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The intertwining of antisemitism and racism in modern South Africa, c. 1880–1939*

REBECCA HODES
AND RODNEY H. REZNEK

This article traces how historical constructions of Jews – informed by protean notions of social, cultural, and physical difference in Europe – were transplanted into the colonial imagination, infusing the writings of scientists, state officials, and the popular press at the Cape colony from the late nineteenth century onwards. It focuses in particular on how eugenic ideas were expressed in the scientific literature, adding momentum to calls for the segregation and sterilization of social “undesirables”, and for greater regulation and control by the nascent South African state.

The claims of European scientists regarding racial difference and inferiority did not arise spontaneously, nor did they travel along a straight line before coming to rest at a colonial cul de sac. Instead, the production and flow of racial science was multidirectional, and adapted in situ. Through exploring how claims regarding racial and Jewish differences ricocheted across time and space, this study emphasizes the mobility and adaptability of these claims.¹ A number of influential racial scientists, including Eugen Fischer, Francis Galton, and Robert Knox developed their ideas regarding biological determinism and racial heredity through research conducted at the Cape and, in the case of Fischer, in Namibia as well.² Knox’s thesis that “race is everything” – the determinant of all human characteristics and achievements – leans heavily on observations made at the Cape Colony during the mid-nineteenth century.

Numerous historians have elucidated the changing “racial place” of Jews in the modern imagination, mapping the ways in which racial

1 Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge 1870–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3.

2 Saul Dubow, “South Africa: Paradoxes in the Place of Race”, *Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, ed. Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 285.

* The authors thank Saul Dubow for his insights into the material covered in this article. We also thank two anonymous peer reviewers for their excellent guidance in revising this work.

concepts were adapted and remade, particularly in the United States and Europe.³ Historians of British imperialism in Africa, in contrast, have analysed racial difference through the prism of “native” subjugation. Saul Dubow’s *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (1995), for instance, features no entry for “Jews” in its index.⁴ Here we seek to merge these historiographical approaches by exploring crossovers between racism and antisemitism and outlining how both forms of prejudice influenced the other. The article explores thinking about Jews within a colonial context, examining the role of Jews in imperial statecraft at the Cape Colony in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Conceptualizing race

This study draws principally on treatises about race written by doctors and scientists. Primary sources are gleaned mostly from the *South African Medical Record*, which later became the *South African Medical Journal*. Their content is used to explore how discourses of racial otherness and pathogenicity were understood by doctors and government officials at the Cape Colony and later the Union of South Africa. Parliamentary debates and popular news articles contribute to the secondary research base for this article, together with the *South African Journal for the Advancement of Science* and archival material from the Department of the Interior (Binnelandse Sake, hereafter BNS). These sources were identified through archival research spanning the rise of the new imperialism⁵ in the late nineteenth century, through the heyday of eugenics in the 1930s, until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Ideas about race are highly unstable, reflecting the political beliefs and contexts of different social actors. As Zine Magubane has argued, through interpreting beliefs about race as static and unitary, some scholars

3 Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (London: Routledge, 1991); Leonard Rogoff, “Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew”, *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (Sept. 1997): 195–230; Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews became White Folks and what that says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Mitchell B. Hart, ed., *Jews and Race: Writings on Identity and Difference, 1880–1940* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011).

4 Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

5 The “new imperialism” designates a period of increased colonial expansion from the late nineteenth century in which colonial powers sought to increase their territorial control.

have unwittingly rehearsed the tenets of biological essentialism. They have approached ideas of racial distinction as expressions of empirical difference rather than ideological contestation.⁶ This article seeks instead to explore the mutability of racial discourses, examining the utility and changeability of race in nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Africa, in particular with regard to Jews in relation to those belonging to other constructed racial groups.

Historiography of eugenics and Jews in South Africa

The literature on the relationship between eugenic thinking and antisemitism in South Africa is sparse. The role of Jews in the colonial enterprise in South Africa is a similarly neglected historical subject, troubling various binaries between the colonizer and the colonized.⁷ A recent unpublished doctoral thesis has shown that eugenics was key to the formulation of the Immigration Quota Act of 1930, which denied entry to Jews from Eastern Europe.⁸ Other studies on immigration into South Africa by Edna Bradlow and Audie Klotz do not explore the role played by eugenics.⁹ The relatively recent work presented by Sally Peberdy covering the entire history of immigration in South Africa refers to the use of eugenicist language in the construction of the 1930 Immigration Quota Act but does not analyse the discourse in sufficient length to assess its impact on excluding Jews.¹⁰ Even studies that cover only Jewish exclusion in South Africa deal with eugenics sparingly or not at all.¹¹ For example, in his 2015 comprehensive work on antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s, Milton Shain contends that eugenic obsessions “impacted perhaps

6 Z. Magubane, “Which bodies matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the ‘Hottentot Venus’”, *Gender and Society* 15 (2001), 816–34.

7 Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, “Introduction: Engaging Colonial History and Jewish History” in *Colonialism and the Jews*, ed. E. Katz, L. Leff, and M. Mandel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 1–25.

8 Rodney H. Reznick, “A Vocabulary of Difference: How Jews were denied Entry to South Africa in the 1930s” (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2017).

9 Edna Bradlow, “Immigration into the Union, 1910–1948: Policies and Attitudes” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978); Audie Klotz, *Migration and National Identity in South Africa 1860–2010* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

10 Sally Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants: National Identity and South Africa's Immigration Policies, 1910–2008* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 73–81.

11 Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980); Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994).

minimally on the Jewish immigration debate”.¹² This article outlines how antisemitic claims featured in the writings of key medical officials, political authorities, and the popular press, influencing local discourses on the supposed dysgenic effects of Jewish migration to South Africa. We aim to shed new light on the role of Jews in the imperial turn by focusing on the place and characterization of Jews within racial discourses and within the larger imperial endeavour at the Cape from the late nineteenth century until the start of the Second World War.

Jews as Hottentots and Negroes

In 1850, the English anatomist Robert Knox published *The Races of Men*. The book established a framework of racial typologies, and in proceeding decades became an important reference for proponents of scientific racism. Knox had worked as an army surgeon at the Cape Colony, and his book included numerous examples from his experiences. While arguing that racial groupings were essentially distinct, Knox also drew numerous comparisons between the supposed physiological, behavioural, and intellectual markers of racial groups, including Jews, Negroes, and Hottentots.¹³ He described Jews and the “natives of black Africa” as “affiliated races”, outlining the features “which stamp the African character of the Jew”. He wrote that Jews “fabricate nothing, create nothing, live in a seeming vision of the past . . . The Jew has no monumental history. He never had any literature, science, or art: he has none yet”. These claims were similar to those Knox made about the “Hottentots” of the Cape, whom he described as being “Without arts, without religion, and without civilization of any kind . . . The history of a day is the history of their lives.”¹⁴

On one level, Knox’s claims seem surprising, contradicting popular beliefs that the Jews were obsessed with and embodied the past, or that they were bookish and hyper-intellectual, elevating the intellectual over the physical.¹⁵ But Knox’s claim here supports another antisemitic trope, in which Jewishness is understood as anachronistic, irreconcilable with modernity and progress. Knox’s claims also cohere with a core

12 Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa 1930–1948* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2015), 137.

13 Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 27; Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 304.

14 Knox, *Races*, 255, 263, 158, 305, respectively.

15 Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: William Heinemann, 1895).

antisemitic claim about Jewish parasitism: that Jews contribute nothing, create nothing, but feed parasitically on the wealth, culture, and health of other so-called racial groups.

Jews and “natives” as disease vectors

From the late nineteenth century, doctors and scientists at the Cape Colony commonly emphasized the connections between native populations and disease vectors, in a way that presaged eugenic ideas about the parasitic nature of “social degenerates” including Jews. In their account entitled “The Transmission of Plague by Human Carriers” in the *South African Medical Journal* of 1916, for instance, D. C. Rees and P. Targett Adams wrote:

The native himself is exceedingly uncleanly in his person and clothing – his blankets and garments are practically never washed. His hut is an ideal incubator for promoting the growth of the bacillus pestis, being dark and dirty, unventilated and overcrowded, and having a cow-dung or earth floor. The natives lie huddled closely together at night . . . They expectorate indiscriminately as they lie on the floor and inhale each other’s breath. Flies and other insect carriers freely pass from one person to another. In short, they exist not very dissimilarly to the way of rodents – the natural host of the bacillus pestis – in their nests and burrows.¹⁶

The zoonotic association of “natives” with rats, and the association of “natives” with the plague is comparable to the long history of association between Jews and vermin, and of Jews as plague-bearers.¹⁷ These associations were harboured also at the Cape Colony. As Dr. A. J. Gregory, medical officer of health for the Cape Colony, stated in 1904 in relation to Litvak Jews (from Eastern Europe): A “large proportion of the immigrants were unsatisfactory in important respects . . . [they were] ill-provided, indifferently educated, unable to speak or understand any language but Yiddish, of inferior physique, often dirty in their habits, persons and clothing and most unreliable in their statements.”¹⁸ Gregory’s

16 D. C. Rees and P. Targett Adams, “The Transmission of Plague by Human Carriers”, *South African Medical Journal* (hereafter, SAMJ), 20 Oct. 1916, 316.

17 T. Finley and M. Koyama, “Plague, Politics, and Pogroms: The Black Death, the Rule of Law, and the Persecution of Jews in the Holy Roman Empire”, *Journal of Law and Economics* 61, no. 2 (May 2018), 253–77.

18 G63-1904, Report on the Working of the Immigration Act 1902–1904, Annexures [sic] to the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Cape Colony, cited in Shain, *Roots of Antisemitism*, 50–51.

assumptions about Jews are characteristic of their place within the colonial project, troubling the supposed racial boundary between black and white, and challenging imperial orders of supremacy and control. Racial categories have been inverted throughout the text to highlight their social construction and mutable application.

During the late nineteenth century, and particularly after the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), the African continent became the site of fervent speculation about humanity's genesis and evolution. As the colonial project gained momentum and the epistemological contours of modern science took shape, race garnered greater attention in scientific debates. With the Cape Colony's close ties to Britain yet with its own burgeoning structures of authority and knowledge production, the Cape became a kind of "moving metropolis" – a colonial society that provided a rich source of reciprocal epistemological influence for Britain.¹⁹ The endeavour to classify native inhabitants became crucial to the maintenance of colonial control as the political project of the Cape Colony advanced – through the inculcation of local expertise and a sense of territorial ownership. Saul Dubow has described this process as "an assertion of acquired indigeneity", and its enactment through the racial classification and oppression of black South Africans has been explored at length in postcolonial historiography.²⁰ But the role of Jews in this process has been under-researched.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the growing concern of the Cape colonial administration to police the boundaries between the colonial and "native" communities reinscribed racial polarities. In the writings of a number of racial theorists, however, Jews presented a challenge to the binary between Black and White – falling somewhere in the middle of the constructed racial spectrum, or perhaps on a fringe as "not-African" but neither precisely "white". As Knox asserted in *The Races of Men*, the Jews "are not Caucasian . . . but stand, as

19 Roy Macleod, "On Visiting the 'Moving Metropolis': Reflections on the Architecture of Imperial Science", in *Scientific Colonialism: A Cross-Structural Comparison*, ed. Nathan Reingold and Marc Rothenberg (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987). The metaphor "moving metropolis" was adapted from the Australian historian Keith Hancock, illustrating similarities between the colonies as sites of epistemological reciprocity within the British Empire.

20 Dubow, *Scientific Racism*; Paul Maylam, *South Africa's Racial Past: The History and Historiography of Racism, Segregation, and Apartheid* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001); Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility and White South Africa 1820–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) are among the key texts.

it were, on the confines between races darker than themselves and others much fairer.”²¹

Fears about “race-mixing”

In the early twentieth century, as the racial features of South African society occupied the colonial imagination, scientists sought to establish discrete physical types and to combine physiological markers with behavioural and intellectual traits.

Social Darwinism had a growing impact on colonial understandings of “coloureds” and “Malays”, as they were described, at the Cape.²² There was a growing fear that cohabitation of different races would erase the supposed differences between them. Cape Town’s racial admixture, in areas such as District Six in which “Europeans” were cohabiting with black South Africans, was singled out as a hotbed of intermixing and degeneracy. Debates about the mixing of races, particularly from the 1920s and 1930s when eugenics gained much traction in medicine, were steeped in the language of taint, enfeeblement, and degeneration. The “poor white” problem posed a particular threat to racial inviolability.²³ Coloured South Africans also posed a threat to notions of white supremacy, blurring the boundaries of racial distinction between “white” and “black”.

Miscegenation, as the breaching of racial boundaries, challenged the inviolability of the racial hierarchy. At a deeper level, the mixing of black and white posed an existential challenge, threatening notions of white superiority. By the 1930s, eugenic accounts of racial imperilments, with a focus on the prime evils of miscegenation, were rife in the pages of the *South African Medical Journal*. The social Darwinist leanings of these texts are apparent from their titles, as in A. G. H. Hay-Michel’s article “The Colour Problem in South Africa: A Bio-Sociological Survey of its National and Survival Values”:

That section of the population euphemistically and loosely designated coloured constitutes a problem as profound and disquieting as it is malignant and depressing; it is in effect nothing more than the problem of tainted stock, the baneful results of which . . . recoil with devastating

21 Knox, *Races*, 300.

22 Vivian Bickford-Smith, “Commerce, Class and Ethnicity in Cape Town, 1875–1902” (D.Phil. thesis, Cambridge University, 1988).

23 S. Klausen, *Race, Maternity and the Politics of Birth Control in South Africa 1910–1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 40–63, “Birth Control and the Poor White Problem”; Reznick, “Vocabulary of Difference”, 158–83.

effect upon countless families and untold generations of both racial stocks. It thus becomes an increasing menace to national solidarity, social development, and to the ethnic value of white stock in particular. . . . [A] white South Africa is the dynamic if unproclaimed urge of all concerned in the development of South African nationality, and that a mixed brown or yellow people cannot be contemplated with equanimity.²⁴

He went on to evoke the spectre of an embattled Occident in the fight for civilization:

The Levantine contact of Europe with Asia and Africa, the Orientalization of Greece, together with the Moorish occupation of Spain and Portugal, are ancient warnings, while the numerous republics of South Africa, the South Sea Islands, and the Philippines, furnish us with more recent demonstrations of the danger of fusion of stocks of such racial, physical, psychic and cultural diversity.²⁵

Hay-Michel called for an extension of the “colour bar” to strengthen the racial hierarchy in South Africa and to reinvigorate Anglo-Saxon white supremacy.

While some doctors working in the Cape Colony challenged the ethnic basis for disease, others rehashed claims that were being discredited by tropical medical specialists, both locally and abroad.

Disproving the ethnic basis of infectious diseases

In 1903, the bacteriologist Louis Sambon declared: “[O]ur ideas concerning the relation between race and disease have been totally changed. We know now that there are no purely ethnic diseases.”²⁶ Sambon’s research on malaria and sleeping sickness had delivered a decisive blow to the alleged racial elements in their aetiology. He was decorated by both France and Italy for his work in establishing the tsetse fly as the vector of trypanosomiasis, and the body louse as the carrier of typhus. He also collaborated with Patrick Manson at the London School of Tropical Medicine, in proving that mosquitoes, rather than social proclivities, were the primary vectors of malaria. But the effects of

24 A. G. H. Hay-Michel, “The Colour Problem in South Africa: A Bio-Sociological Survey of its National and Survival Values”, *Journal of the Medical Association of South Africa (B.M.A)* (23 June 1928): 324–6.

25 *Ibid.*, 326.

26 Louis Sambon, “Sleeping Sickness in the Light of Recent Knowledge”, *Journal of Tropical Medicine* 6 (1903): 201–9.

Sambon's challenge to the ethnic basis of tropical diseases among doctors in the Cape Colony are difficult to ascertain, and are partial at best. As is evident in many investigations into the ethnic basis of disease, conducted decades after Sambon's findings had been widely disseminated, ethnic hypotheses for disease causation were remarkably fungible in South Africa.

As the twentieth century progressed, and as eugenics gained greater adherents within the scientific and medical communities, praise for Nazi Germany's treatment of inferior races entered South African medical discourse. Writing in the *South African Medical Journal* in 1934, a year after Hitler came to power in Germany, J. W. Adams claimed:

In the good old days, the unfit were weeded out by Nature's method, and the fit survived to carry on the strain . . . To-day the physically and mentally unfit are nurtured and kept alive by medical science at enormous cost to the State. . . . Here, in South Africa, with the poor-white problem . . . we continue to attempt to tackle the subject from the wrong end. The mentally deficient and otherwise socially inadequate are increasing out of all proportion to the desirable members of the nation, yet we go on treating the effect and ignoring the cause. [T]here can be no national health if the national stock is unsound. We spend millions yearly on segregating some of the more obvious mentally deficient, while others, only slightly less defective, continue to spread their taint. You cannot import a guinea-pig or a bundle of hay into the country without a permit, for fear of introducing disease into the animal or vegetable stocks in the country, yet immigrants from Eastern Europe and elsewhere, who may be most undesirable from a eugenic point of view, are allowed to come to South Africa, provided they can deposit a sum of £50.²⁷

The Eastern European immigrants to whom Adams refers were Jews emigrating to South Africa from countries such as Lithuania, Poland, and the rest of Eastern Europe. Adams's notion of an impending racial catastrophe was heavily overlaid with eugenics fears about "race suicide", enfeeblement, and biological degradation. Jewish migration presented a challenge to the entire imperial project, risking the presumed superiority of whites in the colonial endeavour through introducing "inferior" racial stocks.

While arguments about race enfeeblement continued to gather popular pace in the run-up to the Second World War, immigration restrictions revealed the evidence of eugenic thinking as a matter of governance in

27 J. W. Adams, "Some Population Problems of the World", *SAMJ*, 24 Feb. 1934, 131-2.

the Union. The 1913 Immigrants Regulation Act ensured that only whites would be admitted as citizens to South Africa.²⁸ Through the 1920s it became clear that, despite the flexibility of the Act's criteria for prohibiting immigrant entry, the borders remained porous, and did not allow for selection of the "right kind" of white person in the view of the authorities. To the growing alarm of white South Africans, higher numbers of Eastern European Jews began arriving in South Africa. Between January and March 1925, 38 per cent of "foreign" (that is, non-British) immigrants were Lithuanians, and 92 per cent of Lithuanians entering the country were Jews.²⁹ In March 1930, therefore, the Immigration Quota Bill was enacted, effectively putting an end to Eastern European immigration.³⁰ Dr. D. F. Malan, the Minister of the Interior, in introducing the bill, explained it as an attempt to counteract the dysgenic effect of immigration.³¹ Previously, he explained, "through natural selection", the country had received "the most courageous . . . the strongest . . . those with the most initiative . . . the very best", namely the "Nordic" stock. The ease of travel had now allowed "the weakest element to come", resulting in "the main white racial stock from which the population had been drawn up" to be replaced by "alien elements from Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Poland and Palestine".³² There was no doubt who these aliens were, as by 1927 Jews constituted 97 per cent of Lithuanians, 94 per cent of Latvians, 91 per cent of Poles, and 88 per cent of Russians entering South Africa.³³

The impact of the imperial context is well illustrated by the construction of the Act.³⁴ The formulation of restrictive clauses was shaped by Joseph Chamberlain, who, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, determined in

28 *Statutes of the Union of South Africa*, Act No. 22 (1913).

29 *Statistics for Immigration to and from the Union, 1920–25: Special Report Series*, U.G. [Union Government] 25-'27, J. E. Holloway, "Introduction", 7 July 1925.

30 *Statutes of the Union of South Africa*, Act No. 8 (1930).

31 House of Assembly Debates (hereafter, HAD), 10 Feb. 1930, col. 564.

32 *Ibid.*, cols. 559, 560.

33 *Statistics of Migration into the Union, 1927*. U.G. 38-'29; Binnelandse Sake (hereafter, BNS) 1/1/684.1,160[C], Memorandum, "Immigration by Quota", 22/150/74.

34 The transnational linkages that bound together diverse and geographically distant settler colonies in their formulation of immigration laws have been well documented by Jeremy Maartens and others. See John W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Jeremy Martens, "A Transnational History of Immigration Restriction: Natal and New South Wales, 1896–97", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34 (2006): 323–44; Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

the late 1890s that explicitly race-based laws would be vetoed by the British government.³⁵ This requirement persisted, so that well after the Act of Union, all legislation passed in South Africa was subject to the ratification of the British monarch (or his/her representative in South Africa).³⁶ It was therefore not possible to specify Jews in this Act.

Restricting immigration of “social undesirables”

The Immigration Quota Act demarcated a two-tier system of unlimited admission for (white) people born in “scheduled” countries including the British Empire, the United States, and northern and southern Europe. From all others (including Eastern Europe), designated unscheduled countries, a small quota of fifty (white) immigrants were allowed entry.³⁷ In so doing, a line was drawn, a demarcation between a “desirable” and “undesirable” citizen. This line was defined not only geographically but also, as Malan explained, to safeguard the national “identity”, “civilization”, and “racial composition” of South African society.³⁸

The language used in drawing the line was infused by the eugenicist terminology prevalent in the imperial discourses of the 1920s. In South Africa the discourse was framed by “frontier guards”, who justified their antagonism to immigrants by defining their own role as “trustworthy watchers”,³⁹ or “guardians of the gateway”.⁴⁰ Scientists and the medical profession spoke of immigration control as “safeguarding our nation from racial deterioration”.⁴¹ Rejection of Jewish immigration was made even more striking by the persistent acknowledgment that the country “needed whites”.⁴² However, these whites had to be “fit” for South Africa’s

35 Marilyn Lake, ‘On Being a White Man, Australia, circa 1900’, in *Cultural History in Australia*, ed. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003), 106.

36 Martin Chanock, *The Making of South African Legal Culture, 1902–1936: Fear, Favour, and Prejudice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19.

37 Statutes of the Union of South Africa, Act No. 8 (1930).

38 Cape Town: Parliamentary Archives, Senate Debates, 4 March 1930, col. 293.

39 Graaff-Reinet Advertiser (hereafter, GRA), 8 Aug. 1921.

40 South Africa’s *Sunday Times*, 19 March 1922, Morris Alexander Collection BC(160), file BDI.

41 H. B. Fantham, “Heredity in Man: Its Importance both Biologically and Educationally”, *South African Journal of Science* (hereafter, SAJS) 21 (1924): 499.

42 GRA, 8 Aug. 1921; *Cape Times* (hereafter, CT), 11 Sept. 1925, 17 May 1929, 20 Aug. 1929; BNS 1/1/382, 200/74K; *Die Volkstem* (hereafter, VS), 29 Jan. 1930; Senate Debates, 4 Feb. 1930, col. 295; HAD, 10 Feb. 1930, cols. 536, 580 (Kentridge); 12 Feb. 1930, col. 673; *Die Volksblad* (hereafter, VB), 13 Feb. 1930.

needs.⁴³

Worldwide, in the 1920s, racial science and eugenics were prominent in the thinking of those arguing to exclude Jews,⁴⁴ postulating the hereditary nature of so-called Jewish traits and properties that made them different from “Nordics”.⁴⁵ Karl Pearson, one of the leading British eugenicists of the period and a pioneer in the science of statistics, set out to show the “low standard of life and cleanliness” of Eastern European Jews in the first issue of *Annals of Eugenics*, the journal he founded in 1925.⁴⁶

He explained in detail why immigration was so central in eugenics thought, describing it as “fundamental for the rational teaching of national eugenics”. According to his reasoning, a “superior breed” could be swamped by an “inferior race”, a process that would be “destructive to all true progress”.⁴⁷ The imperial endeavour sought to instantiate the superiority of white colonizers over native subjects, and Jewish migrants troubled neat racial characterizations and the untrammelled superiority of whites, seeming, as they did, to blur racial boundaries and cast doubt on innate white supremacy.

Opposition to Eastern European Jewish immigration

Between 1880 and 1920, approximately 2.2 million Eastern European Jews, distinguished by their religious and cultural traditions, and their use of Yiddish as a mother tongue, joined the massive global migrations of these decades.⁴⁸ While most went to the United States, South Africa was a popular destination for Litvaks, who constituted the overwhelming majority of Jewish immigrants to South Africa during the 1920s.⁴⁹

Antisemitic opposition to Jewish immigration to the Cape had first emerged in the 1890s, when hostility towards growing numbers of Litvak

43 *Journal of the Medical Association of South Africa* (hereafter JMASA) (May 1928); *Ons Vaderland*, 31 Jan. 1930; HAD, 12 Feb. 1930.

44 David H. Levy and Sandra J. Peart, “Statistical Prejudice: From Eugenics to Immigrants”, *European Journal of Political Economy* 20 (2004): 20.

45 Raphael Falk, “Eugenics and the Jews”, in Bashford and Levine, *Oxford Handbook*, 463.

46 Karl Pearson and Margaret Moul, “The Problem of Alien Immigration into Great Britain illustrated by an Examination of Russian and Polish Children”, *Annals of Eugenics* 1 (1925): 5–127.

47 *Ibid.*, 7; see also Levy and Peart, “Immigrants”, 5–22.

48 Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, 1881 to 1914*, 3 vols (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), vol. 2.

49 Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980), 6–7.

immigrants, described as “paupers” and “parasites”, was conveyed in the popular press.⁵⁰ Fears of racial mixing at the Cape were undergirded by eugenics-inspired notions of Jewish racial inferiority. Political campaigns to bar Jewish immigrants from entering the Union of South Africa grouped Jews together with “Orientals” and “Asians” in the lower rungs of the racial hierarchy, while “English”, “Anglo-Saxons”, and “Nordics” were designated as its higher tiers.⁵¹

Denotations of the “Jewish character” fuelled medical perceptions of Jews as a distinct racial group. Debates raged about the relative importance of heredity and the environment in clinical susceptibility. Whatever their causality, clinicians were increasingly persuaded that Jews had a particular psychiatric propensity for nervousness and madness. Mental disease was just one manifestation of Jewish distinctness, a marker of the “Jewish constitution”.⁵²

As racial deterioration was ascribed to Jewish immigrants to the Cape, so too was this notion of deterioration pinned to black South Africans and imagined to be a consequence of urbanization. As stated in an article in the *South African Medical Journal*, “The urban native . . . tends not only to absorb the weaker traits of European character, but also to neglect those factors in his own customs that tended to virility, and to hold to those that were inherently disintegrating.”⁵³

During the 1930s, at the height of its intellectual power, eugenics discourses were widespread among medical officials and colonial authorities at the Cape. Somatometric proportions, such as the shape of a nose or the texture of hair, took on a new political significance. Physical appearance was imbued with a moral quality. Increasingly, the language of eugenics was used with reference to Jewish immigration into the colony, with Jews presented as a threat to the preservation of white domination.

Eugenics gains adherents

From early in the 1920s, immigration was drawn closely into eugenicist thinking. J. E. Duerden, Professor of Zoology at Rhodes University College, Grahamstown, extolled the virtues of the “Nordic” as being “far

50 Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, 148.

51 Shain, *Roots of Antisemitism*, 119.

52 S. Swartz, *Homesless Wanderers: Movement and Mental Illness in the Cape Colony in the Nineteenth Century* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2015), 148.

53 D. L. Ferguson, “The Urbanization of the Bantu”, *SAMJ*, 24 Dec. 1932, 802.

and away the most valuable type, standing at the head of the whole human genus".⁵⁴ In doing so, Duerden, showing the influence in South Africa of eugenicists in Britain and the United States, and quoting from the work of Lothrop Stoddard, warned of the dangers of immigration.⁵⁵ In a paean to the South African white man, an amalgam of the "stock derived from two closely allied European nationalities, Dutch and English", Duerden held that the South African "type stands for gentlemanly action, uprightness, intelligence, ability in leadership as well as valour in war". Such heroic attributes, Duerden argued, were only transmissible through heredity as "outstanding individuals do not arise from ancestrally poor stock".⁵⁶ In his article in *Eugenics Review* of 1922/23, "Genetics and Reclamation of the Poor White in South Africa", Duerden proposed that this was only achievable by allowing the immigration of "efficient whites", men who would be capable of a high level of production. As attention was being focused on Eastern European Jewish immigration in the 1920s, Duerden referred wistfully to an earlier influx drawn from "the two most virile nations of Europe, industrious, adventurous, sea-faring Dutch and British with a slight admixture of French".⁵⁷ Duerden was publicly creating a scientific vocabulary for the link between the racial superiority of the "Nordic" immigrants, and the need for a scientific selection and exclusion of those who were not "efficient". The term "efficient" was often used interchangeably with "fit" by South African eugenicists, implying both a physical and mental suitability to function productively under local circumstances.

A later president of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science (SAAAS) argued even more powerfully against the existing immigration policy. H. B. Fantham, the president in 1927, a passionate eugenicist, was also Professor of Comparative Anatomy and Dean of Science at the University of Witwatersrand.⁵⁸ Fantham drew inspiration from the eugenics-inspired Immigration Act of 1924 passed in the United States, arguing that immigration was "dysgenic" as "efficient" elements

54 J. E. Duerden, "Social Anthropology in South Africa: Problems of Race and Identity", *SAJS* 18 (1922): 30.

55 Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1920).

56 Duerden, "Social Anthropology", 31, 29.

57 J. E. Duerden, "Genetics and Reclamation of the Poor White in South Africa", *Eugenics Review* 14 (April 1922–Jan. 1923): 271.

58 Paul Rich, "Race, Science and the Legitimization of White Supremacy in South Africa 1902–1960", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, no. 4 (1990): 677.

in the population were being outnumbered by the “unfit”.⁵⁹ Controlling this influx was essential for “safeguarding our nation from racial deterioration”. To do this, Fantham insisted, the population in general and the government in particular should be educated and guided by “biological experts” in formulating policy in “politico-social practices”.⁶⁰

Fantham warned of the “undesirables of eastern European society” who would jeopardize the racial “fitness” of white South Africans. At a time when Eastern European Jewish immigration was gathering momentum, Fantham enunciated the eugenicist stance: “the essential importance of immigration, and its control, is bound up with the question of the addition of persons of antisocial traits to a country”. He further argued that consideration ought also to be given to “their relatively low moral ideals and criminal tendencies”.⁶¹ Such measures were fundamental, he insisted, in his 1927 presidential address, for the “White race to survive”.⁶² Fantham had rhetorically asked a question that was often paraphrased by his fellow “frontier guards” in referring to Jewish immigration: “Is the world to be ruled by races of high standards or is the higher civilization to be submerged under the dominance of races whose standards are relatively low?”⁶³

Contributors to the *Journal of the Medical Association of South Africa* (JMASA) consistently expressed fears of white racial “degeneration in the circumstances inevitable in a subtropical environment”. The journal appealed for “new blood” and “new stock” to graft onto the population, citing immigration figures showing that the country was not importing the “best stock”, and calling for more “severe tests of efficiency” for immigrants. These representatives of the profession saw themselves as charged with “safeguarding” the nation against the “undesirable element” now entering the country.⁶⁴

C. Hugh Bidwell, in his presidential address of 1928 to the Medical Association of South Africa, specifically drew comparison with events in the United States where immigration had resulted in a “watering down

59 Fantham, “Heredity in Man”, 499.

60 H. B. Fantham, “Some Factors in Eugenics, together with NOTES on Some South African Cases”, *SAJS* 22 (1925): 412.

61 *Ibid.*, 406, 407.

62 H. B. Fantham, “Some Thoughts on Biology and the Race”, *SAJS* 24 (1927): 419.

63 Fantham, “Heredity”, 500; R. Hodes, “‘Kink’ and the Colony: Sexual Deviance in the Medical History of South Africa, c. 1893–1939”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 725–32.

64 Editorial, “Our White Population”, *JMASA*, May 1928, 257–8.

of [their] stock” and caused “disease and degeneracy”.⁶⁵ He and others drew particular attention to the context in South Africa where, “with the Natives outnumbering Whites by 7:1, the eugenic question” should be applied to monitoring the “moral qualities” of the white race.⁶⁶ Thus at a time of mounting concern about Eastern European Jewish immigration, these opinion-formers of the medical profession fervently promoted their role in protecting the population against the supposed ravages of immigration’s dysgenic effects. On several occasions the editor of *JMASA* decried the admission of “new citizens into the Union of unsuitable type whose ultimate effect on our population will be disastrous”.⁶⁷ Immigrant Jews would therefore impede the white population from fulfilling its “manifest duty” of maintaining its dominance over other races, particularly “coloured” and “black” South Africans. An editorial in the *JMASA* called for the public to “demand” a change in immigration law to make it impossible for such “a class of undesirables” to pollute the Nordic white stock.⁶⁸

Demographers and dysgenics

Census officials played a powerful part in limiting Jewish immigration to the South African Union. As early as 1921, C. W. Cousins, Director of the Census, called on South Africans to “decide once and for all . . . whether the White race is to have any part in the ultimate development of South Africa or whether it is to be entirely outnumbered or crowded out by the aboriginal peoples.”⁶⁹ Decrying the greater numbers of Eastern Europeans, Cousins explained that the dysgenic effect of “rapid transport and increased facilities of communication” allowed the movement of this “inferior stock” into South Africa. Cousins painted an apocalyptic picture whereby if this were not addressed, the “White race may be forced to abandon its domination or even abandon the country”.⁷⁰ Regarding Eastern European immigration, Cousins also warned that

65 C. Hugh Bidwell, Presidential Address, *SAMJ*, 2, no. 6 (1928) 143–7; Hay-Michel, “Colour Problem”, 324, reiterated this.

66 Bidwell, Presidential Address, 144.

67 Editorial, “Our White Population”, *JMASA*, May 1928, 257–8.

68 Editorial, “Our White Population”, 10.

69 *Third Census of the Population of the Union*, 3 May 1921, Part I – Population Organization and Examination, U.G. 15-’23, Item (22) Racial Proportions and Population Third Census; see also *ibid.*, Section IV, Progression and Distribution of Population, 28.

70 *Ibid.*, Item (22).

“biological forces” worked to “propagate most rapidly the elements of the population which physically and intellectually are of inferior type”.⁷¹ This preoccupation was exploited by the English-language press in lobbying for limits on Jewish immigration.⁷² *The Star* warned particularly of “poorer Eastern European races” being notorious for fecundity and likely to “increase their numbers . . . at a faster rate than the Dutch or the English”.⁷³ There were strong echoes here with the threatened *oorstrooming* (“swamping”) of European immigrants by “native” South Africans in earlier years. Thus, colonial discourses of racial inferiority took on a new dimension in application to the supposed racial and ethnic inferiority of Jews.

To the demographers it was attention to the “quality” of the selected immigrant that was to be the saviour of the white race in South Africa. Consequently, for the next ten years, reports on immigration statistics included a section entitled the “Quality of the Migrant Population”. In July 1925 the author of these reports, J. E. Holloway, who was the Director of Census and Statistics, referred in this section to the “serious aspect” of the immigration pattern being the steady and increasing influx of “poverty-stricken Lithuanians . . . one may be permitted to doubt the wisdom of admitting this type . . . into the country”.⁷⁴ By this date demographers were referring regularly to Jews as Hebrews, the only immigrant religious category singled out for separate analysis, and a term quickly picked up by the English-language press.⁷⁵ Holloway’s reports of 1925 and 1927 left no doubt that these Lithuanians (and other Eastern Europeans) were Jews.⁷⁶ Antisemitism heavily influenced immigration policies during the 1920s, with restrictions against Eastern Europeans ultimately reducing their entry to South Africa to a meagre trickle in an attempt to shore up Anglo-Saxon and Nordic white superiority in South Africa.

The influence of these demographers on those who wielded power is

71 *Ibid.*, Section IV, 29.

72 *CT*, 16 Aug. 1921; *The Star*, 17 Sept. 1924; 1 Sept. 1925.

73 *Star*, 1 Sept. 1925; 17 Sept. 1925.

74 Holloway, “Quality of the Migrant Population”, *Statistics of Migration*, U.G. 25-'27, 7 July 1925.

75 *Star*, 17 Sept. 1925; *CT*, 1 Dec. 1925; 4 March 1926; *Natal Mercury* (hereafter, *NM*), 19 Sept. 1929.

76 Holloway, “Introduction”, *Statistics of Migration*, U.G. 25-'27; *Statistics of Migration*, 1927, U.G. 38-29, J. E. Holloway, Annual Report, April 1929. In both reports of 1925 and 1927, Holloway pointed out that Jews made up 96–97% of Lithuanians, 92–94% of Latvians, 80–91% of Poles, and 81–88% of Russians.

unmistakable. For example, a confidential document was prepared for the Ministry of the Interior by A. W. Carruthers, Assistant Director of Census and Statistics, entitled “Notes on the Immigration of Hebrews into South Africa”. Repeatedly referring to “these undesirables”, Carruthers appealed to the government to act against these “low-class Hebrews” to maintain the “quality” of the white community in order to “preserve its position in relation to the hordes of native and coloured inhabitants”.⁷⁷ Reports on immigration and census statistics are found throughout the files of the Department of the Interior, often with press cuttings commenting on them.⁷⁸ A memorandum prepared by demographers on “Immigration by Quota” encouraged the introduction of a system of quotas, describing their use as “a modern method” of controlling immigration and citing the example of the United States and Australia as evidence of their effectiveness.⁷⁹

It was the Interior Minister and future Prime Minister, D. F. Malan, in introducing the Quota Bill of 1930, who relied most heavily on the reports of demographers.⁸⁰ Quoting extensively from the statistics provided by the officials, Malan drew from their analysis of the “quality” of the Jewish immigrants, referring to a “class that are not needed . . . do not belong to the producing class but . . . 80% . . . live on what others produce”, and pointing out how “this poor class of immigrant” differed from the “original stocks”.⁸¹

The medicalization of immigrant Jews

Immigrant Jews were regularly termed a “contamination” or “infestation” that would penetrate the native white community and result in its degeneration, both physically and morally.⁸² The *Natal Advertiser* graphically referred to the “immigrant anarchist” as a “pestilent”

77 BNS 1/160-2/160,1/1/684,1/160[A], “Confidential: Notes on the Immigration of Hebrews into South Africa” (n.d. [1925]), 6.

78 BNS 1/160-2/160,1/1/684,1/160[A]: CT, 24 May 1926; *Star* 28 February 1929; *NM and Commercial Advertiser* (hereafter CA), 19 Sept. 1929; BNS 1/1/382,210/74K: CT, 15 Aug. 1929; 20 Aug. 1929.

79 BNS 1/1/684,1/160[A], Memorandum to the Secretary, “Immigration by Quota”, 1/150/74, 10 Sept. 1925; although uncredited, this is referred to later in BNS files as having been prepared by Carruthers.

80 HAD, 10 Feb. 1930, cols. 558-60.

81 *Ibid.*, col. 558.

82 *Star*, 20 March 1920; CT, 18 March 1922; 21 March 1922; *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (hereafter DFA), 20 March 1922; *East London Daily Despatch*, 1 April 1922.

minority.⁸³ The *Star* demanded that this “dirty, evil” invasion like a “poison must be expelled from our body”.⁸⁴ References to biological stigmata were widespread in the discourse surrounding the immigration of Eastern European Jews. In 1921, the Secretary for the Interior called for special vigilance regarding the conditions stipulated in the 1913 Act, relating to “contagious and loathsome disease”. He noted that “these requirements should be strictly enforced” by port health officers.⁸⁵ Understanding the implication of stigmatizing immigrant Jews in this way, the Principal Immigration Officer replied confidentially that “the intimation . . . in regard to Polish and Russian Jews is noted”.⁸⁶ James Alexander Mitchell, the Union’s Chief Medical Officer in the 1920s, a eugenicist, relentless in his efforts to exclude diseased immigrant Jews, needed no instruction in this. He advised against immigration “from all countries of East Europe”.⁸⁷ There was “no country more in need of a physically fit . . . white population” than South Africa. In 1929 Mitchell appealed for more legislation and broader legal powers for immigration officials to deal with the “unfit”.⁸⁸ Eugenicists pointed to freedom from disease as “among the most important factors to be considered” in immigration legislation in order to maintain “racial fitness . . . both morally and physically”.⁸⁹ If immigration was not to lead to degeneration, “efficient” (or “fit”) whites should be selected to “satisfy the country’s needs”.⁹⁰ Pre-existing prejudices and a eugenicist imperative created a linkage between disease and immigrant Jews. Using biological language to create a vocabulary of racial difference, Jewish immigrants could be rejected in the name of health protection. For instance, the “frontier guards” created a particular focus on trachoma, an infectious eye condition. As early as 1921, in a confidential instruction to the Principal Immigration Officer, the Interior Ministry, in calling for

83 *Natal Advertiser*, 14 March 1922; see also DFA, 20 March 1922.

84 *Star*, 13 March 1922.

85 BNS 1/1/380,29/200/724, Secretary for the Interior to Secretary to High Commissioner, 30 May 1921; see also BNS 1/1/380,200/74A, Public Health Secretary to Port Health Officer, Cape Town, 17 March 1921.

86 BNS 1/1/380,200/74, Principal Immigration Officer (Natal) to the Secretary for the Interior, 1 March 1921 (Confidential).

87 *Ibid.*, Minute from Minister of the Interior, 19 April 1922; BNS 1/1/380,200/74B, Secretary for Public Health to Secretary for the Interior, 18 Oct. 1922.

88 CT, 17 May 1929.

89 Fantham, “Factors in Eugenics”, 400, 407.

90 Hermann Lundborg, “Dangers of Degeneracy 2”, *Eugenics Review* 14 (April 1922–Jan. 1923): 43.

“rigid enforcement” of the exclusion of the diseases mentioned “Russian and Polish Jews”, more specifically instructing that “particular care with trachoma be conveyed confidentially to all immigration and port health authorities”. The Secretary for Public Health issued the same warning regarding Jewish immigrants, informing the senior port health officer that the disease was “known to be prevalent in such immigrants”, adding the chilling rider that “many immigrants with this disease have [already] gained entry”.⁹¹

Jews and degeneration

The central eugenicist concern about degeneration of the white population was strongly expressed by the demographers throughout the 1920s, raising fears that failure to “pick” the “right” type of white might be “to surrender the destiny of the White race in the subcontinent”.⁹² They argued that to be replaced by a “low-type Lithuanian” would hasten “white degeneration”.⁹³ Fear of “white degradation” without an urgent infusion of “new blood” became a standard view in the upper echelons of the medical profession,⁹⁴ which filtered into the press.⁹⁵

The fear of white degeneration was overlaid by a fear of loss of white domination over the black population.⁹⁶ Demographers who instilled this fear of a degeneration of “white civilization” advocated putting a stop to immigration of the “class” of white person alleged to be deleterious to the maintenance of that “civilization”,⁹⁷ insisting that “low-class Hebrews” would erode “the position of the European population in relation to the hordes of native and coloured inhabitants”.⁹⁸ As the Prime Minister’s secretary wrote in 1926, “it would affect the standing of the Europeans”.⁹⁹ This had been bluntly expressed in 1922 by E. Braude, Cape Town’s Principal Immigration Officer, who considered it “disastrous to admit a

91 BNS 1/1/380,23/200/74, Secretary for Public Health to Dr. J. du Toit Malan, Port Health Officer, Cape Town, 17 March 1921.

92 Third Census, U.G. 15-23, 3 May 1921, 24.

93 BNS 1/1/68,1/160[C], Memorandum, “Immigration by Quota”, 22/10/74, 7.

94 JMASA (May 1928), 258.

95 *Ons Vaderland*, 31 Jan. 1930.

96 Timothy Keegan, “Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in South Africa, 1912”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (Sept. 2001): 461–2.

97 Third Census, U.G. 15-23, Section IV, 27–8.

98 BNS 1/160-2/160,1/1/684,1/160[A], “Confidential: Notes on the Immigration”, 6.

99 BNS 1/160-2/160,1/1/684,1/600, C. Farrell, Secretary to the Prime Minister, to the Private Secretary of Internal Affairs, 23 July 1926.

class of White who can only lower the prestige of the European in the eyes of the native".¹⁰⁰

The eugenic argument in the press

The press was vociferous in spreading the message that a "race of white men" needed to be built up "for whom the native will always have respect".¹⁰¹ Allowing in the "rag-tag and bob-tail of Europe" would lower the standards required for the "South African vision of a great [white] nation".¹⁰² Jewish immigration was so potentially degrading to white "civilization" that it was "difficult to regard these as White men", and it was feared that their "contamination" might reach "the natives".¹⁰³ English-language papers showed more aggression in their rejection of this "racially destructive class" made up of "speculators" with "pushful characteristics" who would "penetrate the very vitals" of the "original European inhabitants".¹⁰⁴ Jews who "would swell the parasite classes in our midst",¹⁰⁵ had no desire to add to the productivity of South Africa by the "sweat of its brow", preferring instead to "milk" the locals – an influx that would "spell disaster for South Africa".¹⁰⁶ A substantial difference between the English and the Afrikaans press was that those writing in English constantly encouraged the immigration of the more productive, "sturdy", "superior Nordic class".¹⁰⁷ This feature was absent from the Afrikaans press, which did not encourage immigration of any sort.

English-language newspapers, strongly infused with the language of eugenics, alleged that "this strain" of immigrants would, with its "penetrative power" and "ultimate ethnological influence", contaminate the "national characteristics" of "our Nordic strain" and "chang[e] the whole character of the White population".¹⁰⁸ Jews with their "peculiar standards of morality" were rapidly tending to "degrade the social and

100 BNS 80/200/74, Principal Immigration Officer, Cape Town (E. Braude), to Secretary of Interior (H. B. Shawe), 8 Dec. 1922.

101 CT, 10 April 1922.

102 GRA, 8 Aug. 1921.

103 *Sunday Times*, 4 May 1919.

104 *Eastern Province Herald*, 4 Dec. 1925.

105 CT, 16 Aug. 1921.

106 *The Cape*, 2 Dec. 1921; CT, 16 March 1922; DFA, 21 March 1922; *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 March 1922.

107 *Eastern Province Herald*, 4 Dec. 1925.

108 *Ibid.*; *Star*, 17 Sept. 1925; 1 Sept. 1925; CT, 7 July 1925; 21 Oct. 1929, respectively.

commercial life of the country".¹⁰⁹ Little was heard from the Afrikaans-language press regarding degeneration, except from the pro-South African Party *Volkstem*, which complained that the white population was being "degraded" by those who were "forced to come", implying that South Africa was receiving only those immigrants being rejected by their home nations.¹¹⁰

Around the time of the introduction of the Immigration Quota bill, the press denied any antisemitic motive. Such sentiments were substantially more prevalent in the Afrikaans- than English-language press.¹¹¹ In matters related to Jews but not to Jewish immigration, *Die Burger* and *Die Volksblad* expressed a strongly positive attitude to Jews, particularly in relation to their "struggle" for a homeland.¹¹² They praised Jewish academic achievement in South Africa,¹¹³ initially presenting immigration figures without any animus towards Jews.¹¹⁴ When anti-Jewish manifestations occurred abroad they were condemned to the same extent as the rabidly antisemitic tirades of General Maritz in South Africa.¹¹⁵ Indeed, *Die Burger* accused the *Cape Times* of being antisemitic.¹¹⁶

For middle-class English-speakers it made good sense to argue that the threatened degeneration of a portion of the white race would critically damage the edifice of white supremacy. "Poor-whiteism" stood as a stark reminder of the fear of racial degeneration; the vast majority of "poor whites" were Afrikaners who, not surprisingly, avoided a eugenicist vocabulary when arguing against Jewish immigration. Moreover, the publications of the medical profession, the SAAAS, and the leading eugenicist scientists were English-speaking. It was the English-language press and English parliamentarians who most frequently employed this vocabulary.

Conclusion

By March 1930 a line had been drawn in South African political discourse. It was a geographical line that divided East from West but also "desirable"

109 *The Cape*, 28 April 1922, also cited in Shain, *Roots*, 107.

110 *VS*, 11 Feb. 1930.

111 *VB*, 12 March 1930.

112 *Die Burger*, 21 Jan. 1930; 7 Jan. 1930; *VS*, 17 Oct. 1929; 31 Oct. 1929; 9 Jan. 1930.

113 *Die Burger*, 13 Feb. 1930.

114 *VB*, 14 Jan. 1929; 25 Oct. 1929; 27 Nov. 1929; *VS*, 29 Jan. 1930.

115 *Star*, 17 Dec. 1924; *VS*, 27 Dec. 1924; *Star*, 8 Nov. 1929.

116 *Die Burger*, 17 Feb. 1930.

from “undesirable”, “healthy” from “diseased”, “fit” from “unfit”, “efficient” from “inefficient”, “Nordic” from Jew. The vocabulary and language of eugenics was used to demarcate this line, but its purpose lay in prohibiting Jews from Eastern Europe immigrating into South Africa. Racial science and its “scientific” language, concepts, methods, but particularly its authority, were used to support the belief that immigrant Jews were intrinsically and genetically inferior to others by socially defined criteria such as morality, criminality, “civilization”, and even susceptibility to disease. Local anatomists, anthropologists, zoologists, physicians, and particularly demographers argued that the study of biological sciences and eugenics was the key to the most pressing problem of the day, namely the fate of the “white” population in South Africa. Demographers broadened the accessibility of eugenics language, and doctors, politicians, and the press made it familiar to the white body politic.

The medical profession provided a powerful justification for the use of a eugenicist vocabulary in the policy on immigration. Medical doctors bought into the central eugenicist preoccupation with the idea of national degeneration, and with scientists, demographers and, most vociferously, the press, argued that Eastern European Jewish immigration would hasten the process. In South Africa, however, such degeneration took on a particular characteristic as it became synonymous with loss of “civilization” or loss of “white” dominance over “blacks”. It justified the argument that the alleged impaired morality of Jews, their failure to appreciate the “natural relationship” between what was constructed as different races, would exacerbate “white” deterioration.

Few historians have focused on scientific perceptions of human difference across the southern hemisphere, a neglect felt acutely in studies of twentieth-century race science. It seems timely, then, to explore the distinctive nature and scope of “southern” ideas about human difference. Human biology looks substantially different when viewed from southern perspectives. The conventional history of scientific ideas about race, and the way these concepts shaped policy and popular assumptions, emphasizes fixed racial classifications and hierarchies, support for racial separation and segregation, hard-line eugenics, and condemnation of “race mixing”. Yet in the southern hemisphere (with the notable exceptions of parts of Australia, as well as South Africa after the 1930s) we can find greater interest in racial plasticity, environmental adaptation, mixing or miscegenation, and blurring of racial boundaries.

Although white privilege was maintained in the Global South, its perceptual boundaries often varied.¹¹⁷

As this article shows, parallels were drawn between Jews and “native” South Africans. These reveal the direct influence of racial categories on the “science” of comparative anatomy, especially eugenics. This resulted in a rich wellspring of parallels between Jews and native subjects in the scientific literature of the nascent South African state. Here, bioculturalist notions of difference were transformed into an imaginary of hard racial differences. As biological notions of racial difference were discredited in the aftermath of the Second World War, culturalist conceptions of race took on powerful new meanings in apartheid South Africa.

117 Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), 1.

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