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Immoral Habits: Delinquent White Girls in 1920s Cape Town and the Distribution of Blame

Historians agree as to the significance of the poor white problem in the making of the South African state and the creation of a racially stratified society during the decades between the end of South African War in 1902 and the election of the National Party in 1948.[1] In this light it is perhaps unsurprising that poor white anxieties have been found to be at the heart of the South African child welfare movement. As Sarah Duff persuasively argued, because they were still malleable, 'civilising' poor white children promised the surest route to breaking cycles of white poverty and thus securing the racial order. The rescue of white children from the slum yards of Johannesburg and Cape Town proved that the downfall of 'poor whites' need not be permanent. The poor white child encapsulated the poor white problem but conjured its salvation too. Saving the child, as Duff put it, was to save the nation by extension.[2]

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[1] R. Morrell, ed., *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992); J. Seekings, '"Not a Single White Person Should be Allowed to Go Under": *Swartgevaar* and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929', *Journal of African History*, 48, 3 (2007), 373-394; P. Bonner, 'South African Society and Culture, 1910-1948' in R. Ross, A. Mager and B. Nasson, eds, *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, Volume II (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 254-274; L. Koots, 'The Black Peril Would Not Exist if it were not for a White Peril that was a Hundred Times Greater: D. F. Malan's Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid Era, 1912-1939', *South African Historical Journal*, 65, 4 (2013), 555-576; G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 23-102; T. Middlemann, 'The Hartebeestpoort Irrigation Scheme: A Project of Modernisation, Segregation and White Poverty Alleviation, 1912-1926', *South African Historical Journal*, 67, 2 (2015), 158-179; T. Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); E. Bottomley, 'Transnational Governmentality and the 'Poor White' in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54 (2016), 76-86.

[2] S. Duff, 'Saving the Child to Save the Nation: Poverty, Whiteness and Childhood in the Cape Colony, 1870-1895', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, 2 (2011), 229-245. See also Duff, *Changing Childhoods in the Cape Colony: Dutch Reformed Church Evangelicism and Colonial Childhood, 1860-1895* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Other accounts corroborate this view. The 1913 Children's Welfare Act, Linda Chisholm argued, was concerned with white children only, its operation in line with wider state policies to 'rehabilitate poor whites'.[3] Prinisha Badassy, likewise, saw child welfare legislation as motivated principally by worries over poor whites.[4] More recently Sandra Swart and Jennifer Muirhead have argued that the development of a child welfare movement at the Cape was driven by 'a perceived need to address the growing social concern over "poor whites" that was becoming increasingly visible in the urban context.' Little concern was given to Black children, they argued, as poverty came to be normalised as the accepted status quo of the African population.[5]

The importance of poor white worries notwithstanding, the view that the emergence of child welfare in South Africa was essentially *about* poor whites can be developed in several respects. First, with their principal focus on the institutional and discursive history of child welfare, existing studies have had little to say about the day to day endeavours of child welfare practitioners as they went about their work, reporting on children's home circumstances and – where these were deemed inadequate – arranging for children to be removed from their parents' or carers' control. Reflecting the wider historiography concerning South Africa's 'poor whites', the *social* history of child welfare remains under researched, certainly compared to its biomedical and literary dimensions.[6] Second, though scholars have worked across the geographical breadth of South Africa, little explicit attention has been paid to the importance of local dynamics for shaping how ideologies of child welfare incorporated ideas around race, gender and class in sometimes very different ways. Allowing for the importance of local or regional context is important for nuancing what 'poor whiteism' meant to contemporaries and how it inflected – or did not inflect – child welfare work.[7] Lastly, we still know very little about how children of different ages were perceived and treated in different ways. Yet interventions concerning babies and infants were nothing like those involving pubescent girls and boys.[8] Whereas young children were seen as, by definition, innocent – and thus their removal from their home environment was understood in terms of rescue – adolescents were typically judged responsible for their own undesirable behaviour. Adolescence began with the possibility of blame.

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[3] L. Chisholm, 'Class, Colour and Gender in Child Welfare in South Africa, 1902-1918', *South African Historical Journal*, 23, 1 (1990), 114.

[4] P. 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.

[5] S. Swart and J. 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*, 8, 2 (2015), 236. For the wider context, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (California, University of California Press, 2002)

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[6] On the medical record see S. 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*, 23, 1 (1997), 27-50; K. Jochelson, *The Colour of Disease: Syphilis and Racism in South Africa, 1880-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) and R. Hodes, 'Kink and the Colony: Sexual Deviance in the Medical History of South Africa, c. 1893-1939', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 4 (2015), 715-733. On discourses around girlhood and adolescent sexuality, see S. E. Duff, 'The Jam and Matchsticks Problem: Working Class Girlhood in Late Nineteenth Century Cape Town', in Kristine Moruzi and M. J. Smith, *Colonial Girlhood in Literature, Culture and History, 1840-1950* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and S. E. Duff, '"Facts about Ourselves": Negotiating Sexual Knowledge in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa', *Kronos*, 41, 1 (2015). On the challenges of writing social histories of white people more broadly, see N. Roos, 'Neil Roos, 'South African History and Subaltern Historiography: Ideas for a Radical History of White Folk', *International Review of Social History*, 61, 1 (2016), 117-150.

[7] The classic social history of Johannesburg remains C. van Onselen*, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1982). For Cape Town, see E. Heyningen, N. Worden and V. Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town, The Making of a City: An Illustrated Social History* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998) and *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social Histo*ry, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999). For a comparative history of South African cities, focusing on Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, see Bickford-Smith, *The Emergence of the South African Metropolis: Cities and Identities in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 2016).

[8] The 1913 Children's Protection Act defined a child as a 'person under 16 years of age' and an infant as a 'person under the age of 7 years'. Child Welfare agencies did involve themselves with young people over the age of 18, however. When they were admitted to custodial institutions, they were typically confined there until their eighteenth

The work of distributing blame in the child welfare case record reflected this fundamentally ambiguous aspect to adolescence. Then as now, adolescence did not so much represent a life stage between childhood and adulthood so much as the thing that confused the ability to distinguish one from the other.[9] Lacking the legal and social status of adulthood, adolescents nevertheless showed the attributes of physical maturity. Adolescents were adults and children simultaneously. This was especially problematic for girls who, once pubescent, were potential mothers themselves.[10]

This article uses child welfare case records to show how adolescent girls categorised as white or European were constructed as being 'out of control' in Cape Town in the years after the First World War. We know a lot already about how medical and scientific knowledge reflected

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birthday and they often figured in the case records of younger children, either in the role of siblings or as parents themselves.

[9] There is a substantial historiography on adolescence in contexts beyond South Africa. Significant contributions include J. Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain, 1860-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986); P. Cox and H. Shore, eds., *Becoming Delinquent: British and European Youth, 1650-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002); H. Ellis, *Juvenile Delinquency and the Limits of Western Influence, 1850-2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). See also the special issue of the journal *Social Justice* on the theme 'Juvenile Delinquency, Modernity and the State': *Social Justice*, 38, 4 (2012). For a settler-colonial context comparable to South Africa see M. Bellanta, *Larrikins: A History* (University of Queensland Press, 2012).

[10] Laurent Fouchard has argued that ideas around juvenile delinquency only became current in South Africa from the 1930s. The fact remains that anxieties around adolescent youth were prevalent throughout the 1910s and 1920s, even if they predated the emergence of juvenile delinquency as an organising term. Children being 'out of control' or 'uncontrollable' were the most commonly used descriptors. L. Fouchard, 'The Making of the Juvenile Delinquent in Nigeria and South Africa', *History Compass*, 8, 2 (2010), 129-145.

prevailing ideologies of race and gender and how they justified the incarceration of young women in mental hospitals, 'homes for friendless girls', reformatories and industrial schools.[11] Yet child welfare had a much wider remit than this. Not all the young people whose lives were touched by welfare organisations were incarcerated by the state. Some were adopted or apprenticed. Others were allowed to remain at home. If their parents were deemed to be 'doing their best' and if 'out of control' youth were thought capable of rectifying their behaviour, welfare agencies supported families to stay together, disbursing grants whilst monitoring children's progress, sometimes over a period of several years. Just as historians of psychiatry have attempted to write histories outside the asylum, therefore, tracing the social and family lives of mental patients before they became patients, so we might do the same for the world of child welfare.[12] The distinction is between an institutional and a social history: the difference between the deserving and undeserving poor was established *before* young people were removed from their families and committed to the legal custody of the state. The process involved, moreover, a particular kind of surveillance and a particular discursive regime. Besides the Society case workers who organised each case, parents, police detectives, school teachers, hospital superintendents, doctors, and, sometimes, parish priests all assumed the authority to judge girls' intimate relationships as well as their mental health, their bodily appearance, their emotional dispositions and the sources of their apparent distress. To the extent that poor white anxieties did motivate child welfare practitioners, concern focused on female sexuality: sex was at the heart of almost every case file involving 'out of control' European girls but scarcely figured at all in cases pertaining to 'European' boys or to girls described as 'Coloured' or 'Mixed'. 'Immorality', however, was not only about the prospect of inter-racial sex. Simply the possibility that white girls had sexualities at all was dangerous. While it is true that ideas around mental weakness and moral aberration rationalised the medical discourse around female sexuality in South Africa at this time, it is also the case that child welfare practitioners fell back upon a more quotidian, common-sense language of blame in order to identify where the corruption of innocence should lie. As often as blame was located with bad mothers and bad homes, it was also directed at girls themselves – ever the carriers, never just the victims, of moral contagion.

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[11] L. Chisholm, 'Reformatories and Industrial Schools in South Africa: A Study in Class, Colour and Gender, 1882-1939', PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1989; S. Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 170-189; S. M. Klausen, *Race, Maternity and the Politics of Birth Control in South Africa, 1910-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). For the Southern Rhodesian context, see I. Mhike, 'Intersections of Sexual Delinquency and Sub-Normality: White Female Juvenile Delinquency in Southern Rhodesia, 1930s-c.1950', *Settler Colonial Studies*, 8, 4 (2018), 575-593.

[12] In the South African context see J. Parle, 'Family Commitments, Economies of Emotions and Negotiating Mental Illness in Late Nineteenth to Mid-Twentieth Century Natal, South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 66, 1 (2014), 1-21 and Sally Swartz, *Homeless Wonderers: Movement and Mental Illness in the Cape Colony in the Nineteenth Century* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2015).

IMMORALITY AND BLAME

The cases I discuss here are all drawn from the Cape Provincial archives. All relate to the implementation of the 1913 Children's Protection Act and all were overseen by the Cape Town Society for the Protection of Child Life (SPCL). What is perhaps most initially striking about these case files is the absence of any explicit 'poor white' discourse. In a sample of 800 case files dating between 1918 and 1935 the term 'poor white' appears in only a handful of cases.[13] This is not to say that welfare work was not racialized; the very fact that children's homes were racially segregated meant that children had to be classified as 'European' or 'Coloured' before their admission could proceed.[14] Yet child welfare workers in Cape Town intervened in the lives of children they identified as 'Coloured' as well as those they judged to be 'European' – and with Muslims as well as Christians. Child welfare work was not only about 'poor whites'. Nor is it true that Coloured children and their parents were automatically deemed inferior to those labelled 'European'. The evidence of the case records appears, therefore, to challenge the impression given by Vivian Bickford Smith – that by the early twentieth century whiteness and respectability had become interchangeable. Only whites, Bickford Smith argued, were judged deserving whilst Cape Town's Coloured population increasingly came to stand for crime, disease and disorder.[15] It is an argument similar to those made by Duff, Chisholm and others: poor whites were to be rescued and uplifted; non-whites cut adrift.[16]

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[13] See, for example the records pertaining to Martha Dann: Cape Archives (hereafter, KAB), 1 (CT) 2, 95/19 and Dawie Swart: 1 (CT), 3, 109/19.

[14] I explore how racialization worked in practice in W. Jackson, 'An Unmistakeable Trace of Colour: Racializing Children in 1920s Cape Town', *Past and Present*, 238, 1 (2018) 165-195.

Historians of South Africa have long been aware of the ways in which hierarchies of gender, race and class intersected in the working out of segregationist ideology.[17] What the child welfare records show are the ways in which, through the construction of a particular raced and gendered version of adolescent delinquency, those hierarchies were socially reproduced. That construction was made by distributing blame. Locating blame with adolescent white girls worked to displace blame from white men. Girls were found guilty not so much for having – or even wanting – sex but of exhibiting behaviours and appearances that incited male desire. That, paradoxically, raised the spectre of male sexuality at the same time as it deflected attention from white men's other failings – as fathers, husbands, breadwinners – indeed, as white men. We should not forget that 'immorality' during the 1920s was commonly believed to be a problem of white men. During parliamentary debates on the 1927 Immorality Act, MPs expressed surprise that 'men who go into the locations of the towns and next day go to the homes of decent citizens' were not 'punished by their fellow citizens and ostracised'.[18] According to the 1932 Carnegie Poor White Commission, inter-racial sex was 'consequent on a poor white having sunk to a socio-economic status which eventually cause him to associate with natives and coloured people on an equal footing'.[19] The 'poor white' here was gendered male.

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[15] V. Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town, 1875-1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 116-7

[16] Andrea Badham notably took the opposite line, arguing that in Woodstock – an area of Cape Town where the child welfare project was especially active – respectability was more important than race. 'It was a matter of class before colour,' she argued, 'morals above pigment'. A. Badham, '"The Badge of Respectability": Anglicanism in Turn-of-The-Century Woodstock', *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, 6 (1988), 84.

[17] Important work includes: S. Burman and P. Reynolds, *Growing up in a Divided Society: The Contexts of Childhood in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1986); B. Bozzoli, ed, *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives* (Johannesburg, 1987); C. Walker, ed, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990); P. Scully, *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823-1853* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1997); T. Keegan, 'Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in South Africa, ca. 1912', Journal of Southern African Studies, 27, 3 (2001), 459-477; L. Lange, *White, Poor and Angry: White Working Class Families in Johannesburg* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2003); Z. Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); P. Badassy, 'A Severed Umbilicus: Infanticide and the Concealment of Birth in Natal, 1860-1935', PhD Dissertation, University of KawZulu-Natal, 2011; M. Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013).

The problem of out of control white girls, in other words, cannot be understood apart from the problem of white men. In the child welfare record locating blame with adolescent girls worked to contain responsibility for what was undoubtedly an abiding social question – the breakdown of white settler families – within the bodies and minds of a group that, lacking social capital and financial independence, were uniquely vulnerable within the settler colonial population (in this light the presumed vulnerability of pre-pubescent children might itself be seen as a form of social capital). It is certainly not the case, however, that the failings of white men are missing from the case files. In many cases the suggestion of female adolescent sexuality was combined with intimations of sexual abuse by male figures in and around the home.[20] Other cases describe men's failure to hold down work and make consistent contributions to the household purse.[21] Men could be aggressive and violent to other family members.[22] Dozens of cases are framed by male absence. Some men were in jail or work colonies.[23] Some had gone away in search of work or to fight in the First World War and had not returned.[24] And others, from hostels and boarding houses and mine dumps and cattle sheds across the British Empire, were found to be failing to provide maintenance payments to the mothers of their children.[25]

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[18] Jeremy Martens, 'Citizenship, "Civilisation" and the Creation of South Africa's Immorality Act, 1927', *South African Historical Journal*, 59, 1 (2007), 238.

[19] R. W. Wilocks, *Carnegie Commission Part II: Psychological Report: The Poor White* (Stellenbosch, 1932), 62-3, cited in J. Martens, 'Citizenship, "Civilisation" and the Creation of South Africa's Immorality Act, 1927', *South African Historical Journal*, 59, 1 (2007), 233.

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[20] For examples, see KAB 1 (CT) 2, 51/19; 1 (CT) 12, 23/21; 1 (CT) 16, 208/21; 1 (CT) 16 243/21; 1 (CT) 24, 116/23; 1 (CT) 26, 192/23; 1 (CT) 33, 22/25; 1 (CT) 37, 131/25; 1 (CT) 42, 109/26; 1 (CT) 46, 118/27; 1 (CT) 48, 165/27; 1 (CT) 98, 112/34; 1(CT) 101, 246/34.

[21] Men's failure to fulfil the role of breadwinner could take many forms; men worked hard to present this failure as beyond their control. Unemployment, alcoholism and men's inability to provide financially for dependents are some of the most pervasive themes across the case files as a whole. Examples include 1 (CT) 3, 138/19; 1 (CT) 3, 139/19; 1 (CT) 4, 243/19; 1 (CT) 14, 123/21; 1 (CT) 14, 148/21; 1 (CT) 24, 81/23; 1 (CT) 29, 06/24; 1 (CT) 42, 91/26.

[22] 1 (CT) 2, 64/19; 1 (CT), 2, 82/19; 1 (CT) 15, 187/21; 1 (CT) 16, 243/21; 1 (CT) 19, 96/22; 1 (CT) 19, 97/22; 1 (CT) 39, 197/25; 1 (CT) 94, 19/34; 1 (CT) 101, 250/34.

[23] 1 (CT) 12, 23/21; 1 (CT), 14, 144/21; 1 (CT) 17, 255/21; 1 (CT), 21, 133/22; 1 (CT), 26, 161/23; 1 (CT) 28, 261/23; 1 (CT) 29, 15/24; 1 (CT) 54, 11/22/19; 1 (CT) 98, 104/34.

[24] 1 (CT) 3, 103/19; 1 (CT) 3, 137/19; 1 (CT) 23, 190/22; 1 (CT) 26, 197/23; 1 (CT) 27, 249/23/31; 1 (CT) 47, 7/18/A/2; 1 (CT) 50, 191/26; 1 (CT) 66, 75/29; 1 (CT) 72, 34/30.

[25] 1 (CT) 3, 106/19; 1 (CT) 14, 129/21; 1 (CT) 17, 253/21; 1 (CT) 22, 162/22; 1 (CT) 51, 22/27; 1 (CT) 80, 233/30. Many more case histories are described in the archives of the Governor General in Pretoria,

It is significant in this respect that blame was not simply imposed on families from above, through the surveillance of the state. Blame circulated within families themselves. Men and boys renounced their female relatives. Fathers worked with stage agencies to rid their daughters of 'immoral habits'. Even mothers renounced their daughters. And blame was decisive. Having a girl admitted to an institution was far easier when family members agreed with state agents that the blame for a girl's behaviour lay largely with herself.

Distributing blame, moreover, both relied upon and reproduced a particular discursive grammar. The link between moral and mental weakness – between sexuality and 'feeble-mindedness' – was in many cases what made sense of a girl's seemingly uncontrollable behaviour but it was apprehended only through on-the-ground surveillance and documentation. State agents drew upon the eugenicist discourse of 'poor whiteism' but it was filtered through a common-sense, inferential vernacular. Certain aspects of a girl's life – the way she looked, the people she associated with, the condition of her home – *became* significant in the process of conversation as a human subject became a case. Information became evidence. Details became telling. Eustace Grabant was fourteen when police detectives reported having seen her at the railway station and the docks. 'I have seen her loitering about the streets now for nearly six months,' reported a police detective, 'sometimes she loiters with a coloured prostitute and other nights she is alone. The parents of the girl are unable to control her. They are in very indifferent circumstances'. The magistrate added a judgement of his own. 'The girl is well nourished,' he observed, but indifferently clad. She…has the appearance of being somewhat defective.'[26] Doctors agreed. In August 1923 Eustace Grabant

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containing letters of petition from women seeking the whereabouts of their missing husbands. See South African National Archives, Pretoria, SAB, GG 1182-GG193.

[26] KAB 1 (CT) 26, 161/23, Det. George Turck, statement; Willshire Harmer note, both 25 July 1923.

was admitted to the Alexandria Institution for the Mentally Deficient, for how long and with what outcome it is unclear.[27]

Commentary on appearances could include the physiognomy of a face, the way a girl walked, dressed or carried herself, her physical size and stature and her demeanour in relation to adults and other children. In one case, doubt over female respectability centred on the uncertainty over how mother and daughter could afford the clothes that they wore. 'Both Mrs and Miss Beasley,' a case worker reported, 'were exceptionally well dressed and one begins to wonder where the money for such elaborate clothing comes from'.[28] In another case, nineteen-year-old Sally Chambers was noted to be staying at home, unable to work due to ill health. The SPCL General Secretary was unconvinced. 'Sally is not working,' she wrote, 'and we are not favourably impressed with her. When we visited she was well dressed and very much painted and powdered'.[29] Female modesty, or the lack of it, was read from physical appearance. The same police detective who had fifteen-year-old Mary van der Merwe removed from her home not only emphasised the undesirable influence of her mother and sister; he also emphasised Mary's attractive and pre-adolescent physical appearance:

> Mary is quite a child. She does not look more than 14 years of age, she has a nice appearance, short bobbed hair, with skirt to her knees. The child is strong and healthy.[30]

Mary was still a child. But if she was already showing signs of the adult she would become, she was showing precisely the kind of modesty and decorum – the absence of sexuality – by which respectable white femininity was defined. Of equal significance here is the fact that a CID detective assumed the right to comment in such detail on the dress, the hair style and the bodily appearance of a girl whose home circumstances he had been sent to investigate. He did so because what he was looking for was not merely evidence to show that Mary was sexually active. Rather, his commentary offered a judgement as to whether Mary was making herself into a sexualised object – for him and other men. Faces that were painted and powdered or bodies that were modishly attired indicated the failure on the part of young women to protect themselves from male sexuality. The politics of control in this sense centred on who or what any individual should be responsible for. Just as mothers were deemed responsible for the behaviour of their daughters, girls were responsible for the men who simultaneously protected and assailed them. Until it could be safely contained within marriage, female sexuality could only be denied.

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[27] KAB 1 (CT) 26, 161/23, PC Peter Schoof sworn statement, 8 August 1923.

[28] KAB 1 (CT) 4, Joseph de Kock to J. H. van Rooyen, Additional Magistrate, 3 December 1919.

[29] KAB 1 (CT) 42, 220/36, Doris Williams to Commissioner of Child Welfare, 15 February 1938. Though this letter dates from 1938, the case file for this particular family was opened in 1926.

[30] KAB 1 (CT) 23, 193/22, Det. E. Davis to Divisional C.I. Officer, 11 November 1922.

RACE, GENDER AND ADOLESCENCE

Sexuality featured in almost all the cases involving 'out of control' European girls but in very few cases pertaining to 'European' boys or to girls described as 'Coloured' or 'Mixed'.[31] In case after case girls classified as Coloured were described in utterly pejorative ways but without any mention of sex. In May 1919, for example, the mother of fourteen-year-old Emma Classen testified before the Cape Town magistrate that her daughter was 'very disobedient' and was running about the streets with 'low class boys and girls'. On one occasion Emma's father found his daughter fighting with other children in the street late at night. Despairing as to how to keep her in check, Emma's mother requested that her daughter be apprenticed to some person outside the city.[32] Another fourteen year old 'Coloured' girl, Lilley Bailey, was also found to be going out at night.[33] Both Lilley and Emma were apprenticed, to masters at Robertson and Calvinia respectively. Other Coloured teenage girls were described in similar ways. Winifred Robertson was 'mixing with bad company and staying out late at night'. She too was apprenticed.[34] Twelve year old Rosie Church, living with her father and his housekeeper after the death of her mother, was judged by the SPCL's case secretary to be 'a very naughty child'. She was 'quite out of control', the father said; she was untruthful and had taken to stealing.[35] Isabella Adams, fifteen years old in February 1927 when the Cape Town CID filed a report on her behaviour, was observed to be 'completely out of control of her parents'.[36] In all these cases there was no mention, either in parents' testimonies or in police and SPCL reports, of sex or 'immorality' – despite the fact that these girls refused to obey their parents, stayed out late at night and associated with undesirable companions. In the Adams case, the problem was worsened by the fact that Isabella was 'associating with a Malay youth' and 'going about the streets dressed as a Malay'. Isabella's crossing boundaries of culture and religion was keenly observed but no comment at all was made as regards to sex.

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[31] My analysis here is based on a sample of 250 case files dating from 1919 to 1933.

[32] KAB, 1 (CT) 3, 129/19, Annie Classen, sworn statement, undated.

[33] KAB 1 (CT) 46, 138/27, M. E. Retief, report on Lilly Bailey, 8 September 1926.

Even the very idea of control was raced. One thirteen year old girl was thought to be European when she first came to the Society's attention but when it was reported ten days later that she was in fact Coloured, the problem of her being out of control was softened. 'The only poor thing this girl has done wrong,' a police detective wrote, 'is [that] on two occasions she went out at 8pm and stayed away until 10.15pm without the mother's consent'. This, to the police, was a 'trivial occurrence'. Coloured girls on the streets at night had none of the 'poor white' panic that the idea of white girls on the street conveyed. In this case the police detective underlined 'Coloured' for emphasis before adding in parentheses 'not European or white' to clarify the point. Conversely, when European girls *were* seen to be spending time with Coloured people sexuality did not necessarily feature in their case file. In the case of Josephine Lange, for example, though it was noted that she was spending time 'playing cards with coloured girls at an Indian shop', no mention was made of sex. Even when Coloured girls became pregnant, they were damned not for 'immorality' but for dishonesty or bad character.[37]

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[34] KAB 1 (CT) 41, 77/26, Det. F. E. Davis to Divisional C.I. Officer, Cape Town, 31 March 1926.

[35] KAB 1 (CT) 41, 59/26, Case Secretary to Cape Town Magistrate, 17 March 1926.

[36] 1 (CT), 41, 46/26, Det. Davis to Divisional C.I. Officer, Cape Town, 27 February 1926.

A similar pattern is observable in relation to adolescent males, whether 'Coloured' or 'European'. Boys who were deemed to be out of control were those who did not go to school, who ran about the streets or loitered in insalubrious parts of town at night. Time and again parents, welfare workers and police detectives described delinquent boys in these terms, resembling ways of describing juvenile delinquency in other urban contexts of the time. Sex is scarcely mentioned at all in these accounts.[38] In at least two other respects these diverge from the ways in which female adolescent delinquency was described. First, there is a clear emphasis in these accounts on the need for the kind of discipline that only men could provide. When husbands took no interest in their children or had died or deserted their families, women despaired at their limited inability to instil obedience in their sons.[39] Welfare workers echoed these views. Henry Watts would be 'quite mismanaged' wrote one official, were he to remain with his step-mother after his father's death. 'He undoubtedly needs to be under a man's control'.[40] Twelve-year-old Joseph Green 'became unruly' during his father's absence during the First World War. 'I cannot say he mixes with bad companions', said his father, 'because he is a bad one himself'.[41] Just as women were responsible for inculcating the virtues of womanhood in their daughters, so fathers were judged responsible for good behaviour in their sons.

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[37] For an eloquent example, see Leah du Bruyn: 1 (CT) 3, 104/19; 1 (CT) 26, 156/23, CID Police Report, 20 July 1923. For the case of Josephine Lange, see 1 (CT) 84, 25/32.

[38] There are too many examples to cite in depth, but see Sean O' Sullivan, KAB 1 (CT) 2, 98/19; Anthony Woodhouse, KAB 1 (CT) 3, 125/19; Norman Blyth 1 (CT) 31, 130/24; John Jones, KAB 1 (CT) 33, 1/25; Lee Wilcock, KAB 1(CT) 50, 213/26; Daniel Morley KAB 1 (CT) 89, 54/33.

[39] For a good example see the case of Nathaniel Butts: KAB 1 (CT), 42, 94/26.

[40] KAB 1 (CT) 2, 76/19, Cape Peninsula Juvenile Advisory Board, to Rev H. J Coles, St. Mary's Rectory, Woodstock, 24 June 1918.

[41] KAB 1 (CT) 2, 100/19, Dawson Green, sworn statement, 31 March 1919.

Out of control boys, however, were judged more easily salvageable than girls. Unruly behaviour did not reflect profound or inherent deficiencies but was merely the outcome of a bad home environment or the malign influence of undesirable companions. Excess energy or an independent spirit were to be expected. These needed moulding but did not indicate any deeper flaw. Out of control boys, moreover, were often treated sympathetically.[42] 'It will be to the boy's advantage and interests' remarked a police detective of thirteen-year-old George Curran – described elsewhere as a 'superior class coloured boy' – if he could be apprenticed to 'some person in the country'. 'In all probability' he went on, 'he will then turn out to be a useful citizen'.[43] 'He is a strong healthy boy', wrote another detective regarding thirteen year old Elijah Wells, '[and] I have reasons to believe if sent to a suitable institution he would make amends'.[44] In some cases, boys were even consulted as to their own wishes for the future. Officials looked into the possibility of Henry Watts starting up an apprenticeship at the Salt River Railway Works after he expressed a desire to become an engineer. Another boy was apprenticed to a farm after he told officials that he liked animals.[45] Another said he wanted to go away to sea. This also was looked into.[46] With the necessary training even delinquent boys could be made into pliant, productive racial subjects.

Girls by contrast, were subject to particularly close and invasive forms of surveillance. And, in almost every case where girls classed as European were found to be out of the control of their parents, it was sexuality primarily that represented the failure of that control. Though other common signs of juvenile delinquency – stealing, lying, staying out at night, mixing with bad companions – featured too, sexuality was what these accounts were principally *about*. Often, these extended to long and highly-charged exchanges between multiple state agencies. The police, the city magistrate's office and the department of education were all closely involved in these case histories. Although those involved are almost certain to have absorbed – and perpetuated – prevailing ideas around the dangers of racial mixing and white degeneration, their reporting was focused on the life histories and home circumstances of each case before them. Knowledge about social relations in general was refracted through the act of apprehending relations in the concrete.

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[42] 1 (CT) KAB 5, 265/19, Son of B. G. Sharp.

[43] KAB 1 (CT) 1 (CT) 37, 133/25, Det. F. E. Davis to Divisional C.I. Officer, 31 August 1925.

[44] KAB 1 (CT) 38, 159/25, Sea Point CID to Divisional C.I. Officer, Cape Town, 30 September 1925. See also Darron Latham, KAB 1 (CT) 41, 83/26.

[45] KAB 1 (CT) 31, 117/24. Cape Town magistrate, minute, 8 August 1924.

[46] KAB 1 (CT) 33 8/25, Det. F. E. Davis to Divisional C.I. Officer, 23 January 1925.

MALIGN INFLUENCE WITHIN THE HOME

When adults in the care of 'uncontrollable' white girls resisted state intervention or denied that they were to blame for their failures of control, the problem of girls' wayward sexuality was explained with reference to the wayward sexuality of their female relatives, their mothers most of all. Delinquency became – in the eyes of the welfare workers – inter-generational. In July 1925 the SPCL Case Secretary reported the case of a fifteen-year-old girl, Margaret Foley, to the Magistrate. Margaret was fifteen and pregnant. Margaret's father was dead; her mother, Amy, had divorced her second husband and was living unmarried with another man. 'Under these circumstances,' the case secretary reported, 'we feel the girl should be removed as soon as possible from her present environment'. Margaret's mother herself disputed any suggestions that she was to blame. Her daughter's pregnancy was 'not through any lack of control on my part' she testified. 'I have done my best by the child,' she said:

> I don't want her sent away from me. I am well able to support her and the child when born. I intend bringing the child up as my own.[47]

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[47] KAB 1 (CT) 37, 121/25, Amy Foley, sworn statement, 6 August 1925.

When the police were assigned the case to investigate, however, they confirmed the Society's view that the mother's immorality was to blame for the behaviour of her daughter:

> The mother of the girl…is a divorced woman and had been for some time cohabiting with a man […who…] left her on account of the present trouble about the girl. It would seem that she has not had proper parental control over the girl…The mother is a drinker and living as she was with a man who was not her husband, it is not surprising that the girl went wrong…Having regard to the way that the girl has previously been allowed to run loose, one cannot feel confident that the mother will so mend her ways as to look after the girl in future.[48]

Uncontrolled sexuality had been learned at home. A mother unable to mend her own ways could hardly be expected to correct those of her daughter. Despite Amy's protestations, Margaret Foley was admitted to a maternity home in Queenstown in the Eastern Cape, some 600 miles from Cape Town.

In many other cases 'immoral' adolescent girls were described as such with reference to the deficiencies of their parents.[49] The inadequacies of Mary van der Merwe's parents were neatly conveyed with the phrase, 'Father drinks, mother immoral', a formula that well encapsulated the gendered logic by which impoverished whites were perceived as undeserving. It is not merely the case, however that these moral standards reflected different criteria for men and women. *How* the failures of men and women to meet these standards were described reflected different intensities of opprobrium or contempt. Mary's sixty-four year old father was laid up in bed on account of his drinking. 'I do not think for a moment', a police detective wrote, 'that the old father has any idea what kind of a life his wife and daughters are living'. He was 'old and broken up in health' and the detective was certain that his wife and eldest daughter, twenty-five-year old Lisbeth, were 'earning their living by prostitution'. If Mary was allowed to remain at home, he concluded, 'she will be as bad as her sister and mother'.[50] This gendered division of blame was reinforced by a letter received from one of Mary's brothers. Writing from a town in the Northern Cape where he had moved to find work, Jaco van der Merwe reported that his father has always done his best to keep the home in order but was unable to do so 'with a woman like my mother'. 'The ruination of the home', he went on, 'I put down to the fault of my mother and I fear that if the younger girls are left with her any longer they will also become street girls'. Despite there being no evidence provided to support the accusation that Mary's mother or sister were selling sex, Mary van der Merwe as well as all three of three younger sisters were removed from the family home and placed in state institutions.[51]

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[48] KAB 1 (CT) 37, 121/25, CID Police Report, 7 August 1925.

[49] See, for example, the particularly damning report into the mother of Christine Coates: KAB 1 (CT) 31, 139/24, Mrs Greenlees report 4 September 1924.

It is important to stress the value of these records for revealing the precise ways in which juvenile delinquency, female sexuality and the underlying categories of race, class and gender were articulated in the day to day work of child welfare. Institutional or political histories simply cannot capture how child welfare operated nor how the individual identities of children and those around them were constructed. Nor is it enough to suggest that juvenile delinquency was gendered or that female sexuality represented the most vulnerable aspect of a supposedly self-evident 'white' identity. Case histories show how problem children were explained. And because case records mapped families and family relationships, ideas about poverty, race and sex were routed through relationships, most often between mothers and their children. The gendered distribution of blame meant that the relationship between mothers and their daughters attracted especially close attention. In order to deflect blame, therefore, women were liable to disavow their daughters; girls, likewise, disowned their mothers. In February 1925, the Cape Town children's magistrate compiled a History Sheet for fourteen-year-old Amelia Grant, based largely on testimony provided by Grant's mother, Rachel. The document shows that Amelia's parents had married in London and migrated to South Africa in 1912. Under 'character' was entered: 'father wastrel, mother doubtful'; their daughter was described as 'immoral, lying and dishonest'. Since Amelia's father had returned to England, her mother had been working part-time as a bar-maid at the City Hall Hotel, supplementing her wages by sewing. In the absence of her husband it was Rachel's testimony that proved decisive, both in constituting her daughter's character and in deciding her future life-course. My daughter, said Rachel Grant under oath, is always after boys and men:

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[50] KAB 1 (CT) 23, 193/22, Det. E. Davis to Divisional C.I. Officer, 11 November 1922.

[51] KAB 1 (CT) 23, 193/22, Mabel Elliott, to Magistrate, 24 November 1922.

> I have recently found her in possession of filthy books [and…] I recently found out that she was taken out in a motor car by a man. She is not clean in her habits. I want her placed in some institution where she will be under proper control until she reaches an age of discretion.[52]

This was enough to ensure Amelia's confinement at a 'House of Mercy' for women and girls in Pretoria. Before she was admitted, a doctor who examined her judged Amelia to be 'not feeble minded but not very intelligent [and] sexually far too developed for her age'. Hers was a case, he thought, 'that wants constant supervision', ideally away from Cape Town and the influence of her mother who did not have 'the tact and the insight necessary for the education of such a difficult child'.[53] Remarkably, this was a view echoed by Amelia herself when, five years later and approaching her eighteenth birthday, she was due for release. To the Cape Town magistrate, the Mother Superior at the Pretoria home where Amelia had been committed wrote:

> I questioned [Amelia] and she quite firmly says she does not wish to return to her mother at Cape Town as she feels it would not be safe or 'wise' – this without any persuasion on my part and knowing that it probably means a final break with her family Amelia is doing well

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[52] KAB 1 (CT) 33, 22/25, Rachel Grant sworn statement, 5 February 1925.

[53] KAB 1 (CT) 33, 22/25, J. H. Kooy to Miss McLoughlin, 13 February 1925.

> […] has improved in every way and has, I think, a very different outlook on life to the one she had when she came to us. She is happy and I think would like to stay on here but we think it would be better for her to go to service of some sort a little later on. Probably in Pretoria where we can keep an eye on her.[54]

For the Society, the case of Amelia Grant represented a successful intervention. A girl who had been categorised as immoral and dishonest had been removed from the influence of her inadequate mother and placed into an institution where she received the necessary corrective training to emerge a worthy future citizen. Crucially, the resolution to the case rested on the fact that Amelia had – apparently voluntarily – renounced her mother. Quite what pressure was brought to bear on her throughout the course of the SPCL's investigation (not to mention the effects of her five years at the Pretoria home in Pretoria) is impossible to know but in pinning blame on the harmful influence of her mother, Amelia may have escaped further confinement or surveillance by the state. Girls worked both with and against the child welfare regime. Certainly, if a girl attempted to re-establish contact with her mother having been removed previously from her care, child welfare officers were swift to intervene. When Horatio Legg visited the SPCL offices to report that his wife was neglecting her home and children and was constantly out with soldiers the SPCL concurred. 'Mrs Legg and her daughter Anna are well known to the woman patrols,' their case secretary reported, 'who have informed us that they were constantly seen with soldiers in the street and the girl has been out alone at night with Australians'.[55] On investigation, Anna's mother, Dorothy, agreed to have her daughter placed into service and Anna was subsequently sent to work as a domestic servant in Stellenbosch. Anna ran away from here, however, and returned to her mother in Cape Town, to an address the authorities suspected of being 'a house of ill fame'. At this point the police were called in, Dorothy was arrested and Anna was admitted to a Salvation Army Place of Safety with a view to her moving to more long term institutional care after that.[56]

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[54] KAB 1 (CT) 33, 22/25, Sister Enid, pp. Rev. Mother, Irene Homes, Irene, Pretoria, to Cape Town Magistrate, 5 February 1930.

[55] KAB 1 (CT) 4, 179/19, Mabel Elliott to Resident Magistrate, 1 August 1919.

Other times, the sexuality of mothers and daughters was configured in ways that came to describe the harmful environment in which other, typically younger, siblings were being raised. Unlike male delinquency, female 'immorality' corrupted family homes. Albert Beasley was eleven years old when he came to the Society's attention in the spring of 1919. His father was an Irish migrant who had abandoned the family and whose whereabouts were unknown. His mother, Cape Town born Eliza, was working as a dressmaker but once investigations began suspicions were quickly raised as to her moral character. Her landlord, Mr. Buchanan, told police that Mrs Beasley was a 'lazy, indolent woman'. Another male informant, Mr Whittle, a neighbour, viewed Beasley a 'far from respectable woman'. 'She often had male visitors to her house at night time', he said, and although a widow, recently gave birth to a baby:

> She was a supposed dressmaker but did little work and as she had to live there was only one conclusion as to the reason of the visits of the male friends. He did not think that she was a fit person to have charge of children.[57]

Though the investigating detective noted that neither 'the above gentleman' cared to be brought into any proceedings, he was confident their statements could be 'accepted as true indications of Mrs Beasley and her circumstances'.[58] A month later a welfare officer had Mrs Beasley and her daughter call at his office whereupon he 'closely questioned' them both on the matter of the male visitors. 'Although very little is revealed by either the mother or the daughter,' he wrote, 'I cannot help feeling that in order to supplement their small income, immoral acts are sometimes resorted to'. Albert was subsequently placed in a children's home, not because he displayed any undesirable behaviour himself but to save him from the harmful influence of his female relatives.

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[56] KAB 1 (CT) 4, 179/19, Addl Magistrate, Cape Town, to Secretary, CLP Society, 12 August 1919; Order under section 10/14 (b) Act 25 of 1913, 8 October 1919.

[57] KAB 1 (CT) 4, 245/19, CID Police Report, 4 November 1919.

[58] KAB 1 (CT) 4, 245/19, CID Police Report, 4 November 1919.

Focusing blame for the failure of the normative 'white' family on adolescent girls diverted attention both from the structural constraints impinging on adolescent girls *and* from the failings of men. Whereas men and boys could be depicted in pejorative terms – as ne'er do wells, undesirables or bad characters – whatever deviance or disorder was associated with men typically lacked the mobile, transmissible quality attributed to female sexuality. Unlike male misbehaviour, female 'immorality' *moved*, not only through intimate family relations but also in and out of homes, through school classes and friendship groups and beyond the very limits of the welfare officers' gaze. Blame was both contained within the body and mind of an individual and distributed across her social milieu. Hence, stage agents very often relied on other guardians of public morality to inform upon and sometimes discipline girls whose behaviour raised the possibility of female sexuality. These included teachers, employers and in many cases parents themselves. In documenting female delinquency, informants meshed languages of racial degeneration with more common-sense descriptions of girls' behaviour and appearance. Often, they divulged considerable narrative detail too, relating how suspicions had been raised and how their own informal attempts to control or confine girls under their charge had failed. Recognising the extent to which members of respectable Cape Town society constructed female immorality *together* is as important as the underlying point that the poor white problem was as much about gender as it was race or class.

IMMORALITY AT LARGE

Unlike poor white boys, delinquency amongst poor white girls was deemed to be contagious. Boys who stole or ran around the streets at night were disorderly but delinquent girls brought disorder within the home itself. In March 1926 the widow Maud Erikson contacted the SPCL to report that her daughter was staying out late at night. 'She fears she is getting into immoral habits,' read one report. 'She is afraid she may bring trouble to the home', read another.[59] Christine Coates was judged to be a 'bad influence at school' and was 'putting her younger sister Sarah at risk'.[60] Another girl was noted as 'contaminating the other girls in the neighbourhood'.[61] Female delinquency was mobile, infectious in a way that male delinquency was not.[62]

'European' girls as young as ten were found to be corrupting the morals of siblings, playmates or peers at school. 'We have had extremely bad reports of this girl' the Society's case secretary wrote of eleven year old Alice Guest, 'I hear that she is corrupting the morals of all the boys in the neighbourhood, both older and younger than herself'.[63] A police detective subsequently judged Alice 'very intelligent' and 'a moral pervert'.[64] Though investigators were unsure as to the culpability of the parents – one report observed that they were both 'very respectable' while the parents themselves stressed that they were unaware of their daughter's behaviour and would be especially careful to control her in the future – the Society argued for her removal.[65] Though there is no clear evidence to indicate what happened next, it seems likely that Alice was committed to the House of Bethany, an institution established in 1916 by the Anglican church for 'girls of

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[59] She too was incarcerated, at the Holy Cross Orphanage at Irene, Pretoria. 1 (CT) 41, 65/26. G. J. Tawke, SPCL Case Secretary, to Cape Town Magistrate, 24 March 1926; CID Police Report, 27 March 1926.

[60] KAB 1 (CT) 31, 139/24, M. E. McLoughlin to Cape Town Magistrate, 4 September 1924.

[61] KAB 1 (CT) 1, 49/19, Det. Hennessy to Cape Town Magistrate, 5 February 1919.

[62] This aligns with Elizabeth van Heyningen's emphasis on authorities' concern with 'occasional prostitutes': women who worked as nursemaids or domestic servants but sold sex as well. These women 'penetrated the sacrosanct circle of the Victorian family and threatened it with contamination'. Van Henyningen, 'Social Evil', 180.

[63] KAB 1 (CT), 26, 192/23, M. E. McLoughlin to Cape Town Magistrate, 29 August 1923.

[64] KAB 1 (CT) 26, 192/23, CID Police Report, 16 October 1923.

[65] The magistrate thought mother 'does not look a very strong minded person' but this was far less grievous than a charge of immorality. KAB 1 (CT) 26, 192/23, Margery Quinn to Cape Town Magistrate, 8 September 1923.

European parentage' who had been 'the victims of the sin of impurity' or who were judged to be in 'danger of being such victims'.[66]

Girls who had been corrupted by their home environments or by contact with 'undesirable' relatives, became corruptive agents themselves. Audrey Dunn was twelve years old in 1922 when two teachers from her school gave sworn affidavits to the South African police. The headmaster, Henry Jameson – 'a European adult male', the affidavit stated – recorded that Audrey was 'obstinate and sulky, untidy in her dress, and inclined to be dirty in her habits'. On one occasion Jameson had asked Audrey to remove a ring she was wearing because it was against school regulations. Audrey had 'looked very sulky' on this occasion and had avoided looking at the headmaster as he admonished her and sent her back to class.

These were the reasons the headmaster gave for expelling Audrey Dunn from school. Not looking had been an act of defiance, a rejection of the headmaster's authority. The second teacher consulted, Thomas Edwards, confirmed the headmaster's statement and added that he had on several occasions seen Audrey Dunn in Waterkrant Street, talking to young men. Edwards had also seen Audrey on Long Street, on one occasion with a man who appeared to be 'a sailor in plain clothes'. When the CID were contacted, they were asked to focus on the possibility that Alice was associating with men. The detective who investigated the case did see Audrey and another girl in Waterkrant Street talking to youths but these he judged to be only sixteen or seventeen years old. They were the girls' friends, not 'men'.[67] As for the expulsion from school, the policeman thought that Audrey 'did not get on with the teachers'. She was rather deaf, he noted, which could give the false impression that she was 'dull and stupid'. Echoes of eugenicist discourse are perceptible here but it was a discourse that was contested and confused as it filtered through this particular local cluster of interested parties: educators, welfare officers and the police.

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[66] S. Burman and M. Naude, 'Bearing a Bastard: The Social Consequences of Illegitimacy in Cape Town, 1896-1939', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17, 3 (1991), 398.

[67] KAB 1 (CT), 18, 38/22, Det E. Davis to Divisional C.I. Officer, 1 May 1924.

In this case the police report worked to rule out the possibility that Audrey Dunn was 'out of control' and she remained with her mother. In the case records more broadly, however, there was no surer sign of adolescent girls' immorality than their being seen in contact with adult men. As a sea port that had seen successive waves of wartime military mobilisation – during the South African war and subsequently during the First World War – as well as a fairly constant traffic through the city of military personnel (Simonstown in the 1920s was a major British naval base) the presence in the case file of 'the sailor' or 'the soldier' was a particularly powerful sign of out-of-control adolescent sexuality.[68] In April 1919 Thomas Manners, a doctor living with his wife and two children in Oranjezicht in the city bowl, arranged with the superintendent of a children's home to take Aletta Joubert as a 'nurse companion' to his children, in return for 'free board and lodgings and £1.10 a month'. A formal indenture form was drawn up before the magistrate. If Aletta's conduct was good, after the first year she would receive £2 a month until her twenty-first birthday. 'For the first month,' Manners reported later, 'we found her conduct satisfactory but afterwards we found her very lazy [and] unreliable'. On an afternoon in June, he said, a young man in khaki was found sitting on a bench in his garden. His suspicious aroused, at ten o'clock that night Manners and his wife looked into Aletta's room. 'We found the room empty and the window open' he said. Her bedroom was on the ground floor; 'she could easily get out'. The scene he described, of an open window and an empty room, represented the wilful abandonment of the home – itself configured as a pre-sexual or asexual space – by a person whose adolescence criss-crossed the boundaries of public and private, adult and child. Later that night, Aletta was found on Roeland Street and was brought back to the Manners home but she soon 'cleared off' again. Three days later when Manners and his wife 'trapped' Aletta 'in her room' she 'confess[ed] to having been out frequently at night with different khaki men'. Letters found in Aletta's possession seemed to confirm that she had been meeting at least one man: these letters were taken from her, given to the police and enclosed with his report. Though her indenture with the Manners family was terminated, there is no evidence on file in this case to indicate what happened to Aletta Joubert after that.[69]

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[68] As the 1939 Commission on Mixed Marriages in South Africa reported, 'During the South African War (1899-1902) and for some time afterwards the presence of large bodies of troops in the country attracted numbers of loose European women, mostly of Continental origin, to the seaports and larger inland towns, to which they resorted for the purpose of prostitution. The brazen manner in which they paraded the streets and accosted men, extending their attentions also to natives and other persons of colour, became a public scandal'. U.G. 30-39 (Pretoria, 1939), 13-14, cited in Cornwell, 'Black Peril', 443.

Case files operated as dossiers of evidence, their contents supplying narratives of significant events and a composite picture of where blame for female sexuality should reside. Parents and other family members were significant voices. Their letters and their sworn affidavits before the magistrate were often decisive in how blame was apportioned and a case resolved. Parents could be especially influential in triggering a case – in contacting the police or the SPCL to request something to be done about their child. There were, as already discussed, many cases where girls were removed against their parents' wishes but more often parents themselves participated in the construction of their daughters as delinquent and their removal from the family home. This is what happened to Matilda Brooks after her father testified that his daughter was running about the streets after boys. 'I am afraid she will become a prostitute if she is not put under control,' he said.[70] 'She is a strong and health looking girl', added the magistrate, 'and big for her age'.[71] The fact that Matilda's difficult behaviour had begun following the death of her mother was passed over. She too was placed in a children's home – the Good Shepherd Home for Friendless Girls – where she was committed until the age of eighteen.[72]

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[69] KAB 1 (CT) 4, 165/19, Thomas Manners to Ms. Van Rooyen, 30 June 1919; Thomas Manners and Aletta Joubert, sworn statements, undated; Det. Davis to Head Constable SA Police, Cape Town, 6 July 1919.

[70] KAB 1 (CT) 31, 142/34, William Brooks, sworn statement, 27 October 1924.

No less striking in many of these accounts is the emotional intensity that characterises parents' own accounts of disorderly adolescence. In August 1919 47 year old Benedict Hastings was summoned to the West Cliff public school to discuss the behaviour of his daughters, Annabel and Marjory.[73] The principal had found letters in their possession 'of a filthy and disgusting nature'. The children should be withdrawn by their father from the school or would be expelled. The principal did not want his school 'to get a bad name'. To the Cape Town magistrate, Mr Hastings explained: 'For the last year me and my wife have had a lot of trouble with Annabel and Marjory... I cannot keep them away from the boys'. Hastings had thrashed both his daughters on several occasions. On one occasion, he had thrashed Marjory 'until she could hardly speak'. This level of violence was not deemed excessive and nowhere in this particular case file is there any suggestion that Mr and Mrs Hastings were anything less than respectable. Both girls were committed to an Industrial School at Paarl.[74]

Violence in colonial contexts is often analysed as instrumental. Violence inhibits, controls or represses those upon whom it is exercised; violence serves the interests of those who carry it out.[75] Here, however the intensity of the violence described – 'I thrashed her until she could hardly speak' – offers an alternative interpretation. In colonial Natal, as Prinisha Badassy showed, indentured Indians were driven to assault and – in some cases – kill their white employers. These crimes, Badassy argued, 'were the physical expression of revenge, hatred, despair, misery and anguish.' It was resentment, for Badassy, not resistance, that provided the more useful framework for explaining violence.[76] We might apply a similar interpretation here. Hastings, though not named anywhere on file as a 'poor white', was only just able to make a living. 'My place of business', he said, 'is in a back street and trade is very bad.[77] If he was not already regarded as a 'poor white' Hastings would have lived in a near-constant state of avoiding becoming so. Does this explain the violence towards his daughter? Did her 'out of control' state jeopardise the very thing that gave him his identity as a man and a father – his whiteness? Might we even see physical violence at the hands of husbands and fathers within the home as *part* of the broader project to discipline 'out of control' girls? Were Benjamin Hastings and the Minister for Education, the Cape Town Magistrate and the CID Detective all working in this sense together?

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[71] KAB 1 (CT) 31, 142/34, Willshire Harmer, Addl Magistrate, note, 27 October 1924.

[72] KAB 1 (CT) 31, 142/34, Magistrate's Committal Order, 11 November 1924.

[73] KAB 1 (CT) 4, CPA 155/19, Benedict Hastings sworn statement.

[74] KAB 1 (CT) 4, CPA 155/19, Commital Order under Act 25 of 1913, signed J. H. van Rooyen, 1 August 1919.

[75] For an overview, see J. McCulloch, 'Empire and Violence, 1900-1939' in P. Levine, ed, *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Certainly, there are good reasons for broadening our perspective beyond the institutional worlds of industrial schools, reformatories and children's homes in order to better understand how families themselves controlled the behaviour of young people and – when they failed – instigated interventions by the state. As Mark Finnane argued in relation to the mental asylum, families use the possibility of institutional confinement to arbitrate social and familial conflict. There is no 'innocent' family, Finnane insisted. 'So often,' he wrote, 'it is the history of familial relations which is essential to appreciating the decision to commit'.[78] In a similar vein, the case records of child welfare organisations allow us to see outside the custodial institutions to which so many 'out of control' young people were committed. To gain a fuller understanding of the relationship between childhood and the poor white problem in South Africa we need to know more about the family lives of so-called 'poor whites' themselves. Top-down legal, discursive or institutional histories can only ever show a very partial view.

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[76] P. Badassy, '…And My Blood Became Hot!' Crimes of Passion, Crimes of Reason: An Analysis of the Crimes of Murder and Physical Assault against Masters and Mistresses by their Indian Domestic Servants, 1880-1920', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 23 (2005), 64-94.

[77] KAB 1 (CT) 4, CPA 155/19, Benedict Hastings, sworn statement, undated.

[78] M. Finnane, 'Asylums, Families and the State', *History Workshop Journal*, 20 (1985), 137-138.

CONCLUSION

Historians have already investigated in some depth the associated problems of female sexuality, white poverty and social control in segregation-era South Africa. Susanne Klausen's work, in particular, has revealed the fraught politics of social and sexual reproduction throughout the twentieth century, while Linda Chisholm's research into the history of industrial schools and reformatories showed how dangerous white female sexuality was perceived to be at a time when the 'poor white' problem propelled and justified a wide range of penal, sociological and scientific research. The literature on childhood and child welfare, however, has yet to disaggregate between the treatment of babies and young children on the part of agencies such as the SPCL and the very different challenge that older, pubescent and post-pubescent children presented. For organisations such as these, and the stage agencies with which they worked, the problem of female sexuality was never only about miscegenation. This was, in a sense, simply pragmatic: female sexuality meant babies and babies meant ever more work for the child welfare regime. At the same time, sexually active girls embodied the problem that adolescence presented to the neat division of categories of 'adult' and 'child'. Girls having children were children themselves. And yet, there was a larger value in controlling adolescent white girls – and in constructing them as 'out of control' to begin with. Where the mythology of colonial whiteness depended on how people identified as 'white' behaved, those responsible for rectifying social disorder confronted on a daily basis real flesh-and-blood white people living in ways that shattered absolutely the myth of a superior race. Studying individual case histories shows how 'ordinary people' as well as agents of the state resolved this dilemma. How certain individuals came to be understood as deviant may have been rationalised through ideas around morality, health and hygiene but it was read from the material realities of human lives. Documenting female sexuality meant reading for the signs and symbols that indicated some grievous, internal and all-encompassing fault while at the same time exculpating other individuals from responsibility or blame. Though the problems faced by girls and young women had as much to do with their restricted social roles, their exploitation at the hands of employers or, indeed, their experience of absent, violent or unsupportive men in their lives, the logic of blame served to refocus attention upon their sexuality, configured as a problem in itself as opposed to a problem involving men. Rather than see elite or esoteric discourses – around mother-craft, miscegenation or the psychology of poor white-ism – as entirely absent from the child welfare case record, we might better understand these ideas as operating *through* the discourse of the case file itself. The police investigation, the Society's report, the magistrate's committal order – each were elements within a moral framework that worked to both direct and deflect the blame for 'immoral' sex. From the way that a girl styled her hair to the fact that she was observed in the wrong part of town – even the *suggestion* of adolescent female sexuality could articulate a girl's unworthy status and her suitability for (oftentimes, prolonged) incarceration by the state.