

Anti-Semitism in the 1930s: Germany and South Africa

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On 27 October 1936, the steamer *Stuttgart* arrived in Cape Town from Bremen, bringing some 570 Germans of the Jewish faith to settle in South Africa. Hitler had become the German dictator in March 1933. Under the policy of *gleichschaltung* (literally, "putting into gear"), the fate of existing German institutions and structures was decided according to their conformance with the Nazi ideology. Hitler regarded Jews as the cause of all the world's evil, and consequently a series of laws was enacted, such as the *Reichsbürgergesetz* (Reich Citizen Act) and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, which respectively deprived German-Jews of their citizenship, and proclaimed their inferiority purely on the grounds of race. How was this achieved? Or, to put it another way, was modern German history, as Daniel Goldhagen avers, a prologue to the uniqueness of Nazi barbarism, which made justice a matter of natural inequality, based on racist criteria?¹

What is also being raised here is the question of continuance in German history, and how to assess its role in producing the catastrophe which occurred between 1933 and 1945. One could go back as far as the political passivity supposedly implicit in Lutheranism, but a more realistic starting point would be Western Europe in the late nineteenth century, when anti-Semitism was a latent, but potentially threatening force. The theoretical basis for modern anti-Semitism can to a great extent be attributed to a Frenchman, Count J.A. Gobineau (1816-1882), who in 1853 propounded the thesis that race was the determining factor in human development; and that the superior race was one which was racially pure. A vigorous, popular anti-Semitic movement developed in France from the 1880s, but did not seriously threaten French Jews until the Vichy period. Gobineau's beliefs, however, and after him those of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927)², were far more acceptable in Germany.

Unified Germany was a new, fragile, political creation, searching for a national identity against the background of severe social dislocation caused by the country's rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. By retaining the authoritarian, aristocratic-monarchical order of the preceding period, the constitution of United Germany ensured that its political institutions would be contradictory and ambiguous.³

The British historian J.P. Stern lists several characteristics of the Second German Reich which were later to reach their mature form during the Hitler period. "The call for a 'natural' leader, for the abolition of politics in favour of nationalism, of 'civilization' in favour of 'culture', the appeal to Nature, the blood, the iron will, the

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1 D Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1996), pp 5, 9, 419

2 He was an Anglo-German author and Richard Wagner's son-in-law, who developed the theory of the master race with its divine mission

3 See: G Craig, *Germany 1866-1945*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1978), chapter 2; P Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1987), *passim*, for the background to German anti-Semitism, such as its *Völkisch* basis, which developed in Germany and Austria in the nineteenth century

appeal to ‘northern’, later ‘Aryan’ values – all these belong to the temper of the Second German Empire”.⁴

In total, the predominating culture was violently nationalistic and conservative, emphasising purportedly traditional German virtues such as integrity and the sanctity of German womanhood. The concomitants of these beliefs naturally were anti-liberalism, anti-socialism and finally anti-Semitism, which encapsulated all the other “antis”. For, as George Mosse, the American historian whose family were the well-known German publishers, notes,⁵ it was the Jewish stereotype which provided the focal point for the anxieties and hence the aggression inherent in the whole *Völkisch* (national) ideology.

It is important to emphasise that despite the pervasiveness of Gobineau-Chabernian racism, initially this stereotype was based on the criterion of Judaism, not race, as the essential characteristic of the Jews. Thus the belief that “the Jews are our national misfortune”⁶ could co-exist with the belief that individual Jews could be re-educated and rise above the inherently evil, superstitious nature of Judaism, to become totally German.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, there were about half a million Jews in Germany. Despite the law of 1871 which afforded civic equality, there were restrictions on the entry of practicing Jews into politics, the army and certain sectors of the civil service. Jews could teach at the universities but few reached professional status. Yet paradoxically, despite the restrictions and the passive tolerance of anti-Semitism, it would appear (according to Peter Gay, American historian of German-Jewish origin) that on balance, by the end of the century, the relationship between Germans and German-Jews was one of mutual, if somewhat uneven acceptance.⁷

Consequently Jews were increasingly perceiving themselves as German citizens of the Jewish faith. Their occupations reflected those of the German social spectrum. The culture which they enriched in a truly remarkable way, was essentially German; their politics were liberal and capitalist. The adoption, so vigorously, of a secularised German culture however, was a two-edged weapon; for it deprived German-Jews of potential strengths, such as a feeling of common identity with members of the Jewish religion elsewhere, which could be a significant hindrance when they became refugees.

4 J P Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (Fontana/Collins, Great Britain, 1975), p 47

5 G Mosse, *Germans and Jews. The Right, the Left and the Search for the ‘Third Force’ in pre-Nazi Germany* (Howard Fertig, New York, 1970), pp 77-115.

6 A statement made by German historian Heinrich von Treitschke in an article published in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* in 1879. While Von Treitschke believed that German Jews “could win respect and recognition only if they submerged themselves wholly and unconditionally in German life”, his exclamation “gave spurious respectability to the more extreme forms of anti-Semitism” in the 1880s. G A Craig, as quoted from: “Outsiders”, *The New York Review of Books*, 32, 10, 13 June 1985, at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article_id=5428; A. Elon, *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany, 1743-1933*, Review essay by Gordon A. Craig at http://site.umb.edu/faculty/salzman_g/Strate/Discus/2002-12-05CraigOnElon.htm. Both sites accessed 1 November 2004.

7 P. Gay, *Freud, Jews and other Germans. Masters and Victims in Modernist Culture* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1978), chapter 2.

If, on the eve of the First World War, Jewish Germans felt they could echo the Kaiser's words, "Ich Kenne nur noch Deutsche" (I still only recognize Germans), the trauma of defeat, compounded by the economic collapse of the 1920s and the subsequent Depression rang warning bells. The Weimar Republic which succeeded the Empire, failed through lack of enough convinced democratic republicans to make the new system work. Conversely, the opponents of democracy found it easier to mobilise support, even among intellectuals whose academic training should have made them react more critically. The whole educational system – and in particular the universities – remained the bulwark of conservatism. Yet these developments were accompanied by an amazing, intellectual ferment, reflecting an enlightened attitude towards major social issues.

Weimar's culture was ambiguous because its political system was volatile, and dependent on a precariously balanced economy. Consequently the Republic's normal condition was one of crisis characterised by inherent violence. The murders of Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919, a German-Jewish socialist) and Walter Rathenau (1867-1922, a German-Jewish capitalist and Weimar Foreign Minister) were not only manifestations of this violence. They also signaled the start of virulent manifestations of hysterical anti-Semitism, in its most poisonous, racist form, constituting a departure from the passive type of anti-Semitism seen before.

Hitler provided an alternative to the political inertia of Weimar. He became the populist leader, exercising his assertive will, making demands – for discipline and self-sacrifice – which had tremendous appeal in times of social upheaval. Throughout Germany there was a willingness to give up both personal and collective liberty, to be relieved that is, of the problems of making democratic choices; and to accept the *Völkisch* movement's *blut und boden*⁸ message, including its obsession with racial purity.

The Nazi appeal, which led to the charter of the *Stuttgart* was not yet, as J.P. Stern notes,⁹ based on the utilisation of irrational mob feelings as displayed in the Russian pogrom, though *Kristallnacht* (literally Crystal Night, the Night of the Broken Glass) in November 1938 approximated to that phenomenon. Nor was it the product of widely-held beliefs discredited by a "catastrophic" scandal, such as the Dreyfus case. Rather it represented the practical implementation of a developed ideology reflecting earlier precedents, but one whose intellectual pretensions to universal applicability, gave it legitimacy in a society that longed for systematic explanations.

German-Jewish immigration to South Africa

By the end of 1936 about a fifth of Germany's half a million Jews had emigrated. Many, particularly the young, were assisted by organisations such as HICEM¹⁰ and

8 "Blood and soil", representing the concept that power and stability depended on a synergy of race and territory

9 J.P. Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (Fontana/Collins, Great Britain, 1975), p 201

10 Founded in 1927 as an international organisation for Jewish migration The name is an acronym for the three founding organisations: HIAS (the New York-based Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society); ICA (the Jewish Colonisation Association, founded 1891 and based in Britain); and Emig-Direkt (founded in Berlin in 1921). See <http://www.history-of-the-holocaust.org/LIBARC/LEXICON/LexEntry/Hicem.html>, accessed 1 November 2004

the *Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden* (Jewish Benevolent Society), both originally founded to assist emigrant Eastern European Jews.

Initially few German-Jews came to South Africa, but their numbers rose considerably after 1935, as their civil and legal rights in Germany were increasingly being whittled away under the Nuremberg, and subsequent racially based legislation.

They came to a country originally settled in the seventeenth century by whites as servants of a commercial company. Afrikaans, the language of these early settlers, grew out of the Dutch spoken by the white rulers and the servile "coloured" population. Subsequently these Afrikaners became dispersed throughout modern South Africa, initially in independent polities, which after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) emerged as part of the British Empire.¹¹

From the late 1880s, the "pull" of the mineral discoveries in the Transvaal, taken in conjunction with the anti-Semitic policies of Tsarist Russia, added a significant Eastern European component to the small number of Anglo-Germans then comprising the Jewish community, particularly in the Cape, where the Cape Immigration Act of 1902, primarily designed to keep Asiatics out of the Colony, required any prospective immigrant to submit his application in the characters of a European language. Thus while not actually welcomed (see figure 1), the pre-Union arrivals gained fairly easy entry, settling on the Rand and in towns throughout South Africa. In rural areas they lived amongst Afrikaans-speakers. Whatever anti-Semitism was emerging, tended to be individualised and based primarily on cultural perceptions, rather than on crude racism.



Figure 1: Pre-Union attitudes: H Egersdorfer's "The coming of the scum" appeared in *The Owl* on 6 May 1904:

Dr Gregory: "Twenty three per cent of immigrants into the Cape were aliens"

The Owl: "At this rate you'd better print me in Yiddish"

From: M. Shain, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in South Africa* (University Press of Virginia and University of the Witwatersrand Press, Charlottesville, London and Johannesburg, 1994)

11 H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), *passim*

This was however also the period when the cartoon figure of Hoggenheimer, the quintessential Jewish capitalist stereotype, first appeared,¹² for socio-economic factors were tending to change attitudes regarding alien strangers in Southern Africa. The widespread destruction wrought during the guerilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War, and the absence after the war of significant economic development other than on the Rand, precipitated an increase in the existing number of unskilled, poverty-stricken Afrikaners primarily in the rural areas of the two former Boer Republics. Simultaneously, numbers of Jews returned to their homes abandoned during the war and were joined by new immigrants. The first census taken in the newly established Union of South Africa indicated that by 1911 there were some 47 000 Jews in the country, two-thirds of whom were males. Their numbers were reinforced in the 1920s by additional immigrants from the succession states of the old Tsarist Empire.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the descendants of English-speakers (including Jews, who mostly identified with the latter culturally) dominated commerce, the mines, finance capitalism and the trade unions. Agriculture continued to be the preserve of the Afrikaners. When the latter gravitated to the towns, the bulk of them remained unskilled, up to the early 1930s – such workers were in competition with, and living amongst blacks. Their participation in the Rebellion of 1914-1915 reflected an underlying resentment, based on their inferior social and political position, towards the agents of modernisation – Jews, English-speakers and capitalists.¹³

With the highly visible number of Eastern European Jews arriving in the 1920s, anti-Semitism emerged as a populist demand for racially based discrimination. Among English-speakers, this reflected worldwide xenophobia and anti-bolshevism, which in South Africa was articulated most consistently by the English press. Among Afrikaners, the substantial number of poor-whites (as revealed in the sober statistics of the Carnegie Commission's report published in 1932) were to find refuge in the burgeoning nationalism based, in T.R.H. Davenport's words, on the ideology "of the folk as an organic body held together by a common historic culture". According to G.D. Scholtz, the two overriding factors in the development of Afrikaner political thought were both material and spiritual – a *vurige liefde* (passionate love) for their

12 E Bradlow, "Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948 Policies and Attitudes II", Ph D thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978; M Shain, "The Foundations of Anti-Semitism in South Africa: Images of the Jew c 1870-1930", Doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1990; M Shain, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in South Africa* (University Press of Virginia and Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994); P Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1991); T Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom. Power Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975), p 15; H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), p 331; D Coetzee, "Immigrants to Citizens: Civil Integration and Acculturation of Jews into Oudtshoorn Society, 1874-1999", MA dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2000, deals with the relationship between Jews and Afrikaners in a small country town in which at one period Jewish numbers were fairly substantial. Also see: T Weil, "Die Inskakeling van die Jode by die Afrikaanssprekende Gemeenskap op die Platteland van 1800 tot 1950", MA dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 2000, some of whose conclusions differ occasionally from those expressed in the present article

13 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), p 323; G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910-1967* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980); G D Scholtz, *Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa IX* (Nasou, Cape Town, 1973), pp 258-260, identifies the rise of the National Party as dating from the Rebellion of 1914-1915

country allied to the “big principles of Christianity”. Thus a close relationship existed between the Dutch Reformed Church and National Party leaders.

H.F. Verwoerd, who in the 1920s studied in Germany, became a sociologist and professor at the University of Stellenbosch. He was a confirmed Afrikaner nationalist and republican, a key figure suggesting radical, comprehensive statist policies to deal with the sociological aspects of the problem, while Doctor D.F. Malan, the party leader, was largely responsible for linking the poverty-stricken Afrikaners’ fate to the nationalist cause of their people, a cause which increasingly merged with the emotional appeal of the Afrikaans Language Movement.¹⁴

The Quota Act of 1930, introduced by Malan as Minister of the Interior, reflected the shift in the nature of anti-Semitism generated by this nationalist build-up. Hitherto vague resentments were now concentrated in the one collective issue of immigration. The Act was based on the concept of “assimilability” as the criterion upon which an immigrant’s application for entry into South Africa was to be considered. At the time the word’s exact meaning was left undefined, in order to represent the legislation simply as a means of protecting the existing population’s employment prospects. In 1937, however, at the height of support among Afrikaners for Nazi-type discourse, Malan acknowledged that “assimilability” had a precise connotation unequivocally targeting Jews (except dependants) for total exclusion.¹⁵

The debate on the Quota Act precipitated a groundswell of overt racism, which confirmed that a broad spectrum of South Africans regarded all Jews as undesirable additions to the population. The legislation manifestly changed the Eastern European Jewish immigration pattern, proving its intention. Consequently the relations between the Nationalists and the Jewish community were immediately soured. The latter – largely because of its urban character – had never identified to the same extent with Afrikaners as with English-speakers, and for an Afrikaner nationalist like Malan, the legislation could be represented as essential to the survival of the *volk* as a Christian-national entity, even if the “children of Israel” were forever to regard him like the “Canaanites and the Philistines”.¹⁶

Following the fusion of the South African and National Parties in 1934, Malan’s breakaway Purified National Party became the official Opposition, adopting a radically nativist message,¹⁷ increasingly using ingenious euphemisms to project the Jews as an incipient threat to Afrikaner interests. More ominous for the South African Jewish community however, (but equally threatening to Malan’s authority in the Afrikaner nationalist movement) was the emergence of a number of totalitarian,

14 T R H Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, (Macmillan, Johannesburg, 1987), p 318; H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People*, (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), pp 350-397; G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910-1967*, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980), p 103; G D Scholtz, *Die Ontwikkeling van die Politieke Denke van die Afrikaner, Deel VII, 1924-1939* (Perskor Uitgewery, Johannesburg, 1979), pp 91, 449

15 *House of Assembly Debates*, 28, 1937, 13 January 1937, column 116; G D Scholtz, *Die Ontwikkeling van die Politieke Denke van die Afrikaner, Deel VII, 1924-1939* (Perskor Uitgewery, Johannesburg, 1979), pp 180, 484

16 South African Political Archives, University of Orange Free State, *E.H. Louw Versameling*, volume 2, D F Malan - E H Louw, 10 Junie 1930

17 F A Mouton, *Voorloper. Die Lewe van Schalk Pienaar* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2002) Mouton’s biography indicates how even a fairly liberal individual could be confused or reduced to silence because of the prior demands of group solidarity

paramilitary movements such the Nuwe Orde, Louis Weichardt's South African Christian Nationalist Socialist (Greyshirt) Movement with its Nazi-style anti-Semitism to which rural Afrikaners responded (despite Malan's opposition at the time) and the Ossewa-Brandwag, founded in the bicentenary year of the Great Trek. Violence accompanied the latter's activities particularly, reflecting the racist attitudes of its Nazi model towards Jews.¹⁸

A continuous stream of anti-Semitic propaganda (monitored by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies) was channelled into the Union primarily through South-West Africa (the modern Namibia), emphasising the dangers of allowing Jewish numbers to increase unchecked. The Greyshirts went so far as to propose that, as in Germany, Jews be deprived of their civil rights.

Scholtz claims that before the Second World War a minimal number of Afrikaners had national-socialist inclinations. Nevertheless the positive response to Nazi propaganda, initially among both rural and urban poor-whites and members of the working class, persuaded the official Opposition to exploit anti-Semitism as a similar means of enlisting electoral support among right-wingers, by making it a fundamental component of Nationalist ideology. Consequently from about April 1936, the Nationalists launched an anti-Jewish campaign, which concentrated on opposition to Jewish immigration, now comprising refugees from Germany to whom the Quota Act did not apply. This, as was repeatedly emphasised, was not a function of racial or religious prejudice, but based on the grounds that a further absorption of Jews would adversely affect the Afrikaner's survival, and ultimately the "organic unity" of the *volk*. This latter argument continued to be endorsed by members of the intellectual elite such as Verwoerd and Dönges,¹⁹ who supported or sympathised with Nazi-style racism, and who now made common cause with Nationalist working class supporters.²⁰

While J.H. Hofmeyr, Minister of the Interior, opposed the severe method of immigration control favoured by the National Party, the risk of a Nationalist-inspired backlash against the existing Jewish community (in Scholtz's words "such as never before") resulted at the end of September 1936 in Hofmeyr introducing stricter interim regulations governing applications for entry under the Quota Act, with effect from 1 November 1936. Thus the *Stuttgart's* passengers narrowly escaped the new, more stringent administrative policy.

18 G D Scholtz, *Die Ontwikkeling van die Politieke Denke van die Afrikaner, Deel VII, 1924-1939* (Perskor Uitgewery, Johannesburg, 1979), p 368 refers to the previously unknown height of political bitterness reached in this "Time of Troubles, 1929-39"; T Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom. Power Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975), pp 15-16; P Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1991), chapter 6; G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910-1967*, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980), pp 103-125; H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People*, (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), p 441; D O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme, Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism 1934-1948*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), *passim*.

19 Dönges was a strong Afrikaner nationalist in the forefront of Afrikaans cultural activities

20 E Bradlow, "Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948 Policies and Attitudes II", Ph D thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978, chapter 12; G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910-1967*, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980), p 108; *Die Transvaler*, 1 September 1937; G D Scholtz, *Die Ontwikkeling van die Politieke Denke van die Afrikaner, Deel VII, 1924-1939* (Perskor Uitgewery, Johannesburg, 1979), pp 187, 459, 484 Hofmeyr accused these academics of conducting "a new racial crusade" in a speech which Dönges described as "sickly sentimentality"

Chartered by the *Hilfsverein* and the *Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland* (Reich Jewish Representative Council), both representative organisations of the German-Jewish communities, the group had been selected expressly with regard to South African requirements. Most were trained artisans, aged between 19 and 30, heading primarily for Johannesburg. As the *South African Jewish Chronicle* emphasised,²¹ they were not the vanguard of a purported “invasion” of German-Jews, but rather “the last pitiful stragglers of an immigration movement which never numbered more than at most a few thousand”.²² Moreover they represented the very kind of educated, skilled Europeans that South Africa’s economic development required at that stage.

In Cape Town the *Stuttgart*’s imminent arrival precipitated a mainly adverse reaction in the local press.²³ At the University of Stellenbosch, the focus of Afrikaner nationalism at the Cape, final examinations notwithstanding, Professors H.F. Verwoerd and C.G.W. Schumann were orchestrating a protest among the students. The Greyshirts were a day premature in their demonstration, with about a thousand protesters converging on the docks before the ship’s arrival. The *Stuttgart* arrived the following morning, flying the swastika in pouring rain.²⁴

Similar crowded protest meetings followed throughout the country, at several of which professors from Afrikaans universities (some of whom had studied in Germany) were prominent in demanding the prohibition of Jewish immigration. These occasions were fully reported in the Nationalist-aligned press. The argument noted above (that Jewish immigration threatened the economic interests “of the older South African inhabitants”) predominated, and continued to do so into 1937. However, ethnic undertones persisted; thus at a meeting of students and professors at the University College for Christian National Education, Potchefstroom (formerly a theological seminary) the emphasis was on the undesirability of Jewish immigrants on both religious and cultural grounds; “the flotsam”, in Professor Geoff Cronjé’s words in *Die Wapenskou*, “from the national life of another country”.²⁵

To counteract this mass mobilisation, after a period of inertia induced by fear, the Jewish Board of Deputies, while refuting the “unassimilability” accusations, on 16 December 1936 confirmed the community’s acceptance of prescribed qualifications for individuals, referent to “personal character, economic position, occupation and cultural standing”. This statement followed the Board’s request to the *Hilfsverein* drastically to reduce the number of immigrants seeking refuge in South Africa.²⁶

21 Quoted in *Cape Times*, 24 October 1936; South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBOD), *Statement*, 14 December 1936

22 The numbers, of course, rose considerably after *Kristallnacht*, 9/10 November 1938

23 For example see: *Die Burger*, 17 Oktober 1936 *et seq*; *Cape Argus*, 17 October 1936; *Cape Times*, 27 October 1936 *et seq*.

24 *Cape Times*, 27 October 1936; *Cape Times*, 28 October 1936; *Die Burger*, 27 Oktober 1936

25 *Die Burger*, 28 Oktober 1936; *The Zionist Record*, 30 October 1937; *Die Transvaler*, 1 Oktober 1937; *Die Volksblad*, 13 Oktober 1937; *Die Oosterlig*, 19 November 1937; T Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom. Power Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975), p 166, quoting *Die Wapenskou* (organ of the Afrikaanse Nasionale Studente Bond)

26 *Cape Times*, 17 December 1936; *South African Jewish Times*, 26 December 1936; SAJBOD, *Minutes of the Cape Committee*, 16 July 1936, Report on Visit of Doctor Mark Wischnitzer, Chairman of the *Hilfsverein*, which again in September and November was warned of the difficulties involved in receiving the German refugees

Small wonder some of the *Stuttgart* passengers thought they had exchanged one repressive system for an equally threatening other. At this stage (the end of 1936) however, if the situation of the Jews left in Germany was becoming increasingly critical, South African Jews, though fearful that the local nationalist movements might more vigorously initiate the Nazi prototype, could still rely on the protection of a government which – unlike that of the Third Reich – observed the rule of law. Primarily to retain the rural vote however, the South African government was compelled to devise a policy, which would temper the popular appeal for restriction held among the competing strands of Afrikaner nationalism, without apparently adopting a racist solution. The answer was the Aliens Act, Number 1 of 1937.

Its rationale was, at the time, a purportedly non-racist one, maintaining the Union's "absorptive capacity" for any particular group of immigrants, implemented through the "selective principle". But while the legislation did not discriminate against German-Jews statutorily, the creation of an ostensibly independent Immigrants Selection Board, using the "selective principle" could (and did) in practice administratively reduce their numbers on the basis of – a still – undefined concept, the immigrant's "assimilability" to the existing population. For the government, "assimilability" was a matter of culture; but for the Nationalists increasingly one of race.

To repeat: the introduction of the Aliens Act was precipitated by the Opposition's continued determination to exploit the emotive issue of Jewish immigration even among government supporters. The openly racist programme adumbrated at the National Party's national congress of 1936 however, and incorporated in Malan's proposed private bill,²⁷ together with his subsequent no-confidence motion,²⁸ which when referring to a "Jewish problem", went far beyond the alleged threat immigrants posed economically, or the prevarications of the Quota Act's "assimilability" test. Rather they constituted the next stage of an anti-Jewish campaign – a warning to the existing community that in future all Jewish immigrants whatever their country of origin, would be statutorily excluded on the grounds of their "unassimilability" as a race. This was to be coupled with limitations on the civil rights of resident aliens, including the tightening of naturalisation procedures, restrictive occupational policies and name changes.²⁹

The Nationalist position and intentions were, however, more explicitly explained in a long article by Verwoerd in the first issue under his editorship of *Die Transvaler*, and in *Die Burger* of 19 August 1937.³⁰ Ostensibly dismissing the racial or religious motivation, and reiterating the economic rationale, Verwoerd recommended, as a

27 *Government Gazette Extraordinary*, 28 December 1936

28 As the Government's Aliens Bill took precedence over Malan's private bill, the latter was therefore aborted, but he explained its provisions in his no-confidence motion

29 E Bradlow, "Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948 Policies and Attitudes II", Ph D thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978, pp 272-274, 277; SAJBOD, *Press Reports*, 1937; *House of Assembly Debates*, 28, 1937

30 T Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom. Power Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975), p 167; H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), p 417

solution to be implemented by a future Nationalist government, that a quota system for major occupations, based on the comparative numbers of English- and Afrikaans-speakers and Jews in the white population, should be legislatively imposed; and that trading licences be refused to Jews until a “balanced distribution” was achieved between the groups.

Was this a local variant of the Nazi ideological model in its early phase, or, as Giliomee claims, a reflection of “traditional Afrikaner economic anti-Semitism”, based on “local stereotypes” such as Hoggeneimer? The march to the Cape Town docks in October 1936; the emotional calls at public meetings and in Parliament to limit Jewish entry ostensibly on economic, cultural and moral, rather than racial grounds – but with the immigrant’s Jewish affinity as the basic criterion; the subsequent, continued Nationalist pressure completely to prohibit such immigration;³¹ the programme announced during the election campaign of 1938, and confirmed at the national congress of that year, when for the first time in South Africa, anti-Semitism was explicitly adopted as the definitive factor in a South African political party’s immigration and naturalisation policies;³² the unconcealed racism of Eric Louw, the party’s spokesman on Jewish affairs and leader of the campaign against Jewish immigration ostensibly on the grounds of its threat to the Afrikaner’s economic position, whose private bill of January 1939, was described by Hofmeyr as “Nazism at its crudest ... to prepare the ground for the substitution of dictatorship for democracy”;³³ the amalgamation in that year of the Greyshirts and the National Party, based among other reasons, on the shared acceptance of an explicitly anti-Semitic immigration policy;³⁴ and the adoption in 1941 and 1944 by Malan and Hertzog’s *Herenigde* (Reunited) National Party’s Federal Council of a statement of policy reiterating demands for the “immediate cessation” of Jewish immigration, and stronger control of naturalisation to protect “South Africa’s” own original white population ... against unfair competition³⁵ – all of the above indicate that despite the obligatory endorsement of an economic motivation, the National Party’s strategy to outflank the influence of the radical right among Afrikaners had introduced a more threatening note – not simply in anti-Semitic discourse, but in a political party’s ideology – than at any previous time in South African history. Given the German precedent did not this appear to the South African Jewish community like an omen of worse to come? Indeed Louw warned that failure to face the “Jewish problem” might result in “a repetition” in South Africa of recent European events.

Though Jewish immigration was virtually negligible during the Second World War, the *Herenigde* National Party continued to use this issue both to embarrass the government and rally nationalist support. As late as 1944, by which time the extent of Nazi genocide was emerging, Louw – presumably with the approval of the party

31 For example, *Die Transvaler*, 24 October 1937 – Sylva Moerdyk: “ the percentage of Jews at present resident in the Union is already too high to form a healthy proportion of the population”

32 *Die Transvaler*, 26 November 1938; *Die Burger*, 25 November 1938

33 E Bradlow, “Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948 Policies and Attitudes II”, Ph D thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978, pp 313-315; G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910-1967*, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980), p 125

34 See: M Roberts and A Trollop, *The South African Opposition, 1939-45* (Longmans, Green & Co, London and Cape Town, 1947), for a discussion of the relationship between the Greyshirts and Nationalists

35 E Bradlow, “Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948 Policies and Attitudes II”, Ph D thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978, p 316

leadership – continued to demand that Jewish immigration be totally prohibited and quotas be implemented in the professions and other economic activities.³⁶

By the end of the Second World War, the traumatic effect of the holocaust on Jewish communities throughout the world meant that the immigration question could no longer be exploited as a threat to the survival of the Afrikaner or any other people. Nationalist thinking was increasingly dominated by the concept of apartheid as the means by which to mitigate a differently perceived form of race conflict and differentiation.

Although proceeding from different premises and in different circumstances, in certain aspects of its implementation, apartheid practice bore a resemblance – shorn of their bombastic phraseology and intrinsic violence – to various Nazi exclusionist measures based on racial classification. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Amendment Act (1950) were South African replicas of the September 1935 German Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, transgressions of which were all punished by imprisonment. The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act corresponded to the attacks on German-Jewish personal rights following the Nuremberg Laws. (“Jews are not wanted here” read signs in Munich parks; “whites only” were their South African equivalent). The Nationalists tackled the same institutions – education, employment, and the press – as the Nazis had done. In Germany the intention however was ultimately to exclude Jews entirely from the nation; in South Africa to control, within the foreseeable future, every aspect of blacks within a common polity.³⁷

Conclusion

Up to the end of the nineteenth century when Jews began to arrive in South Africa in considerable numbers, there was no Jewish stereotype to arouse collective anti-Semitism on a racial basis. The limited number of original Anglo-German settlers fitted into the generality of white English-speaking society socially and culturally. Even when they were joined from the 1880s onwards by urbanised Eastern European arrivals, who gravitated to the few large centres and country towns, the Jewish *smous* or pedlar was not singled out for differential treatment, though the majority retained their separateness through their traditional religious practices and endogamy. Increasingly, however, their secular culture reflected the norms of the larger society; and in the British colonies, as well as the Boer Republics, like other immigrants their legal rights were never in doubt.³⁸

36 *Cape Times*, 10 April 1944

37 For Nationalist policies, see: T R H Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, (Macmillan, Johannesburg, 1987), pp 541-578 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), p 495, asserts that apartheid was not based on failed Nazi ideology, but prior to the 1950s; on mainstream Western racism ranging from a “superficial colour preference to a pathological abhorrence of race mixing”

38 In George Eliot’s words in *Daniel Deronda*: “separateness with communication”
“I shall call myself a Jew,” said Deronda, deliberately, becoming slightly paler under the piercing eyes of his questioner “But I will not say that I shall profess to believe exactly as my fathers have believed Our fathers themselves changed the horizon of their belief and learned of other races But I think I can maintain my grandfather’s notion of separateness with communication I hold that my first duty is to my own people, and if there is anything to be done toward restoring or perfecting their common life, I shall make that my vocation”
From: *Daniel Deronda* (1876), book 8, chapter 60, at <http://www.fullbooks.com/Daniel-Deronda14.html>, accessed 1 November 2004

Even the cataclysmic events of the Anglo-Boer War, and its consequences, did not disturb the mutual acceptance that had developed by the last decades of the nineteenth century. Several reasons can be advanced why this situation began changing in the 1920s. In Europe the immediate period following the First World War was characterised by large population shifts; which throughout the world (but notably in the United States of America) were accompanied by an upsurge of xenophobia, and the consequent introduction of legislation designed to restrict immigration from specified countries.

In South Africa the effects of a slump in the early 1920s, exacerbated by drought, intensified the pace of the rural poor-whites' impoverishment at a time when work was scarce. Simultaneously a steady stream of Eastern European Jews were entering the country, the result of the combined effect of exclusionist legislation elsewhere and the deteriorating position of Lithuanian Jews in particular.

The rise of Nazism with its nationalistic, anti-democratic message; and its appeal – through imitative extra-parliamentary movements in South Africa – to both the Afrikaner working class (originally for mainly economic reasons) and the intelligentsia (particularly those educated in pre-Hitler Germany and exposed to the *blut und boden* discourse) ensured that Malan would have to pitch his nationalist message to these voters, in order politically to draw “profit from anti-Semitic feelings”.³⁹ In doing so, he jettisoned the traditional co-existent Afrikaner relationship with Jews, which if never generally close, had accepted the *Boerejood* and even tolerated a certain degree of intermarriage, particularly in areas with a small Jewish component.

Initially the National Party's programmatic anti-Semitic campaign concentrated on the assertion that Jews had too much economic power in relation to their numbers, a message readily understood by the white, Afrikaans-speaking commonalty. But gradually this rationale for rejecting Jewish newcomers was extended to include non-naturalised members of the existing community, through proposed limitations on the practice of professions, the grant of commercial licences, name changes, and more. On the eve of the Second World War, the crucial section in Eric Louw's private bill “definitely naming the Jewish race as a race not suitable for immigration into South Africa”, specified the exact meaning of the word “unwanted” as being – in accordance with the Nazi racist definition – those of “Jewish parentage”.

South African anti-Semitism was a long way from the final genocide policy of Hitler's Third Reich. Though Afrikaner support for Germany was extensive, there was still not that pervasive antagonism to Jews collectively which had characterised the German *Völkisch* ideology since the late nineteenth century. Undoubtedly however, a solid core of grassroots anti-Semitism existed. According to W.K. Hancock, Smuts's biographer, Malan was not personally thus inclined, but his use of racism to deflect political support from the “shirt” movements so that the

39 W K Hancock, *Smuts, Volume 2, The Fields of Force, 1919-1950* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968), p 290

National Party could be the chief representative of the *volk*, indicates just how widespread such prejudice was amongst Afrikaners.⁴⁰

History is not about prophecy. Conditions in South Africa in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries were not comparable to those in Wilhelmine or post-First World War Germany. However much the Nationalist leaders hid their intentions beneath rational assertions, Christian-nationalism was nevertheless an emotional ideology which excluded non-Calvinists, non-Christians and non-whites. Thus while no Afrikaner politician was fashioned on the lines of a Nazi-style charismatic leader (though Verwoerd came nearest to that model), it is not fanciful to suggest, on the basis of existing evidence, that had Germany won the Second World War, the Jewish position in South Africa could conceivably have become untenable.

Abstract

To understand the Nazi period and its intrinsic anti-Semitic characteristic, it is necessary to understand the question of continuance in German history. In the late nineteenth century anti-Semitism was already a potentially threatening force in Europe, particularly in France. It was, however, in the newly unified Germany, with its specific political and socio-economic features derived from its past, that an exclusivist, conservative nationalism emerged which, contradictorily co-existed with a guarded acceptance of Judaism. This ambiguity inhered in the culture of the Weimar Republic and was one of the causes of its political inertia. Hitler replaced the latter with an aggressive *Völkisch* (national) ideology which was obsessed with racial purity and its antithesis, the Jewish stereotype.

South Africa was one of the countries to which German-Jews emigrated as Nazi racial laws curtailed their civil and legal rights. The existing South African Jewish community, dating roughly from the period 1880 to 1913 was, predominantly of Eastern European origin. Its members tended to identify economically and culturally the closest with English-speakers. Relatively few settled among Afrikaans-speakers who constituted the rural component of the white population; but traditionally the *Boerejood* (Boer Jew) and even a measure of intermarriage were acceptable.

Nazism's appeal, purveyed through extra-parliamentary movements, attracted both the Afrikaner working class and those among the intelligentsia educated in pre-Nazi Germany. Consequently the National Party began pitching its message for these voters in anti-Semitic terms. The latter shifted gradually from the suggestion that the Jews were "unassimilable" and that their economic power was harmful to Afrikaners, to Eric Louw's private bill which explicitly claimed that Jews (as defined in Nazi terms) were "a race not suitable for immigration into South Africa".

In conclusion, while far from the pervasive anti-Semitism of Nazism (or its *Völkisch* ancestry), the fact that the National Party could use racism to fight racism, indicates the extent of such prejudice amongst Afrikaners in the 1930s.

40 E Bradlow, "Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948 Policies and Attitudes II", Ph D thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978, p 254 - Smuts referred to this as "a wide current of anti-Semitism"

Opsomming

Anti-Semitisme in die 1930's: Duitsland en Suid-Afrika

Ten einde die Nazitydperk en sy wesenlike antisemitiese karakter te verstaan, is dit nodig om die kontinuïteitsaspek van die Duitse geskiedenis te begryp. In die laat-negentiende eeu was antisemitisme reeds 'n potensieel gevaarlike krag in Europa, veral in Frankryk. Dit was egter in die pas-verenigde Duitsland, met sy unieke politieke en sosiaal-ekonomiese eienskappe, afkomstig uit sy verlede, wat 'n eksklusiwistiese, konserwatiewe nasionalisme voortgekom het wat in teenstryd, saam met 'n gereserveerde aanvaarding van Judaïsme, voortbestaan het. Hierdie dubbelsinnigheid was gevestig in die kultuur van die Weimar Republiek en was een van die oorsake van die politiese onaktiwiteit daarvan. Hitler het laasgenoemde vervang met 'n aggressiewe nasionale ideologie wat met rassiesuiwerheid en sy antitese, die Joodse stereotipe, behep was.

Suid-Afrika was een van die lande waarheen Duitse Jode kon immigrer toe die Nazis se rassitiese wetgewing hulle siviele en wetlike regte begin inkort het. Die bestaande Suid-Afrikaanse Joodse gemeenskap, wat rofweg van die tydperk 1880 tot 1913 dateer het, was hoofsaaklik van Oos-Europese oorsprong. Die lede daarvan was veral geneig om hulleself ekonomies en kultureel met die Engelssprekende bevolking te assosieer. Relatief min het hulle tussen die Afrikaanssprekendes, wat veral die landelike komponent van die wit bevolking uitgemaak het, gevestig, maar tradisioneel is die "Boerejood" en selfs 'n hoeveelheid gemengde huwelike tog aanvaar.

Naziïsme se aantrekkingskrag wat deur buite-parlementêre bewegings bevorder is, het beide die Afrikaner se werkersklas en dié intelligentsia wat in pre-Nazi Duitsland studeer het, aangetrek. Die Nasionale Party het gevolglik sy boodskap in antisemitiese terme aan hierdie stemgeregtigdes begin verkondig. Laasgenoemde party het geleidelik sy opinie van die suggestie dat Jode onassimileerbare immigrante was en dat hulle ekonomies mag skadelik vir Afrikaners was, gewysig na Eric Louw se private wetsontwerp wat onomwonde verklaar het dat Jode (volgens Naziterme gedefinieer) 'n ongeskikte ras vir immigrasie na Suid-Afrika was.

Oor die algemeen beskou, was die Suid-Afrikaanse ingesteldheid ver verwyder van die oorheersende antisemitisme van Naziïsme (of sy nasionalistiese herkoms), maar die feit dat die Nasionale Party rassisme kon gebruik om rassisme te beveg, dui tog aan tot watter mate sodanige vooroordele in die 1930's by Afrikaners aanwesig was.

Key words

German history, Weimar Republic, Nazism, German-Jews, immigration, South African society, anti-Semitism, Quota Act, "assimilability, National Party.

Sleutelwoorde

Duitse geskiedenis, Weimar Republiek, Naziïsme, Duitse Jode, immigrasie, Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing, antisemitisme, Kwotawet, "assimileerbaarheid", Nasionale Party.