

The Desirable and Undesirable in the life of the Chief Immigration Officer in Cape Town, Clarence Wilfred Cousins, 1905–1915

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This article argues that while immigration exclusions of those considered undesirable were clearly set out by legislation, the subjectivity of the immigration officer was an important aspect of implementation. Drawing on the diaries and personal letters of the officer based at Cape Town, the article focuses on his emotions as he went about his daily life and moved between different intimate city spaces – home, church, docks and office. Bringing together his social world with his world of work, the article argues that what the immigration officer considered desirable in his personal life influenced how he conducted his work at the port.

Keywords: Cape Town, immigration officer, exclusions, emotion, subjectivities.

Introduction

One evening in 1915, whilst in his office in the Cape Town city centre, Clarence Wilfred Cousins snatched a few minutes to write to Ethelwyn, his wife of fifteen years, who was visiting England with their four children:

I am in office once again and have been at this wretched pile of work which never seems to diminish.... It is hot ... in here but lovely & cool at Sea Point. How I would love to slip out of this and get to my carpentry! ...

Now I must resist the temptation to go on chatting in this pleasant way—pleasant at least in contrast with the other occupations which await me—and turn to my duties. Pity me! While all the world is sitting on the beach in the cool & quiet.¹

Diary entries in 1913 covered four different days of his life:

Last Friday was a busy day all round. We were in Court all day and succeeded in making two judges “scratch their heads.” ...

In the evening I had the last practice for the harvest cantata which went well.

Saturday was a boisterously windy day. Wyn did not seem keen on coming out, so that later on I took the two boys round the mountain much to their delight.

Sunday was a very full day. The organist—now back from his honeymoon did not turn up & I had to play—much to my disgust. In the afternoon when school was over I had a practice of the band and in the evening we gave the service to a packed congregation. There seems to be a unanimous chorus of approval, and really everything went well.

Yesterday I had a very full day in office—Jews & Indians again. In the afternoon I gave the garden a much needed watering.²

Since his arrival in Cape Town in 1896, at the age of twenty-four, Cousins had begun a personal journey from immigrant to Cape colonist to English-speaking South African. Beginning as a clerk in the Colonial Secretary's office, he progressed within a decade to become the chief immigration officer of the Cape Colony, a post he retained until 1915. Globally, this was an era of greater communication and mobility, which was simultaneously marked by "checks and containment."³ Immigration officers in America, Australia, Canada, Natal, the Cape, and elsewhere regulated entry into ports in accordance with the desires of legislators. Immigration scholars have highlighted the "discretion" immigration officers enjoyed in implementing the law as well as the pressures on them from public opinion and politicians.⁴ Scholars have pointed to the importance of studying the "individual stamp" of civil servants, for it is they who implement policy.⁵ We have the example of an Australian officer who allowed the entry of a Filipino after asking him to paint a picture instead of writing a literacy test.⁶ We know too of Harry Smith in Natal, who was deemed "capable of a degree of courtesy, friendliness and pragmatism," although his official correspondence reveals his "delight in crushing the hope of supplicants." Ruthless, cruel, and arrogant are some of the attributes Hyslop accords to Smith's way of working.⁷ On the Pacific Ocean coast of the United States, one officer in San Francisco was deemed by a fellow officer to have a "very sympathetic attitude" towards the Chinese immigrants frequenting the office, though there were likely many others less sympathetically inclined.⁸

This article pursues a more comprehensive analysis of individuals' subjectivity in immigration work. Since the work of Ann Stoler, affect and intimacy have become crucial in understanding empire and governance.⁹ As Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton have argued, "the frontiers of intimacy" are not confined to the sexual—they encompass the "courtrooms ... the docks and ships, even ... the offices of the colonial bureaucracy."¹⁰ The rare access to the voluminous personal writings of an immigration officer allows a focus on the multiple spaces of work, home, church, and leisure. At work, Cousins processed passenger landings, wrote short accounts of why passengers were landed or prohibited, issued permits for departure and reentry, drafted regulations, prepared annual reports, and compiled statistics. At home, but also in his office, he wrote short accounts of his social activities and his working day in pocket diaries or, as was the case after 1912, in fuller letter-journal form, which

he posted to family in England and other places around the empire. There is an indication of his developing self-importance and confidence; the gaps in his writings are noticeable in the period when he was new both to his work and to fatherhood. The extracts with which this article began reveal emotions of pleasure and desire (writing to a loved one, music, woodwork, success at court) and dislike of burdensome official paperwork, certain groups of immigrants, and shirkers. Places of desire (Sea Point, the beach, the mountain) are contrasted with the city centre and his office.

Cousins' diaries and letter-journals provide an entry into the rhythm of his daily life, the routine and the mundane. Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff have argued that such sources "challenge us to question the boundaries between the public and private" and warned of the short-sightedness of scholars' "segmenting ... lives."¹¹ Feminist scholars and scholars of empire have similarly refused to accept the binary of public and private.¹² Cousins' dutiful writings allow one to examine more fully the kind of man who headed the immigration bureaucracy without isolating aspects of his life. They draw us into intimate encounters, with family members, friends, and associates but also with ships' passengers and the Cape Town landscape. They were encounters steeped in emotion. The article advances understandings of policy implementation by immigration officers by arguing that one better understands Cousins' official work through revelations about his social life. The desirable in his life framed the undesirable, both within his own subjectivity and in a working life that revolved around exclusion.

The Desirable

The Cape Town to which the young Cousins immigrated bore the marks of almost a century of Englishness. The city had shed most of its Dutch influences: architectural styles changed, English became the language of commerce, and Dutch residents bore evidence of increasing anglicisation. Cousins may well have had the same reaction as an English visitor who called at Cape Town in the 1890s: "There is something indescribably English in the atmosphere of Cape Town."¹³ The new city hall, completed in 1905, Vivian Bickford-Smith observes, "together with the objects of British municipal ritual, were symbols of the hegemonic dominance that Englishness had achieved in Cape Town."¹⁴ A year after Cousins' arrival, the city celebrated Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. Two years later, England went to war with the Boer Republics to the north. These events fostered a greater sense of empire and Englishness in the city.¹⁵ The end of the war in 1902 and the period leading to the unification of the former republics and British colonies into the Union of South Africa in 1910 produced an incipient new collective identity, that of "English-speaking South Africans." Saul Dubow notes, too, the development of a "language of common South Africanism" as English and Afrikaner united to rule over an overwhelming black majority.¹⁶ This is the context in which Cousins made his home in Cape Town and headed the immigration department.

Cape Town's population of 170,000 in 1904 was diverse.¹⁷ Its citizens included the descendants of the indigenous Khoisan; descendants of slaves (from Indonesia, India, Angola, and Mozambique); Xhosa migrants from the Eastern Cape, and European, Indian, and Chinese immigrants. Bickford-Smith estimated that of 70,000 newcomers to the city between 1891 and 1904, 25,000 came from Europe (mainly Britain), 9,000 (Jews) from the Russian empire, 2,000 from Australia, and 2,000 from India. In addition, 21,000 coloureds and 9,000 Africans moved to the city from rural areas. In his opinion, "these extra Capetonians helped to make Cape Town one of the most cosmopolitan cities in South Africa."¹⁸ Multiracial neighbourhoods existed throughout the city, especially in the city centre. There were patches of segregated spaces as in the creation, in 1901, of the Ndabeni location for Africans. Wealth rendered some neighbourhoods in the city whiter than others. Social segregation was evident in schools, prisons, and hospitals.¹⁹

In his decision to buy a house in Sea Point in 1899, rather than in the city centre, Cousins revealed a preference for living in not only the least developed part of Cape Town but also the least cosmopolitan part. With the majestic Lion's Head mountain above and the Atlantic Ocean below, Sea Point (initially a holiday resort for the wealthy) began to grow as professionals, civil servants, port captains, businessmen, and retired folk snapped up the new villas. By the 1890s, it had gained a reputation as "the favourite residence of people engaged in business during the day in town, who prefer to live near the seaside."²⁰ The development of trams (first horse-drawn, then electric) and train services between Sea Point and the city centre stimulated residential growth as did improved water supplies, drainage, sewerage, and street lighting. The municipality of Green Point and Sea Point (one of ten that made up the city of Cape Town) grew from a population of 2,926 in 1891 to 8,839 in 1904, 85 percent of whom were white.²¹

Coloured residents, who numbered fewer than a thousand, resided in an enclave where accommodation for workers of the tram company had been provided since the 1860s. A small number of African workers lived in a hostel in this vicinity in 1903.²² A few Greek cafes sprang up in the 1900s in Sea Point, as did a handful of Chinese laundry shops. Jewish families may have numbered between twenty and thirty.²³ There were only seventeen Muslims and six Hindus in Sea Point and Green Point, in comparison to 9,227 Muslims and 742 Hindus in the Cape Town municipality.²⁴ Encompassing the city centre and neighbouring residential districts, the Cape Town municipality had a population of 77,688, more than half of whom (44,203, or 56 percent) were white. Coloureds (Christian and Muslim) constituted a significant part of the rest of the population.²⁵

Sea Point mitigated urban living with its natural setting. Cousins, who had a preference for a more country-like lifestyle, observed that the Sea Point he had come to was characterised by "not too many houses and plenty of vacant land, [was] unspoiled and full of trees, bushes and wild flowers."²⁶ Even in 1912, a resident could describe it as a "village," "with ... few shops and very few motor cars, horse carts and bicycles." Facilities and friends' homes were in walking distance.²⁷ Cousins named

his house Shotover, in recollection of Shotover Forest on the edges of Oxford, where “the ancient woods, flowery meadows, marshes, ponds, and bracken-covered slopes” hosted birds, foxes, deer, and other wildlife.²⁸ It was not uncommon for British residents to recall their former homes in their new settings. In their choice of names lay desire, longing, and remembrance. While there was nostalgia for the old, there was also a claiming and naming of the new, acts revealing of the “subjective, affective dimensions of human relations with place,” which Jeremy Foster has so eloquently described.²⁹

Cousins apprised family in England of the beauties and advantages of living at Sea Point. There were opportunities for long walks³⁰ and he wrote about his favourite trail around Lion’s Head in rapturous terms: “This morning I took my things up under the pines on the slopes of Lions Head & with the big buttress of the mountain behind—the sea most brilliant of blues in front (though it was a bit hazy to begin with—with the breeze soothingly caressing the pines, the sun sparkling over all & the scents of the trees, coupled with the calm & quiet of it all.”³¹ From Sea Point, it was a short distance to the beach at Camps Bay where his young family enjoyed picnics and afternoon tea.³²

Cousins was a keen cyclist (he even took part in motor-cycle competitions),³³ and the purchase of a motor-cycle with a side-car allowed him to extend his enjoyment of scenic landscapes beyond Sea Point. He marvelled “Why, in a few spare hours the beauties of Stellenbosch, Muizenberg, Somerset West, Caledon, Paarl, Sir Lowry’s Pass, Gordon’s Bay and a hundred other spots are within reach. 25 miles an hour with a splendid companion.”³⁴ On another evening, he observed, “The mountains look far grander as you skirt along the coast at their feet than they do in the day time—huge, shadowy, mysterious.”³⁵ In such affective description of place lay a new evolving identity, relationship to place, and desire.³⁶

One of the most significant spaces in Cousins life was the Sea Point Congregational Church, and this provided his initial desire to live in the vicinity.³⁷ Cousins was the son of the Rev. William Cousins, and his father’s missionary contacts led him to the pastor at Sea Point, Dr James Cameron. A history of churches in Sea Point reveals how in earlier decades, Dutch Reformed Church adherents, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists shared facilities at the Round Church before each denomination built their own church. The Sea Point Congregational Church was built in 1896, a hall for the Sunday school followed in 1899, and the church building was expanded in 1907.³⁸ Members partially drew on contributions from their families back in Oxford to help pay for the construction.³⁹

For the two decades that Cousins resided in Sea Point, there was an unvaried Sunday church routine: morning service, Sunday School in the afternoon, and evening service. While noting that “it would be monotonous to recite each week how I went to Church, School and Church again,” he did regularly record his routine.⁴⁰ One day a week was devoted to meetings of the Christian Endeavour Society, where Cousins, his wife, and others gave lectures to youth on topics such “The Ministry of Music,” “Ruts and How to Get Out of Them,” and “Sacrifice.”⁴¹ Both he and Wyn

replicated their lives in Oxford where church activities had a central place.⁴² Cousins felt nostalgic for the services at the Congregational Church in St George Street, Oxford, where his wife's father, James Murray, was the deacon. He introduced hymns he had first learnt in Oxford and commented on the superiority of the organ in Oxford and the singing.⁴³ The faithful recording of church activities would have reassured the Cousins and Murray families in Oxford, for there were lurking fears of how the colonial environment could make loved ones more unfamiliar, "more colonial."⁴⁴

From his accounts, we can read desire, pleasure, duty, and character. Cousins enjoyed teaching Sunday School, and documented his lessons to the senior boys: "The Devil Possessed," "Our Daily Bread," "Weighed and Found Wanting," "Endure Hardness," "Purpose," "Reaping Where We Have Not Sowed," "My Neighbour."⁴⁵ As a former music teacher, his talents were appreciated and drawn upon. He wrote about the regular Wednesday choir practice, extra practices, and special music arrangements for the church's anniversary, Good Friday, and Christmas. These made heavy demands on his time, but he saw it as necessary duty: "It must be done."⁴⁶ He desired "a high standard of church music," and expressed an unwillingness to settle for the mediocre.⁴⁷

There was obvious enjoyment of activities such as the theatrical performance by members of the Christian Endeavour Society in 1914. Cousins wrote of his role as jurymen in the *Bardwell-Pickwick Trial* (drawn from Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*) in the Sea Point Hall: "I had a bright chocolate coat, wideawake collar, big blue bow, the striped portion of a U.S.A. flag for a waistcoat, white trousers (pyjamas over ordinary ones) etc."⁴⁸ Cousins also participated in the musical events and debates of the Guild, a secular body whose membership was drawn in large part from the church membership. One highlight was the annual moonlight Sea Point walk.⁴⁹

Wyn's brother, Wilfred, also lived in Sea Point, and the two families met often. Cousins' brother, Arnold, lived in the town of Malmesbury, some distance from Cape Town, with his wife, Constance, and their five children, so meetings were infrequent.⁵⁰ Cousins' intimate circle of friends lived in Sea Point and families walked to church and to each other's homes.⁵¹ Social evenings were spent in music or playing the board game, *Spelka*.⁵² Cousins spent many evenings at the home of his closest friend, Alick Dichmont, an attorney, enjoying tea, a musical evening, or a game of billiards. They also went for drives outside of Cape Town.⁵³

In 1914-15, when Cousins was separated from his family, who had gone to Oxford, he visited families who had just returned from holidays there for news. It was as if these visits brought Cousins closer to Oxford and his family.⁵⁴ He reveals his vulnerability several times: "The Oxford news has made me most miserably homesick. I could never have believed that separation was going to make me feel quite so much of a weakling."⁵⁵ As he prepared his home in 1915 in anticipation of the family's return, he was crippled with emotion: "This afternoon I felt simply as if I could sit down and weep. I was turning out the loft & it was a case of here a box of children's bricks—

Alison's cradle—Alan's museum—David's Teddy bears—& what not! I don't suppose I have spent such a bad hour since the first day or two after leaving Oxford."⁵⁶

This period contrasts with diary notations, in other years, of the domestic space shared with Wyn and his children. While never writing about sexual intimacies, Cousins recorded a life of domestic bliss and warmth. This was not a space of discord. There were evenings of sitting together and reading aloud, observations of Wyn sewing or writing, of children's birthday parties, and the delight at being "a father of Four!"⁵⁷

Cousins developed a new passion for woodwork in 1912 and started modestly with a shed, a doll's house, a bureau, a drawer, and a cradle for the baby. In the absence of family during 1914–15, he more ambitiously furnished the house with a teak table, an oak table, a smaller walnut table, a hall stand, beds for his sons, a combination table and shoe cupboard, a dinner wagon, six dining room chairs, a linen box, an oak book case, two chest of drawers, an easy chair, a boot cupboard, and a waste paper basket.⁵⁸ In the quiet workspace he created for himself, and as the intricacies of chiselling and chipping pre-occupied his mind, he found relief from the strains of office work. It made him quite "light-hearted."⁵⁹ Desire lay in stealing time each morning and evening and, as with his music, he aspired to high craftsmanship.

Cousin's social world was small and defined what he considered desirable. He reveals himself as a man always ready to help the church congregation and as one possessing a work ethic of note: "better a strenuous life than a slack one," he wrote.⁶⁰ His writings also referred to undesirable activities, undesirable lifestyles, and his work in keeping "undesirables" out of the country.

The Undesirable

While his family were in Oxford, Cousins resided with his in-laws and observed the Murray household where the children were unregulated free spirits.

Madeline has just come into the room with one of her books—she is simply a voracious reader—and has sprawled down on the settee. I am sure she would not lie about like this so continually if she was forced into a different kind of life—plain fare & sufficient quiet exercises. They all indulge in plenty of rich food—this is not a bread & butter house—and violent & exciting exercise, cricket or tennis. Some quiet walks would be much more in point during the holiday season. I can recall the sort of food I was brought up upon, & her father too for the matter of that; & I am sure we were none the worse for it. Present day children seem very much pampered & I am getting quite convinced that a return to simple fare & harder living is desirable. The Scotch turned out fine men on plain oatmeal and long hours of manual & mental labour. There will be some long faces when my lot returns & I begin to turn theory into practice!⁶¹

He made comparisons of "the business-like" mealtimes at Shotover with the "shocking waste of valuable time" at the Murrays.⁶² Food was clearly not something to be enjoyed or indulged in. His lunch at work was often "frugal," sometimes just a "bun and tea."⁶³

Every December and January, Cousins recorded one of his most undesirable activities—marking history exam papers for the University of the Cape of Good Hope and the junior and matriculation exam papers. Utilising his qualifications as holder of a master's degree in history was a matter of financial necessity. Unlike the emotions evoked by carpentry, he wrote about “those evil exam papers” for which he had to steal time from work and pleasure.⁶⁴ His daily hours were full: “I had a busy day in office, fill up my spare time before breakfast and then tea at my tools, attended to Annual meeting of the Boy Scouts in the evening, & was very busy in what other time I had to spare preparing one of the B.A. exam papers.”⁶⁵

There is little in Cousins' writings to indicate that he embraced the cosmopolitan possibilities that Cape Town held out, what Ulf Hannerz describes as “a willingness to engage with the Other, an openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.”⁶⁶ While he wrote of one “lovely afternoon” socialising on the fringes of Cape Town with an Indian interpreter who worked for his department, this was an exception.⁶⁷ He occasionally went to sporting matches with his Dutch colleague, William van Rhee de van Oudtshoorn, and attended the christening of the latter's child in the Dutch Reformed Church.⁶⁸ When the Dutch (Afrikaner) troops⁶⁹ from the former Boer Republics camped on the Green Point Common during the First World War, Cousins marvelled at their physique and their singing of “Rule Britannia” or “It's a Long Way to Tipperary.”⁷⁰ However, there is evidence of lingering nineteenth-century perceptions of the Afrikaner as the inferior Other who could not match English precision and discipline, as evidenced in the mirth with which he described the march past at the opening of parliament.⁷¹

Aside from his evidently almost non-existent social activities with people of other ethnic groups and nationalities, Cousins wrote about unpleasant encounters he had with Jews. Having to share the intimate space of a hotel bathroom with a family of Jews while he was on temporary immigration duties in Durban provoked feelings of revulsion: “the bath would have wanted a good disinfecting after that crowd—as a matter of sentimental if not actual necessity.”⁷² He sought to protect his son from contact with Jews, rejecting as a possibility enrolment in the South African College in Rondebosch, which had been “spoiled by the large number of Polish Jews,” so that “decent boys cannot be sent there with safety.”⁷³

There is no mention of “the other” in Sea Point, though coloureds did, in fact, use its public spaces.⁷⁴ The annual New Year procession of coloureds received a mention only once. The marching was “in the weirdest fashion,” though the procession of lanterns, the bands, and the singing was “quite fine.”⁷⁵ “A coloured man” features in his letter-journal for deftly appropriating his dropped pen at the station.⁷⁶ The crowded city districts received one mention in a description of a new road that “saves the miserable ride through the slums and is in itself a lovely ride with glorious views of mountain and sea, with pine woods to be passed through.”⁷⁷ Cousins' writings to his family prioritise his English world and the beautiful landscape rather than the complexity of the city.

It is in his account of his work life though, that we get descriptions of his interactions with the diversity of people he encountered on board ship, in his office, and

at the detention depot. If his social life was marked by discipline, order, frugality, religiosity, generosity, and Englishness, his work life was dominated by excluding the undesirable, as defined by the legislature. The late 1890s and early 1900s saw legislation passed in several of the southern African British colonies to exclude undesirables (criminals, prostitutes, sailors, cattlemen from South America, and foreign nationals) at their borders. As was the case in Australia and America, Asians (Indian and Chinese) were singled out for exclusion. In Cape Town, in 1900, the recently arrived rural African in the city was perceived as a dangerous, disorderly element. In a time of plague, Africans were blamed for the city's crisis, as race and disease came to be connected in the minds of the legislature, and Africans were relocated to the city's periphery. Attention then shifted to the growing arrivals at the Cape Town harbour of Indian and poor eastern European Jewish immigrants.⁷⁸

Thus it was that, six years after Cousins had freely entered Cape Town with hope and ambition in his heart, the liberal policy governing entry into the colony underwent drastic change with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1902 and its successor, the Immigration Act of 1906. The intent was "to restrict undesirable immigration," undesirables including prostitutes and pimps; lunatics; convicted criminals; those without "visible means of support" and hence "likely to become a public charge"; anyone about whom the minister received information about their undesirability; and those unable to write and sign an application in a European language. Europeans in possession of formal contracts of work in the colony were excluded from the writing and means test. It was little secret that the writing test was intended to keep out Indians and drew on the precedent set by Natal in 1897. The later inclusion of Yiddish as a European language facilitated the admission of Jewish immigrants who nonetheless still had to pass the writing test. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904 ended Chinese immigration.⁷⁹

The Immigration Regulation Act of 1913 governing entry into the Union of South Africa, retained the previous exclusions of the four colonies but included a few new categories: those undesirable for political reasons and those with "contagious and loathsome diseases," including tuberculosis in its active phases. Any "idiot," "epileptics," the "insane and mentally deficient," the "physically weak" and disabled were deemed undesirable. The minister was empowered to issue a regulation excluding "any person or class of persons ... on economic grounds or on account of standard of life to be unsuited to the requirements of the Union or any particular province thereof." Asians and other "non-whites" were subsequently excluded under these provisions, except for African workers on contracts.⁸⁰

The immigration exclusions were an attempt to shape and consolidate a white South Africa unencumbered by the weak, the unhealthy, the disabled, the poor, and people of colour. The majority of new immigrants, the largest number being British, passed immigration. Between 1906 and 1913, 71,006 new immigrants were landed at Cape ports. In comparison, 1,794 were prohibited, and of these 1,649 were deported (others having escaped or had their landing later condoned).⁸¹ When the 1902 act first came into effect, the largest group of prohibited immigrants were British Asians, 334

of whom came from Bombay. Also prohibited were ninety-five Italians, eighty-seven Russians, sixty-four Portuguese, thirty-one Chinese, nineteen South Americans, seventeen Greeks, fourteen Austrians, and smaller numbers of other nationalities.⁸² As the requirements of the law became known, and shipping companies took responsibility for ensuring that passengers complied with the law (for instance, immigrants had to have at least £20), the numbers of prohibited immigrants dropped, though Indians continued to constitute one of the largest single groups. Other significant groups of prohibited immigrants included Jews from Russia, followed by Italians, Greeks, Spanish, and Portuguese. While 154 South Americans were prohibited in 1905 and 1906 and only two were prohibited in 1911–12, very few entered.⁸³

Whilst he officially compiled the bare facts of prohibition, Cousins' diaries provide an insight into his emotions and subjectivity in dealing with the undesirables at the port and how the everyday panned out. Hours dealing with prohibited immigrants could be followed by Sunday School, church, choir practice, a musical evening—or they could intervene to disrupt such plans. His working days involved long waits for ships to arrive, and some days could begin at four in the morning and some end at eleven in the evening. Passengers also had to be processed quickly aboard ship to avoid undue delays in disembarking.⁸⁴

Immigration officers across the world came into contact with the variety of humankind and became keen observers of behaviour with numerous anecdotes to share. Victor Safford, who was stationed at Ellis Island, found the opportunity to reflect on how it was he could so astutely identify the nationality of immigrants by their dress, physical features, such as head shape, or behaviour. He particularly enjoyed talking to Russian Germans about life in Russia and paid keen attention to what immigrants thought of America.⁸⁵ There is little to indicate that Cousins found in his encounters with foreign nationalities opportunities to be informed about their countries or their expectations of Cape Town. Talking with returning domiciled English men of stature brought enjoyment, while prohibiting “all the unpleasant creatures” of the world provided an “exciting time.”⁸⁶ In a reference to lawyers and those who stood in his way, he wrote with glee that he “triumphantly vanquished my foes.”⁸⁷

While the legislature clearly intended to exclude Indian immigrants, there is little doubt that Cousins own background and lifestyle influenced the pleasure with which he deported them to Bombay. While displaying a longing for Oxford, he had made Cape Town his home and visited England only twice between 1896 and 1915. Indians in Cape Town, in contrast, maintained wives and children in India, remitted earnings to India, and visited family every three years or so. Cousins' Christian values made Hindu and Muslim polygamy and the practice of child marriages particularly repugnant.⁸⁸ He wrote of “an unmitigated humbug” who sought to bring a “girl child” from India.⁸⁹ This also influenced his attitude to Mormon preachers. He could not bar any one group on religious grounds, but other aspects of the legislation could be used to deny entry, such as the capacity to earn an income.⁹⁰ A diary entry —“Deported 3 Mormons by ‘Edinburgh Castle’”—has to be read alongside the following sentence: “Evening choir practice.”⁹¹

Like immigration officers elsewhere Cousins encountered those seeking to enter by fraudulent means and deception. Safford's published remembrances provides humorous anecdotes of such attempts by Jewish immigrants. Safford does note, though, that "at the close of day an immigration official would be likely to characterise his work as a tiresome, wearisome task of trying to pry enough of the truth out of immigrants to assess their rights of entry."⁹² Cousins would have agreed. Immigration records do, in fact, reveal that Indians sought various means to enter the colony, such as pretending to be minor sons of resident Indians or by falsifying documentation.⁹³ Privately he noted his encounters with "Indian cunning," "wily Asiatics," and "their ingenious frauds."⁹⁴ Cousins' choice of language, however, was significant: "To-day we have had another boat with Indians, & Parliament St has been so infested with them all day."⁹⁵

Cousins wrote also about Jewish "miserable specimens" whom he prohibited. He described one "filthy young reptile whose hair is all falling out as the result of some disease" and noted of "a consumptive Jew" that "anyone who knows of their unsanitary domestic habits will not wonder."⁹⁶ In contrast, he wrote with compassion about poor English consumptives he was forced to bar: "It is all very distressing."⁹⁷ He wrote with irritation about influential Jewish lobby groups who pressured the government (with some successes) to reverse decisions in individual cases.⁹⁸ "The Jew thinks that every law—as far as he is concerned is made to be broken; and that there must be maintained a special dispensation for the benefit of the Chosen Race."⁹⁹ His prejudices against Jews, as reflected in his social life, made prohibiting them easy. Even on official paper, he employed derogatory, highly subjective terms: "Undesirable and dirty. Absolutely ignorant type," or "A most degraded and undesirable specimen. Appears half imbecile."¹⁰⁰

In his diary musings posted to family, Cousins rendered the undesirable in colourful terms possibly to impress on family the excitement rather than the monotony of his career as much as to entertain them: "We had quite an interesting collection of 'cases' on the [ship] 'Garter.' There were two undesirable looking Portuguese, a cut-throat Austrian, a weedy-looking Greek, a most degenerate, half-imbecile Russian, a Jewess coming to a husband—who turned out not to be a husband, a Syrian, a helpless English boy without means of support, an English lunatic travelling with a keeper, a young English woman coming to a husband of doubtful existence."¹⁰¹

English undesirables, there were, but they were spared colourful, pejorative epithets. Cousins presented chivalrous concern for young, unaccompanied women. He wrote about a "young English girl ...who seems quite certainly to have been abducted from her home."¹⁰² He recounted the tale of a first-class passenger who "was clearly a nice girl, well-educated and a lady." Yet investigations showed she had been brought to Cape Town by a "company promoter" who ran a boarding-house and on the bidding of the girl's mother sought to introduce her, for marriage purposes, to "young fellows." The girl was sent back to England.¹⁰³ The white slave trade was at the back of Cousins' concerns. He had no qualms dealing firmly with those suspected of being behind such operations.¹⁰⁴

Criminals, alcoholics, and disorderly seamen also feature in Cousins' working life. He noted in his diary, "An unruly set of lascars from the wrecked *Umhlali* put on *Tinbagel* after a great struggle. Sunday school in the afternoon but not evening service."¹⁰⁵ Ship captains reported their runaway crew, who made their way to the city's pubs and failed to return to duty. Cousins' staff located them and made sure they left the colony.¹⁰⁶ He dealt with criminals, some being "pretty desperate characters." Yet, he noted a "young Scotchman, for whom I took a distinct liking. He is not a conformed criminal & seems to feel his position keenly." He hoped the man would make "a new start elsewhere."¹⁰⁷

Cousins did more than simply implement the law. His story of how he sent "a young English simpleton" back to England is instructive.¹⁰⁸ The young man had accompanied a Cape Town-born coloured mother and her daughter who were returning after a seven-year stay in England. He intended to marry the daughter. Cousins subjected all the parties to close interrogation after which he presented his decision. He described the scene that ensued:

Then the tears began to freely flow—and when they left my office I was overheard to be described as a man of Stone. The young man however said that he thought that the whole business was an attempt to trap him into a union [he] realised would be most undesirable. At home he said these people were thought a lot of—and their being half-castes added to their attractions—but his eyes were now open to a different state of affairs. The girl put her head on his chest (she is only 15 years old) and sobbed very ostentatiously, but weakling though he is he did not succumb and went off thankful to be returning home.¹⁰⁹

Cousins, who was responsible for providing the youth's new insight, wrote further: "Really English people can be hopelessly idiotic in their preparedness to form unions with coloured races. To see English & particularly Scotch girls marrying young native or Indian students and then coming out to disillusionment here makes one sad indeed. ... I for one would support legislation, prohibiting race mixture. Nothing but evil seems to result—degradation to all concerned."¹¹⁰

This concern about "degradation" was not unusual at this time amongst white South Africans, but Cousins was ahead of the legislature.¹¹¹ Officially, he also expressed his distaste for working-class Portuguese Madeirans who came to Cape Town: "It has always been a mistake to admit the Madeira natives, as they have invariably drifted into the Town and there collected themselves with the lowest type of coloured people."¹¹² The city's working-class district was not Sea Point.

While Cousins carried out the law, we also see partiality and selective compassion with feelings of dislike, repugnance, and abhorrence as well as an enjoyment in exclusion. There were other emotions that we can hint at here—the hopes and fears of those who sought entry, the crying in his office of the young coloured woman whose fiancé was sent back, the "tears and great lamentations" that followed his decision to return the Indian child bride.¹¹³ The documents regulating entry also produced "madness" in the hearts of travelling Indians.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Cousins' lifestyle reflected his missionary upbringing and Victorian ideas of manliness which, as John Tosh has pointed out, were not confined to chivalry but was centrally about "the inner character of man ... the dominant code of manliness, with its emphasis on self-control, hard work and independence."¹⁵ At home, Cousins regulated his behaviour and shaped his family; at the port he regulated entry and shaped a white South Africa. He could be caring in the small social world he carved out for himself. He shed tears himself, but he could be immune to the cries and sounds of distress from non-English speaking hopefuls in his office and at the harbour. His work partially demanded that he be that "man of stone" that he was accused of being. His own values ensured that this was easy to be.

Cousins' social life was one of English middle-class respectability. There was no embracing of the cosmopolitan possibilities of Cape Town, and there were many like him who created an English world and enjoyed the African landscape. While we know a little of the ways in which other immigration officers worked, the affective quality of Cousins diaries and letters take us into a variety of intimate spaces, from the home and the church, to the immigration office and the docks. We see the softness of a husband and a friend, the caring father, the helpful congregation member, the precise carpenter, the exacting musician, and the decisive immigration officer. His life was disciplined, stoic, and marked by duty. While he implemented the law, his personality, character, and Christian values all played out in his work, which engendered emotions. Exclusions and the framing of the desirable in Cousins' personal life are matched by his exclusion of the undesirable at the port.

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Notes

- * Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie is a professor of History at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa.
- 1 UCT, Letter-Journal, 11 January 1915, CWC B1.3
- 2 UCT, Letter-Journal, 18 February 1913, CWC, A4.1.3.
- 3 Hyslop, “Oceanic Mobility,” 250, quoting Valeska Huber.
- 4 MacDonald, “Strangers in a Strange Land,” 64; Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers*, xix, 38, 40, 58, 65; and Yarwood, *Asian Migration*, 45–47.
- 5 Evans, “Biography and Global History,” 25.
- 6 Martens, “Pioneering the Dictation Test,” 47–48.
- 7 Hyslop, “Oceanic Mobility,” 252, 259
- 8 Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers*, 37.
- 9 Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties” and idem, *Haunted by Empire*.
- 10 Ballantyne and Burton, *Moving Subjects*, 9.
- 11 Bunkers and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily*, 2, 5.
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- 13 Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, 136.
- 14 Ibid., 134–36.
- 15 Worden et al., *Cape Town*, 263.
- 16 Dubow, “The Case of South Africa,” 14–15.
- 17 Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, 11.
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