

Mixed Feelings: Spoiled Identities in the New South Africa

Nancy Scheper-Hughes

I want to begin by acknowledging my personal and intellectual debts to Gerald Berreman. Gerry took anthropology into the fray and to the forefront of many decisive political battles—from the American civil rights movement to the anti-war movement to debates over the complicity of anthropology with the U.S. Cold War efforts. When Gerry was awarded his honorary doctorate at the University of Stockholm, he was honored for “having been a courageous spokesman for a practice of social science which remains independent and critical in its stance toward political interests.”

One of Gerry’s Indian colleagues, Ved Prakash Vatuk, filled out this picture considerably in saying of Gerry that he “supported the freedom of Indians, but also the freedom of Vietnamese, Cubans, Blacks of the U.S. and Brazilian Indians. During the Vietnam crisis, his dignified method of non-cooperation was apparent. He not only opposed the war but he refused to train Peace Corps Volunteers going to India because he thought that a nation which was annihilating a people in one country cannot be truly interested in doing good to another. His friends chose power, money, and comfort, while he laid his life on the line to voice the fears and hopes of the downtrodden” (Vatuk 1979:viii).

I was first introduced to Gerry Berreman in 1969, soon after I arrived in California, by our mutual friend and my first mentor, Hortense Powdermaker, who had recently retired from Queens College in New York City and came to live at the Kroeber compound on Arch Street in North Berkeley. Hortense, Gerry, and I, representing three closely successive generations of American anthropology, shared more than a few formative experiences and anthropological passions. Each of us, for example, had gone “South” at a decisive moment in the transformation of American race relations there. Hortense went to Sunflower County, Mississippi in the 1930s to study the effects of the Jim Crow laws on race relations there (see Powdermaker 1993). Gerry lived for two years, 1953-1955, in Montgomery, Alabama where he was stationed at Maxwell Air Force base in military service. It was just at the time when the U.S. Supreme Court abolished official race segregation in the public schools and when the military services were undergoing racial integration. It was also the time of the first rumblings of the Montgomery bus strike that led to the American civil rights movement. Gerry considered those years decisive with respect to his development of a broadly comparative theory of social inequality that allowed him, for example, to

compare caste relations in India, the American South, and, by further extension, South Africa. I also went South at the tail end of the Southern-based civil rights movement, joining a SNCC-affiliated project in Selma, Alabama in 1967-1968. My job was to co-ordinate field research in several Black Belt counties on hunger and malnutrition among tenant and sharecropper farmers to be used as evidence in a class action suit against the Department of Agriculture (see Scheper-Hughes 2003). In Berkeley, Hortense, Gerry, and I formed a close bond around a certain definition of anthropology as a critical tool for expanding the possibilities of human liberation.

For the purposes of this volume I have chosen to honor Gerry's lifelong commitment to the critical study of social inequality (see Berreman 1960; 1962b; 1972a; 1976; 1980; 1993; 1999; 2001), and his theoretical and methodological contributions to symbolic interactionism (see Berreman 1962a; 1971; 1972b; 1984) with some reflections on the re-casting of identities—personal, cultural, and national—in the “new” South Africa. One of the deepest wounds and “hidden injuries” left by the apartheid state is the legacy of “spoiled identities.” Here, I will focus on the vexed social history and the current political and social dilemma of one of those groups in particular—the so-called “Cape Coloured” (racially mixed) population of the Western Cape.

Still Waiting

This paper is part of a larger, on-going study of violence and the “democratic transition”¹ in Cape Town and in the small village of Franschhoek, a politically conservative (*verkrumpte*) fruit and wine-producing community that is dominated to this day (politically and economically) by a white farm-owning class of conservative Dutch Reform Church Afrikaners. Franschhoek (under the pseudonym of Wyndahl) was the site of Vincent Crapanzano's research in the early 1980s that resulted in his controversial book, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa* (1985). Crapanzano portrayed the whites of Franschhoek/Wyndahl as comfortable, socially isolated, and self-absorbed “racists” who were trapped in a passive state of suspended animation, “waiting” (as it were) for the future to go away and leave them alone.

I was interested in learning something about the “other” waiting residents of Franschhoek—the “coloured” workers and newly arrived black squatters—in order to understand what the “democratic transition” meant in this small and tense community. To this end I conducted episodic research in greater Cape Town and in Franschhoek between 1993-1994 (when I joined the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town) and in 1996, 1997, and 1999. In the mid 1990s some 1300 Whites lived in Franschhoek. The larger population, however, consisted of the more than 3,000 “Coloured” farm workers, the descendants of Dutch, French, and English settlers and their covert and still unacknowledged carnal relations with indigenous Khoisan herders (so called “Bushmen” and “Hottentots”), Malay slaves, and Bantu (mostly Xhosa) farmers. For generations the Cape Coloured provided farm labor to

whites in the Boland (farm country of the Western Cape). With the end of apartheid, a new population of South African Blacks, disproportionately young, single, and male, left the old rural homelands and came to work and some to settle in beautiful Franschhoek. By 1999, the time of my last research trip, the new Black residents of Chris Hani squatter camp on the outskirts of Franschhoek numbered almost 2,000 and had begun to replace the coloured farmworkers on the surrounding vineyards and farms.

My research in the Coloured communities of the Cape concerned the political debates and struggles of the day over access to land, schooling, housing, and reparations for the suffering afflicted on Black and Coloured South Africans under apartheid. A fierce competition between the still largely (de facto) segregated Black and Coloured communities over basic amenities has thwarted the ANC government's dream of building a race-blind rainbow nation. As the new Black squatters began to "jump the waiting lists" in the mid-1990s to occupy housing sites that had been long promised and designated for coloureds, the coloured community of Franschhoek, led by local activist women, retaliated by moving a few hundred mixed-race farmworkers along with the elderly, sick, unemployed, and homeless people onto a strip of public land bordering the main street of Franschhoek where they formed "Vietnam Bos" (Vietnam Woods) squatter camp. The war analogy was intentional, one of the activists, Minnie Peterson, told me: "We are declaring war on the Black squatters of Chris Hani camp." Similar tensions marked post-apartheid relations between South African Blacks and Coloureds in the multi-racial neighborhoods of Cape Town (Mowbray to Salt River) and in the townships of the Cape Flats.

Despite the years of the anti-apartheid struggle, race remains a salient category in the New South Africa, a bitter and seemingly intractable legacy of the post-colonial condition. In the following essay I attempt to explore the relations between the apartheid state's official construction of "coloured" as a demographic category of indeterminacy; the personal narratives of suffering, exclusion, and "spoiled identity" expressed by coloureds in the transitional democratic state; and the temporary resolution of the psychological and cultural conflicts in a paradoxical re-assertion of colored identity in the 1994 democratic elections as these were played out in the Western Cape. In the end, the Coloured population of the Western Cape seemed to have no choice but to side with the National Party (the former Afrikaner/Boer) government which, for better or worse, had given the social group a cultural identity and therefore something of a stake in the new post-apartheid "multi-cultural" democratic state.

Exiles from Eden: A Brief Social History of the Cape

*"We have been planted here, we believe, with a destiny...
for the evolution of Africa and the advancement of Christianity"*

--H.F. Verwoerd, 1961

The Cape of Good Hope figured in the Dutch colonial imagination as a "*lui-lekker* land," a place of natural beauty, ease, and plenty, where even "the savages" seemed hardly to labor to feed and decorate bodies described by the first European visitors as healthy, supple, and full-bodied. When Jan Van Riebeeck, the head merchant for the Dutch East India Company, and his men arrived and established the first European settlement in the Cape in the mid 17th century they had no intention of exploring the vast interior of the peninsula which the colonizers described as a sandy, barren, and inhospitable desert. Van Riebeeck wished to contain the first European settlement to the cultivation of a network of coastal gardens to serve as a supply station for ships en route between Europe and the East.

Many other European ships, particularly from England and Portugal, sailed into the Cape in the late 17th century, and they competed with the Dutch in establishing their own provisioning outposts there. But the Dutch remained dominant in the Cape for the first four decades of the European presence. They were the early "Dutch Masters" of the world traffic in rich trade goods—gold, ivory, sugar, tobacco, *slaves*, and dyewood—and it was the Dutch mercantilists who brought Europe, Africa, and South America into the same economic and cultural orbit. Central to the Dutch mercantile hegemony was their dominance in the slave trade. Early conquests in Northeast Brazil, West Africa, and Angola allowed the famous trade triangle to flourish whereby European trade goods were exchanged for slaves in West Africa, who were then transported to Northeast Brazil to work on sugar plantations. The sugar was to be sold in Europe to satisfy a voracious new taste, a craving really, for sweetness that was intentionally cultivated in urban workers (see Wolf 1982; Mintz 1985).

Van Riebeeck was under strict "Company" orders to keep peace with the indigenous herding people—the Khoikhoi as they called themselves, or "Hottentots" as the Dutch called them—to trade with them for sheep and cattle, but *not* to enslave them. The first slaves were introduced to the Cape from elsewhere—Angola, Guinea, Bengal, and Madagascar. In the end it was Dutch, rather than Portuguese or English, that became the language spoken (in a patois) between master and slave in the Cape and that evolved into the Afrikaans language.

The colonial myth of the discovery of a lost Garden of Eden and a state of primordial innocence was a recurring subtext in the European narratives of conquest

in the New World and in Africa, among English, Spanish, and Portuguese colonizers as well as the Dutch. However, the interpretations of this Biblical image differed in Catholic and Calvinist contexts. Pedro Vaz de Caminha, the Portuguese scribe who sailed with Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1500, described the discovery of Brazil as “an earthly paradise, a kind of tropical Eden” and a place where “sin [or at least colonial guilt] did not exist” (Parker 1993:9). Colonial Brazil was imagined by the Portuguese as a land free of interdiction, where an infantile polymorphous perversity and sensual gratification could reign freely. Native women were portrayed as alluring, sensual and, above all, available. Gilberto Freyre, Brazil’s first national anthropologist, fell readily into the colonial myth of Eden when he described the coastal Indians of Pernambuco as “the first to offer themselves to the whites, the more ardent ones going to rub themselves against the legs of these beings whom they supposed to be gods” (Freyre 1956:85).

Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch Calvinist colonizers defended themselves against the threat of sensuality which they, too, attributed to the “naked” savages. The Dutch who landed in the Cape tried to seal off their community from the “Hottentots.” Contributing to the early segregative impulse was the extraordinary natural beauty, the sublime natural landscape of the Cape Peninsula. On seeing the view from the National Botanical Gardens at Kirstenbosch in the southern suburbs of Cape Town, the early 19th century British botanist William Burchell was moved to write of the almost indescribable and incomparable beauty of the area:

The view from this spot...is one of the most picturesque of any I have seen....The beauties here displayed to the eye could scarcely be represented by the most skilful [*sic*] pencil....To the left the noble Table Mountain rose in all its grandeur....The last beams of the sun, gleaming over the rich, varied, and extensive prospect, laid on the warm finishing lights, in masterly and inimitable touches. [cited by Coetzee 1988:36-37]

The colonizers justified the right to seize and to domesticate all this beauty in the name of the Dutch East India Company by means of two contradictory colonial narratives. The first represented the Cape Peninsula as uninhabited virgin territory, as empty space there for the taking. This narrative suggested that the indigenous population of semi-nomadic Khoikhoi herders did not live in the Cape year round but merely returned there each spring to water and rest their cattle and sheep.

A later version of the “empty land” myth was the story that the Dutch settlers arrived in Table Bay at roughly the same time that African Bantu speakers (mainly Xhosas and Zulus) traveled south and crossed the Limpopo River into what is today Transkei, South Africa. In this narrative both Black Africans and white Afrikaners were fairly recent “settlers” in South Africa, a story that is still told in some parts of the country. There is, however, abundant archaeological evidence of Bantu speaking

peoples living in the South African Transvaal as early as the 5th century A.D., and of Bantu speakers settled along the Transkei coast long before the 16th century (Wilson and Thomas 1971:138).

The alternative (and contradictory) colonial narrative acknowledged the presence of indigenous people in the Cape but denied their claim to fully human status and hence their right to ownership of the lands on which they were settled. Absolute distance with the Khoisan peoples of the Cape was established through a relentless cataloging of the native peoples' physical and cognitive differences. J. M. Coetzee (1988:13) notes the repetition in colonial memoirs of stereotypic descriptions of the Khoisan peoples, especially their implosive "pseudo-speech" (often described as "turkey-gobbling"), their diet of unwashed intestines, their use of animal fat for cosmetic purposes, the "peculiarities" of the pudenda of their women (the so called the Hottentot apron), and, above all, their incorrigible indolence.

In his 1686 work *Short Account of the Cape of Good Hope and of the Hottentots who Inhabit that Region*, William Ten Rhyne, physician for the East India Company, wrote:

All the Hottentots have slender and finely-knit bodies....Their noses are snub, their foreheads low; they are thick-lipped, and have curly woolen hair, shaved into various patterns....The women are distinguished from the men by their ugliness. And they have the peculiarity...of dactyliform appendages, always two in number, hanging down from their pudenda....If one should happen to enter a hut full of women...then with much gesticulation and raising their leather aprons, they offer these appendages to view. [cited by Oakes 1989:103]

In all, the Hottentot were described as ugly, unwashed, and smelly, their food unclean, their meat eaten nearly raw, their clothing merely unelaborated animal skins, their habitation the meanest of huts, and their speech (full of clicks) the language of monkeys, not humans. What kept the Hottentot in their backward evolutionary state was, above all, their "idleness," their refusal, that is, to work for Dutch wages. The specter of Hottentot (later of "Coloured") idleness haunts the colonial and post-colonial history of the Western Cape.

If the natural beauty of the coastal Cape Peninsula was legendary, the city that the Dutch built overlooking Table Bay was more known for its ugliness. Obsessed with hierarchy, rank, order, and with all the insignias of privilege, the Dutch colonial engineers applied basic geometric grid forms to convert the spectacular landscape into rigidly organized and uninteresting towns with grid street plans that were interspersed with forts. Dutch colonial town plans reflected a strong sense of order, but it was an order born of desperation (Hall 1991:46) as colonial authorities struggled to control

the chaotic growth of the city and the unruliness of those whose lands were being colonized. Tucked away within the well-ordered town houses of Cape Town, Dutch colonists were slaves living in attics, in kitchens, and in basements, turning affluent homes into prisons. And behind these stately homes were “warrens of side streets and alleyways where a large underclass of poor whites, artisans, mixed race coloureds, free blacks, and slaves lived” (Hall 1991:52).

It came as a shock to the Victorian English novelist Anthony Trollope to discover during his visit to South Africa in 1877 that the city of Cape Town was neither particularly beautiful nor white. Trollope went to South Africa expecting to find in Cape Town a charming and civilized outpost of Europe. Instead he found a city that struck him as “a poor, niggery, yellow-faced, half-bred sort of place, with an ugly Dutch flavour about it” (1973[1878]:4-5). English-speaking Capetonians were not, Trollope discovered, the primary population at all:

A walk through the streets of Cape Town is sufficient to show the stranger that he has reached a place not inhabited by white men.... The gentry no doubt are white and speak English...but they are not the population [which is primarily comprised of] Coloured persons, Malays, Mahommidans flaunting about the town in their turbans and flowing robes....And there is a Hottentot admixture, a sprinkling of the Guinea-coast Negro, and a small Kafir [Bantu] element mixed within a preponderance of Dutch blood. [1973:78]

Although hardly a radical, Trollope heaped scorn on the conventional colonial notion of the lazy Coloured:

The stranger in South Africa will constantly be told that the coloured man will not work....It will be the first word whispered in his ear when he arrives, and the last assurance hurled after him as he leaves the coast. And yet during his whole sojourn in the country he will see all the work of the world around him done by the hands of coloured people. It will be so in Cape Town far away from the Kafirs. It will be so on the homesteads of the Dutch in the western Province.... And yet he will be told, “the nigger will not work.” [1973:458]

Dispossession

From the mid 17th century to the end of the 20th century African farmers and herders, Black and Coloured laborers, and farmworkers were gradually but thoroughly dispossessed. Until the mid 19th century the majority of Bantu-speaking Africans in Southern Africa lived in independent chiefdoms. Following the Xhosa wars in the mid 19th century and the Zulu War in 1879 which signaled the fall of the last Black empire in South Africa (see Edgerton 1988), the final onslaught on the land and its

people began in the early 20th century via the bureaucratic violence of government-sponsored social engineering.

The Land Act of 1913 reduced African ownership to 7% of the land, although Black South Africans comprised 80% of the population. The Black "reserves," styled after North American Indian reservations, were a scattered patchwork of barren and unproductive lands that consigned Black South Africans to penury and hunger. But the final coup came decades later, beginning in 1948, with the Afrikaner National Party's policy of apartheid. A centerpiece of this policy was the national government's forced removals of more than 3.5 million Black South Africans from white and urban areas to what were now called "Bantustans" or "self-governing homelands." These "homelands" were a pretext for what were really concentrated labor reserves designed to service white-owned agricultural estates and the mines in the East and West Rands.

The language and policies of race segregation were periodically "modernized" and sanitized (see Boonzaier and Sharp's 1989 Introduction). By the time of Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd's "scientific" approach to apartheid (apartness/separateness) the dispossession was concealed within a modernist discourse on cultural "self determination" and city and regional planning. Thus, the most brutal, mass relocations of black and brown people on the entire African continent were passed off as urban planning in the interests of promoting the growth of orderly, self-contained "model cities" and towns, preserving greenways and open spaces, and preventing the kind of chaotic urbanization that was occurring throughout much of the third world at roughly this same time.

What white South Africans seemed to fear most was the threat of demographic "swamping" by non-white populations, Black and Coloured. Consequently, the modern history of South Africa was one of increasing restriction and interdiction against the presence of black bodies which were seen as contaminating, violating, and unaesthetic "foreign objects." In the bureaucratic language of apartheid, African people were described as "influx" and "overflow," as "black spots" to be "removed." Like stubborn stains their presence needed to be "rubbed out." Like feces their bodies and possessions were to be "evacuated." Like cancelled checks, Black and Brown women and children were to be "endorsed out." The subsequent attacks and violent destruction of older urban black communities, settlements, and squatter camps served both anti-black and anti-urban white South African agendas. Slum removal simply meant black removal.

Still, these same dark-skinned bodies were needed for labor. A series of "pass laws" (though *impasse* laws might better describe them) controlled the movement of Black South Africans into cities and towns where they were temporarily housed in worker hostels (see Ramphela 1994) as "guest workers" carrying approved permits. Following the post-World War II industrial expansion of Cape Town the pass laws

were overlooked for a time so that by 1948—when the National Party came into power—there were an estimated 150,000 non-white squatters in Cape Town. Among the first actions taken by the new apartheid government was a brutal crackdown on the Black South African population in greater Cape Town. This was followed, two decades later, by a similar crackdown on Cape Town's even larger mixed-race Coloured population, those who dared to think that their cultural and linguistic kinship with white Afrikaners might allow them to escape the worst ravages of the apartheid madness.

The Murder of “District Six”

At the turn of the century Cape Town was, as Anthony Trollope noted, a predominantly working class, mixed-race community of small shopkeepers, artisans, laborers, and dock workers. At the heart of Cape Town and walking distance from the old city center was the sprawling, boisterous, congested neighborhood officially named “District Six” (though called *Kanaladorp* by its Coloured residents). District Six was just the kind of mixed community one would expect to find in a port city that was a stopping-off point between nations and continents. The neighborhood brought together immigrants from Britain and Australia, Jews from Tsarist Russia and later from Soviet Lithuania, Indians from Durban, Portuguese from all over, and a smaller number of Chinese. These newer arrivals mixed with the earlier residents of the Cape—the mixed-race Cape “Coloured,” Malay Muslims, and Black South Africans.

Even more threatening to the social engineers of apartheid than residential integration was the tolerance of racially mixed marriages characteristic of District Six. It was a place where a person might be the son of a West Indian seaman and a Coloured seamstress from the rural Western Cape, or the offspring of a female migrant from St. Helena and a Lithuanian Jewish cabinet maker. Another person's father might be a Tamil Indian migrant from Natal and her mother a Moslem woman from a Kalk Bay fishing family with an unmistakably Portuguese surname.

In District Six people of different “colors” attended the same schools, belonged to the same trade unions, shopped in the same markets, drank in the same bars and canteens, and enjoyed themselves in the same movie houses. District Six was famous for its gambling and its gangsters, and for its vibrant street life dominated by hawkers and push carts. With the possible exception of the Indian market in Durban, there was nothing else quite like District Six in the rest of South Africa. The neighborhood represented a plausible, if imperfect, model of racial integration, and for that reason alone it was marked for demolition by “the Nats” (National Party) as an unacceptable “black spot,” a blight on the urban landscape of Cape Town. District Six was the National Party's worst nightmare, a vision of the inevitable “browning” and “Africanization” of South Africa.

Thus, District Six was simply ripped out of the city by the “urban renewal” bulldozers of apartheid in 1965. The forced removals of more than 60,000 people were carried out with the precision of a military operation: trucks arrived to remove, forcibly, when necessary, the residents of the neighborhood and their possessions.² The exiles, some of whose ancestors had lived in central Cape Town since the days of the Dutch East India Company, were relocated by color, following the criteria of the Group Areas Act. “Blacks” were driven out to informal settlements in Kensington, Ndabeni, and to Langa. “Coloureds” were sent to ugly new settlements carved out of the barren, sandy, lots of the Cape Flats. Apartheid race classifications tore families and neighbors apart when they were designated to different “group areas.” As so, for a brief and terrifying period of South African history, Cape Town was definitively (if not permanently) claimed for whites alone.

With the destruction of District Six, the heart and soul of Cape Town was destroyed. Without the teeming and lively population of District Six to fill its streets, the downtown area quickly became a vacant, spooky, and ghost-like complex of gloomy concrete and glass office buildings. The white colonizers had finally realized their dreamscape of an “empty land” in the Cape. What was once the “Grand Parade,” the central square of Cape Town, remained grand in name only. In its place was a bleak and windy car park for white civil servants who worked in the Civic Center building. In the late 1970s a large underground Shopping Mall was built on the site of the old railroad station. Indeed, life in general had gone underground.

To this day District Six is a scar-faced zone of abandonment. Few people of any race live there. Here and there one encounters a few inhabited flats with children playing skip rope in front of a stoop and a few places of uncertain commerce along with one or two churches, which the pious Dutch Reform practitioners of apartheid were afraid to raze. These churches stand alone surrounded by ruins and open lots filled with weeds, broken glass, chipped bricks, and rusted tin. But for the most part District Six is dead. There was a certain poetic justice in the Anglican Church choosing to locate its celebrated “Trauma Center for the Victims of Political Violence and Torture” on a deserted and gutted out side street of District Six, where it functioned for the early years of the democratic transition from 1994-1997.

Because of the enormous social and symbolic significance of District Six for the Coloured population of the Western Cape, it has left a profound sense of loss, resentment, and a sense of betrayal that has never been adequately recognized by the formal institutions of social repair in the new South Africa, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It contributes to a sense of victimhood among the Coloured population of Cape Town who all too often turn their misplaced rage against the new government. Adam Small, for example, a noted Coloured intellectual of the Western Cape expressed a sentiment (personal communication; see also Small 1971) that was widespread in the mixed-race community of the Western Cape when he said: “The history of Coloured people is the *most* tragic one you have in South Africa.”

Apartheid and the Construction of Coloured Identity

The existence of ambiguously “raced” people (i.e., “coloureds”) was a “wild card” (the Joker) in the system and ideology of strict race segregation on which modern South African apartheid was built. The origins of the popular view of “coloureds” as a residual or “left over” category was inscribed in the apartheid laws which defined South African citizenship in terms of a system of racist population classifications (see West 1989). Apartheid was implemented through the hated Population Registration Act of 1950 (which was amended no fewer than 15 times between 1956 and 1986).

Under apartheid (1948-1994) racial segregation and classification was used to separate people into absolute categories of difference. One’s racial classification then determined every aspect of a person’s life—where and with whom one lived; where and how one worked; how one traveled; how one was educated; even the quality of food one ate. The key metaphors that were mobilized in maintaining apartheid were spatial: fears of physical contact, of mixing, of spillage, and of leakage. The solution was separation, exclusion, and containment.

The apartheid state constructed and enforced—often with violence—a system of group identities. Over time the state revised its official categories and modernized its arguments to marshal national and international support for its racist policies. The apartheid state controlled the ideological content of education, of television, and of radio. It used censorship to control the press. Consequently, these crucial institutions were corrupted and they reproduced the official apartheid discourses about race, nationhood, citizenship, racial violence, and public security that played a role in defining the South African social and political reality as a constant state of siege. Ultimately, apartheid shaped individual and group subjectivities and social self-perception.

Section 1 of the apartheid state’s Population and Registration Act identified three basic racial classifications: Black, Coloured, and White. A Black person (sometimes classified as Native or a Bantu) was defined as one “who is, or who is generally accepted as, a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa.” A White person was defined (in extremely hedged-in and nutty language) as: “a person who is (a) in appearance obviously a White person, and who is not generally accepted as a Coloured person; or (b) is generally accepted as a White person and is not in appearance obviously not a White person.” Finally, a White person excluded “those who were once classified as white but who voluntarily confess that they are by descent a Black or a Coloured person, unless it is proven that this admission is patently false.”

Coloureds were defined under apartheid as the racial population formed by the historical mixing of the indigenous Khoi-san peoples and the early European

settlers: the Dutch, but also the English, Portuguese, and Germans. Later, the coloureds mixed with African Bantu groups and Malay peoples who were brought to the Cape Colony as slaves. But the official legal definition of "Coloured" in the Population Registration Act was a residual category. A Coloured person was defined as a "person who is *not* a White person or a *Black*."

This "negative" definition led to many absurdities. In a famous and often cited press interview given by Mrs. de Klerk in the early 1990s, the wife of the last white President of South Africa described the coloured population as follows:

You know, *they* [coloured people] are a negative group. The definition of a coloured person in the population register is someone that is not white and not black, and is also not an Indian, in other words a non-person....They are left overs, the people that were left over after the other racial nations were sorted out. They are the rest....The coloureds were always under the wing of the whites. They have never been on their own. They have no history of governing themselves....They must be supervised.

The de Klerks prevented their own son from marrying a young coloured woman to whom he was engaged, which caused a deep rift in the family. Several years later, F.W. de Klerk made a public apology to his estranged son and to the Cape Coloured Community.

Section 5(1) of the Population Registration Act later subdivided coloureds into seven "ethnic" groups: Cape Coloured (the largest and most definitive of the category), Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, Other Asiatic, and "Other Coloured." Despite these subgroups the South African government continued to use the term "non-white" to describe all those who were either African blacks or "coloureds."

Over time the Registration Act added further bureaucratic clarifications (often to the point of absurdity) in order to assist civil servants in the time consuming task of classifying people who did not fit neatly into the ordained categories. Eventually, cultural "traits," language, and "habits," were added as markers of racial and ethnic identity in addition to "appearance" and "general acceptance as such." Finally, section 5(5) was added, which stressed the importance of "descent" over "appearance" or popular consensus. Under this section, a person was classified as white if both natural parents were so classified. Thus, a person was classified as coloured if both natural parents were so classified, or if one parent was classified white and the other classified as coloured. Where a person was the child of one black and one coloured parent, classification followed that of the father.

As the anti-apartheid struggle grew during the 1980s, many South Africans did begin to resist the invidious race-caste system. Although it was almost suicidal for

White South Africans to do so, some secretly married Blacks and Coloureds. If they were reported by neighbors, the White spouse was reclassified the race of the non-White spouse, creating a small population of "Whites" officially classified as "Blacks" or "Bantus." But meanwhile a great many mixed-race Coloureds continued to "pass" as whites. A much smaller population of politicized Coloureds did self-identify during the anti-apartheid struggle as Blacks, refusing the intermediate category that had traditionally allowed them more privileges under apartheid.

In all, the apartheid system of race classification was a hodgepodge of contentious and problematic indicators, further complicated by the possibility of formal reclassification through appeal to the government bureaucracy, the despised Race Classification Board. Each year the Board sat and reviewed the cases of all those who believed they had been wrongly classified. In 1986 no less than 1,624 South Africans sought reclassification, and of these 1,102 were successful. About half the petitioners were Cape Coloureds seeking reclassification as whites, and half were Blacks seeking reclassification as Coloureds. Those requesting reclassification were subject to humiliating physical "tests," such as whether a pencil inserted into the hair would stay in place or fall to the ground.

Neither Black nor White

Brazil, South Africa, and the U.S. share certain similarities in that the population of each nation is to a large extent the product of racial and ethnic mixing in a context of European colonialism and African slavery (see Degler 1971; Marx 1998). However, the race-caste or race-class system that arose in each case gave very different social positions and value to the mixed person.

In Brazil an ideology of "racial democracy" invented the "mulatto" as an ideal social type, so that to be Brazilian meant to celebrate and to lay claim to a universal sense of "brownness." However, in practice, Brazil is a deeply racist country, although one in which the existence of a multitude of socially ranked racial distinctions (which refer both to appearance and to class-linked behavior) means that racial identity is in part ascribed and in part achieved. Brazilians are not concerned with the genetic background of a person, but they do pay close attention to physical features—hair, cheekbones, lips, and color of eyes and shade of skin—and to social comportment and family name. Brazil could be described as a kind of racial free market in which people actively trade in racial identities. The rules of the game are to try to dis-identify with the lower and darker designations such as "preto," "moreno," or "pardo," and to be included in one of the "whiter" and higher status groups ("galego," "loiro," or "*branco de terra*"). Education, professional achievement, and money "lighten" the skin. In Brazil "passing" is not viewed negatively but is recognized as a fairly universal social strategy. Within this system the "mulatto" is valued not only as a national prototype but also as an available "escape hatch" for the

black person who can, with hard work, eventually attain that status. Only class barriers restrict the racial mobility of Blacks (“*os negros*”) in Brazil.

In contrast to Brazil, where there is a spectrum or a continuum of race and class-linked ethnicities, in the United States a rigid race-caste system emerged around two “absolute” qualities: black and white. North Americans (with the exception of Louisiana) never developed an intermediate category in which to locate biracial people. The operating principle behind American apartheid was that each group could remain “pure” because any biological degree of blackness (i.e., “black blood”) made that person completely black, while whites were defined as those without any trace of black ancestry. Historically, the U.S. race-caste system (see Berreman 1960) allowed no place in the American social imaginary for ambiguity or for mixed people. Today, the cultural identity revolutions beginning in the 1960s and the new biotechnologies of DNA testing have challenged the way that black, white, and bi- or multi-racial Americans understand their social and racial histories.

In South Africa, the social construction of the mixed person passed through various phases, at times (exemplified by District Six) resembling the Brazilian racial continuum and at times (under apartheid) resembling the American system of absolute racialization. One experiences considerable cognitive dissonance as one moves among the three systems. American Blacks visiting South Africa refuse to see Coloureds as anything other than “Black.” Coloured South Africans visiting America express strong racial prejudice toward African-Americans. Conversely, the South African classification of “coloured” is like the Brazilian notion of ... well, a Brazilian! A visiting journalist from Rio de Janeiro described to me his shock when he was taken to a “coloured” township in the Cape Flats: “It was as if the South African government took all of Brazil and gave it a single ‘racial’ classification and then banished it to a segregated ghetto.” He toyed with the idea of writing a piece entitled “Brazil in a Township” as a way of explaining the South African notion of “coloureds” to Brazilians.

Spoiled Identities

“And that, my friend, is why I ran away. I ran away because I was scared of the coming changes, and scared of the consequences of not changing. I ran because I wouldn’t carry a gun for apartheid, and because I wouldn’t carry a gun against it. I ran away because I hated Afrikaners [white Afrikaans-speakers] and loved blacks. I ran away because I was an Afrikaner and feared blacks. You could say, I suppose, that I ran away from the paradox.”

--Rian Malan, *My Traitor’s Heart* (1990)

Apartheid not only shaped social self identities in South Africa, it spoiled those identities, filling people of all races with feelings of disgust and self-loathing even long after the anti-apartheid struggle had begun. Father Michael Lapsley, a naturalized South African from New Zealand and wounded chaplain to the ANC, thought about his "whiteness" for the first time when he arrived as a young Anglican priest to South Africa and experienced his white skin (in the context of white oppression of African Blacks) as a mark of Cain, a stigma. In an interview with him in 1994 he told me: "Whiteness for me became like leprosy, something that would not wash off. Although I knew a lot about apartheid beforehand, I never really understood what it would mean structurally to be an oppressor...so my decision to join the struggle for liberation was also a struggle for the recovery of my own humanity" (see also Worsnip 1996).

Indeed, there is no easy way to be "white" in South Africa, even in the new, non-racial South Africa. Nor is there any easy way to be "brown" or "black" when this is tied to a specific ethnic identity, whether "Hottentot" (Khoi), Zulu, Xhosa, or "Cape Coloured." Even the simple questions, "Where are you from," or "Where were you born?" can be seen in some South African circles as an attempt to "peg" a person to a particular ethnic group and is therefore a lapse in social etiquette.

Erving Goffman (1963) identified the social dynamics of "spoiled identity" resulting from the stigmas of physical difference, of ethnicity, and "tribe," and the stigmas of behavior and morality, to which I would now add the stigmas of history and of place. A continuing dilemma of the non-racial South Africa is the legacy of apartheid that has spoiled all cultural and ethnic identities, although some are more spoiled than others: Zulu (because of its identification with the right-wing Inkatha Freedom Party); Afrikaner (because of its political history of institutionalized racism); and "Coloured" (because it is seen as a fictive category, a "pure invention" of apartheid) are perhaps the most spoiled identities today.

Zulus and Afrikaners have, however, developed a strong, oppositional identity (and accompanying political organizations) to reassert ethnic and national pride. Zulus march proudly and defiantly in their leopard skins carrying "tribal" weapons (sticks and, lacking these, golf clubs will do), while Boer civil servants can flaunt their language, their "backkies" and their backyard *braais* (the traditional Afrikaner barbecue), their semi-literacy, and their white tribal dreams. Like angry township youth (soon dubbed "the lost generation"), Zulus and Boers were seen as dangerous and so are respected as well as ridiculed. In recent years both groups have ingeniously invented and reinvented their ethnic "histories" (Sharp 1994; see also Berreman 1971 for a comparative example of the struggle to escape from stigmatized ethnic identity).

"Cape Coloureds," however, are without either the cultural panache or symbolic capital of South African Zulus and Boers. South African intellectuals and

progressives discredit coloured identity as a legal fiction, a bureaucratic invention, one of the many nightmares of apartheid. Meanwhile, the mother tongue of the “coloureds,” Afrikaans, is perceived by all as the language of their oppressor, the white Dutch settler, the hated Boer, the sly and absent “fathers” who “spawned” but never claimed their mixed-race offspring. Thus, to this day South African “coloureds” are still generally viewed by other South Africans and even by themselves in the same way that Robert Redfield (1967) described peasants—that is, as “part-people with part-cultures.” Coloured social self identity and self-esteem suffer accordingly.

The Dilemma of Coloured Identity

Because they stand in-between what was arguably an essentially bi-polar race model (black/white), South African “coloureds” are social liminals, the half-way mark between “whites” and “blacks.” They are a marginal and therefore a dangerous category: in Mary Douglas’s (1970) terms, coloureds are anomalous, “out of place,” and “out of set.” Consequently, South African coloureds were often viewed with suspicion, mistrust, and even hate by other social groups. The in-betweenity of South African coloureds and other marginals (such as South African blacks who speak only Afrikaans and interracial couples of all kinds) is as pernicious as the sub-alterity of other oppressed groups.

During the apartheid era Black South Africans expressed little solidarity with the coloured population, sometimes describing them as “part settlers,” “half-whites,” or (most damningly) as “brown Afrikaners” (that is, brown Boers). Coloureds were seen as a “remnant” and a reminder of the first vanquished black tribes of the Cape Colony: the Khoi (Hottentots) and the native San (the Bushman). Racist whites (and some Blacks) in the rural Western Cape still refer to coloureds by the hated terms “Hot-nots,” “Bushmen,” and “Basters” (bastards).

To white South African racists, coloureds are a perennial reminder of the failure to maintain white purity and separateness under colonialism and apartheid. In the village of Franschhoek, conservative white farmers told me with a straight face that the large “colored” population there had “arrived by boat from other countries.” They could not, even in the late 1990s, accept their social and biological ties with the “inferior” race.

Even the educated classes share some of these same toxic stereotypes. A professor of physics at the University of Cape Town reminisced about his boyhood school days in liberal Cape Town: “I always felt sorry for the coloureds. We said the worst things about them. We said that coloureds had no backbone, that they were lazy, they had no loyalty, and that their mothers were loose. The worst insult you could throw at a school chum was to say: ‘Your mother didn’t love you, and your father was a coloured!’ I had a coloured friend once who told me, ‘David, you don’t

know how lucky you are. You're English and you're white. Even the kaffir boy [i.e., the 'nigger'] knows that he's black. But we coloured people, we're just a mess."

Cape Coloureds refer to themselves as *gekleurdes*—that is, coloureds, but in their Afrikaans dialect the term carries a positive sense of being a "colorful" people. Many others simply refer to themselves as *bruinnwse*, or brown people, and leave it at that. But none are immune to the negative ways that Black, White, and even indigenous South Africans view their social group.

Indeed, when a small group of self-identified San "Bushmen" (now residing in the Kagga-Kama nature reserve of the Northern Cape) emphasized *their* racial distinctiveness and distance from the mixed-race Cape Coloureds, I began to understand the pervasiveness of the dilemma of Coloured identity. Coloureds seemed to represent the one ethnic group from which every other group wished to dis-identify. They were/are the generative scapegoats of the pre- and post-apartheid era. One could say that they were the only "race" abandoned by the anti-racial, anti-apartheid struggle. Dawie, the leader of the Kagga-Kama San band, explained to me his disdain for the Cape Coloured:

Bushman and "Baster" [i.e. the Coloured] don't live together because the Bushmen came here first and the Baster came last....The Bushmen was here first and then Jan van Riebeck came [the Dutch colonizer] here...and he was a white man and he came to a Bushman's woman and from there on came all this mixing. The last was the Baster....I believe it when they say "Baster," but not when they say Coloured, because the Baster, he's got no color, he's a mix-up. He's just a mongrel.

During my visit with this small (indeed residual) band of Kagga-Kama San, which took place immediately following the democratic elections in 1994, Dawie expressed his fear that the New South Africa might force even more race mixing. He emphasized the necessity of marrying-in to preserve "Bushman" bodies and all their physically defining characteristics. Dawie said:

We are afraid to marry other kinds for then surely we will disappear. We want each baby to come out looking like a Bushman, with the same little ears [pointing to a baby in one of his wives' arms], the same round little head, the same cheekbones. Everything must be just so, perfect. We must not marry with Blacks for then we will become Kaffirs [a derogatory term for Black South Africans]...and we must not marry with coloureds or we will become Basters. *When that happens it will be our end.*

The sense of in-betweenity, of having no clear identity, was articulated in many different ways by my “coloured” informants and friends in Franschhoek. The following statements taken from the life histories of coloured farmworkers illustrate the dilemma:

Nellie Prince (60+ years): “I don’t see myself attracted to Blacks. The coloured people are more conservative. And I don’t see myself cozing up with the whites either. I am coloured. I was born coloured and coloured I will die.”

“What does it mean to be coloured?”

“I ... I ... don’t know really.”

Minnie Peterson (37 years): “As a coloured person in South Africa I don’t really know where I stand. I don’t know whether to trust the whites or the Blacks. I don’t even know what it means to be coloured. We don’t really have a culture. We don’t have our own language. We speak Afrikaans, the language of the Boer. Whatever languages we had in the beginning—Malay and Khoi—a few words got mixed up with Afrikaans . . . but that’s all that’s left.”

Myra Braderman (35 years): “What does it mean to be a Xhosa [a Black African]? That’s easy. They dress differently. Some wear large earrings. When the boys are 15 or 16 they are taken up to a mountain for initiation so they can become men. They are cut. Colored boys are not circumcised except for some Moslems.”

“And what does it mean to be coloured?”

“To be coloured? . . . Wait . . . wait . . . wait [her hand is on her head]. Oh, this is difficult. Just give me some time to collect my thoughts.”

“Dress?” I ask, trying to be helpful.

“No, it’s nothing of ours in particular.”

“Language?”

“No, that’s not ours?”

“Food?”

“Yes! We like our bredei. It’s a kind of Irish stew made with carrots, beans, and mutton. We like pasta, potatoes, and meal. Coloured people don’t fancy vegetables unless they’re flavored with meal. We like carrots cooked with sugar and a little custard.”

“Religion?”

“No, no different, unless you are a Moslem. But when I say coloured I mean us, the ‘Afrikaner-coloured,’ ‘the half-settlers,’ ‘half-Hottentots’ that we are, for better or worse.”

Jana October echoed the same in saying: “We can call ourselves ‘Black,’ but to the Blacks we will always be yellow-skinned Hot-Nots.”

Although few “coloured” farmworkers could identify any salient social or cultural features distinguishing them as a social group, the one festival clearly identified with “Cape Coloureds,” the Coon Carnival celebrated in Cape Town on New Year’s Day, filled them with embarrassment. Considered the poor coloured man’s holiday, the Coon Carnival reveals all the contradictions of colored identity and status. Imitating the Black minstrel tradition of the American South, the “coons” lamp-black their faces and parade under such self-deprecatory names as “The Mississippi Nigger Minstrels.” Strumming their banjos and singing inane ditties like “Playing with my Ding-a-ling,” the coons act out white stereotypes of “coloureds” as “happy-go-lucky,” shiftless, witless, ne’er do wells.

An egregiously racist entry on the Coon Carnival in the *Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa* (1972:336) referred to Coloured peoples’ “zest for life” and their “animated dancing and prancing” on the main parade of Cape Town. It concluded: “The Cape would be much the poorer without its Yankee Doodle Dandy Darkies” (1972:336). The Coon Carnival reproduces the mimetic quality that haunts South African coloured identity, labeling it as childish, imitative, a farce.

As is true of carnival play the world over, the playful mockery, ridicule, and defiance—in this case of pernicious racial stereotypes—can backfire and reinforces the negative images. Politically aware “coloured” people reject the Coon Carnival as a ritual of self-loathing. An anthropologist colleague from the University of Cape Town (personal communication) recalled a poignant scene at a Coon Carnival in the early 1990s (when American identity politics began to enter South Africa and collide with the decidedly anti-identity politics of the ANC and the South African Communist Party). A coon minstrel, his face painted and ready to perform, jumped to his feet and loudly proclaimed: “I’m coloured, I’m coloured, I have no identity!”

Arthur Mac-William Smith, the then “progressive” ANC-aligned white mayor of Franschhoek, interpreted the local coloured “culture” of his farm region in terms of Oscar Lewis’s culture of poverty:

“‘Our’ coloured is very much like your Negro population. He is of a lower economic group. He tends toward a matriarchal society. You get more drunkenness, more drugs, not because he’s coloured but as a consequence of the slum culture in which he lives. Despite his slum culture, the coloured shares the same church (Dutch Reform), the same language (Afrikaans) and the same western values as the Afrikaner. The coloured is not an African in the true sense of the word. He is African the way whites here are African . . . as an outsider. Our coloured man is like your American Negro. He is an American (or South African) in all respects except for his color and his lower social class. Your red Indian is more like our Black African, except that our indigenous cultures are very strong and populous here.”

“How do you know the difference between coloured and black?” I asked the mayor in one of our early interviews. His answer reveals some of the tensions and contradictions still surrounding the idea of race and ethnicity as simultaneously existentialist and manipulated categories in South Africa. He replied:

“Black is . . . Well, Coloureds are always mixed bloods . . . and you know them by their language and by their looks.”

“Umm . . . but some Blacks are ‘mixed’ too.”

“Er, yes but . . . not really. They may be mixed with other Black ‘tribes,’ but they are not mixed with whites, because if they were mixed with white they would be classified as ‘coloured.’”

“That would have been taken care of in years past through the Population Registration Act?”

“Yes, just so, and up until now a person with any mixed blood would certainly ‘go’ for the coloured classification. It would be impossible for him to pass as white, and there would be no reason to try and pass as Black because being colored naturally gave a person more opportunities—better schooling, better housing, social mobility . . . all those material benefits. But there are also *real* differences in culture between the two groups.”

Resistance

The anti-apartheid struggle sought to free all South Africans from racist and merely racialist thinking and to construct alternative collective identities in terms of political commitment and “the struggle.” Race was a disallowed discourse to be stamped under the feet of revolutionary toyi-toyi dancers. Meanwhile, progressive academics, anthropologists foremost among them (see Boonzaier and Sharp 1989) pursued cultural critique discourses in an attempt to problematize and destabilize “race,” “colour,” “tribe,” “ethnicity,” and “culture” as these were coopted by the state to implement apartheid. Today, South Africans of good will have their hands raised and their fingers curled ready to supply scare quotes that throw into question the social fictions that the apartheid state presented as hard facts and as reality. However, the necessary attacks on biological and cultural essentialisms (the apartheid state often used “culture” as a surrogate for “race”) seemed to leave no space for positive assertions of cultural and ethnic identity even when viewed simply as a shared history. This was especially true for the “coloured” population.

Thus, despite the dismantling of official apartheid, psychological apartheid remains strongly entrenched in South Africa and “coloured” identity remains ambiguous and problematic. A recent pamphlet written by a respected “coloured” scholar (Van der Ross 1993) entitled “100 Questions about Colored South Africans” leaves the reader more confused than enlightened. The question of coloured “identity” is given considerable attention:

“What is our identity?”

“Because we are the result of so much mixing, it is difficult, indeed impossible, to define our limits....This is why, of all South Africans today, we have the least sense of identity. But a person’s identity is largely what a person considers it to be!” [1993:5]

“Do the Coloured people have an identity?”

“The fact that people refer to the ‘colour-ed people’ means that there is a certain identity as a population group. But as we have said it is hard to define the Coloured people in exact terms. When people refer to themselves as ‘we, the coloured people’ or as ‘Bruirunense,’ they are using a term of identity just as when people refer to themselves as ‘we Xhosas.’...Yes, we have an identity; if we don’t wish to accept or admit or agree to it, we must find some other way of identifying ourselves.” [1993:14]

Other questions treated the issue of whether to keep the apartheid term “coloured” or to create a new term. Van der Ross stresses the historical fluidity of

ethnic terms which can pass from stigmatized to valued in a short period of time, pointing to the shift in the U.S. from “Black” as a derogatory term to “Black” as a valued term of self-identity. And he notes that the largest Black American organization in the U.S. is still called the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

During the struggle years (late 1970s and 1980s) a minority of progressive Coloureds identified themselves socially and politically as “Blacks.” It was part of a grand and ultimately successful strategy for building a broad base of unity among all South Africa’s disenfranchised. However, beginning in 1990 with the first phase in the transition to democracy, coloured peoples’ identification with blacks again became problematic. Black identity is no longer seen as the best strategy for advancing the political and material circumstances of South African coloureds. A new discourse on difference between Black and Coloured has reasserted itself. It emphasizes the considerable competition between the interests of the two groups. In its vulgar form the new discourse has fed old racist stereotypes that try to advance coloured status by denigrating Black status in a neo-social evolutionary model that plays to fears of Black violence and primitivity.

Mixed Feelings: The Coloured Vote in the April 1994 Elections

The democratic elections of 1994 was accompanied by a strong reassertion of “coloured” identity that was expressed in a resounding “Coloured” vote for the new National Party (NP), the “reformed” party of apartheid. The vote registered Coloured peoples’ keen “opposition” to Black leadership and dominance under the ANC. One of the great ironies of the democratic elections that brought Mandela and the ANC into power was the near unanimous support by Coloureds in the Western Cape for “Papa” de Klerk, the last White President of South Africa. The “absentee” Afrikaner father was claimed in the end.

In the months and weeks prior to South Africa’s first democratic elections I tried to engage coloured farmworkers in political conversations. What one heard throughout the Cape was that the “coloureds” would be responsible for “selling out” to the racist National Party, and that in the end, the coloureds would forget their oppression at the hands of the Boers who gave them “preferential” employment over the Blacks, who paid them in brandy and in wine (through the “dop system”), and bribed them with food baskets and second hand, cast-away clothes.

What the coloureds of the Western Cape said themselves in the weeks preceding the elections and in the midst of campaign fever was that they felt squeezed out, superfluous, “in the way,” because the real contest in South African politics was being played out in shades of “Black and White.” Either one joined the ANC and toyi-toyed with the Blacks, or one joined the “Nats” and waltzed with the Boer—but in each case one was dancing with the enemy, maybe even dancing with the devil, and

as Minnie Peterson of Vietnam Bos (coloured) squatter camp summed up the situation:

As a coloured voter you are caught in the middle. You don't have anything that is your own. You don't have a language and you don't have a political party. The ANC is the party of the Blacks (no matter what they say or would like us to believe). The National Party is for the Boer. So as a coloured person, where do I stand? The *toyi-toyi* is not our dance, and though we sometimes *toyi-toyi* with the Blacks we do it with mixed feelings. I can't vote for the ANC because I do not believe—with all the problems the Black people have in this country—that the ANC will be able to take care of us too. So, in the end I will have to side with the NATS [the National Party], but I'll vote for them with mixed feelings. For generations we were used by the Boer, but now I want to believe that things are changing and at the end of the day the Boer will recognize us as his [*sic*] kin.

If the search for paternity, legitimacy, and kinship with the primordial Boer father-ancestor—and hence the search for personal identity—underlies part of the farm laborer coloured vote for the local white National Party (as I believe it did), fears of retaliatory Black violence was the most commonly articulated reason for casting their lots with the NP given by coloured voters as they arrived by bus loads to attend the final NP rally at the Good Hope Center in Cape Town and to catch a glimpse of “Papa de Klerk” himself.

As I stood in my academic robes, along with a few dozen religiously affiliated mixed-race Christian and Muslim faculty from the universities of Cape Town and the Western Cape, in a silent protest against the blatantly racist NP campaign against Mandela and the ANC in front of the Good Hope Center where de Klerk and Hemus Kriel were about to address thousands of coloured voters who were bussed in from the Cape Flats and from the surrounding rural farm country, we were verbally assaulted by the workers (some of them already quite drunk before mid-day). They called us “kaffir-lovers” and “coloured traitors” and tossed beer cans and other debris at us.

The South African Police (SAP) threatened to arrest us because (they said) they feared a mob scene following the rally and they could not guarantee our “protection” from the “angry mobs” as they poured out of the Good Hope Center. As we waited outside loud speakers broadcast the messages of de Klerk and Kriel to the coloured voters. Kriel, in particular, traded in racist imagery, speaking in Afrikaans, and made many references to the Black so-called “Station Strangler,” a serial killer who preyed on young coloured boys in the Cape Flats. Kriel praised the NP Afrikaner police chief who had apprehended a major suspect and thereby allowed coloured parents to sleep more easily. But even de Klerk was not above making pointed

references to the “necklace” [the burning of suspected police and other “collaborators” by putting a burning tire around their necks] as a key ANC political strategy.

The message obviously reached home, for on that and subsequent days leading up to April 27th and 28th similar sentiments were cast by coloured voters, even as they waited on the long, snaking queue in front and around polling stations on April 27th and 28th in the Western Cape. The following comments were tape-recorded on the election days in the coloured township attached to Franschoek, in mixed-race Mowbray, and in Mitchell’s Plein:

“Look at how the Blacks kill their own people. They are a race of killers. When the ANC comes into power we all had better go out and buy ourselves a coffin. Some of the coloured are so stupid. They go to ANC rallies and before you know it they are jumping up and down saying, ‘Viva Mandela! Viva Mandela!’ And I think, ‘Yeah, long live Mandela and death to the rest of us! Toyi-Toyi for Jesus, not for Mandela!’”

“We [coloured people] can’t vote for Mandela. He was in prison, man. Ah, he is a criminal! Who wants a criminal for President?”

“We can’t have a kaffir-man [a nigger] for President!”

“Natives can’t lead us. What do they know about anything? Shame, they will send us all back to the stone age.”

“Wherever the Blacks [the swarts] go there is violence, bloodshed, and burning tires. Look at the rest of Africa: Burundi and Somalia. When the ANC had its rally in Athlone [a coloured community in the Cape Flats] three children were trampled to death. When the National Party held their rally in the Good Hope Center no one died. Everything was peaceful. The coloured people are tired of violence.”

“But wasn’t it the NP that took away coloured peoples’ homes and forced them to live in the Cape Flats?” I asked.

“Not here in Mitchell’s Plein,” denied the woman. “That was over in Mannenberg where the people from District Six were forced to move. We ourselves “chose” to come here. And we always had our food under the Nats. We kept our jobs, even if the pay wasn’t so good. There was no equal pension, but . . . we didn’t really suffer.”

After elections the coloured mood was more subdued. The “Kaffir Man” (Mandela) was now their President, while the local Prime Minister of the Western

Cape, following the strong coloured regional vote, was the ex-Chief of Police, Hemus Kriel. Now they would have to live with him and his first attempts to create a separatist “state” with local citizenship and passports designed to keep Black migrants from leaving the “homelands” for jobs and houses in the Western Cape. But even more curious, the Afrikaner Hemus Kriel and the local “white old boys” of the regional NP will have to live with coloured voters who are now, ironically, their main constituency.

In a way, political events have come full circle. Originally, in the Western Cape the social identity “Afrikaners” was applied to the “the half-bred, half-caste offspring of slaves” (Editorial 1877). The colonial administration used the term to refer to the new population of “mixed descent” born in the Cape colony (Gilomee 1994:8). Then, the term was used by Dutch speakers to refer to all colonists with some Dutch European ancestry, to both white and brown “Afrikaners.” Soon after, the term Afrikaners took on its ideological and political connotations and was adopted as a term of self-reference by Dutch-speaking colonists who held white supremacist convictions. An early history published in 1898 defined the Afrikaner as “a person of Dutch extraction, who believed in the advancement of the brandy market, protections for the common farmer, and the repression of the Black native” (cited by Gilomee *op. cit.*)

Throughout this historical process, the intermediate population of brown Afrikaners in the Western Cape was at times included in Afrikaner identity and politics and at times excluded. The Cape Coloured—like Blacks in the American South—had the voting franchise for a period and then lost it and had to fight to regain it. Hermann Gilomee, a progressive white Afrikaner political scientist at the University of Cape Town, has stressed the political dimensions of the contraction and expansion of Afrikaner identity in the history of modern South Africa. He notes that in the elections of 1920 the National Party, as the main vehicle of Afrikaner nationalism, competed with some success for the Coloured vote. But when in the elections of 1929 the National Party got only 10% of the coloured vote, the National Party dropped the “coloureds” and adopted the divisive ideology and strategy of apartheid. In the early 1990s with the goals of the anti-apartheid struggle finally in sight and in light of an expanded franchise, the National Party was again forced to redefine Afrikaners to include the interests of the “coloured” voters (who were again being courted as “Brown Afrikaners”) with considerable success.

Thus, the same party—the National Party or the “Nats”—that was responsible for the segregation and forced removals of the Coloured population in the Western Cape was transformed in the mid-1990s into the official party of Cape Coloureds. Consequently, in the Western Cape the National Party has had to be accountable to their Coloured constituency, for better or worse, as the party’s political future rests with them and not with South African whites. Nonetheless, a pervasive doubt about the legitimacy of their history, their social identities, and their uncertain “ethnicity” is

a continuing and painful theme among the “coloured” people of the Western Cape. Of course, nothing is ever stable or predictable in politics or in personal or cultural identity. The jury is not yet out and it remains to be seen what the Cape Coloured population will ultimately make of its new franchise and ultimately of themselves and their place in the New South Africa.

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¹ See Scheper-Hughes 1994; 1995; 1998; 2000a; 2000b

² This story was told to me by many friends and informants in the Western Cape. My son-in-law, Santos Roman, was a primary school child when his family was forced to leave District Six and made to reside in one of the ugly sand trap townships of the Cape Flats. His father, Michael Roman, who had worked for many years as a librarian's assistant at the University of Cape Town, never recovered from that forced removal.