken in connection with the Children's Protection Act (1913).

the South African state, were a distant concern. Race, here, was conveyed in terms of suspicion and conjecture: in rumours of a mother's immoral behaviour, in the unexplained absence of a father or in the anomalous presence of a stranger in the home. As individuals transgressed the behavioural codes of respectable modern life, so they were also discovered to be racially at fault; uncertain racial status both indexed social disorder and justified its control. The search for unambiguous racial identities, however, led investigators ever deeper into the present lives and past histories of families, neighbours, associates and friends. Questions only brought on new lines of enquiry; the task of identifying a single child inevitably meant radiating out into its social context. In many cases investigations into a child's home environment diverted into attempts to account for conflicts – and conflicting testimonies – within witnesses' families, making assessments in the process that themselves encompassed tacit judgements as to character, morality and, indeed, race itself. It is principally this polyphonous quality to race-making that explains the discrepancy between the expectations of clean, clear and self-evident racial identities presupposed by the conventions of the case-files and the far more complex and conflicted content that their records contain.

III

AN UNMISTAKABLE TRACE OF COLOUR

In many cases, doubt over a child's racial identity emerged when staff at a children's home alerted the Society to the presence of a non-white child at a European Institution.[58] By the

[58] For other cases for which there is not the space for detailed discussion here, see 1 (CT) 2, 97/19, Henry van Vuuren; 1 (CT) 13, 69/21, Manuel MacDonald; 1 (CT) 16, 243/21; 1 (CT) 22, 159/22, Alexander and Leslie Darvall; 1 (CT) 31, 114/24, Charlotte Kinnes; 1 (CT) 36, 113/25, Pinnock family; 1 (CT) 37, 137/25, Munro

early 1920s a plethora of industrial schools, orphanages, hostels and children's homes had grown up around Cape Town. All were racially exclusive. On numerous occasions, children were removed on the ground that they were racially impure. Six year old Nellie Hale had been classed as European when she first came to the Society's attention in the winter of 1924. Her father, from California, had come to South Africa to dig for diamonds. Her mother was identified as 'South African, Dutch'. After her mother died and her father deserted, Nellie was cared for by an older sister, noted by police as being 'of doubtful character'. And so Nellie was committed to the care of the Society and sent to the Salvation Army's home in Woodstock, while arrangements were made for her placement in foster care. Some time after her admission, however, staff at the home discovered that Nellie was not wholly European but 'slightly coloured'. Instead of being placed with foster parents, therefore, Nellie was apprenticed, to a housewife at Worcester, some seventy miles from the city. As the Society's case secretary (now categorising the girl as 'mixed race') explained, Nellie's interests would best served not as the daughter within a European family but in preparation for work as a domestic servant instead.[59]

Time and again, institutions' refusal to accept children on racial grounds prompted the Society to open investigations into children's family background. In 1924, five year old Richard Sales was removed from the Europeans-only Lady Buxton Home on the grounds that he was 'unmistakably coloured'. Police investigations into Richard's background revealed that his father, an Englishman, had met and married a Capetonian woman, Dorothy, in 1916. When, five years later, the couple separated Dorothy had her two sons informally fostered – Henry to a Mrs. Payne and Richard to a Mrs. Peterson. We know nothing about the Payne

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family; 1 (CT) 42, 93/26, Johanna and Hendrina van der Linde; 1 (CT) 42, 97/26, Johanna Francke; 1 (CT) 155, 382/39, Fanie Botes.

[59] 1 (CT) 42, 95/26, Nellie Hale, various correspondence.

family but the Petersons were found to be ‘low class Malays’. Removing Richard from such ‘unsuitable surroundings’ prompted his admission to the Lady Buxton home. When he was deemed inadmissible there, Richard returned to the Petersons. Only months later, once a maintenance order for his care had been arranged, was Richard removed once more, this time to another children's home prepared to accept him.[60]

In Cape Town the informal sharing of child care beyond the biological family sabotaged the making of a stable racial order. But the attempt to pre-empt the adopting or fostering of European children by Coloured people blurred into a wider endeavour to prevent what was viewed as undesirable racial mixing. Contempt for parents, mothers especially, who gave up caring for children in order to go out to work, compounded the contempt felt towards those who failed to recognise racial boundaries. When white women failed in their home-making, children were susceptible to contaminating influences from outside, influences that meshed colour with the prospect of juvenile delinquency. Boys and girls inadequately raised began to associate with ‘coloured loafers’; European children brought up in the company of Coloured people raised the prospect of an uncontrolled, criminal and racially amorphous urban underclass. At the same time, the preparedness of a parent to leave his or her children with Coloureds displayed an insufficiently racialized sensibility, something suggestive in turn of both parental negligence and a failure of mental or moral competence.[61] In the autumn of 1926, siblings Freda and Peter Justice were found living ‘in the care of coloured people’. Their mother had died two years previously; their father drank (both were

[60] 1 (CT) 31, 125/24, M.E. McLoughlin, General Secretary, SPCL, to Cape Town Magistrate’s Office, 16 August 1924; E. Davis to Divisional C.I. Office, 23 August 1924, 17 December 1924 and 24 December 1924.

[61] For graphic examples, see, besides those discussed above, 1 (CT) 15, 164/21, Frances Noble; 1 (CT) 16, 323/21, Fred and Francis Freeman; 1 (CT) 29, 3/24, Cyril Davis; 1 (CT) 29, 10/24, Freddie Schonlo; and 1 (CT) 54, 179/29, John Cridland.

European). In such straitened circumstances, the children were cared for by a Mrs. Teasnar. We know nothing of the relationship between Teasnar and the children's parents; she might have been a neighbor, a concerned acquaintance or an intimate friend, but the perceived inadequacy of the situation is clearly apparent in the Society inspector's report:

> The father is a drunkard, the mother died in November 1924. Nobody really looks after the child. Freda informed me that sometimes she is with coloured people for days.[62]

There are suggestions elsewhere in the file of immorality. An older sister was known to be living with a man to whom she was not yet married and the father's drinking was mentioned repeatedly. On their own, none of these factors was enough to constitute neglect but, combined, they made a powerful case for the children's removal. Besides the fecklessness of the father and the cautionary bad example of the older sister, prolonged exposure to 'coloured people' closed the argument. Both children were sent to industrial schools, Peter in the Orange Free State and Freda in the far north of the Transvaal. It is not clear what became of them after that.

Intimations of miscegenation had powerful intellectual and emotional resonance but were framed in every case by the normative family ideal and via detailed, highly evocative accounts of its disrepair. Race in all these accounts was embedded, within overlapping discourses of morality and sex, dirt and disease, character and respectability. Unhygienic dwellings manifested parental neglect but chimed with a prevailing (highly racialized) discourse of sanitation.[63] A father's desertion conveyed both the suggestion of inherited 'bad character' as well as the injudicious judgement of the woman who married him. The

[62] 1 (CT), 40, 15/26, Freda and Peter Justice, J. L. Crawford to Divisional Officer, Cape Town CID, 11 February 1926; M.G. McLoughlin, 25 February 1926; Wilshire Hamer minute, 9 March 1926; 25 March 1926.

[63] Maynard W. Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909', Journal of African History, xviii (1977).

insalubrious or insanitary home represented the material expression of a dysfunctional family explicable in turn only through a retrospective, genealogical imagining. Six year old Mercia Smith, Davis noted in 1920, is illegitimate, belonging to a 'very unsatisfactory family' in which there was 'an unmistakable trace of colour'.[64] Later that year, as the Society made arrangements to have eleven year old Phyllis Prime placed in a children's home, Hamer hinted at the inadequacy of the mother. 'The child is of European appearance but there seems to be a little colour about the mother.'[65] The suggestion of a 'little colour' carried significance here not because of its clarity but because of its doubt. The 'unmistakable trace' was persuasive because of, not despite, the element of subjectivity involved in its apprehension.

Insinuations of a trace, a touch or a taint permeated accounts of individuals' physical appearances, the nature of their family relations and the supposed racial identities of their family forebears. The parents of Mercia Farinnha were understood to have been born in Portugal and were classed as European. After her father's death in 1912, however, Mercia was informally adopted by Sarah Ryan, a Coloured woman. In this case, the Society decided not to intervene – largely because Sarah was deemed respectable, a quality demonstrated in part by the evidence of a well-run home and in part by her marriage to a man in full employ with a European ancestry of his own. As the relevant police report explained:

> Sarah Ryan is a Coloured woman age about 46 years. She is a very respectable woman. Her husband is a slightly coloured man whose father was an Irishman and mother a Coloured woman. He is employed as a machinist…The house in which they reside consist of five rooms and [a] kitchen. I found the rooms clean, tidy and well furnished. Ryan has two children of his

[64] 1 (CT) 9, 245/20, M. E. McLoughlin, Gen Sec, to Magistrate Cape Town, 21 April 1926.

[65] 1 (CT) 42, 104/26, Wilshire Hamer note, 17 June 1926.

> own. A son who is married and occupies two rooms with his father, and a daughter age 22 years, also living at home.[66]

A similar mapping of race and respectability characterizes the case of Ellen Oakes. In February 1926 the Society received reports that a European girl was living 'in the charge of coloured people' on St John's Street in central Cape Town. An inspector was dispatched and the information found to be correct. The woman caring for Ellen – 'a respectable colored woman named Mrs Rompler' – told the inspector that she was the child's foster mother and that she had received the child when she was just a month old from her mother, a European woman named Ida Austin. The name 'Oaks' was that of Rompler's first husband, now deceased, though it was in fact spelled OCH, not OAK, for Oaks was a German and Ellen in fact had none of the English inheritance that the Anglicised version of her name imparted.[67] Nonetheless, there was still a strong European strain in Ellen's family tree, as Davis discovered. 'Mrs. Rompler's first husband,' he reported, 'was a German named Ochs':

> Her present husband, Richard Rompler, is also a German. He is employed as a coachman...Mrs. Rompler has two sons by her first husband, they are both white and are classed as Europeans...Rompler is a very respectable woman, she has lots of property in Cape Town left to her by the first husband. She has been living at 24 St. John's Street for the past 30 years.[68]

While the Society's case committee recommended that Ellen be placed in an Institution to avoid her remaining amongst Coloured persons, Davis argued for her to remain with the Romplers. In concluding his report, Davis reverted to Ellen's birth-name, May, underlining the fact of her European parentage:

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[66] 1(CT), 37, 131/25, Mercia Ferinnha, E. Davis to Divisional C.I Officer, Cape Town CID, 21 August 1925.

[67] 1 (CT) 40, 28/26, M. G. McLoughlin to Cape Town Magistrate, 17 Feb 1926.

[68] 1 (CT) 40, 28/26, E. Davis to Divisional C.I Officer, Cape Town CID, 23 February 1926.

> I have seen the girl May Austin, she has a good home and receives every attention...She will be well provided for should anything happen to Mrs. Rompler [and] she is looked upon as one of the family. I do not consider that the Authorities should take any action now. I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that this girl has a good home. Mr. Rompler is a European born in Germany.[69]

The record does not indicate whether Davis's proposal was accepted but the fact that there are no documents on file relating to institutional or foster care would suggest that May (or Ellen) Austin (or Oaks) was permitted to stay with the Romplers. Here, it was the combination of Mrs. Rompler's respectability, expressed in part by her ability to secure successive European husbands, and her propertied status that cast her as a suitable mother and hers an adequate home. Biological, material and cultural inheritance reinforced each other, together placing the Rompler household and the Rompler children on the deserving side of Cape Town's hardening racial line.

In other cases, by contrast, children were removed from their guardians on the grounds that children who might be classed as white were exposed to the baneful effects of colour. Between 1905 and 1915 Irish migrant Charles Godsil had seven children with his wife, Annie, noted to be 'slightly coloured'. When both Charles and Annie died – him in a shipwreck, her in the 1919 influenza epidemic – the society discovered their children in the care of Annie's sister, Dinah, a Coloured widow with seven children of her own. Neighbours informed Davis that both Dinah and another sister living at the house were addicted to drink. 'In my opinion,' the detective concluded his report, 'these children should be removed from their present surroundings. Four of the six Godsil children would almost pass as Europeans'.[70]

[69] 1 (CT) 40, 28/26, E. Davis to Divisional C.I Officer, Cape Town CID, 23 February 1926.

[70] 1 (CT) 1, 37/19, Godsil children, E. Davis to Sub-Inspector Wallace, 28 February 1919.

Colour, in this configuration, was coupled with the deviance of alcoholism. Significantly, however, that final allusion to racial passing was the only reference to the Godsil children's physical appearance in a dense and detailed 800-word report. Its placement at the very end of the report worked to resolve the report's preceding contents. The children could almost pass as Europeans; they could not be recommended for admission to a Europeans-only institution but were judged deserving nonetheless, albeit within the constraints that their trace of colour implied. That trace of colour was not only found in children: its suggestion in the appearance of family members raised the possibility of other genealogical deficiencies. 'Having seen several members of the family,' wrote Davis of the Lloyd sisters, Neta and Martha, 'I am doubtful whether they were or can be classed as European.'[71] Doubt in this case did not represent the lack or failure of knowledge but the necessary step towards racial differentiation. This is because detecting colour, however slight, worked to compound, confirm or indeed to explain other species of deviant behaviour. To state that within a particular family there existed 'an unmistakeable touch of colour' was to provide the rhetorical finishing touch – and the explanatory key – to an otherwise hard-to-explain concatenation of social, economic and psychological distress.

Across the several thousand Society case files dating from the 1920s alone it is impossible to establish a straightforward equation at work matching 'European' with virtue and 'Coloured' with vice. 'A very respectable coloured woman' is a phrase that recurs throughout these files. The language of family worked to nuance race: to inscribe colour by degrees. 'There is not the slightest doubt that Mrs Morton is a hardworking woman', wrote Davis of one woman, 'she is only very slightly coloured'.[72] On other occasions, race was qualified or compounded by the apparent care or lack of it that parents showed to their

[71] 1 (CT) 26, 154/23, E. Davis to Cape Town CID 14 July 1923.

[72] 1 (CT), 12, 7/21, E. Davis to Divisional C.I. Officer, Cape Town, 30 October 1922.

children. 'He is decidedly coloured' reported a magistracy official in describing the boy George Thomas in February 1926, 'but appears fairly well fed and clothed'.[73] From the quality of a child's clothing to the language that he used, to the imputed character of a lodger, a neighbour or a parent's friend – all this could serve to articulate a kind of social inadequacy that could be either loaded with racial meaning or left apparently entirely free of it. In all these accounts race gained discursive force not so much when it was clearly stated as when it was alluded to or implied.

Racialization, however, did not represent simply the imposition of elite knowledge on to an unruly social terrain. Case work was written up by Society staff but it contained the voices of family members themselves, as well as neighbours and associates, employers, friends and assorted other interested third parties. Recognising how these voices were incorporated into the Society's case files, therefore, is as necessary to an understanding of the racialization of Cape Town's children as is an understanding of the ideological assumptions of the Society itself.

IV

RACIALISATION FROM BELOW

Whereas case files were organised around a decisive, pivotal moment, at which a child's racial identity was established and a future life-path envisioned, the moment at which a case-file began was typically unclear. As noted above, staff at a school or a children's home frequently alerted the Society to the presence of a 'coloured' child at a whites-only institution. More often, however, family members, neighbours or other concerned individuals

[73] 1 (CT) 40, 25/26, Minute by N. G. Marias, Commissioner of Oaths, 4 February 1926.

reported what they considered to be an undesirable home environment to the Society, prompting formal investigations to begin. In a number of cases, these interventions reflected the prevailing anxiety over inter-racial 'baby farming'. On other occasions family members mobilised the language of miscegenation to impeach the character of rival claimants for the care of a child. After the death of Cecil Newman, his wife applied for the custody of their daughter, Thelma. Cecil's father objected. 'She is at present living with some coloured people', he testified before Hamer, 'she is very fond of men's company and is continually out until late at night'. That evidence proved decisive. Thelma remained with her grandparents, under the Society's supervision.[74] In their police interviews and sworn statements Coloured as well as European witnesses testified to the undesirable aspect of European children being raised amongst non-European people. The Society also received anonymous letters and telephone calls reporting the fact of European children in Coloured care.[75]

On occasions, moreover, children themselves described the inadequacy of their parents through their failure to maintain an adequate racial distance. In 1919 seventeen year old Gwennie Taylor wrote to the Society to object to the possibility of her being returned to her mother. The house where her mother lived, she testified, was filthy and was shared with a coloured woman.[76] 'My father,' complained twelve year old Hester Blignaut, 'does not give us any clothing and mixes a lot with coloured people.'[77]

[74] 1 (CT) 77, 151/30, Frederick Christian Newman, sworn statement, 29 July 1930, WH; G. R. Tawke, to Magistrate, 29 July 1930.

[75] 1 (CT) 15, 170/21 Catherine Stroebel; 1 (CT) 41, 86/26, Francis Greef; 1 (CT) 46, 131/27, Grace and Leonard Collins.

[76] 1 (CT) 4, 250/19, Marsh Memorial Home, Rondebosch to SPCL, 18 December 1919.

[77] 1 (CT) 43, 147/26, Wilshire Hamer note, 10 August 1926.

Witnesses supplying evidence did so in the presence of the state (during interviews conducted with the magistrate and the police) and the Society (when visited by inspectors from its case committee). Hester Blignaut had been summoned to the magistrate's office and questioned: her evidence was not given freely. If we countenance the possibility that Hester disclosed the fact that her father mixed with coloured people unprompted (the wording of the magistrate's questions is not recorded on the file) it may be that she anticipated the reaction it would provoke. Such are the 'unconscious or unspoken ways of sorting people' to which Grace Davie referred and they represent the empirical limit of what these sources enable us to say. The uncertainty of the case file is only deepened in this case by the fact that Hester Blignaut was herself initially judged to be 'of mixed race' but was later decided to be European.

It would be a mistake, however, to judge uncertainty as a discursive problem. In the Society's case work doubt did not so much obstruct the process of racialization but allowed race to open onto wider categories of social disorder. Doubt worked. It was, moreover, ideally suited to a form of knowledge production that rested to a great extent on the testimony of, often anonymous, third parties. Informants relayed the stuff of hear-say, gossip and rumour and Society staff borrowed liberally from the language of their sources. One mother was said to be 'an impossible person'; another 'a devil of a woman'.[78] One Society inspector observed that an entire family were judge by their neighbours to be 'a good for nothing lot'.[79]

Investigators did not accept the testimony that they received uncritically, however. As they looked for evidence of child neglect so they also looked for discrepancies in those supplying them with information. Like the transcriptions of criminal court proceedings, the

[78] 1 (CT) 14, 130/21: Josephine Fisher; 1 (CT) 15, 15/22, Clarence Fitzjohn; 1 (CT) 101, 246/34: Violet Higgens.

[79] 1 (CT) 14, 116/31, Mclure Family, Mabel C. Elliott to Cape Town Resident Magistrate, 2 June 1921.

Society's case records document the submission and recording of evidence. Whereas interpreting evidence in criminal cases went on within the institutional context of the court, in child welfare work evidence was supplied, reported and judged upon in various sites: in the home, on the street, in the magistrate's office.[80] Unlike court room judges, investigators entered social milieus: at once detective, ethnographer and family expert. Theirs was a kind of fieldwork, linked to both the exploration of the Victorian slums of London by the reformist middle class and the 1932 Carnegie Commission's sociologically informed fieldwork into the lives of South Africa's 'poor whites'.[81]

A significant part of investigators' reports involved, therefore, an effort to identify and account for false or exaggerated information. After the Society received reports that a twelve year old girl was having immoral connections with coloured men, it was later decided that the source of this information – a nineteen year old man – had been acting maliciously. The source had himself been paying the girl 'great attention', Detective Davis averred; when rebuffed 'he concocted his story against her to get his revenge'.[82] That the source cited miscegenation as evidence of bad character suggests that disdain for racial mixing animated

[80] Especially germane to this essay are: Terence Ranger, 'Tales of the "Wild West": Gold-Diggers and Rustlers in South-West Zimbabwe, 1898–1940: An Essay in the Use of Criminal Court Records for Social History', South African Historical Journal, xxviii (1993); Peggy Pascoe, 'Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of Race in Twentieth-Century America', Journal of American History, lxxxiii (1996); Stacey Hynd, 'Benjamin Knowles v Rex: judging murder, race and respectability from colonial Ghana to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, 1928-1930', in Shaunnagh Dorsett and John McLaren (eds.), Legal Histories of the British Empire: Laws, Engagement and Legacies (London, 2014).

[81] The work of the Police and Society investigators in this respect resembles Bernard Cohn's notion of the 'investigative modality' as one of the core colonial 'forms of knowledge' by which, according to Cohn, the British constructed colonial life. Cohn, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge. Seth Koven, Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London (Princeton, 2004).

[82] 1 (CT) 37, 131/25, E. Davis to Cape Town Resident Magistrate, 21 August 1925.

popular as well as elite thinking but it was articulated in the specific context of one young man's unrequited attentions. Hatred for the girl who rejected him found expression in accusations of her supposed 'immoral connections with coloured men'. Detective Davis went further than discounting the credibility of this accusation; he explained it as well. By attributing the false statement to injured amour propre, Davis was providing a commentary on what we might term the emotional life of race. His report raises the difficult question of how historians might read not just for racial thought but for racial feeling as well.

Similar doubts over the reliability of neighbours' witness statements are evident in the case of Susanna Purcell. In March 1919, when enquiries were begun into the home circumstances of Purcell and her two children, sworn statements from Purcell herself were evaluated beside the content of police interviews conducted with her neighbours. She had been abandoned by her husband in Bulawayo in 1914, Purcell said, going on to claim that she had been in receipt of government aid until certain 'false reports' had been made against her. Her account was challenged, however, by two other women, a Mrs Randall and a Mrs Webb. Webb, who rented two rooms in the same building as Purcell, reported her to be 'an inveterate smoker' who 'on more than one occasion had misbehaved with men'.[83] Randall, who lived two doors down the road, described Purcell as a loose character who was frequently to be found smoking and who took her daughter twice a week to a dance hall in town from which she returned home by the last train at night, not infrequently in the company of men.[84]

A second police report now placed the character of her accusers into doubt. Randall, Webb and Purcell, it was noted, all inhabited the same terrace of houses, besides the Salt River railway yards:

[83] 1 (CT) 3, 106/19, of Johanna Webb, sworn statement, undated; A. W. Kidd, 21 March 1919 report.

[84] Ibid.

> The terrace is known locally as the 'White Location' and as its name applies [sic] the people living here are not of much class. They are nearly all Europeans with here and there a touch of colour. Even the two women above mentioned – Randall and Webb – are not beyond question. They would have said nothing about Mrs. Purcell if it had not been that they were working off a bit of spite….Mrs Purcell appears to be an unfortunate woman, she has been forced into her present mode of living. She certainly is misconducting herself, but is entitled to a certain amount of pity. I called at her address at 4pm on Friday 25 April 1919 and found her hard at work doing washing for a customer. The other people that I visited in adjoining houses were engaged in gossiping. Mrs. Webb had not even tidied up her bedroom.[85]

While Purcell was judged a victim – 'she had been forced into her present mode of living' – her accusers were malicious, their testimony due only to their need to 'work off' spite. That this was mentioned immediately after the suggestion of 'a touch of colour' gave imputed bad character its racial aspect. Witness evidence was accepted only when it was deemed to be motivated by the same concern that guided the Society: disinterested care for the child. Gossip, on the other hand, signalled a lack of female self-respect, analogous to the failure to maintain clean and tidy living quarters. Investigators relied on neighbours to talk to them, but gossip represented a flow of information beyond their control. At the same time, investigators used gossip: to discredit Johanna Randall, the police detective noted that one of her own daughters was 'being spoken of as carrying on' with a factory manager while her husband was overseas. Immorality passed through families like contagion. In keeping these informants anonymous, however, the detective drew a line around the case. Investigating a person's character by repute could potentially advance through ever-extending layers of testimony and judgement. Reconstructions of children's lives illuminated a part of wider family networks but raised the spectre of far larger webs of human intimacy remaining in the dark.

[85] 1 (CT) 3, 106/19, P.C.C. D. Hennessy, Woodstock CID, to Cape Town Magistrate, 20 April 1919.

V

CONCLUSION

The correspondence regarding Jessie Cavill with which this essay began spanned a period of fourteen years – from 1919, when the Society was first notified of her case, until 1933 when her step-mother's application for custody was refused. During that time, the child welfare movement in South Africa developed rapidly. In 1924, five years after Wilshire Hamer began his weekly consultations with the Society's case committee, a National Council for Child Welfare was established in Pretoria, formally linking all child welfare organisations across the Union with the South African government. Annual child welfare conferences were held throughout the 1920s, bringing together several hundred delegates from across South Africa's towns and cities. Senior officers of Cape Town's Child Life Society travelled regularly abroad to learn of the latest developments in child welfare and help encourage the optimum methods for raising healthy, well-adjusted children back at home. Mothercraft, a movement dedicated to the science of infant care, advanced rapidly, inspired by the work of Truby King in New Zealand and the growing mothercraft movement across the English-speaking world. By the end of the 1920s, childhood and the family had become significant and highly visible subjects of public discussion and government debate.

The dramatic expansion of child welfare work in South Africa was only one part of a much wider, global development as nation-states across Europe, Asia and the Americas discovered in the intimate domains of family life new frontiers for the making of racialized human subjects. At the very moment when high-imperial understandings of racial differentiation began to ebb, parenting, hygiene, sex and sanitation all emerged as powerful sites for the reinstatement of boundary lines separating the normal from the deviant, the moral from the immoral and the undesirable from the healthy and the well. Childhood in the

early twentieth century emerged as critical new terrain for defining the terms of modern citizenship and both state and non-state actors expended considerable effort in its management and control.[86]

Despite this, we still know relatively little about the lives of children and those around them into which state agencies intervened. In part, this reflects the entirely banal fact that individual case records have proved less accessible than published writings.[87] But it also reflects a prioritising of what was written in public over what was attempted in private – this despite the fact that welfare workers always spent the vast majority of their time on case work, inspecting homes, assessing the character of their occupants and reconstructing their social networks and family trees. While the evidence of the Society's case work clearly supports a notion of racial knowledge as 'co-produced' from above and below, it also shows how multiple, overlapping and mutually reinforcing languages for human failure converged at the point of the racially indeterminate child. Faint yet (supposedly) undeniable, a putative trace of colour marked bodies, moved through families and connected otherwise disparate signs of moral deficiency and material decay. In this light these case records offer more than merely illustrative or eloquent examples. Historians have written at length on the problem that miscegenation presented for colonial regimes but the category, 'mixed', has tended to be

[86] Alexandra Minna Stern, 'Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism and Welfare in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920-1940', Journal of Historical Sociology, xvv (1999); Michelle Mouton, From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk: Weimar and Family Policy, 1918-1945 (Cambridge, 2007), Elisa Camiscioli, Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy and Embodiment in the early Twentieth Century (Durham, NC, 2009); Nadine Attewell, Better Britons: Reproduction, National Identity and the Afterlife of Empire (Toronto, 2014); Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power, 110.

[87] The difficulties of accessing case records and the resulting effects on relevant historiography is discussed in Jenny Keating, A Child for Keeps: A History of Adoption in England, 1918-45 (Basingstoke, 2008).

taken for granted.[88] What the Society's records reveal is how precisely human beings were perceived as mixed. As the search for a straight answer to the question, 'Coloured or European?' took investigators into the social worlds of Cape Town's poor, they generated in the process escalating quantities of descriptive and narrative prose, in which a trace, touch or taint of colour was the organising thread.

It may be tempting to consider the salience of colour in these sources as a specifically Capetonian phenomenon. The category 'Coloured', after all, though applied across South Africa after Union in 1910, is widely understood as part of a history that is peculiar to the Cape. Yet miscegenation anxieties were an aspect of hardening racial boundaries across the sub-continent. In Johannesburg, Durban and in dozens of smaller towns, the salience of a touch of colour lay in its capacity not merely to express but to define socially deviant behaviour.[89] In each of these locales, child welfare societies devoted the majority of their time to case work: like the Child Life Society, the Johannesburg Children's Aid Society processed several hundred cases every year.[90] Conventionally these children have been

[88] White, Children of the French Empire; Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, 'The Threat of Wooly-Haired Grandchildren: Race, the Colonial Family and German Nationalism', The History of the Family, xiv (2009); Emanuelle Saada, Empi*re's Children: Race, Filiation and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago, 2012). Ray, Crossing the Color Line; Firpo, The Uprooted.

[89] Timothy Keegan, 'Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in Southern Africa, c. 1912', Journal of Southern African Studies, xxvii (2001); Lis Lange, White, Poor and Angry: White Working Class Families in Johannesburg (Ashgate, 2003); Jeremy Martens, Citizenship, 'Civilisation' and the Creation of South Africa's Immorality Act, 1927', South African Historical Journal, lix (2007). For a comparative history of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, see Vivian Bickford Smith, The Emergence of the South African Metropolis: Cities and Identities in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, 2016).

[90] Linda Chisholm, 'Class, Colour and Gender', 107. Although there is not a series of case files comparable to those in Cape Town, South Africa's provincial archives nonetheless contain significant numbers of individual

depicted as white or European, in line with the view of South African child welfare as a part of the broader project to uplift 'poor whites'. But 'poor whites' were themselves defined by racial doubt. As the South African novelist, Sarah Gertrude Millen put it, a poor white 'belonged to a 'type characterised by dubious antecedents, dubious whiteness [and] dubious respectability'.[91] While the phenomenon of racial mixing in Cape Town was particular to that city, the significance of a touch of colour as the marker of white imperfection had much wider appeal. While Coloureds could be judged respectable despite their colour, poor whites were rendered problematic because of it.

The time span of Jessie Cavill's case file was not only coincident with the expansion of the South African child welfare movement; this was also the time when, historians have suggested, tackling the problem of miscegenation served to advance Afrikaner nationalism.[92] While it is tempting to see the racialization of children during these years in the light of the election to power of the Afrikaner National Party in 1948 and the beginning of apartheid, it is important to note that the work of child welfare work in Cape Town had no connections to Afrikaner civic or political organisations. Child welfare here was a very British affair, conducted by English-speaking officers who owed their inspiration to the wider British-imperial child rescue movement. Significant too in this light is the proportion of English-speaking first or second generation immigrants who figured in the case files: poor whites

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case records. See, for example, SANA (South African National Archives), Pietermaritzburg, CSO, 255 1899; AGO, 1907 258A; Pretoria, GG 25/244; JUS 46 5/176/10; JUS 122, 3/1113/11; BNS 1/3/4, C99; GG 168/ 33.

[91] Sarah Gertrude Millen, *Adam's* Rest (London 1922), 42.

[92] Jonathan Hyslop, 'White Working Class Women and the Invention of Apartheid: 'Purified' Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation against 'Mixed Marriages', 1934-9', Journal of African History, xxxvi (1995); Marijke du Toit, 'The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904-29', Journal of Southern African Studies, xxix (2003); 155-176; Hermann Giliomee, The Afrikaners: Biography of a People (Cape Town, 2003), 347.

were as likely to have their roots in Lancashire or London as the Orange Free State or the Transvaal. The Society's case records were assembled in Cape Town but their contents traversed the European colonies in Africa and the 'British world' beyond.

Always, it was the fundamentally unbounded nature, both of the family and of the racial categories of 'Coloured' and 'European' that marked the encounter between Society investigators and the children into whose lives they intervened. Children and their carers had diverse social relationships that transgressed the borders of the family and the home. Ties of reciprocity, affection, dependence and support blurred the boundaries between lodgers, visitors, associates and friends. Biological parents were often absent; wider family networks comprising grandparents, aunts and uncles, step-parents and in-laws frequently cohabited and cared for children. Intimacy paid scant regard to the threshold of the home. All this directly contravened the ideal of childhood to which the Child Life Society was dedicated but it was in the act of reconstructing these transgressive relationships that the Society apprehended race. A trace of colour could be discovered at the edges of an individual's social network as well as at some remote location in their family tree. Drawing on a language of character and morality, the evidence of bodily appearance and material circumstance meshed with the imagined inheritance of ancestry and descent. As a discursive technology, the case file worked to order this knowledge: its assemblage of testimony, reportage, correspondence and (no less significant) marginalia converted disparate and dissonant strands of investigation into a coherent narrative. Where the case file failed was in its capacity to construct the individual as an individual, detached from its social context. This is because the family, as the primary ideological setting in which the child was constructed, represented both the primary locus for racialization and the domain in which racial knowledge most surely failed: intimate human relations, between husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings, lovers, enemies and friends, were at once the most vital points of social reproduction and those most subversive

of it. The removal of a child from its home environment and its placement into circumstances of which the Society approved represented the conclusion to a case but the project of racializing colonial childhoods remained always incomplete.