‘Daisyfield in the Crucible’: Afrikaners, Education and Poor Whites in Southern Rhodesia, 1911–1948

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Abstract

This article examines the history of Daisyfield School, an Afrikaner children's orphanage and school in Southern Rhodesia. The existence of an Afrikaner school in a self-consciously British settler colony represented a distinctive settler project within the settler state, one supported by the school’s transnational connections and one whose aims often conflicted with the state. These aims centred around the rehabilitation of poor white children and we demonstrate how non-state institutions engaged in far-reaching interventions into the lives of children identified as poor whites. We also show how the children who were recipients of this treatment could resist it by crossing social and geographical boundaries. Challenges to Daisyfield’s regime produced a kind of solidarity between the school and state to suppress this challenge as the existence of poor whites threatened racial boundaries in the colony.

Introduction

Abraham Botha, assistant minister of Bulawayo's Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), offered a succinct explanation about why he had established an orphanage for Afrikaner children in the nascent settler state of Southern Rhodesia (modern-day Zimbabwe): not long after his arrival in 1910, he had encountered six white Afrikaner orphan children being cared for by Black African families. What might be considered an act of kindness shocked him as a terrible threat to racial boundaries and spurred him to action. Within a few months he and his wife had founded an orphanage that subsequently became a school for Afrikaner children, Daisyfield in Bulawayo.[1]

This article focuses on Daisyfield as an institution that aimed to rehabilitate poor Afrikaner children. White impoverishment was a threat to the sharp racial boundaries between coloniser and colonised as it revealed there was no automatic, enduring link between whiteness and power. Political and social elites in Southern Africa's settler societies feared poor whites would not be able to – or, even worse, would not be interested in – maintaining sufficient economic and social distance from Africans, and this would disrupt carefully constructed racial boundaries.[2] This was an acute concern in Southern Rhodesia, which had been established in the 1890s as a white settler colony but consistently failed to attract many settlers. White settlers remained a small minority and depended heavily on the African majority for labour.

Southern Rhodesia, however, was not simply intended by its rulers to be a settler colony, but to be one populated primarily by white settlers of British descent.[3] This project was

[1] Gustav Hendrich, "Help ons bou" – Die Daisyfield-inrigting en die impak van sendingwerk en godsdienstige bearbeiding in 'n weeshuisomgewing in Rhodesië (1910 – 1948)', *New Contree* 60 (2010): 2.

[2] Duncan Money and Danelle van Zyl-Hermann, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa*, ed. Duncan Money and Danelle van Zyl-Hermann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 11.

[3] For an overview of the conquest and early aspirations for this territory to be a colony for British settlers, see A.S. Mlambo, *A History of Zimbabwe* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), 36-51.

fraught with difficulties. In addition to the failure to attract or retain white settlers, many of the whites present in the colony were not the kind of settlers that the state wanted at all, and were the targets for disciplinary interventions or even expulsion.[4] Afrikaner settlers who arrived from South Africa were among those about whom the settler state felt uneasy because there were fears that they would bring "poor" Afrikaners, a group whose presence did not fit with broader state goals.[5]

Scholars have increasingly recognised the inaccuracy of white Rhodesia's self-image as a place populated by prosperous British settlers and have detailed how the experiences and position of white settlers was shaped by ethnicity, class, and gender.[6] Divisions within settler society consistently undermined the project of making Southern Rhodesia a viable settler colony. However, much of the previous work on how the settler state unsuccessfully sought to create a "white man's country" populated by British whites has examined immigration policy, and often focused on efforts to discourage or keep out other whites.[7]

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[4] George Bishi, 'Immigration and Settlement of "Undesirable" Whites in Southern Rhodesia, c.1940s-1960s', in *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa*, ed. Duncan Money and Danelle van Zyl-Hermann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 59-77.

[5] D. Lowry, 'Rhodesia 189-1980 "The Lost Dominion", in R. Bickers, (ed)., *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124; J.M. Mackenzie, 'Southern Rhodesia and Responsible Government', *Rhodesian History*, 9 (1978): 26.

[6] A.S. Mlambo, *White Immigration into Rhodesia: From Occupation to Federation* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press, 2002); Kate Law, *Gendering the Settler State: White Women, Race, Liberalism and Empire in Colonial Rhodesia, 1950-1980* (London: Routledge, 2016); Ushehwedu Kufakurinani, *Elasticity in Domesticity: White Women in Rhodesian Zimbabwe, 1890-1979* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Nicola Ginsburgh, *Class, Work and Whiteness: Race and settler colonialism in Southern Rhodesia, 1919–79* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

[7] A.S. Mlambo, 'Building a white man's country: Aspects of white immigration into Rhodesia up to World War II', *Zambezia* XXV, no. ii (1998): 123-146; A.S. Mlambo, '"Some are More White than Others": Racial Chauvinism as a Factor in Rhodesian Immigration Policy, 1890 to 1963', *Zambezia* XXVII, no. ii (2000): 139-160; Josiah Brownell, 'The Hole in Rhodesia's Bucket: White Emigration and the End of Settler Rule', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (2008): 591-610; Ellen Boucher, 'The Limits of Potential: Race, Welfare,

In this article, we contribute to this burgeoning literature on divisions within the settler state by turning the focus to educational institutions. Educational institutions were a crucial way that settler states sought to reproduce themselves and were crucial in establishing racial differences in the colonies of settlement.[8] Daisyfield, however, was not a state institution. It had a quasi-independent existence that both conflicted and collaborated with the settler state. We show that Daisyfield was a distinctive settler project within the settler state, as the school sought to reproduce a distinctive Afrikaner cultural identity among children and moved these children to a geographically isolated location to do this. The settler state, in contrast, sought to use education to foster a kind of unified white identity that was self-consciously British. Daisyfield was an institution that existed between competing settler ideologies.

At the centre of the conflict between these ideologies was the question of what to do about poor whites.[9] The perceived problem of poor whites, as we have seen above, motivated the foundation of the school. Ministers from the DRC – a Protestant church that was closely intertwined with Afrikaner nationalism – had a clear answer. Children identified as poor whites were targets for intervention from the church and the school and needed to be separated from Africans, and from other whites. State officials, on the other hand, were highly sceptical about

and the Interwar Extension of Child Emigration to Southern Rhodesia', *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 4 (2009): 914–34; Baxter Tavuyanago, Tasara Muguti and James Hlongwana, 'Victims of the Rhodesian Immigration Policy: Polish Refugees from the Second World War', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, no. 4 (2012): 951-965. Bishi, '"Undesirable" Whites in Southern Rhodesia'.

[8] Rebecca Swartz, *Education and Empire Children, Race and Humanitarianism in the British Settler Colonies, 1833–1880* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

[9] This conflict was not new. Sarah Duff has pointed out that in the 1870s the DRC and state officials in the Cape Colony had diverging views on education and poor white children. S.E. Duff, *Changing Childhoods in the Cape Colony: Dutch Reformed Church Evangelicalism and Colonial Childhood, 1860–1895* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 2.

Daisyfield's ability to "reform" poor white children because they conflated Afrikaners with poor whites, and believed the community was prone to "poor whiteism"'.[10]

Colonial states often sought to identify and "save" children, and indeed Abosede George has argued that the existence of the supposedly imperilled child legitimised a 'salvationist colonial regime.'[11] There was a different imperative in the settler states in Southern Africa, where states engaged in wide-ranging interventions to rescue children deemed to be poor whites. This was about identifying the right kind of education and training that would enable white boys and girls to maintain dominance over Africans, and thus secure the future existence of states predicated on racial divisions.[12] Children were a category who could be moulded by the settler state, and other institutions, and 'saved' from the ignominy of being poor whites. Their status could be changed, and this would help both the children themselves and the state.

[10] This conflation was rooted in the rural depression that pushed many Afrikaners from the land in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the supposed link with poverty and backwardness was a convenient justification for Britain's conquest of the region in the South African War. There is a rich literature on 'poor whites' and 'poor whiteism' in Southern Africa: Rob Morrell (ed.) *White but Poor; Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1992); Tifanny Willoughby-Herard, 'South Africa's Poor Whites and Whiteness Studies: Afrikaner Ethnicity, Scientific Racism, and White Misery', *New Political Science* 29, no. 4 (2007): 479-500; Jeremy Seekings, ''Not A Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under': Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924–1929', *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 3 (2007): 375-394; Lindie Koorts, '"The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater": D.F. Malan's Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid Era, 1912-1939', *South African Historical Journal* 65, no. 4 (2013): 555-576.

[11] Abosede George, *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014), 8.

[12] Carol Summers, 'Boys, Brats and Education: Reproducing White Maturity in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1915–1935', *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 132-153. Sarah E. Duff, 'Saving the Child to Save the Nation: Poverty, Whiteness and Childhood in the Cape Colony, c.1870–1895', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 229-245

There is a rich literature in Southern Africa looking at how educational institutions were used as tools for the reformation of recalcitrant or poor whites, and as part of social engineering more broadly.[13] Sarah Duff argued that in the 1890s legislation and debates in the Cape Colony over lifting white children out of poverty 'were partly a product of anxiety over the maintenance of white rule.'[14] Linda Chisholm has shown a system of reformatories and industrial schools were established in South Africa to discipline and reform white youths into productive workers, and to reduce opportunities for convivial contacts with African and Coloured children.[15] Scholars have explored how poor white children emerged as a category to be rescued, disciplined, and reformed in the early twentieth century as white urban poverty became more visible, and how the state became an important factor in this process.[16] Poor and 'delinquent' whites were often blamed for their own circumstances, especially white girls as Will Jackson has shown in interwar Cape Town.[17] This attribution of blame also evident in our study of Daisyfield and in other work on Southern Rhodesia. Ivo Mhike, for instance, showed how the authorities established an institution for 'delinquent' white girls, whose transgressive

[13] For the latter, see Rob Morrell, *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinities in Colonial Natal, 1880–1920* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2001); Rebecca Swartz, ''Good citizens and gentlemen': Gender, Reputation and Identity at the South African College, 1880–1910', *South African Historical Journal* 68, no. 4 (2016): 517-535.

[14] Duff, *Changing Childhoods*, 137.

[15] Linda Chisholm, 'Class and Color in South African Youth Policy: The Witwatersrand, 1886-1910', *History of Education Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1987): 1-27. Linda Chisholm, 'Reformatories and industrial schools in South Africa a study in class, colour and gender, 1882-1939' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1989).

[16] Jennifer Muirhead and Sandra Swart, 'The Whites of the Child?: Race and Class in the Politics of Child Welfare in Cape Town, c. 1900–1924', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 8, no. 2 (2015): 229-253.

[17] Will Jackson, 'Immoral Habits: Delinquent White Girls in 1920s Cape Town and the Distribution of Blame', *South African Historical Journal* 72, no. 1 (2020): 29-50.

behaviour was attributed to insanity or mental 'degeneration', to conceal them from broader settler society.[18]

This article makes three broad contributions to this historiography. First, we show how non-state institutions intervened in the lives of children and families identified as poor whites. Second, we argue that children were not passive recipients of this treatment and could resist by transgressing social and geographical boundaries. The settler state sought to reinforce new colonial boundaries by creating a standardised education system for white children who, in the eyes of the state, represented the future of the territory, with the implication that they would stay within its bounds. Daisyfield sought to create a sense of broader Afrikaner identity that went beyond geographical boundaries, though had sharp racial and cultural boundaries. Children, in some instances, sought to avoid both visions. Third, we show there were competing settler ideologies around how to "solve" the poor white problem that were manifested in conflicts over who controlled education at the school and what the purpose of education was for. These conflicts were related to tensions over the uneasy position of Afrikaners in a supposedly British settler colony. These tensions were compounded during the Second World War when the Afrikaans community were suspected of disloyalty.[19] The school, and the church that ran it, were not content with their relatively marginal status and sought to contest it.

There is a small existing literature about Daisyfield. Shirley Frances Pretorius' MA thesis is an extensional institutional history of the school, focusing on evangelisation,

[18] Ivo Mhike, 'Intersections of Sexual Delinquency and Sub-Normality: White Female Juvenile Delinquency in Southern Rhodesia, 1930s–c.1950', *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (2018): 575-593. See also, Ivo Mhike, 'Rhodesian state paternalism and the white working-class family, 1930s–1950s', in *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa*, ed. Duncan Money and Danelle van Zyl-Hermann (Abingdon, Routledge, 2020), 42-58.

[19] Gustav Hendrich, 'Allegiance to the Crown: Afrikaner Loyalty, Conscientious Objection, and the Enkeldoorn Incident in Southern Rhodesia during the Second World War', *War & Society* 31, no. 3 (2012): 227-243.

education, and language from 1911 to 1991.[20] More recently, Gustav Hendrich has focused on the impact of missionary and religious teaching at Daisyfield.[21] Our article expands upon this research by looking at the relationship between the state and school and the actions of white children using documents from the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), as well as publications produced by the school. There are some archival materials on Daisyfield in the archives of the DRC in Stellenbosch, though this article is primarily focused on the relationship between the school and the settler state and so concentrates on material drawn from the NAZ.

The documents utilised in this article – produced by the Education Department and the Criminal Investigation Department – importantly contain some records from poor white children and parents, albeit mediated through a government investigation. As Sarah Duff notes, it is difficult to access voices of children in the archive who are not middle-class youth, other children in the archival record 'often fall into the category of a social problem to be solved or to be saved.'[22]

Situating Daisyfield in Southern Africa

Daisyfield was established in January 1911 first as an orphanage for the destitute children encountered by Reverend Botha and ran by a committee appointed by the DRC. Admission to the orphanage was controlled by this church committee, though there was an element of collaboration with the state as no child could be admitted there without the agreement of the district magistrate.

[20] Shirley Frances Pretorius, 'The history of the Daisyfield orphanage, Bothashof Church School and Eaglesvale School between 1911 and 1991' (MA thesis, UNISA, 1992).

[21] Gustav Hendrich, "Help ons bou" – Die Daisyfield-inrigting en die impak van sendingwerk en godsdienstige bearbeiding in 'n weeshuisomgewing in Rhodesië (1910 – 1948)', *New Contree*, no. 60 (2010): 1-20.

[22] Sarah Duff, *Children and Youth in African History* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 13.

The DRC had long been exercised about white poverty. The church had been providing aid to destitute whites in the region since the 1650s, at the beginning of white settlement in the region. The focus from the DRC on white poverty intensified in the late nineteenth century, however, amidst industrialisation and urbanisation across Southern Africa and the spread of a deadly cattle disease in 1897 that hit many of its white congregants hard. The church first held a congress on the poor white problem in 1893 and several others followed.[23]

This concern about white poverty meant not all those admitted to Daisyfield were orphans. Some had one surviving parent or stepparents, while others had parents who were homeless.[24] These were children deemed in danger of becoming destitute and, from the outset, the guiding assumption was that the fate of white Afrikaans children, not simply white children, required special attention.[25] The other guiding assumption was that these children needed to be educated separately with a curriculum that reflected the theological and social views of the DRC, or the future reproduction of the Afrikaner community was imperilled.

This brought the school into conflict with the settler state from the outset. Nominally a British colony, Southern Rhodesia's settler state had an unusual degree of independence from the metropole. It was established in the territory seized by the British South Africa Company in the 1890s under a charter granted by the British Government and following the end of company rule in 1923 the colony was granted self-government. This gave Southern Rhodesia's

[23] Gracie Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*: *A Social History of Human Science* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), 42-3.

[24] Pretorius, 'History of the Daisyfield Orphanage', 32-34.

[25] As in settler states in the region, white poverty was seen as something unusual and threatening to the racial order, while African poverty became normalised as a kind of natural state of affairs. Muirhead and Swart, 'Whites of the Child', 236.

government, which was elected by a small overwhelmingly white electorate, considerable autonomy to set its own policy in many areas, including education.[26]

Education policy generated conflict and the contention around Daisyfield's curriculum was that the language of teaching was Afrikaans, not English. English-speaking whites constituted the majority of Southern Rhodesia's white population, but Afrikaners made up a sizable minority.[27] The settler state had decided from the outset to use language as a marker of identity. State officials ruled emphatically in 1902 that the language of instruction for white children would be English, and equated Afrikaans-education with political disloyalty.[28] Several Afrikaans medium schools that opened after the initial colonisation closed in the 1900s or were taken over by the state. As in other British settler colonies like Australia and New Zealand, the English language was the 'standardised language of state' and a marker of British identity.[29]

State officials in Southern Rhodesia envisaged education as a tool to create a unified identity between Afrikaans and English-speaking children which would bolster white domination over the African majority. Schools, as one settler politician put it in 1915, should aim to mould 'the peoples of Rhodesia into one united race'.[30] The other aim of education for the state was to combat "poor whiteism" and by 1930 all white children were offered free secondary schooling.[31] As Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins argued in 1937, 'I think it is a

[26] The British Government retained control over foreign policy and had a veto over legislation that might negatively affect Africans. Mlambo, *History of Zimbabwe*, 105-6.

[27] David Kenrick, *Decolonisation, Identity and Nation in Rhodesia, 1964-1979: A race against time* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2019), 32-33. Gustav Hendrich estimated that Afrikaners constituted almost 25% of the total white population in 1944. Hendrich, 'Allegiance to the Crown', 230.

[28] Mlambo, 'Rhodesian Immigration Policy', 149-50.

[29] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 56.

[30] Bob Challis, 'Education and Southern Rhodesia's poor whites, 1890–1930', in *White but Poor; Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940* ed. Rob Morrel (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1992), 162.

[31] Boucher, 'The Limits of Potential', 926.

crime that there should be any child in this country who is not able to obtain a good and sound education … it is only through training our youth properly that they will be able to hold their own in the future'.[32] White youths, in his view, needed to 'hold their own' against Africans.

Daisyfield did not aim to foster a unified white identity. The school could do this and maintain itself as an institution independent from the state because of their connections with South Africa. Initially, the DRC in South Africa's Cape Province (Hopetown, a branch of the Presbytery of Dutoitspan Kimberley) provided personnel and finance to maintain the new white congregations in Southern Rhodesia.[33] However, in 1928, this responsibility passed on to the Synod of the Orange Free State in South Africa, who expanded the activities of the church in the colony and financially supported Daisyfield School. In 1957, the Synod of the Orange Free State handed over to the congregations in Rhodesia to the Transvaal DRC and in 1963 the churches in Southern and Northern Rhodesia had established the Central African Synod, a fully-fledged Central African Regional Synod.[34] The Orange Free State was the heart of Afrikanerdom and had been an independent republic before being annexed by Britain following South African War (1899-1902).[35]

Daisyfield embodied transnational connections across the region attracting children from different territories and all accommodated in boys and girls hostels.[36] Children came to the school from both Southern, Northern Rhodesia, Portuguese East Africa, Tanganyika,

[32] *Southern Rhodesia House of Assembly Debates*, 29 October 1937.

[33] Shirley Francis Pretorious, 'A history of the Dutch Reformed Church in Zimbabwe with a special reference to the Chinhoyi congregation', (PhD thesis, University of South Africa, 1999), 87-107.

[34] Ibid., 16-17.

[35] Though Tiffany Willoughy-Heard reminds us that to remain aware that the Orange Free State was 'Afrikaner in terms of political and state power but never in terms of the actual constitution of labour, demography, land ownership, and social make-up'. Willoughby-Herard, 'South Africa's Poor Whites', 483.

[36] *Eyrie, Eaglesvale*, 2001, 6; *Eyrie, Eaglesvale High*, 2002, 2.

Belgian Belgian Congo, and South Africa, while most of the staff came from South Africa.[37] These transnational connections were useful to help to finance the institution mainly from the DRC and other DRC related organisations in South Africa as Daisyfield encountered severe financial difficulties that the small Afrikaner community in the colony could not finance.[38] The only real solution to persistent debt problems came through a deal with the state. In 1914, the expanding school reached an agreement with the Department of Education that the government would guarantee teachers' salaries and the school would retain the right to recruit its own teachers, subject to approval by the Department of Education. Other parts of the school continued to be financed by the DRC and the school board continued to appoint teachers.[39]

Despite this deal, Daisyfield was able to keep the state at a literal distance. The same year, the school moved from Bulawayo to a rural area 120km outside the city along the main railway line to Salisbury. This was done partly because land for the expanding school was cheaper there and partly to ensure greater independence from the state and to exercise greater control over the pupils at the school. Abraham Botha later explained why the school had to be moved 'it was realised that a town with its restricted space and peculiar temptations was not the most suitable centre in which to establish an orphanage for our Afrikaner children.'[40] These 'peculiar temptations' were those of urban life: alcohol consumption, sex and multi-racial contact. It also entailed physically separating the school's pupils from English-speaking white children in Bulawayo.

[37] Hendrich, 'Help ons bou', 13; Daisyfield Orphanage, *Commemoration of the Twenty-First Anniversary of the Institution 1914-1935* (Bulawayo: Philpott and Collins, 1935), 2.

[38] *The Eyrie*, 1998, 36; Pretorius, 'History of the Daisyfield Orphanage', 37-39.

[39] J.S. Blackwell, *A brief history of European education in Rhodesia* (Bulawayo: Argus Print & Publishing, 1918), 5.

[40] Daisyfield Orphanage, *Commemoration*, 2.

Rehabilitating 'Poor Whites' at Daisyfield

The establishment of Daisyfield was closely linked with white orphans and destitute children. Indeed, as the school magazine, the *Eyrie* noted that 'orphans have played a pivotal role in the history of our school. Without them, the school would not have come into being!'[41] The foundation of Daisyfield was closely bound up with fears of poor and destitute whites, as illustrated by the justification provided by Abraham Botha and the school magazine. Botha sought to convey that the founding of the orphanage and later school was necessary to maintain racial boundaries between whites and Africans in a racialised Southern Rhodesia. White children living alongside Africans, establishing close relations and depending on Africans was a threat to the maintenance of racial boundaries, which required whites to maintain a position of dominance.[42] Daisyfield also developed in a wider context of growing and grave concern about 'poor whiteism' in Southern Africa.

There had been official concern over 'poor whiteism' since the foundation of Southern Rhodesia as a settler colony in the 1890s, and these fears grew in the interwar period with an expanding white population and the Great Depression.[43] Poor whites were a problem that political and social elites believed could, and must, be solved by rehabilitating them into productive citizens. The way to do this was wide-ranging and often intense state intervention, including intervention into the domestic lives of families identified as poor whites. For poor

[41] *The Eyrie, Eaglesvale High*, 2002, 2.

[42] The exception, of course, is dependence on Africans who were employed in care roles for white children.

[43] P. Stigger, 'Minute substance versus substantial fear: white destitution and the shaping of policy in Rhodesia in the 1890s', in *White but Poor; Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940,* ed. Rob Morrell (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1992), 130–50.

white children, this meant removing them from their families and placing them some kind of institutional care.[44]

One consequence of this is that Daisyfield expanded significantly in the interwar years. By 1935, there were 198 children and 21 staff at Daisyfield by 1935 and it had grown into a small village; the school had its own church, hospital, school, workshops, school hostel, staff quarters and farm buildings.[45] Some students came to the school via DRC congregations while others were committed to the institution by district magistrates in Northern and Southern Rhodesia from families deemed to be poor whites. Students were equipped with skills that the school believed would prevent them falling into the ranks of poor whites and would be appropriated to their imagined future gender roles. The curriculum reproduced gendered divisions as boys were taught farming, leatherwork, upholstery, shoemaking and carpentry while girls took subjects such as domestic science and dress-making.[46]

Daisyfield was self-consciously a school specifically for poor white Afrikaner children whose education required their separation from other whites in the colony. The school applied for secondary school status in 1925 and was rejected because of the relative proximity of a secondary school for white children in the town of Gwelo.[47] Appealing this decision, the Church Committee emphasised the supposed special circumstances of their Afrikaner pupils. Students who went to school in urban areas 'are taken too much out of their environment' and 'the farm child is continually suffering from some ailment or other in the town owing to cramped conditions and look of open country air'. Then there was the question of the expense

[44] Will Jackson, 'An Unmistakable Trace of Colour: Racializing Children in Segregation-Era Cape Town, 1908–1933', *Past & Present*, 238, no. 1 (2018): 165–195. Mhike, 'Intersections of Sexual Delinquency'.

[45] Daisyfield Orphanage, *Commemoration*, 1.

[46] *Eyrie*, 1998, 35.

[47] National Archives of Zimbabwe, Harare (hereafter NAZ) S246/231, Department of Education, Southern Rhodesia to Colonial Secretary, 7 August 1925.

of education in towns and the relative impoverishment of a rural community that existed outside the money economy: 'The question of clothes in town is a considerable expense which our farmers cannot meet. In our hostel at Daisyfield the farmer can pay in kind – with the products of his farm.'[48]

While Daisyfield believed it was a rehabilitative site for white Afrikaner children, state officials were not convinced. Regular state inspections of Daisyfield began after 1915 and inspectors regularly took a dim view of the school and its pupils. In 1925, for instance, the colony's Director of Education informed the Colonial Secretary that the intellectual ability of children at Daisyfield was considerably below the average of children at similar schools and attributed this in part to the supposed inferior parentage of the pupils.[49] A few years later, the colony's Chief Agricultural Officer complained that the school's farm was primitive and advised that better training was required as he assumed that most boys would have to live on the land.[50]

Class and ethnic boundaries were blurred as officials in both Northern and Southern Rhodesia believed that Afrikaners were innately predisposed to poor whiteism. Afrikaner parents and the children themselves were blamed for their impoverishment by state officials. This is apparent in the case of Christian Ruddolph Looy. Archival documents are usually produced about poor whites rather than by them.[51] As Will Jackson notes, most work on poor whites 'has focused on attempts to manage or control them,' while the voices of poor whites themselves have been 'far more elusive'.[52] In this case, we have some records about how

[48] NAZ S246/231, H. Barrish, Presbytery DRC to the Colonial Secretary, 16 September 1925.

[49] NAZ S246/231, Director of Education to the Colonial Secretary, 25 September 1925.

[50] NAZ S824/703/1-3, Chief Agriculturalist to the Director of Education, 20 July 1929.

[51] Money and van Zyl-Hermann, 'Introduction', 10.

[52] Will Jackson, ''The Shame of Not Belonging: Navigating Failure in the Colonial Petition, South Africa 1910–1961', *Itinerario* 42, no. 1 (2018), 86.

children responded to these state interventions and testimony from those who were the targets of state intervention, albeit mediated through colonial officials.

In early 1931, 12 boys absconded from Daisyfield and among them was Christian Ruddolph Looy, then aged 13, who made it to Broken Hill (Kabwe) in Northern Rhodesia, a distance of almost 1,200km.[53] It is not clear how the immigration officials failed to detain Looy, or perhaps he avoided them, and his whereabouts only came to light when his mother raised a complaint. Looy claimed he ran away from Daisyfield because one of his teachers, named Vermaark, constantly beat him and was always hungry.[54] He later informed a government investigation

> I saw my eldest brother being beaten by a master, Mr. Joubert; the master tied three canes together, made my brother bend over and touch his toes. My brother was then beaten many times. After the beating I saw blood coming down my brother's trousers.[55]

This prompted him to leave the school with the other two boys and walked for five days from Daisyfield to Bulawayo living on mealies, which they took from the fields of Africans that they passed through.[56] Looy had been committed to Daisyfield in 1928, along with his three siblings. His mother Maria Magdellena Jordan had all four of children sent to Daisyfield by the colonial administration in Northern Rhodesia after her husband died and she could not secure work. Here too fears of poor whiteism animated policy. Northern Rhodesia's Governor James

[53] Similar cases of disciplinary issues in the 1930s were common at other schools and reformatory houses in the colony, S824/15 Child Welfare Society, 17 March 1932.

[54] NAZ S246/231 Daisyfield Raising of Status, 7 April 1931.

[55] *Ibid*.

[56] *Ibid*.

Maxwell had gravely warned that the 'growing population' of poor whites was 'the greatest danger to the existence of white civilisation in tropical Africa.'[57]

Jordan's testimony to the police at Broken Hill about her son is worth quoting at length:

> I examined his body when he arrived, he had black bruises on the back, and shoulders which, he informed me were the result of frequent beatings he had received at the hands of a master named Vermaark. I later asked Dr Wallace to examine the boy and he did so but stated that the lad was bruised and had marks, but that owing to the lapse of time he was unable to state that the marks were the result of a beating or not. If they were the result of a beating, then it had taken place sometime previously. As I am now in a position to support the remainder of my family, I would like the government to let me have the children to reside with me in Broken Hill and leave the orphanage. I have not written to the orphanage requesting this, as I know that they will not let the children leave until they are 17 years of age. Since I have heard of this ill-treatment of my children, I am most anxious to have them back way from the school and have them with me at Broken Hill. When the boy arrived back, he was very thin and looked as if he never had enough food to eat. He told me that he was always hungry at the school.[58]

These allegations prompted an investigation by the state and Southern Rhodesia's Director of Education visited the school. In this, the state and the school colluded to suppress any opposition from poor whites to the schemes that governed their lives. Both school and state

[57] James Maxwell, 'Some Aspects of Native Policy in Northern Rhodesia', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 29, no. 117 (1930): 477.

[58] NAZ S246/231 Daisyfield Raising of Status, 7 April 1931

were in agreement that intervention into their lives of poor white families was effective and required.

However, while the Director of Education exonerated the school, he also suggested that Afrikaner community was innately predisposed towards "poor whiteism". This conclusion was informed by his own personal experience with poor whites. The Director, for instance, found that Looy and his siblings were 'undersized for their age' but explained that while 'an ordinary observer would say that they suffered from malnutrition' it was more likely because of their experiences at home during childhood: 'From personal knowledge I would say that conditions of living at Daisyfield are immeasurably superior to those in which the Opperman family, of which Mrs Jordan is a member, were brought up.'[59] This callous disregard for child welfare is a good illustration of the attitude of state officials towards poor whites and reveals a justification for intervention: institutions for poor white children cared for them better than their families could.

Both Daisyfield School and state institutions disregarded and discredited the testimony of children. Although Looy was white and living in a settler colony, his claim that he saw his elder brother beaten bloodily at school was rubbished. State officials saw him, and children like him, as a threat to the colonial order and a group to be disciplined. The Director of Education concluded: 'It is my conviction that the bruises were inflicted by the complainant himself or by another at his suggestion to provide an excuse for running away.' This is even though the report contained detail of other violent treatment at the school, including one boy beaten around the ears so hard that blood vessels inside his nose burst. The testimony of Looy's mother was discounted too and she also represented a threat to the future reproduction of the racial order by failing to raise her children appropriately. The Director claimed that children

[59] NAZ S246/231, Director of Education to Governor Northern Rhodesia, 4 May 1931.

ran away from the school because they 'come from bad homes and are apt to return to an undisciplined care-free existence.' Jordan's request to have her children returned to her was therefore refused.[60]

Tellingly, behaviour deemed transgressive and deserving punishment was behaviour that resembled or emulated common practices among Africans, who were considered to be racially inferior to whites. In this sense, the poverty of these white children raised the spectre of racial degeneration. The report into Looy and the other escapees emphasised that these children walked a great distance from the school, as was common practice for Africans in rural areas, and had eaten mealies taken from fields, a foodstuff associated with Africans, to sustain themselves on their journey. Other children at Daisyfield were reprimanded for stealing blankets from the school and selling them to Africans.[61] As Allison Shutt has observed, efforts to enforce and reproduce whiteness involved inculcating a set of behaviours particularly appropriate behaviours towards Africans.[62] In the eyes of the state, Daisyfield was failing to do this, and failing to reform recalcitrant white children into proper future white citizens.

Afrikaners and Daisyfield in a 'British' colony

The relationship between Afrikaners and the Southern Rhodesian state was uneasy in the first half of the twentieth century.[63] While white settlers united against supposed political, economic and sometimes sexual threats from Africans, there were continual tensions and divisions within white society.[64] Part of this involved the widespread articulation of prejudices by English-

[60] *Ibid*.

[61] NAZ S246/231 Daisyfield Raising of Status, 7 April 1931

[62] Allison Shutt, *Manners Make a Nation: Racial Etiquette in Southern Rhodesia, 1910-1963* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 78.

[63] Donal Lowry, 'Rhodesia, 1890-1980', in *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas*, ed. Robert Bickers (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 124. See also Mlambo, *White Immigration into Rhodesia*, 53-59.

[64] John Pape, 'Black and white: The 'perils of sex' in colonial Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, no. 4 (1990): 699-720.

speaking whites towards Afrikaners and official efforts to marginalise the community.[65] For instance, the franchise qualifications established in 1912 included a requirement to be able to write in English, introduced to limit the political influence of Afrikaner settlers.[66] In the interwar period, these prejudices centred around 'poor whiteism' and the belief that Afrikaners were inherently prone to lapsing into 'poor white' status.[67]

However, although marginalised within Southern Rhodesia's white society, Afrikaners were by no means a powerless minority. Not only did they possess political rights, but they could appeal to state representatives in South Africa, who in turn could pressure their counterparts in Southern Rhodesia or the British Government.[68] Daisyfield utilised such transnational connections in their contestations with the government. In 1928, the government rejected Daisyfield's application for funding to build a girls' hostel, arguing that these girls should be sent to schools in Bulawayo where they would be taught with other white children, and taught in English. Predictably, the Church Committee disagreed and argued that Afrikaner children were unsuited to living in town, but mostly feared losing control over these children.[69] Instead, Daisyfield raised sufficient funds to construct the hostel through donations from DRC congregations in South Africa to accommodate more pupils.

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[65] George Bishi, Jospeh Mujere and Zvinashe Mamvura, 'Renaming Enkeldoorn: Whiteness, place, and the politics of belonging in Southern Rhodesia', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 77 (2022): 60.

[66] Takawira Shumba Mafukidze, 'Towards Inevitable Conflict: An Examination of the Political Effect of the 1923 Award of Internal Self-Government to the Colony of Southern Rhodesia' (MA thesis, Duquesne University, 1973), 3.

[67] Mlambo, 'Rhodesian Immigration Policy', 147.

[68] Sol Plaatje made a similar point about Indians in South Africa, noting that the colonial government of India occasionally pressured South Africa to modify anti-Indian legislation in the interests of imperial harmony. He contrasted this to Africans, who possessed no outside authority to appeal to so their interests 'could comfortably be relegated to the regions of oblivion'. Sol Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (Picador Africa: Johannesburg, 2007 [1916]), 182.

[69] NAZ S824/703/1-3, Daisyfield Grants, May 1928.

Daisyfield, however, was only one school. Wider demands were made by the DRC and its allies in South Africa for the provision of Afrikaans-medium education in Southern Rhodesia during the 1910, but these rebuffed. Connections with South Africa were again important as Afrikaans schools were formed outside the state education system, partly financed from South Africa. A compromise was reached in 1922 prior to the settler colony being granted self-government whereby the state agreed to add Afrikaans to the curriculum. This compromise was partly motivated by the fear among white settlers that the withdrawal of Afrikaans children from schools would herald the emergence of a poor white class in the colony.[70]

Tensions over education, language policy and the position of Afrikaners in the colony reignited during the Second World War. Animosity between English and Afrikaans-speaking whites were shaped by conflict, notably the South African War (1899-1902) in which the two republics established by Afrikaans-speaking whites, the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, were defeated in a bitter conflict.[71] Many white settlers in Southern Rhodesia had personal experience of this conflict, on both sides. The charge that Afrikaners constituted a separate white community which conflicted with the aims of the settler state and was heightened during the Second World War. In South Africa, Afrikaner nationalists opposed involvement in the war and formed an organisation in 1939 specifically to oppose the war effort, Ossewabrandwag.[72]

There was soon extreme suspicion of any Afrikaans-medium schools as being essentially disloyal and, from the outbreak of war, 'anti-fascism in Southern Rhodesia carried

[70] Challis, 'Education and Southern Rhodesia's poor whites'

[71] For more on the South African War, see for example, Andrew Porter, The South African War and historians', *African Affairs*, 99, (2000), 633-648; Bill Nasson, *The war for South Africa: The Anglo–Boer War 1899–1902* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2010).

[72] Patrick Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika. The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1991)

anti-Afrikaner undertones.'[73] Southern Rhodesia's Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins alleged that it was 'unfortunate that Daisyfield has been the headquarters of the Ossewabrandwag and the Herenigde [Nasionale] Party because there is no doubt that proper racial hate is threatening to develop at this particular centre.'[74] The government put several Daisyfield teachers under surveillance by the Criminal Investigation Department due to their apparent sympathies with Afrikaner nationalism, including the school's headmaster Dewald Hattingh Davel. Davel and his wife Johanna Elizabeth Catharina had been in Southern Rhodesia since 1933 when Davel was first hired as a teacher from a school in the Orange Free State. The couple retained close links with the Free State and Johanna became a correspondent of the Bloemfontein-based newspaper *Die Volksblad* in 1941 and sent regular requests for financial assistance for Daisyfield to South Africa's Afrikaans press.[75] Rumours circulated in Southern Rhodesia that secret Afrikaner nationalist groups opposed to the war were providing financial assistance to Daisyfield.[76]

Increased government surveillance was prompted by Daisyfield's efforts to preserve its status as an Afrikaans school and its transnational connections, which in wartime were threatening to the state. At the outbreak of war, the agreement that school would appoint teachers with the agreement of the Department of Education broke down. During the 1920s and 1930s, the school had consistently recruited teachers from South Africa, and this had been approved despite growing official criticism of the school. In 1939, the Department of Education concluded that it was necessary to appoint a substantial number of English-speaking teachers

[73] George Bishi, ''Filthiest Gangs of Thugs': Anti-Fascism and Anti-Nazism Perceptions in Southern Rhodesia, 1930s to 1940s', *South African Historical Journal* 74, no. 1 (2022): 110.

[74] The Herenigde Nasionale Party was a hard-line Afrikaner nationalist party. NAZ S482/194/41, Godfrey Huggins to J.C. Smuts, 9 December 1941.

[75] NAZ S517, Afrikaans Nationalism Reports, 11 November 1949.

[76] 'The Colony's Schools and Racialism', *The Bulawayo Chronicle*, 27 July 1945.

at the school and a new headmaster. The Department would monitor the appointment of teachers at the school, select suitable candidates for appointment and retain the final say on selection of staff.[77]

Daisyfield School and the Church Committee which ran it were outraged. Presented with a fait accompli, the committee appealed to South Africa, specifically to the Synodical Committee for Care of the Poor Dutch Reformed Church, Orange Free State. In turn, the secretary of this committee Rev. P.J Piennar appealed to South Africa's Minister of External Affairs Jan Smuts to intervene with Godfrey Huggins. The plans of the Department of Education, Piennar warned, 'will have tremendous repercussions not only in Rhodesia but also in the Union'. Piennar also threatened that Daisyfield would withdraw from the state education system in Southern Rhodesia and re-establish itself as an independent school supported by the DRC in the Orange Free State.[78] At the same time, Daisyfield sought to mobilise other sections of the DRC. In November 1941, Southern Rhodesia's censorship department intercepted and translated a letter from Abraham Botha entitled 'Daisyfield in the Crucible' and addressed to the DRC publication *Die Kerkbode* in Cape Town. Botha enclosed an article arguing that the move by the Department of Education to appoint English-speaking teachers touched at the very existence of Daisyfield and claimed the school's staff were willing to continue the struggle against the government to defend its Afrikaans character at all costs.[79]

This struggle did not occur. Smuts promptly intervened with Huggins and urged him to avoid confrontation with Daisyfield.[80] This intervention was likely motivated by Smuts'

[77] NAZ S482/194/41, A.G. Cowing, Chief Education Officer to the Director, Daisyfield Orphanage, Rev Botha, 3 October 1941.

[78] NAZ S482/194/41 Rev. P.J Piennar, Chief Secretary Synodical Committee for Care of the Poor Dutch Reformed Church to J.C. Smuts, Minister of External Affairs, 11 November 1941.

[79] NAZ S482/194/41, Hannie Botha to the editor Die Kerkbodt, Cape Town, 19 November 1941.

[80] S482/194/41 J.C. Smuts to Godfrey Huggins, 17 November 1941.

delicate domestic position in South Africa with Afrikaner nationalist opposition to the war. Huggins acquiesced yet emphasised his opinion that the school was a failure in rehabilitating the poor whites in its care. The problem was, he argued, that 'the class of teachers at Daisyfield was too *low* to improve the *type* of children at the institution.'[81] Reflecting the aim and self-image of Southern Rhodesia as a British settler colony, Huggins believed English teachers were required at Daisyfield to transform its pupils into future members of the settler state, and thought the school failed in its rehabilitative aim.

Conclusion

Daisyfield's relationship with the settler state oscillated between conflict and compromise from its foundation, but in 1944 a more enduring compromise was reached. State officials had long pressured for the relocation of the school's pupils to an urban area and in 1944 the school acquiesced and agreed to move closer to Salisbury (Harare). Expanding pupil numbers and the increased cost of transporting pupils to the school in wartime along with poor soil fertility and growing water scarcity prompted Daisyfield's acquiescence, though the school managed to retain an independent existence.[82] In fact, the school still exists today, albeit in a very different form.[83]

The school eventually moved in 1948, the same year that Afrikaner nationalists won power in South Africa's elections. Afrikaners, until then a relatively marginal group among the region's settler population, now had a party claiming to act in their interests in control of the most powerful state in the region. This altered their position of this group in Southern Africa

[81] S482/194/41 Godfrey Huggins to J.C. Smuts, 9 December 1941. Emphasis in the original.

[82] *The Eyrie*, 1998, 35.

[83] The school still exists today as a private Christian boarding school in Harare. The school was renamed Eaglesvale School in 1982, though the Dutch Reformed Church retained overall responsibility until 2010. Eaglesvale School traces its origins back to Daisyfield and publicly refers to itself as 'one of the oldest schools in Zimbabwe.' 'Eaglesvale School', available at http://www.eaglesvale.ac.zw/wp/, retrieved 20 February 2023.

and changed the dynamic of Daisyfield's relationship with the state, as did the school's relocation.

Both the Southern Rhodesian state and Daisyfield shared the same fears about poor white children, but had different ideas about what to do with them. Daisyfield School represented a competing settler project in Southern Rhodesia. The school sought to reproduce a distinctive white Afrikaner community through the education of children kept at a physical distance from the rest of the colony. This was motivated from the outset by fears of poverty and racial degeneration in the new colony, epitomised by the reliance of white Afrikaner orphans on an African family.

The Southern Rhodesian state also thought intervention into the lives of poor white children was necessary and appropriate. However, the state sought to use educational institutions to produce a self-consciously British settler colony, and state officials were sceptical that an Afrikaans school like Daisyfield could properly rehabilitate poor whites. These officials conflated ethnic and class divisions and many believed Afrikaners were inherently a poor white community.

Yet white children were not simply pliable material for competing settler projects. They had their own lives and agency. At least some of the supposed beneficiaries of the school resented the harsh interventions into their lives and resisted by running away. In these instances, whatever conflicts existed between them, the school and the state acted in concert. Poor white children had to be physically separated and isolated to be rehabilitated into productive future citizens.

We know far more about what white elites and state officials thought about and planned for poor whites than what those labelled poor white thought about the treatment they received. The actions and testimony of Maria Magdellena Jordan and Christian Ruddolph Looy, though

mediated through colonial police officers, provides an important record of how the targets of rehabilitation responded and opposed these interventions. Despite conflicts between the school and settler state over the aim of education, both were united over the urgent need for interventions into the lives of poor whites and disregarded any protestations from the supposed beneficiaries of these interventions that they wanted to live differently.

Daisyfield was not a rehabilitative institution for white children generally, but specifically for Afrikaans-speaking children and one that was relatively independent of the state and national boundaries. Although located in Southern Rhodesia, it was partly controlled and staffed by the DRC in the Orange Free State, South Africa and took in pupils from beyond the colony's borders, and these pupils occasionally fled back across these borders if they did not like the school. Transnational ties with organisations in South Africa enabled Daisyfield to maintain its independent status and were used to effectively counter the marginal position of the school and Afrikaners within Southern Rhodesia. With this, Daisyfield could carve out a position for its own distinctive settler project within the colony.

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