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Miscegenation Madness

Interracial Intimacy and the Politics of ‘Purity’ in Twentieth-Century South Africa

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Abstract

In this article, I examine how the fear of miscegenation developed as a *raison d'être* for the construction and maintenance of apartheid. I argue that despite its efficacy at reproducing racial-caste formations, miscegenation taboo ultimately undermined its own hegemonic mythology by constructing contradictory erotic desires and subjectivities which could neither be governed nor contained. I consider how miscegenation fears and fantasies were debated in public discourse, enacted into law, institutionalized through draconian policing and punishment practices, culturally entrenched, yet negotiated and resisted through everyday intimacies. While crime statistics show that most incidences of interracial sex involved White men and women of color, the perceived threat to “White purity” was generally represented through images of White women—*volks*-mothers and daughters—in the Afrikaner nationalist iconography. White women’s wombs symbolized the future of “Whiteness.” This article offers a critique of the prevailing South African “exceptionalism” paradigm in apartheid studies. Detailed analyses of government commission reports (1939, 1984, 1985) and parliamentary debate records (1949) reveal considerable American influence on South Africa’s “petty apartheid” laws, and especially the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and Immorality Amendment Act (1950). While these “cornerstone” policies of apartheid developed from local socio-political conflicts and economic tensions, they were always entangled in global racial formations, rooted in trans-oceanic histories of slavery, dispossession, and segregation. This historical anthropological study of race/sex taboo builds on interdisciplinary literatures in colonial history, sociology, postcolonial studies, literary theory, art history, cultural studies, feminist theory, queer studies, and critical race theory.

Keywords: Apartheid; Interracial Intimacy; Sexuality; Race; Miscegenation; Taboo; Settler Colonialism

Introduction

In September 1974, a twenty-year-old man from Cape Town threw himself under a moving train after learning that his seventeen-year-old girlfriend, a White girl named Sonya, was pregnant with his child. The man was categorized as “Coloured” under the Population Registration Act (1950), and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) not only debarred him from marrying her as he desired, but also from claiming her child as his own (Horrell 1975; Uys 1974). He left her thirty Rand and a suicide note, asking Sonya to buy

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clothes for their unborn baby, and to name it after him, if born a boy. Instead, Sonya's parents forced her to spend the money on a clandestine abortion. She then tried to commit suicide but failed in the attempt. Sonya later spoke with the press: "I did not know my boyfriend was Coloured. The first I knew was when the police told me. It would not have made the slightest difference. If only he had known that. We could have run away to another country and got married and lived a normal life away from apartheid" (see Uys 1974, p. 2).

The problem of "*bloedvermenging*," Afrikaans for "blood-mixing" or "miscegenation," has long been a source of moral anguish and existential fear for European settlers in southern Africa (Coetzee 1980, 1991; Cronjé 1945; van den Berghe 1960).¹ "Miscegenation"—defined as the "interbreeding" of peoples regarded as different "racial types"—was a nightmare which haunted and animated the architects of colonial rule (Adhikari 2008; Gilman 1985, p. 237; Schields and Herzog, 2021; Stoler 1989a, 1989b; Young 1995, p. 136–7). Heterosexual intercourse across racialized boundaries, and particularly its possible outcome of conceiving "mixed-race" progeny, violated the inviolable myth of "purity." This "purity" myth developed as the ideological foundation for the construction of "Whiteness" and "Blackness," relational categories which were imagined and realized through a world-system of political, economic, and social domination (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991; Du Bois 2014; Fanon 2008; Jordan 1968; Klausen 2021; Smedley 1993; Steyn 2001; Woodson 1918). Colonial elites feared that sex and intimacy across the color line would erase somatic status distinctions and thereby subvert the race/sex hierarchies upholding White men's dominion. In this supremacist worldview, shaped by Calvinistic theological dogma and eugenicist pseudo-science, the idea of "blood-mixing" was reviled as "immorality," "social sin," and even a "harbinger of doom" (Coetzee 1980; Dubow 1995, 2015; Furlong 1994; Walters and van der Waal, 2020).

The eminent statesman J. C. Smuts exhorted his compatriots to beware the menace of miscegenation, "lest one day... little brown children will play in the ruins of the government buildings of Johannesburg" (see Adhikari 2005, p. 15). In this worldview, mixture amounted to "blood pollution" (Coetzee 1980; Gilman 1985; Smedley 1993; Walters and van der Waal, 2020). Interracial intimacy represented an unforgivable betrayal of one's kin, an act of defilement against purportedly "pure" ancestral bloodlines, and an existential threat to the future of the ethno-nation. Mixed-race people were regarded as "tainted" and "impure" (Balibar 1991; Coetzee 1980; Douglas 1966; Stoler 2022). So-called "mixed-breeds," "half-castes," "mestizos," "mulattos," or "Coloureds" were classified as liminal beings—being neither White nor Black—and became symbols of violation, exclusion, and shame (Adhikari 2005, 2008; Erasmus 2001; Fields and Fields, 2012; Millin 1924; Noah 2016; Sollors 1997; Wicomb 1998).

The Afrikaner historian J. S. Marais (1939) observed that "this philosophy of blood and race" occasioned "a passionate fear of miscegenation... the primary article of faith of the [white] South African nation" (see Adhikari 2005, p. 23). Philosopher Alfred Hoernlé (1934) wrote: "the fear of race mixture is at the root of the 'anti-native' feeling of many white South Africans" (p. 265). Most settlers opposed any form of social, political, and economic equality (*geelykstelling*) between racialized communities because it would "inevitably lead to a breaking down of social barriers and thus of the racial integrity of the white group" (p. 265). Decades later, sociologist Pierre van den Berghe (1960) argued that South Africa's "increasingly morbid fear of miscegenation... [was] unparalleled in intensity anywhere else in the world" (p. 71). Yet, despite its centrality to colonial culture and ideology, this "miscegenophobia" phenomenon has not been adequately examined in the scholarship on apartheid (Adhikari 2005; Coetzee 1991; Jansen 2017; Klausen 2021; Potts 1982; Ratele 2009b; van den Berghe 1960).

In this article, I examine how the fear of miscegenation developed as a *raison d'être* for the construction and maintenance of apartheid. I argue that despite its efficacy at reproducing

racial-caste formations, miscegenation taboo ultimately undermined its own hegemonic mythology by constructing contradictory erotic desires and subjectivities which could neither be governed nor contained. Following scholars like W. E. B. Du Bois (2014), Stuart Hall (2017), Anne Stoler (2002), and Frederick Cooper (1999, p.28), this article takes a “long-term view” of colonial and racial processes, transcending traditional temporal, geographical, and disciplinary boundaries. By examining the development of anti-miscegenation discourse over time, I demonstrate how fears and anxieties around “race” and sex were co-constructed, manipulated, and mobilized by Afrikaner nationalists—and other White supremacists—throughout the twentieth century. Settler symbolism and icons reveal how contradictory gender and sexuality discourses shaped the shifting symbolic boundaries of intersecting structures of racial caste, ethnicity, nation, and class (Crenshaw 1991; Davis 1981; Douglas 1966; Du Bois 2014; Fanon 2008; Hall 2017; McClintock 1995; Myrdal 1995; Weber 1917).

I consider how miscegenation fears and fantasies were debated in public discourse, enacted into law, institutionalized through draconian policing and punishment practices, culturally entrenched, yet negotiated and resisted through everyday intimacies. This historical anthropological study of race/sex taboo builds on interdisciplinary literatures in colonial history, sociology, postcolonial studies, literary theory, art history, cultural studies, feminist theory, queer studies, and critical race theory. While social historians have written excellent micro-histories of colonial sexualities by examining specific cases and laws, few have adequately theorized the symbolic continuities underlying the cultural and psycho-affective structures of the purity/miscegenation myth which shaped intimate relations, desires, and subjectivities. This research offers two central contributions to literatures on White supremacy in South Africa, and beyond.

First, while crime statistics show that most incidences of interracial sex involved White men and women of color, the *perceived threat* to “White purity” was generally represented through images of White women—*volks* mothers and daughters—in the Afrikaner nationalist iconography. White women’s wombs symbolized the future of “Whiteness” (Hyslop 1995; Keegan 2001; Klausen 1997; McClintock 1995). This was true in the 1930s, as Jonathan Hyslop (1995) demonstrated (Figure 1)², but also in the 1970s and 1980s (Figures 2 and 3)^{3,4}. Suzanne Klausen (2022) argues that the Immorality Amendment Act of 1957 was primarily enacted to regulate White men’s transgressions against race/sex boundaries. However, I suggest that this latter amendment merely addressed legal gaps, loopholes, and contradictions of earlier anti-miscegenation prohibitions which disproportionately policed White women’s sexualities. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, public debates about “race purity” commonly reflected colonial anxieties about White women’s proximity to Black and Brown men (Bland 2005; Heyningen 1984; Hyslop 1995; van Onselen 1982).

The “Black peril” (*swartgevaar*)—a racist myth about Black rapists and subaltern insurrection—constituted one of the greatest dangers to the colonial order (Anderson 2010; Baldwin and Mead, 1971; Davis 1981; Fanon 2008; Hyslop 1995; Inglis 1975; Lubbe 1997; Nagel 2003; Plaatje 1976). The “immorality” of White men only became a cause for concern when their race/sex transgressions came into public view, exposing the gendered double standard upholding White patriarchal rule. The flagrant hypocrisy of thousands of White men—who forbade their daughters from dating Black men, while sneaking around with Black maids—drastically undermined apartheid’s moral legitimacy in the eyes of a rapidly decolonizing world.

Second, this article offers a critique of the prevailing South African “exceptionalism” paradigm in apartheid studies. Detailed analyses of government commission reports (1939, 1984, 1985) and parliamentary debate records (1949) reveal considerable American influence on South Africa’s “petty apartheid” laws, and especially the Prohibition of Mixed

Marriages Act (1949) and Immorality Amendment Act (1950). While these “cornerstone” policies of apartheid developed from local socio-political conflicts and economic tensions, they were always entangled in global racial formations, rooted in trans-oceanic histories of slavery, dispossession, and segregation (Cell 1982; Frederickson 1981; Lewin 1960; Mason 2003; Nkosi 1975; Patterson 2014). The government’s Villiers Commission (1938–1939), tasked to study the “detrimental” effects of interracial marriages and intimacies in South Africa, also studied American anti-miscegenation laws (see Furlong 1983; Sollors 2000). These U.S. comparisons were repeatedly referenced during parliamentary debates in 1949, when the newly empowered National Party (NP) argued for a more comprehensive race/sex prohibition in South Africa. Indeed, “Jim Crow” anti-miscegenation laws provided NP legislators with policy blueprints from which the latter fashioned race/sex segregation codes of their own. However, the repeal of U.S. endogamy laws—following the *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court ruling in 1967—left apartheid South Africa in isolation (Bobo 2011; Pascoe 2010). During the mid-1980s, renewed comparisons with post-*Loving* America emboldened apartheid’s critics to renounce—what Hannah Arendt (1959) might have called—South Africa’s “most outrageous laws.” In response to mounting pressure from within and without, the apartheid regime finally repealed the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts in 1985 (Furlong 1994; Klausen 2021; Welsh 2010).

Theoretically, this research builds on J. M. Coetzee’s (1991) critique of the historiography’s conceptual inability or refusal to theorize apartheid for what it was—“madness” (Dubow 1995; cf. Hyslop 1995). The “mind of apartheid”—epitomized by Geoffrey Cronjé, whose eugenic theories influenced anti-miscegenation and censorship legislation—could not be explained by scientific reasoning alone, for it was mired in racial delirium, bound by contradictory fears and desires for “difference” (Coetzee 1991; Fanon 2008; Jordan 1968; Mbembe 2013; McClintock 1995; Vaughan 1993). “Cronjé’s apartheid,” Coetzee (1991) wrote, “developed as a counterattack on desire” (p. 18; Hook 2023). “Apartheid will remain a mystery as long as it is not approached in the lair of the heart” (Coetzee 1996, p.164).

Methods

Methodologically, this research develops from archival and ethnographic research, conducted in Cape Town and Stellenbosch between 2018 and 2020. The sources for this article were primarily gathered from archival collections and newspaper repositories at Stellenbosch University’s J. S. Gericke Library, Western Cape Archives and Records Services, and Cape Town’s central library. I also studied digitized sources, gathered from Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA), Bailey’s African History Archive, and the University of South Africa Digital Collections. I analyzed legal documents and proclamations, political campaign posters, parliamentary debate records, government commission reports and memoranda, newspaper articles, eugenics research publications, novels, and magazines pertaining to interracial sex, intimacy, and kinship. I analyzed these texts and images through decolonial and antiracist anthropological frames to better understand the racial meanings, ideologies, symbols, and affective economies which shaped people’s subjectivities and desires (Ahmed 2004; Baldwin and Mead, 1971; Balibar 1991; Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre, 2019; Fanon 2008; Frederickson 1981; Hall 2017; Harrison 1992; Mullings 2005; Stoler 2022).

I examined how legislators, bureaucrats, clergymen, judges, social scientists, and everyday people constructed and reproduced racial attitudes and feelings—an embodied “common sense” premised on colonial claims of “White supremacy” and “Black inferiority”—which overdetermined all identities and intimate entanglements (Boersema 2022; Hall 1980; Jackson 2015; Posel 2001a). Many Black and Brown people also abhorred interracial

relationships (Adhikari 2005; Ray 2015; Schields and Herzog, 2021). However, the *ressentiment* of colonized people differed from the racial animus of colonizers (Du Bois 2014; Fanon 2008; Fassin 2013). While marriage and sexual relationships between Black, Coloured, and Indian South Africans were intensely stigmatized, they were never outlawed under apartheid law. Moreover, the political opinions of Black and Brown people held little influence over the architects of colonial rule. When representatives from these subjugated communities were consulted—by the Villiers Commission (1938–1939), for example—their opinions generally reflected those of the colonial policy makers. Indeed, the supposed paramountcy of “race purity” was principally a White elite obsession. As such, this article focuses on colonial elite discourses, and how these constructed the boundaries of “Whiteness” through sex taboos and prohibitions. Sociologist Jacob Boersema (2022) argues: “White racial common sense tends to decenter Whiteness; yet in order to understand the problem of unlearning racism, Whiteness must be analytically centered” (p. 240; Steyn 2001).

However, studying miscegenation discourses in colonial archives can be difficult, precisely because of the power of taboo (Du Bois 2000). Colonial authorities—especially the puritanical Calvinist Afrikaners—often used vague, euphemistic language when they spoke about racialized sexuality. Explicit terms of “race” and “sex” were rarely used by apartheid officials, especially after the 1950s, following the revelations of the Holocaust and United Nations’ statement (1950) against biological (i.e., blood-related) notions of race (Fields and Fields, 2012; Mullings 2005; Smedley 1993). Instead, policy makers generally used more ambiguous terminology: “ethnic groups,” “immorality,” and “mixed marriages” (Furlong 1994; Jackson 2015; Klausen 2021, 2022). Historians and social theorists argue that discourses of sex and intimacy were systematically obfuscated by various techniques of power, censorial practices, and institutionalized biases—masquerading as “truth”—in the production of historical narratives and colonial archives (Arondekar 2009; Foucault 1990; Jackson 2015; Stoler 2009; Trouillot 1995; Wolfe 2016). Colonial archives are full of fragments, gaps, omissions, silences, and traces (Arondekar 2009; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; S. Jackson 2020; Jackson 2015; Stoler 2009; Wolfe 2016). Anjali Arondekar (2009) argues that archives are “system[s] of representation,” but they also produce “real” material consequences, especially concerning sexuality (p. 4). Will Jackson (2015) argues that the “hazy, uncertain quality” of documentary remains can also be productive for studying how sexuality was historically constituted and articulated (p. 186). The gaps and silences of archival remains speak volumes about the visceral, affective dynamics underlying colonial culture (Arondekar 2009; Jackson 2015; Schields and Herzog, 2021; Stoler 2022; Troillot 1995).

Inevitably, I also read these poignant histories through my own subject positionality as a Black/mixed man, raised by a White mother from the Netherlands and a Black father from the United States, on both sides of the “Black Atlantic” (Gilroy 1993; S. Jackson 2020; Ray 2015). Apartheid is a word of Dutch etymological origins, but as a social system it most closely resembled American segregation (Cell 1982; Fredrickson 1981). My fluency in Dutch granted me access to sources written in Afrikaans. While I cannot claim South African history as my own, I nevertheless see my face reflected in its colonial past. This research has certainly taken an emotional toll on the researcher. Reading anti-Black texts in a university library (Stellenbosch)—which banned people of color from entry until 1978—made me keenly aware of my own genealogy. However, my subjective “two-ness” and “double consciousness,” as Du Bois (1994) suggested, also offered me a “second sight” into the contradictions and arbitrariness of racial classification schemes (p. 2; Bobo 2000; Du Bois 2014; Gilroy 1993; Harrison 1992; Itzigsohn and Brown, 2015).

Race/Sex Taboo in History and Theory

“The problem of the twentieth century,” Du Bois (1994) argued, was “the problem of the color line” (p. 9). This was certainly true in the United States and South Africa (Fanon 2008; Fredrickson 1981, 2002). These settler societies, separated by the Atlantic Ocean, were shaped by interconnected histories of racialized slavery and segregation, the “highest stage of white supremacy” (Cell 1982). America’s first “racial” laws were enacted to regulate sex between free Europeans and enslaved Africans in Virginia during the 1660–1670s (Higginbotham and Kopytoff, 1989; Moran 2001; Pascoe 2010). Contrary to English common law, Virginia’s laws decreed that children born from enslaved mothers would be slaves, irrespective of their paternity (Kopytoff and Higginbotham, 1989). The first South African race/sex laws, introduced in Cape Town in the 1680s, also regulated slavery and determined slave status through matrilineal descent (Heese 1971; Hendricks 2001; Malherbe 2006; Mason 2003; van den Berghe 1960). The rape and coerced concubinage of enslaved women by European men was common, generally tolerated, and economically incentivized, not least because it expanded the embodied capital of the enslaved population (Beinart 2001; van den Berghe 1960; Hendricks 2001; Wells 1998). However, even consensual sex between White women and Black men was socially forbidden (Graham 2012; Hendricks 2001; Myrdal 1995; Posel 2004; Stoler 2002).

Historian Evelyn Higginbotham (1992) argued that “cross-cultural and historical studies of miscegenation law reveal shifting, arbitrary, and contradictory definitions of race” (p. 253; Du Bois 2014). These shifting, contradictory meanings of “race” were always constructed in relation to gender, sexuality, and class (Bozzoli 1995; Clancy-Smith and Gouda, 1998; Davis 1981; Hall 2017; Hendricks 2001; Higginbotham 1992; Nagel 2003; Posel 2004; Schields and Herzog, 2021; Stoler 2002). Stoler (2002) writes that “the categories of colonizer and colonized were secured through notions of racial difference constructed in gender terms” (p. 75). Tim Keegan (2001) posits that “gendered conceptions of sexual morality were central to definitions of racial respectability and belonging” (p. 460). “The white woman’s role,” Keegan (2001) continues, “was to ensure that racial standards were maintained free of contaminating influences and biological defilement. Racial purity was her responsibility” (p. 464). South Africa’s White community never exceeded 22% of the total population (Beinart and Dubow, 1995; Beinart 2001), and settler fears about being “swamped” by Black masses were commonly expressed and exploited through what Cheryl Hendricks (2001) and Lynn Thomas (2003) call the “rule of uterine descent” and the “politics of the womb.”

Sexuality was fundamental to colonial politics (Furlong 1983, 1994; Hyslop 1995; Jackson 2015, 2020; Klausen 2015, 2022; Posel 2004, 2005; Ratele 2009a, 2009b; Schields and Herzog, 2021; Stoler 2002; Voss and Casella, 2011). Michel Foucault (1990) argued that sexuality constitutes an “especially *dense transfer* point for relations of power” (p. 103). Historical sexual regulation schemes reveal how modern nation-states used various biopolitical techniques to discipline bodies, desires, and populations (Foucault 1990; Higginbotham 1992; Schields and Herzog, 2021; Stoler 2002). Queer scholars have written about “dissident sexualities” in southern Africa, detailing how queer people navigated the settler “heteropatriarchy” and the criminalization of homosexual intimacies (Elder 2003; Epprecht 2004; Hoad 2006). However, the overregulation of heterosexual, reproductive sexuality—as a primary mechanism of racial boundary-making and maintenance—had been largely overlooked in the apartheid historiography until recent decades (Furlong 1983, 1994; Hyslop 1995; Klausen 2021, 2022; Martens 2007).

Indeed, prior to the 1980s, historians often refused to acknowledge race and racism: “On account of its divisiveness, the salience of race has at times almost been wished away” (Coetzee 1991; Dubow 1995; p. 4; Klausen 2021; Posel 2001a). Marxist historians often

minimized racism as epiphenomenal to class-conflict under conditions of the (White) capitalist ownership of cheap (Black) labor power (Hall 1980; O'Meara 1983; Posel 1995, 2001b; Wolpe 1995). Marxist economic histories were indispensable to the study of colonial capitalism, "Grand Apartheid," and the exploitative African migrant labor system which fueled South Africa's industrializing economy (Beinart 2001; Bundy 1972; Wolpe 1995). However, Stuart Hall (1980) rightly argued that economic perspectives failed to explain other social phenomena which were not reducible to economic relations, and which required a more sociological engagement. So-called "liberal" historians also avoided studying racial ideologies, deeming them "pseudo-scientific" and unworthy of serious scholarship (Dubow 1995, 2015; Klausen 2021; Posel 2001b). Historians of Afrikaner nationalism minimized the influence of eugenic theories on apartheid ideology, downplaying the influence of miscegenation taboo on Afrikanerdom's overarching narrative of "political survival" (cf. Dubow 1995; Giliomee 2009; Moodie 1975; Walters and van der Waal, 2020).

Saul Dubow (1995) mentioned that the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) "perhaps more than any other statute, symbolized the meaning of apartheid for supporters and opponents alike" (p. 182). More recently, Jeremy Martens (2007) and Susanne Klausen (2021) proposed that the Immorality Acts (1927, 1950) constituted legal "cornerstones," the "legislative foundations of apartheid" (Martens 2007, p. 225). However, the symbolic and psycho-affective dimensions of these laws have not been adequately examined (Coetzee 1991; Furlong 1994; Hyslop 1995; Klausen 2021, 2022). "The apartheid state," Achille Mbembe (2013) argues, "was first and foremost a psychotic state" (p. 133). From a postcolonial psycho-analytic perspective, racisms unfurl as collective psychoses, resulting from the disavowal of desire for difference (Coetzee 1991; Fanon 2008; Hall 2017; Ratele 2009b; Seshadri-Crooks 2000). American historian Winthrop Jordan (1968) insisted that miscegenation fear emerged from the recognition of the "self" in the "other": "[The] irreconcilable conflict between desire and aversion for interracial sexual union...rested on the bedrock fact that white men perceived Negroes as being alike and different from themselves" (p.137-138). Frantz Fanon (2008 [1952]) argued: "In the phobic, affect has the priority which defies all rational thinking" (p. 133; McClintock 1995; Stoler 2022; Wolfe 2016).

Fanon (2008) continued: "[I]t is because the white man feels frustrated by the black man that he in turn seeks to frustrate the black man, hemming him in with taboos of all sorts" (p. 152). In the United States, White fears of Black men gave rise to widespread lynching practices (Davis 1981; Du Bois 2000, 2014; Wells 2020). Fredrickson (2002) proposed that South African laws prohibiting interracial marriage and sex "signified the same obsession with 'race purity' which characterized other racist regimes" (p. 3). Gunnar Myrdal (1995 [1944]) observed:

The ban on intermarriage has the highest place in the white man's rank order of social segregation and discrimination...No other way of crossing the color-line is so attended by the emotion commonly associated with violating a social taboo as intermarriage and extra-marital relations between a Negro man and a white woman (p. 606).

In South Africa, Julius Lewin (1960) argued: "What Myrdal found in the southern part of the United States...is true in South Africa, if one looks beneath the surface of any argument—sex is the hidden principle...around which the whole structure of apartheid is organized" (p. 64). Zimitri Erasmus (2017) explains that miscegenation taboo emerged as the "reversal" of incest taboo. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969) also noted that: "incest proper...

combines in some countries with its direct opposite, inter-racial sexual relations, an extreme form of exogamy, as the two most powerful inducements of horror and collective vengeance” (p. 9). Both were seen as morally repugnant because they threatened normative heteropatriarchal relations.

Comparative studies of racial caste are instructive for theorizing hierarchical power relations in settler societies (Weber 1917; Wilkerson 2020). Max Gluckman (1940) wrote: “Black and white are two categories which must not mix, like castes in India” (p. 13). Decades earlier, Max Weber (1917) argued: “Rules of endogamy...always form the essential basis of caste...America acknowledges [caste] between whites and blacks ... these barriers imply that marriage is absolutely and legally inadmissible” (pp. 399-406). He also considered the symbolic salience of women in race/caste societies, noting that upper-caste men often had extra-marital relationships with lower-caste women, but sexual liaisons between upper-caste women and lower-caste men were socially forbidden (p. 406). Mary Douglas (1966) explained:

Here the purity of women is protected as the gate of entry to the castes. The mother is the decisive parent for establishing caste membership. Through women the blood and purity of the caste is perpetuated. Therefore, their sexual purity is all-important, and every possible whisper of threat to it is anticipated and barred against (p. 178).

While caste and race are not selfsame categories, analogies between these systems of domination remain important to the analysis of racial endogamy customs, norms, and policies in colonial South Africa. Gareth Cornwell (1996) articulated this point well: “The iron rule of endogamy at the heart of the notion of caste helps explain why ‘miscegenation’ has been such an obsession among white South Africans” (p. 453).

‘Black Peril’ and White Womanhood: Race/Sex Symbolism in Settler Mythology

There were relatively few European women living in southern Africa during the early centuries of colonial settlement. In 1663, Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) records counted seventeen White women in the Cape Colony. By 1718, White men outnumbered White women 691 to 390 (Heese 1971; van den Berghe 1960). However, in the late nineteenth century, South Africa attracted thousands of poor, unmarried women from Europe—especially sex workers. Prostitution was tolerated under British colonial rule (Hyam 1990; van Heyningen 1984). Most sex workers in the nineteenth century were women of color, and colonial authorities regarded prostitution as a necessary “safety-valve for public morality,” offering “some protection to the chastity and purity of our virgins and matrons” (see van Heyningen 1984, pp.173-174). Yet, by 1895, more than ten percent of White women in Johannesburg worked in the sex industry (van Onselen 1982). The population of White prostitutes grew exponentially during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), when the mass mobilization of British soldiers increased demand for commoditized sex (Hyam 1990; van Heyningen 1984). Most of these women were recent immigrants from Europe and had not been conditioned by settler mores, and some did not discriminate against Black and Brown men (Hyam 1990; van Heyningen 1984).

In 1901, the Cape Colony’s officials address this problem. Attorney-General T. L. Graham claimed that there was “a considerable traffic being carried on in Cape Town between aboriginal natives and white European women” (see Heyningen 1984, p. 192). Graham concluded that this problem was “of the greatest importance, for once the barriers were broken down between Europeans and native races in this country” there would be “no limit to the terrible dangers to which women would be submitted” (see van Heyningen

1984, p. 192). In 1902, the Assembly passed the Brothels Suppression Act. Under section “Brothels and Immorality,” this law decreed that it was “unlawful for any white woman to voluntarily have illicit sexual intercourse for the purposes of gain with any aboriginal native.” Neighboring settler colonies passed similar ordinances the following year (Keegan 2001; Mushonga 2013).

The aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War saw significant social upheaval. British victors were keen on reintegrating the vanquished “Boers” into a new nation: “White South Africa.” The success of the Union of 1910 depended on renewed solidarity between former enemies, centered around gendered notions of White supremacy, honor, and purity (Hyslop 1995; Keegan 2001; van Onselen 1982). From the 1860s to the 1920s, settler communities in South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and Kenya experienced recurring “Black peril” panics (Anderson 2010; Etherington 1988; Graham 2012; Huigen 1993; Kennedy 1987; Martens 2002; McCulloch 2000; Pape 1990; Seekings 2007). These panics reflected colonial fears of “native” insurrection and Black male rapists (Etherington 1988; Martens 2002; van Onselen 1982). These panics explicitly concerned White women, whose bodies were “mythologized by a frontier society as the last and most intimate frontier of all” (Cornwell 1996, p. 441). In the settler imaginary, White women’s wombs symbolized the “fountainheads of racial strength”—the organs from which the White bodies reproduced themselves along the colonial frontier (Kennedy 1987; Klausen 2015; Stoler 2002, p. 76). However, “Black peril” panics revealed how the source of “racial strength” also symbolized its vulnerability.

Newspapers routinely ran headlines like, “Another Black Peril Case,” “Outrageous Attack on a White Lady,” describing alleged perpetrators as “black monsters” and “black devils” (see Plaatje 1976, p. 91). One newspaper warned middle-class Whites: “Beware of your ‘houseboy,’ for under the innocent front may be lurking and lying latent the passions of a panther, and worse!” (van Onselen 1982, p. 261). Despite the ubiquity of “Black peril” anxiety, there was no proportionate correlation between public panics and actual instances of rape (Anderson 2010; Graham 2012; Keegan 2001; Stoler 2002). Charles van Onselen (1982) argued that “Black peril” panics often flared up during periods of economic unrest, such as the 1911–1914 recession and the 1913–1914 miners’ strikes. However, fluctuating economic conditions only explain outbreaks of “Black peril” hysteria, not the undercurrents of racialized fear behind these outbursts (Anderson 2010). White men’s economic anxieties about competing with cheaper African laborers easily morphed into sexual fears about competing over women (Cornwell 1996).

Since the government refused to act, a newspaper organized a petition, collecting 51,925 signatures. This petition led to the government’s official Assaults on Women Commission of 1913. The commission’s investigation concluded that poor, “debased whites” lacked the prestige and respectability associated with Whiteness. These lower-class Europeans diminished Black men’s “respect for the white race,” emboldening them to pursue White women (Assaults 1913, pp. 16–23; van Onselen 1982, p. 263). However, the commission also found that many rape charges were either fabricated or wildly exaggerated. In 1912, a court condemned an African “houseboy” to whip-lashes and four-months’ imprisonment for “assault” because he had taken his mistress’ hand, confessing that he “liked her very much” (see van Onselen 1982, p. 261).

Affluent White families often took young Black men into their homes as domestic workers, signaling status and prosperity. In 1912, there were some 35,000 “houseboys” working in Johannesburg households (Keegan 2001; Martens 2002). White employers often cheated their servants, even contriving false rape accusations to “defraud their ‘houseboys’ of their wages” (van Onselen 1982, p. 265). African intellectual Sol Plaatje (1976 [1921]) noted that these “Black peril” scares served to “justify” the Native Land Act of 1913, which stripped millions of Africans of property rights, and forced them to live in

impoverished ethnic reserves. Plaatje noted that most cases of interracial rape involved White men and women of color, emphasizing that this “White peril” posed a far greater threat to the purity myth (Graham 2012; Ray 2014).

In 1926, Justice Minister Tielman Roos introduced an “immorality” law which prohibited “illicit carnal intercourse between Europeans and natives” (Immorality Act 1927; Martens 2007). The bill was contested in the legislature but passed the following year. The Immorality Act of 1927 aimed to promote Briton-Boer solidarity, and it reflected the prevailing eugenics theories of the day (Martens 2007). Eugenics “scientists” were obsessed with the “problem” of miscegenation (Coetzee 1980; Dubow 1995; Rich 1990). Preeminent race scientists like Robert Knox and Francis Galton established their reputations by studying different “racial types” in southern Africa (Dubow 1995; Stocking 1987). German anthropologist Eugen Fischer (1913) applied eugenic theories to his study the *Rehoboth Bastards*, the mixed-race descendants of Dutch/Afrikaner men and indigenous Khoena women in South-West Africa. Fischer examined the physiological effects and defects of “hybridity” and “bastardization.” His research influenced Nazi Germany’s Nuremberg Laws of 1935 (Dubow 1995; Walters and van der Waal, 2020).

In the 1920s and 1930s, South Africa’s scientific and medical discourse was dominated by eugenics (Dubow 1989; Klausen 1997; Rich 1990; Walters and van der Waal, 2020). White support for segregation centered around pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference, hygiene, and degeneration. South Africa’s colonial medical establishment obsessed over issues of “feeble-mindedness” among working-class White women (W. Jackson 2020; Klausen 1997). Eugenicists believed that the White-minority population needed protection from “undesirable impurities,” and that poor women required special moral education as the “mothers of the future race” (Hyslop 1995; W. Jackson 2020; Klausen 1997, McClintock 1995; Stoler 2002). South African eugenic discourse was strongly influenced by the zoologist H. B. Fantham (Dubow 1995). Fantham (1927) claimed that mixed-race people were “degenerates” and that the White community’s repulsion for “blood-mixing” was congruent with the laws of society *and* nature.

During the Great Depression, there were some 300,000 to 400,000 impoverished Whites living in South Africa (Ilfie 1987). The problem of White poverty became a central issue for Afrikaners and Britons who supported segregation and White-preference capitalism. The Carnegie Corporation of New York commissioned a five-volume, multi-year study of rural White poverty in South Africa, employing teams of American and South African researchers. The Carnegie Corporation endeavored to “preserve the racial purity of American society,” and “believed that white South Africans should learn from American Southern whites how to handle *their* Negro problem” (see Magubane 2008, p. 693; Willoughby-Herard 2015). The Carnegie Commission reported that 17.5% of White families lived in “great poverty,” often among Black and Brown people (Ilfie 1987, p.117). Poor Whites who slept with racialized “others” were seen as “internal enemies”—with no regard for morals or “interior frontiers”—believed to “sap the fiber of white civilization at its most vulnerable point” (Dubow 1995, p. 56; Stoler 2022). The politics of “poor Whiteism” were deeply gendered (Hyslop 1995; W. Jackson 2020; Magubane 2008; Stoler 2006). Thousands of rural White girls and women migrated to Johannesburg in search of work and freedom, often living alongside African migrant laborers in slums (Steyn and van Zyl, 2009; Stoler 2006). The Carnegie Commission urged the colonial government to establish segregated boardinghouses for indigent White women, providing them with a “proper” Protestant education in feminine etiquettes and domestic work (Stoler 2006).

In Cape Town, Coloured children had been banned from public schools since the 1860s (Adhikari 2005; Jackson 2015; Thompson 1990). School segregation was necessary because, as one principal explained, it was “very undesirable that white children, especially

the girls, should be brought into close relations with the ordinary type of coloured street boy" (see Watson 1970, p. 32). In 1937, Supreme Court Judge J. A. Tindall implored legislators to follow Transvaal's example by segregating Whites from Coloureds:

In the Transvaal marriage between coloured and white has always been looked upon by Europeans as abhorrent... A white woman marrying a coloured man would suffer social ostracism... a European who advocates such marriages... would lose caste himself and would incur the hatred and contempt of most citizens (*Reports of the Select Committee* 1984, p. 16).

Anxieties about working-class White women in South Africa peaked during the 1938 election (Cronjé 1945; Hyslop 1995; Sofer 1949). The Afrikaner "Purified" National Party (NP), led by D. F. Malan, circulated a propaganda poster portraying White womanhood in a state of depravity, signaling a horrific outcome of United Party-rule. The poster's central illustration depicted a motherly White woman, gazing solemnly into the future (Figure 1)². Bold captions relayed her message: "The hope of South Africa speaks to you and says: vote for the National Party and protect my nation and my posterity against mixed marriages, which the United Party will not prohibit by law." A second, smaller illustration represented four White men in business suits. These men—labeled "capitalist," "communist," "imperialist," and "Jew." The third image depicted a young White woman sitting beside a Black man in front of the shack in which they lived. Their two children, playing in the doorstep, completed this White supremacist horror-scape. The Malanites used the campaign poster to attack moral legitimacy of UP-rule and urged voters to embrace the NP's "purified" vision for apartheid (Hyslop 1995). The NP-propaganda poster was extremely controversial. The UP capitalized on it, claiming that the Malanites had "slandered" White women's honor by making the "foulest allegations and insinuations" that they would willingly marry Black men, and required "legislation to keep [their] blood pure." Malan's campaign failed, for the UP won the election (Hyslop 1995, p. 77).

However, the public controversy occasioned another government commission. The Commission on Mixed Marriages (1938-1939), led by Charles de Villiers 1939, investigated, and reported on "the question of mixed marriages" between "Europeans and non-Europeans." It sought to determine whether such unions were "sufficiently numerous to be seriously detrimental to the welfare of the Union and the future composition of the population," and whether the government needed to "take further steps to discourage such marriages" (de Villiers 1939, pp. 1-2). This commission hired teams of social scientists to study census data and marriage records, and collect witness testimonies from agreeable clerics, bureaucrats, and ethnic organizations. The commission also contacted South Africa's chief diplomat in Washington D.C., directing him and "practically the whole research staff" to study American anti-miscegenation laws at the Library of Congress (p. 3). They learned that thirty of America's forty-eight states enforced anti-miscegenation laws, and they proposed that South African lawmakers could learn from these models (p. 30).

The de Villiers commission reported that "there can be no doubt that public opinion is, on the whole, against mixed marriages" (de Villiers 1939, p. 15). Most of the invited "witnesses" agreed. The DRC representative condemned intermarriage as a "social evil." A Methodist minister from Natal insisted that he "would refuse to celebrate a marriage between a Coloured and a European person, and definitely so between any Native and European" (de Villiers 1939, p. 16). A Salvation Army officer reported: "From what I have seen in this country, as well as in Jamaica and British India, mixed marriages are injurious to the persons concerned and to their offspring" (de Villiers 1939, p. 16). Another White

Methodist, tending to an African congregation in the Transkei, assured the commissioners that most Africans were also opposed to intermarriage: “Mixed marriages are just as repugnant to Native public opinion as to European public opinion” (de Villiers 1939, p. 16).

An African minister from Transvaal stated: “The black race must be proud to remain purely black... We must be brothers-in-Christ and not brothers-in-law... To allow mixture is to tamper with Nature’s good originality” (de Villiers 1939, p. 19). The South African Indian Association proclaimed: “The Indian community is opposed to mixed marriages as strongly as any other community in South Africa” (de Villiers 1939, p. 21). Representatives of the Cape Peninsula’s Coloured Welfare Association stated that it opposed mixed marriages because White men of “low type or class” often pursued Coloured girls when they failed to find a “decent wife” among the White community. “[W]hen one of two sisters marries a European and the other a coloured man,” The CPCWA declared, “the children of the former look down on the children of the latter and, indeed, on all other members of the family who are not as light-skinned as they are. Sometimes such a child disdains even its own mother” (de Villiers 1939, pp. 21–22). White supremacist theories of “purity,” enshrined over centuries of colonial domination, also shaped the racial subjectivities of Black and Brown people.

Although the de Villiers Commission found that “mixed marriages” were rare, they nevertheless recommended a comprehensive prohibition of interracial marriages and nonmarital sex, to prevent such “undesirable” intimacies from becoming more common. The commissioners referred to the efficacy of American and Australian anti-miscegenation laws and asserted that Transvaal’s endogamy laws (1871–1897) were “wisely conceived and simply planned” (de Villiers 1939, p. 35). Finally, they recommended that the “infiltration of non-European blood into the European population” could be prevented through residential segregation, and by expanding economic uplift programs for impoverished Whites (de Villiers 1939, p. 34; Fourie and Inwood, 2019; Sofer 1949). The commission’s report was well-received by the UP government, but further actions on anti-miscegenation legislation were suspended during World War II (Furlong 1983; Lewin 1960).

Miscegenation Madness and the Making of Apartheid

During the war, “miscegenation” was vigorously debated in White churches, universities, newspapers, and households. Patrick Furlong (1983, 1994) argued that the creation of stricter anti-miscegenation laws became *the* priority for the powerful Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the “spiritual arm” of the National Party. J. D. Strijdom, a prominent Afrikaner nationalist and Calvinist minister, warned his compatriots that “only carrying out the policy of apartheid in the light of God’s Word and with God’s blessing would provide deliverance from the dark danger of colour-mixing and bastardization” (see Ritner 1967, p. 24). This animosity towards mixing was not new, for the DRC had officially opposed mixed marriages since 1817 (Fourie and Inwood, 2019; Furlong 1994; Ritner 1967). By 1943, the DRC-leadership implored the UP government to take harsher measures against “*bloedvermenging*.” The DRC declared that it was “unalterably opposed to miscegenation and all that might further miscegenation,” and that it was the “sacred conviction of the Afrikaner people and Church” to establish “*rasse-apartheid*”—the “only salvation of the people’s existence” (see Ritner 1967, p. 24).

The Second World War created labor shortages in urban industries, as over 100,000 White men were shipped off to fight Nazis overseas (Wessels 1999). These shortages were “temporarily” filled by African migrant workers. By then, Africans comprised nearly two-thirds of the industrial workforce in Johannesburg, and the growing predominance of Black men in the streets reinforced White fears of being “swamped” (Klausen 2021; Posel 2011).

Anxieties surrounding African urbanization and the future of the White minority population were exacerbated by White women's increased use of birth control (Furlong 1994; Klausen 2015). At bottom, the White dream of apartheid was "underpinned by a hankering for order," a return to a colonial situation in which Whites dominated Blacks in all matters (Posel 2001a, p. 52).

Rampant miscegenation fear was exploited by race scientists like Gerrie Eloff and Geoffrey Cronjé (Coetzee 1991; Dubow 1995). Cronjé, a University of Pretoria sociology professor, was highly regarded by the NP-elite. His racist theories provided "scientific" justification for the NP's apartheid policy (Boersema 2022; Coetzee 1991; Dubow 1995; Hook 2023; Moutinho 2023; Posel 1995; Dubow 2014; Walters and van der Waal, 2020). His book *A Home for Posterity* (1945) became a manifesto for Afrikaner nationalists (Coetzee 1991). Cronjé dedicated this book to his wife and "all other Afrikaner-mothers... the protectors of the blood-purity of the Boer-nation" (1945, p. 2). Cronjé's main concern was the so-called "Coloured question." "With regard to blood-mixing," Cronjé (1945) wrote, "the coloured presents the utmost danger to the European race in South Africa" (p. 39; see Walters and van der Waal, 2020). He cited eugenics research, including texts by Fischer and Fantham, and declared that there was "convincing evidence" to conclude that mixture defiled divine creation and produced an "impoverish[ed] humanity...biologically inferior human material" (Cronjé 1945, p. 71).

Cronjé (1945) claimed: "political equality between non-whites and whites, which encourages miscegenation, constitutes one of the most dangerous situations ever to exist in this land, because its consequences will unavoidably result in the complete bastardization of the European race in South Africa" (p. 49). Cronjé feared that "mixed areas" would become the "death-places [*sterfplekke*] of white South Africa" (1945, p. 66; Coetzee 1991). He beseeched the legislature to enact stricter "*ontugwette*" (immorality laws) because: "only through racial-apartheid can racial differences be maintained...blood-mixing must be labeled a crime in this country because it is an extremely serious transgression against the white race and undermines its survival" (p. 47). He rebuked British imperialists for their cowardly indifference, urging them to unite with Afrikaners around the: "perpetuation of the blood-purity of the white-race in the southern land ...together with the Boers they must provide—A HOME FOR POSTERITY!" (Cronjé 1945, p. 19).

In 1948, Malan's (Reunited) National Party finally defeated the United Party in the landmark election which formally established apartheid rule (Klausen 2021; Posel 2011). The principal aim of the NP's comprehensive apartheid policy was the preservation of a White purity through the "complete elimination of miscegenation" (Sauer 1947, pp. 2-3). In May 1949, the newly appointed Minister of Home Affairs, T. E. Dönges, introduced such a bill in the Assembly (*Volksraad*). "The aim of this legislation," Dönges explained, was "to prevent as much blood-mixing as possible, and to preserve race-purity as much as possible" (*Debatte* 1949, p. 6302). Dönges read from the De Villiers Commission's report, emphasizing its recommendation for prohibition. "[T]here can be no doubt", he read, "that public opinion is generally opposed to mixed marriages" (*Debatte* 1949, p. 6303). He claimed to be motivated by its "the innocent victims"—"the children"—claiming that mixed children were doomed to live as "outcasts" without "family traditions." However, the UP-MPs tried to use Dönges' logic against him. Abraham Jonker insisted that such children would be "bastardized under this law." Dönges replied: "would it not be better if they were never born?" (*Debatte* 1949, p. 6303). Jonker agreed.

"Mr. Speaker," UP-leader J. C. Smuts interjected, "if there is one thing all South Africans can agree upon, it is that race-blood-mixing is an evil" (*Debatte* 1949, p. 6311). Despite his disdain for "*bloedvermenging*," Smuts argued against the NP bill. He stated that it would be an impossible task to discern tan-skinned Whites from light-skinned Coloureds, citing U.S.-based studies of American mixed families in which some

children were pale, while their siblings were dark. Smuts concluded that South Africa had too many “border-cases,” and that prohibition would create more problems than solutions (p. 6317). The Nationalists were not swayed by Smuts’ remarks, retorting that the Immorality Act of 1927 had been necessary and practical, but lacked enforcement. As in 1938, the National Party and United Party agreed that miscegenation was socially “undesirable,” but disagreed on whether it should be outlawed. Only Sam Kahn, a Jewish communist MP from Cape Town, rejected the premises of the debate itself. He compared his colleagues to the Nazis who wrote Germany’s Nuremberg Laws (1935), which forbade “Aryans” from marrying Jews. Kahn denounced Dönges as South Africa’s “foremost misanthrope,” rejected his “biological fantasies about racial purity,” and condemned his ideology as an “unlawful union between racial superstition and biological pseudo-science” (*Debatte* 1949, p. 6558; Furlong 1983; Klausen 2021). The NP was unmoved by Kahn’s cogent critique.

The NP-MP, M. Visser, endorsed Dönges’ bill and pointed to American Jim Crow segregation: “It would be my pleasure to notify you that apartheid is already enforced in the southern states of America.” He quoted Booker T. Washington’s 1895 “Atlanta Comprise” speech in which he claimed that Whites and Blacks should be “separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things, essential to mutual progress” (*Debatte* 1949, p. 6567). Dönges concluded:

Look at the experiences of other countries regarding the same issue of mixed marriages. Is it not something for the opposition to consider that thirty of the forty-eight states in the United States have such policies in place? Is it not an argument to prove that there are no reasons to discard such laws, just because they may not be as efficient as we would like? I assume that those difficulties also exist there, but thirty states have decided to implement these laws; thirty states considered it necessary to take legislative action in order to keep this social evil under control. And, let me remind the honored Members that the demographic proportions in the United States, in those thirty states, are not even half, not even a quarter, as urgent as the situation in South Africa (*Debatte* 1949, pp. 6639-6640).

Malan and Dönges’ NP ultimately overruled Smuts’ UP. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act (1949) passed by a thin margin, becoming the first major legislation of the apartheid regime (Furlong 1994; Hyslop 1995; Martens 2007). It decreed that marriage between any “European” and a “non-European” was “void and of no effect,” and “any children born or conceived of such marriages... shall be deemed to be illegitimate” (PMMA 1949). NP legislators also ratified the Immorality Amendment Act (1950), which criminalized non-marital sex between any “European” and “non-European” (Beinart 2001; IAA 1950; Klausen 2021; La Guma 1970).

Additionally, any South African living with someone of another “ethnic” (racial) group faced criminal charges. The government ratified the Population Registration Act of 1950, which assigned South Africans to one of four hierarchically arranged categories based on physical appearances and family reputations (Ratele 2009b, p.166; Watson 1970). People were classified and registered as “European” (White), “coloured” (Mixed), “Indian,” or “native” (Black/Bantu). This law defined a “Coloured person” as “a person who is not a white person or a native” (Adhikari 2005, 2008; Erasmus 2001; PRA 1950). The NP government also implemented a monumental political economic project of “grand apartheid.” The Group Areas Act (1950) forced people to inhabit separate residential areas. It also forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of African and Coloured people to vacate “White areas” and live in desolate “ethnic homelands.” In the 1950s and 1960s, all

Africans, Coloureds, and Indians were debarred from voting, and consigned to low-paying jobs (Beinart 2001; Posel 2011; Welsh 2010; Dubow 2014).

In 1948, Seretse Khama—the king-in-waiting of the Bangwato of Bechuanaland—married Ruth Williams, a White English woman. The union of Seretse and Ruth was opposed by multitudes in Britain and Bechuanaland. Ruth’s parents refused to attend the wedding. Seretse’s regent uncle, Tshekedi Khama, used the controversy to stay in power. However, the backlash against the marriage was most fiercely opposed in South Africa. The NP could not stomach the thought of Seretse and Ruth living as king and queen in Bechuanaland, situated between South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. The *Johannesburg Star* called the marriage “distasteful and disturbing,” and the *Natal Witness* declared it struck at “the root of white supremacy” (see Hyam 1986, p. 921).

The Khama marriage resulted in a diplomatic crisis between Britain and the Union of South Africa. The NP demanded that Seretse and Ruth be exiled to England. South Africa’s strong-arm diplomacy was quite effective. Commonwealth Secretary Gordon Walker convinced the British government to prohibit Seretse from becoming Bechuanaland’s monarch. Gordon feared that South Africa’s virulent racism would drive them—and their vast mineral wealth—out of the Commonwealth. Perhaps South Africa’s military would even consider invading British protectorates in Bechuanaland and Basutoland (Hyam 1986). In June 1950, Gordon wrote to Parliament:

We must also do our utmost to keep the Union in the Commonwealth [...] The Seretse case represents perhaps the one set of circumstances that could unite—and inflame—all white opinion in the Union against us...and can drive South Africa into completely irrational attitudes and actions...an outburst of uncontrollable emotion and anger (Hyam 1986, p. 938).

Prime Minister Clement Attlee’s Labour government temporarily exiled the Khamas from Bechuanaland. In 1952, Winston Churchill’s Torie government rendered their exile permanent. Seretse, Ruth, and their children were finally permitted to return to Bechuanaland as private citizens in 1956 (Williams 2006).

In 1957, South African prime minister J. G. Strijdom’s government intensified apartheid. Strijdom claimed that “God” had created “separate nations, colours and languages,” and condemned any “mongrelization between white and black” (see Elder 1998, pp. 29–30). Strijdom’s government introduced another Immorality Act amendment (1957) which criminalized “any immoral and indecent acts” across racialized boundaries, including cuddling and kissing. This amendment sought to remove “certain anomalies” in which well-resourced White men were exonerated, while their Black mistresses were found guilty by confession. Klausen (2022) argues that the 1957 amendment specifically targeted these White men. In 1968, homosexual relations, which were previously outlawed under so-called “sodomy laws,” were also criminalized under the Immorality Act after 350 men were arrested during a massive police raid on an interracial “homosexual party” in Johannesburg (Gevisser 1995). The opposition parties in the Assembly consistently argued that the Immorality Acts were ineffective, succeeding only in turning neighbors into “spies and snoopers” (Horrell 1957, p. 232). The police’s “Immorality Squad” used unscrupulous surveillance techniques, such as spying through windows and analyzing bedsheets. Policemen often used African women as “traps,” luring errant White men to their downfall (La Guma 1970).

Helen Suzman, the Jewish MP of the Progressive Party, cited legal records and newspaper articles in Assembly debates, claiming: “Thousands of people have been publicly humiliated, have had their careers ruined and their family lives wrecked...for a crime which is only a

crime where colour is involved” (Horrell 1963, p. 75). However, Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd (1962) defended sexual apartheid: “I say it unequivocally that the people of South Africa cannot accept the consequence of a multi-racial state unless the whites, the coloureds, and the Indians are prepared to commit race-suicide.” Ironically, it was apartheid’s Immorality Acts that drove many to commit suicide (*Cape Argus* 1962; Klausen 2022; La Guma 1970; *Rand Daily Mail* 1970). One retired policeman from Boksburg disclosed that he endured an “indescribable hell” after being charged: “there is always a stigma that remains after a person...is found not guilty” (Horrell 1969, p. 36).

A school principal from Johannesburg was accused of “immorality” by his wife but was later acquitted. He too described his ordeal: “There is a terrible stigma attached to anything concerning the Immorality Act and it is dreadful to have your name dragged through the mud when you know you are innocent. People treat you as though you had leprosy....” (La Guma 1970, p. 7). Mr. Botha, a thirty-five-year-old father of four, hanged himself in a prison cell to spare his wife and children from any further humiliation. “To avoid the malevolent stigma left by the Act,” one newspaper reported, “many people...a large number of them fathers of families—have hanged, drowned or shot themselves after being charged. One man poured petrol over himself and set himself aflame” (*Rand Daily Mail* 1970).

The NP sought to re-educate people’s erotic desires before any forbidden fornication could occur. In 1954, the government formed a commission of inquiry into the problem of “undesirable publications.” The government appointed Geoffrey Cronjé—apartheid’s ideological godfather—to lead the commission. They spent years scrutinizing novels, films, magazines, and theatrical performances for “undesirable” elements. Cronjé’s commission presented its findings to the Assembly in 1957, but their censorship policy was not implemented until 1963 (Coetzee 1996). The 1963 Publications and Entertainments Act created a Board of Censors—mostly White supremacist academics—who were authorized to ban any texts and images deemed “undesirable.” This law became the cornerstone of apartheid’s censorship regime for decades to come (Coetzee 1996). Thousands of books, magazines, films, and television shows were banned from public view (Gordimer 1972; Hachten and Giffard, 1984). The Apartheid regime feared that foreign images would corrupt South Africa’s segregated “public morals.”

In 1959, Communications Minister Albert Hertzog warned his compatriots that “the effect of the wrong pictures on children, the less developed and other races can be destructive.” “As far as I am concerned,” Hertzog continued, “we will never have television” (Nixon 1994, p. 266). In a subsequent speech in the Assembly, Hertzog explained why he abhorred television, describing a hypothetical “Black peril” scenario:

It is afternoon and the Bantu houseboy is in the living room cleaning the carpet. Someone has left the television set on. The houseboy looks up at the screen, sees a chorus line of white girls in scanty costumes. Suddenly, seized by lust, he runs upstairs and rapes the madam (Krabill 2010, p. 38).

Television was banned until 1976. Ron Krabill (2010) writes: “the fear of miscegenation was linked to television...television became the great racial and cultural miscegenator” (p. 38). In 1976, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) began producing television programs for segregated audiences. Leonard Thompson (1985) wrote that these programs adhered to NP policy: “[SABC] avoids featuring black and white people in egalitarian situations—especially anything that hints at interracial sex” (p. 48). Many foreign films were banned. For example, the American comedy/drama *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967) was banned because it normalized “taboo” relationships between White women and Black men (Hachten and Giffard, 1984, p. 160).

In 1970, the Free State town of Excelsior made international news when five White men and fourteen Black women were charged under the Immorality Act (*Chicago Tribune* 1970; Mda 2002). It had been a “public secret” that these men, including prominent nationalists, indulged in sex with African women. However, the sex ring was discovered by the police. Initially, seven men were arrested, but one was acquitted. Another—a local councilman—fatally shot himself after being charged. Eventually, all charges against the “Excelsior 19” were dropped because the prosecution’s witnesses refused to testify. However, the women—and their babies—spent months in jail before the trial’s conclusion (*New York Times* 1971). The Excelsior 19 case was a colossal embarrassment for the NP regime. Excelsior, once regarded as the shining epitome of Afrikanerdom, subsequently became known as the town “where the people screw the maids” (*City Press* 2016). Scandals such as these revealed apartheid’s madness. Despite its cruel prohibition and penalties, the apartheid state failed to eliminate “mixing.” There was a self-defeating policy. The more forceful the prohibition became, the more it encouraged transgression (Bataille 1986; Fanon 2008; Stallybrass and White, 1986).

The opposition hoped that these scandals would bring an end to the Immorality Laws. In 1974, MP Suzman declared: “We must get rid of this appalling, rotten bit of legislation” (Horrell 1975, p. 55). In a 1977 address, Suzman cited crime records to show that over 10,000 people had been convicted of “immorality” since 1950 (Horrell 1979). Between 1974 and 1982, 1916 people were convicted of breaking apartheid’s ultimate taboo (*Reports of the Select Committee* 1984). To the NP’s horror, most convicted men were Afrikaners. One anonymous critic, “Candidus” (1965), discussed this psychosexual “tragedy” of the Afrikaners: “many of these lads were brought up from infancy by African ‘nannies’ some of whom they knew more intimately than their own mothers” (p. 22). These boys were raised by Black mother-surrogates. However, they were forced to sever these intimate bonds when they entered adulthood: “the real love of the African mother-substitute may thus be turned to guilt-ridden hate and fear” (Candidus 1965; Nkosi 1975, pp. 22–23). These boys entered the symbolic realm of colonial culture through patriarchal law: “the Afrikaner has been fed from infancy with stories of black treachery and violence—stories handed down from father to son and dating from Dingane, the Frontier Wars and Voortrekker days when a handful of whites survived among the hordes of ‘black savages’” (Candidus 1965, p. 221). The emotional trauma inflicted on White boys through this racist rite-of-passage fundamentally shaped their identities and subjectivities as men. This pseudo-oedipal “love-hate attitude” helped explain why so many White men violated the Immorality Acts, for they had “not outgrown their childish love of a black woman” (Candidus 1965, p. 222).

Criticism of apartheid’s Immorality Acts peaked in the 1980s. As P. W. Botha’s government edged closer toward repealing the Acts, many Afrikaner voters abandoned the NP for its more conservative splinter-parties (*New York Times* 1985). Former DRC-minister Andries Treurnicht established the Conservative Party in 1982 to counteract the creeping “*verligting*” (enlightenment) within the NP ranks (Beinart 2001). The Reconstituted National Party (HNP), which split from the NP in 1969, also attempted to reconsolidate Afrikaner nationalists’ support for petty apartheid. Ahead of the 1983 Constitutional Reform Referendum—which would grant Coloureds and Indians some political representation in the legislature—HNP politicians tried to arouse White fears by circulating propaganda posters depicting a White girl in need of protection. The captions read: “For *her* sake, preserve White South Africa: Vote HNP” (Figure 2)³.

In 1983, the DRC finally admitted that the Immorality Acts could not be justified on scriptural grounds (Furlong 1994). In response, the NP established a new commission (1984) to enquire into the “desirability” of the laws. In their memorandum to the 1984 commission, the Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) argued: “South Africa can no

longer justify this law on the grounds that the United States has similar laws” (*Reports of the Select Committee* 1984, p. 33). These progressive lawyers included Chief Justice Warren’s majority opinion from *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), which declared Jim Crow anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. In the LHR memorandum, legal scholar Christopher Dugard predicted that South Africans would learn to tolerate interracial marriages: “as the United States evolved over the years...so too South African society has evolved since 1949 and, at this point in time, South African society is prepared to tolerate marriages of this kind” (*Reports of the Select Committee* 1984, p. 11). A memorandum by the Black Sash, a White women’s anti-apartheid organization, declared that the Acts were “corruptive of the very concept of morality” because the “bonds of attraction and affection, are matters of free personal choice” (*Reports of the Select Committee* 1984, p. 94). Finally, the 1984 commission concluded that the Acts “[could] not be justified on scriptural or other grounds,” and recommended their annulment (*Report of the Joint-Committee* 1985, p. 2). The commissioners insisted that segregation in housing, education, and employment was sufficient to perpetuate apartheid (*Report of the Joint-Committee* 1985, p. 6).

In 1984, historian Hans Heese published a book in which he claimed that thousands of prominent Afrikaner families, including those of distinguished politicians, had mixed-race ancestors. Heese argued that the Immorality Acts could not be justified on historical grounds “because there is no racial purity anyway” (*Los Angeles Times* 1985). In response, sixteen HNP-legislators sued Heese for libel. Jaap Marais, the HNP-leader, insisted that: “[t]here has been a process of racial purification over the generations as whites married other whites and shunned those with black genes...It is obvious just by looking at people that the Afrikaner nation today is white” (*Los Angeles Times* 1985). A Pretoria councilman, Piet Rudolph, punched his colleague Ernie Jacobs in the face, after Jacobs referenced Heese’s book to question Rudolph’s genealogy. Afterwards, Rudolph exclaimed: “It makes by blood boil, all these lies about us...I just could not control myself any longer, but I have no regrets...the ancestry of the Afrikaner cannot be questioned!” (*Los Angeles Times* 1985).

On June 19-22, 1985, Botha’s NP government finally repealed the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts. However, the Group Areas Act and Separate Amenities Act remained enforced, making it nearly impossible for mixed couples to live together unless one person applied for racial reclassification (*Los Angeles Times* 1986; Sherman and Steyn, 2009). Initially, the repeal was heavily criticized. A 1984 survey found that eighty percent of Afrikaners opposed the repeal of the Immorality Acts (*BBC* 1984; Furlong 1994). On the other side, the African National Congress (ANC) leadership accused the NP of “window dressing,” and denounced the repeal as “purely cosmetic” (Klausen 2021, p. 225; *Sunday Times* 1985). ANC freedom fighters maintained that they fought to secure the Black vote, for only true democracy could end apartheid. They were not risking their lives merely to “have girlfriends across the color line” (*BBC* 1985). Even Bishop Desmond Tutu remarked that the repeal was “peripheral” to the “total problem of apartheid” (Klausen 2021, p. 225). Indeed, the repeal of the Immorality Acts was part of Botha’s “total strategy,” designed to “win hearts and minds,” while his regime imposing a brutal counter-insurgency war against apartheid’s many enemies (Beinart 2001, p. 245; Welsh 2010). However, many others rejoiced that the race/sex laws were no more.

On June 23, 1985, Protas Madlala and Suzanne Leclerc became the first mixed couple to legally marry in post-prohibition South Africa (*AP* 1985; *BBC* 2015). Madlala, a Black South African man, and Leclerc, a White woman from the United States, met in Washington D.C. After considering an easier life in the States, they moved to Durban, South Africa to confront apartheid directly (*BBC* 2015; Marhanas 2016). When

interviewed by the British press, enquiring if their marriage marked the “end of the road” for apartheid, Suzanne answered:

Oh no, this is just the beginning...a tiny step, and hopefully it will just grow from there. [...] So far, we are quite shocked at how this has become world news—history headlines, even! To think that this is 1985, and a mixed marriage is making such a big shebang here...that’s sort of sad.

Protas agreed: “Yeah, that’s shocking, especially because South Africa is...claiming to be part of the first world” (*AP* 1985). The Group Areas Act forced Protas to live in an impoverished Black township, and Suzanne had to be reclassified as “honorary Black” to live together as family (*Los Angeles Times* 1986; Marhanas 2016). After their first children were born, the government sought to classify them as “Coloured,” but Protas and Suzanne resisted this designation. When prompted to register their second child, they wrote: “human” (Marhanas 2016).

Conclusion

In this article, I examined how the fear of miscegenation developed as a *raison d’être* for the construction and maintenance of apartheid. I argued that despite its efficacy at reproducing racial caste formations, settler society’s miscegenation taboo ultimately undermined its own mythic hegemony by constructing contradictory erotic desires and racial subjectivities. Crime statistics demonstrate that most “immorality” cases involved high-status White men and subordinated women of color (Klausen 2022). However, crime statistics only tell part of the story. A long view of miscegenation taboo reveals how questions of White womanhood dominated the iconographic imaginary of Afrikaner nationalism. Interdisciplinary and comparative theories of race/caste systems around the colonized world help explain why Afrikaner nationalists represented White mothers and daughters as sacred symbols of “White purity” and posterity (Figure 3)⁴. Indeed, the mythic “sanctity” of White women was central to the meaning of apartheid. Furthermore, this article demonstrated the limits of “South African exceptionalism,” detailing how apartheid’s architects and critics used comparisons with the United States to legitimize *and* undermine the Immorality Acts.

It has been thirty years since apartheid ended in 1994, when Nelson Mandela’s ANC won South Africa’s first “nonracial” democratic election. Symbolically, the repeal of the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts in 1985 signaled the beginning of the end for apartheid. While South Africans have been legally “free” to love across color lines for decades, the social, psychic, and affective afterlives of *de jure* segregation continue to shape the intimate geographies of post-apartheid society. In many social spaces, interracial intimacy remains stigmatized (Jansen 2017; Posel 2004; Ratele 2009b; Sherman and Steyn, 2009). “Apartheid,” Coetzee (1996) wrote, was a “dream of purity, but an impure dream” (p. 164). This dream—epitomized by Cronjé, Malan, and Dönges—was based on fallacy and contradiction, fear and desire, myth and madness (Coetzee 1991; Hook 2023). The origins of apartheid, Coetzee noted, resided in “fear and denial”—the “denial of an unacknowledgeable desire to embrace Africa, embrace the body of Africa; and the fear of being embraced in return by Africa” (Graham 2012, p. 10). Archbishop Tutu (2011), reflecting on the symbolic significance of the Immorality Acts, recalled how painful memories haunted him:

Do you recall how police would climb trees in order to peep into bedrooms, hoping to catch out couples who might be contravening the Immorality Act, rushing to feel the

temperature of the sheets, making sordid what should have been beautiful—love between two persons—and how many careers and lives were destroyed when people faced charges under this abominable legislation? (p. 187).

However, Tutu also noted how these memories indicated considerable social change: “And now I think I am about the only person who still goggles—look at all those mixed couples who saunter around hand in hand with hardly a care in the world, pushing a pram with a baby of indeterminate hue inside. I still seem to fear that a policeman will come crashing into them for breaking the law” (Tutu 2011, p. 187). Tutu’s reflections suggest that post-apartheid South Africa exists somewhere between apartheid and “post-racialism” (see Bobo 2011). More research is needed to uncover the psycho-affective detritus of apartheid. Studying the development of miscegenation taboo in the twentieth century offers valuable lessons for antiracist scholarship in the postcolonial moment. Understanding how race/sex myths were constructed and maintained through social practices and laws enables us to think beyond “purity,” embrace “creolization,” and envision a “racial otherwise” (Erasmus 2017; Glissant 1990).

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Notes

¹ George Findlay’s controversial book *Miscegenation* (1936)—which argued that thousands of “White” South Africans, claiming to be of “pure stock,” were actually of “mixed stock”—was translated into Afrikaans as *Bloedvermenging* (1937).

² <http://digilibrary.unisa.ac.za/digital/collection/p21049coll6/id/589/rec/1>

³ <http://digilibrary.unisa.ac.za/digital/collection/p21049coll6/id/260/rec/1>

⁴ <http://digilibrary.unisa.ac.za/digital/collection/p21049coll6/id/434/rec/3>

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