



Better the Devil You Know?

... there was nothing like the Cape, which Drake called the fairest in the whole circumference of the earth, the Cape, with mountains falling everywhere into the sea, and some age and grace not known to the harsh hinterland, with its bitter problems of history and race.

—Alan Paton, *South African Tragedy: The Life and Times of Jan Hofmeyr*

Introduction

One person's coalition is another's racism, one voter's "majority" is another's "minority," and one constituency's understanding of "democracy" is another's experience of "antiblackness." Insofar as the 1999 South African election results in the Western Cape can be reduced to a truism or three, this cryptic analysis can stand as an accurate description of what transpired in the nation's most racially fractious province. Much as in the first democratic elections in 1994, the predominantly coloured Western Cape was again five years later the "most hotly contested province in South Africa"¹ and one of only two regions in the country that did not

return the African National Congress (ANC) to regional power. The other province is KwaZulu Natal, where the Zulu-based² Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) of Mangosuthu Buthelezi also repeated its 1994 triumph over the ANC;³ although the IFP won a (slim) majority in the province and eventually headed the regional government, the ANC engaged in some serious power brokering in an effort to claim the Buthelezi region for itself.⁴ The Western Cape is, however, distinct even from KwaZulu Natal. Although the IFP strongly opposed the ANC, it is not the party of apartheid. For two successive elections, the Western Cape has rejected the

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ANC and voted the National Party (NP), the old apartheid government, into provincial office.

In this regard, 1994 represents the more momentous political event, because by casting their ballot for the "Nationalists" coloureds were distancing themselves not only from the ANC but also from its iconographic and internationally revered leader, Nelson Mandela. Impacted as the 1994 results were, there is nonetheless a striking difference between the two elections in the region. Whereas the 1994 results gave the NP (as it was then still known) a clear mandate to govern, the 1999 outcome was considerably more contentious. Not only did the second election see the Western Cape split the bulk of its votes between the ANC and the New National Party (NNP, the current incarnation of the NP), but the former organization reversed the earlier outcome and actually outgained the provincial rulers. The ANC won 41.92 percent of the vote as opposed to the NNP's 38.50; in 1994 the NP won 56 percent of the vote in the Western Cape as opposed to the ANC's 34 percent. A third party, the predominantly white liberal organization, the Democratic Party (the DP, once known as the

Progressive Federal Party but it changed its name in the 1980s, modeling itself after its American forebear), could only muster 4 percent in the first election.⁵

As significant as the ANC gains were, they did not constitute a workable majority. Soundly defeated at the national level (with its percentage of the vote reduced from 20 in 1994 to less than 7 in 1999), the NNP was intent on retaining the Western Cape as its (sole) power base. So much did the ANC "triumph" in the region galvanize the NNP that its leader Gerald Morkel rapidly formed a coalition to, as he put it, "resist the African National Congress 'assault' on the province."⁶ The ANC was to be "resisted" at all costs and even though the NNP was unable to govern on its own, the "Nats"—as they are colloquially known—were not short of a powerful ally or two in the province.

Intent on remaining in regional office, the NNP quickly made common cause with the energized and surprisingly successful DP, which won 11.96 percent of the vote in the province (a gain of almost 8 percent after its dismal showing in 1994.) Displacing the NNP as the official opposition in the national parliament, the DP and its leadership

is fiercely opposed to the ANC. The NNP also managed to garner some support, albeit not unqualified, from the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP); a small organization, the ACDP obtained 2.8 percent of the vote, a crucial segment of the vote in so closely contested a region. Unlike the DP, however, the ACDP is more ambiguous about its relationship to the party of Thabo Mbeki, the ANC leader who succeeded Nelson Mandela, and often functioned as an arbitrator in the disputes between the "big three" in the Western Cape. It was thus with varying degrees of reluctance, especially on the part of the ACDP, since the DP and the NNP seemed able to quickly repair the sometimes bitter electoral differences that had distinguished them in the 1999 campaign, that these three parties decided to form a coalition provincial government. In response to this exclusion, the ANC declared itself as the "winner" in the Western Cape, claiming that by virtue of having obtained the greatest share of the vote it had achieved the right to lead the provincial government; later on the ANC refused the subservient position offered by the NNP leaders (two or three, again depending on who is recounting the story, of the twelve cabinet posts offered them). Recalling the anti-apartheid rhetoric and policies of the 1980s, the ANC called upon its membership, aided by its allies in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), to make the Western Cape "ungovernable" and to oust the NNP-led coalition. At one such event, on June 15, 1999, the ANC-COSATU alliance brought downtown Cape Town, the provincial capital, to a halt with its "rolling mass action." But the ANC abandoned this strategy fairly quickly and instead reluctantly took its seat as the province's official opposition.

In and of themselves, as this essay will demonstrate, neither the excessive political

maneuvering by all the parties nor the bare statistics (the slight but salient difference between 41 and 38 percent) provide an accurate or subtle-enough sense of the region's history, the racial antagonisms and differences, and the ideological stakes that gird this battle between the old governing party and the new. Unlike the rest of the country, the Western Cape represents an anomalous politics. It is not marked by the contestation between the predominantly black ANC and the largely white NNP—or even the ANC and the mainly white, wealthy DP. In this province, the paradigmatic South African racial binaries are both displaced and redefined by the presence and the voting predilections of the coloured community. Described as "bastards of debauchery" by their own poet Arthur Nortje, coloureds are the hybrid product of that first exchange between European colonialists and the indigenous communities of South Africa—an encounter that occurred mainly in and around the Western Cape.

From its earliest history, the Western Cape was, and it continues to be (in crucial ways), an exceptional, "un-South African" region, the province where the political terrain is different from that of the rest of the country. It is a distinct political landscape, the only province in the country where blacks (or "Africans," the term that currently has greater resonance) do not constitute the majority.⁸ The Western Cape is also the only province where a historically disenfranchised constituency (coloureds) once enjoyed, even in the initial years of apartheid, a qualified franchise—this right was determined by property ownership, thereby limiting the vote to coloured middle classes. Coloureds in the other three provinces, Natal, the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal, were not allowed to be on this "common" voters roll. Furthermore, until the late 1970s the Western Cape was a "coloured preferen-

tial labour area." This apartheid hiring policy meant that, in the Western Cape, coloureds (after whites, of course,) had first rights to employment opportunities—they were privileged over Indians and blacks, in that order. In the apartheid era, even though all the groups were disenfranchised, coloureds and Indians ranked above blacks in the racial hierarchy and were "less oppressed." Coloureds and Indians had, respectively, access to marginally better education, housing, health care, and employment opportunities in the Western Cape and Natal. But for all the province's unique racial character, Western Cape coloureds do not constitute a singular voting bloc; this is a community divided along the fault lines of class, language, and "culture."

Using the two democratic elections as a pivot, this essay will explore beyond the aftermath of the 1994 and 1999 results in the Western Cape. The focus here is both the rationale for and the consequences of the coloured vote in the province. Central to both these issues is an examination of how the black-coloured dynamic—or antagonism—is reconfigured in post-apartheid South Africa and, as important, how the residues of apartheid's racial categories have manifested in the democratic elections. Crucial to these analyses of both the intra- and intercommunity differences is an interrogation of how the complex post-apartheid role played by the coloured community in the Western Cape elections is squarely at odds with the anti-apartheid, anti-NP history of this constituency. It is not simply that the coloured community's support, especially that of its working class, has enabled the architects of apartheid to win the region (a development that is in itself ideologically loaded), but that an issue of greater consequence resides in this tendency. What is the *raison d'être* for coloureds' voting pattern?

A Distinctly South African Dilemma: Explicating Coloured Racism

Historically coloureds were part of the disenfranchised community, but a significant section of the coloured working class in the Western Cape has now twice distanced itself from the "black" ANC and thrown in its political lot with the NNP and, increasingly, its middle class with the DP. As a journalist argued in the wake of the results, the pattern in the working-class townships of the Cape Flats (home to this constituency) has stayed constant over the two elections: "Despite a significant change to the overall picture in the region, key voting patterns have remained remarkably consistent with the NP still strong in predominantly coloured areas and the ANC sweeping the region's African vote. The vote in the traditionally suburban white areas has swung sharply to the DP." Although the NNP still "predominated" in the "coloured areas" in the 1999 elections, its political base was clearly revealed to be the working-class townships; this is in contrast to 1994 when it drew votes across class lines in the coloured community. Like its white counterpart, the coloured middle class has traditionally been based in the "suburbs"—not the same geographical spaces, but constructs that are ideologically similar and distinct from, in the case of the coloured middle class, the working-class townships of the Cape Flats. As is the case with white middle-class support for the DP, the party has been the electoral recipient of a coloured middle class disaffected with the NNP (for whom both racial constituencies voted in considerable numbers in 1994) and wary of the ANC. It should be said, however, that several progressive members of this class, coloured, white, and black, are strong supporters of Mandela and Mbeki's organization. The question then remains, why has the ANC been so soundly and repeatedly rejected by the (working-class) coloured community?



Coloured Woman in Genadendal. Photo by Kristen Clarke.

What happened to the historic alliances that linked coloureds to Indians, blacks, and progressive whites in the anti-apartheid movement?

Integral to the answer is an issue that is publicly unspeakable (or barely articulable): coloured racism. An archetypally hybrid community, coloureds represent both the conjoining of and the disjuncture between black and white South Africans. Linked biologically to both but fully claimed politically by neither (an oppressed minority during the apartheid regime, they now find themselves a regional—or ethnic, some might suggest—minority in the ANC era), coloureds occupy the precarious racial interstices. Consequently, they have shown themselves to be a “defensive” community, wary of racial elites—be they black or white—and more likely to act out of apprehension than hope. There is in the coloured community a generalized fear of the black majority, both suburbanites and township dwellers conceiving of themselves as communities under threat from the “black” ANC; this fear of blacks,¹⁰ a major weapon in the NP’s ideological arsenal, is complicated by a barely spoken sense of racial superiority that is largely—but not exclusively—derived from apartheid’s paradigm.

Apartheid oppressed all people of color, but not always in the same way or to the same extent—which, of course, was one of its more sophisticated maneuvers, although it could not have predicted its effects upon the post-apartheid elections. The Western Cape results of 1994 and 1999 demonstrate the legacy of apartheid thinking. Its racial categories continue to show how, for reasons both expedient and explicable, coloured South Africans have internalized and deployed its racist paradigm. Through its decision to affiliate with the NP and subsequently the NNP, the coloured working class is rejecting the ANC’s ideological and racial profile—coloureds do not want to make common

cause with blacks because they believe that it will endanger their political base in the Western Cape and therefore their tenuous hold on the nation’s radically transformed political landscape. For coloureds, the “new” nation is only tenable through an alliance with the repressive (old) apartheid regime; the post-apartheid state can only be experienced as ideologically “safe” when the political apparatus takes on an apartheid cast; reconfigured, but not unrecognizable, the Nats offer a haven from the black-identified ANC. As a coloured participant put it to NNP officials on a radio call-in show, “If this is the price we, as coloured people, have to pay for apartheid, you must bring it back.”¹¹ In the coloured political imagination, apartheid remains—for this constituency—a viable political philosophy, a mode that can easily be retreated to when this community feels that it is under attack by the black majority.

The line that separates coloured fear from coloured racism is a thin and nebulous one. Although the two political phenomena are often distinct modalities, they also reinforce and mutate into each other. They are frequently indistinguishable from each other, racism girding or motivating fear—or fear serving as a catalyst for racism. (And racism, of course, is not the sole province of coloureds or whites. Black racism has shown itself to be a real political phenomenon as well in South Africa.) This is not to render fear and racism as ideological substitutes for each other; neither is it an attempt to gloss coloured racism or to misrepresent the political purchase and resonance of this hybrid constituency’s fear. Rather, it is to recognize the complicated and often-unspoken relationship between these two highly charged political responses.

None of this, however, can undermine either the reality or the political efficacy of coloured racial trepidation. It is a response born out of the complex experience of mar-

ginality, racial difference (which borders perilously on superiority), and an understanding of the ANC as an "Africanist" party. In the coloured community, the ANC is viewed less as an "ethnic" institution, in the IFP mold where Zulus constitute the organization's base, than as a party dominated by, committed to, and affiliated with the "pan-ethnic" black majority. (Although it draws significantly from the Xhosa community, the ANC includes blacks from a whole range of ethnic and, it should be said, racial groups. Its history as the oldest liberation movement in South Africa—founded in 1912—ensured its widespread appeal to all ethnic and racial communities, including Zulus, whites, and coloureds.) But from the perspective of the coloured working class, the ANC is a party for the dominant "race" in South Africa, a conception of "blackness" that does not—or cannot, or will not, to phrase that more emphatically—incorporate the experience of the majority of people in the Western Cape.

Commenting on coloureds' proprietariness about the region, the postelection editorial in the left-of-center *Mail & Guardian* argued, "The most marginalised people in the Western Cape, the Africans, who have long been kept from any economic or political share of the province, are excluded once again. The subliminal message is that the whites, and a large section of the coloureds, have ganged up to 'fight blacks.'"¹² The chief catalyst in the process by which the NNP and the DP became political bedfellows, the coloured community implicitly sanctioned an alliance committed to "ganging up" on the regional minority. Moreover, the "message" that large sections of the coloured

electorate were issuing to their black fellow citizens was, of course, anything but "subliminal." By voting for the NNP, the Cape Flats working class was clearly articulating its antipathy to, as well as fear and rejection of, the ANC. In this instance, coloured fear and racism function as political collaborators, the latter barely—if at all—disguising the former. The "message" here is that the Western Cape would not be, unlike the rest of the country, a black-run province. As an arena of coloured demographic domination, the region set itself against, and outside of, the ideology of the national government.

An Anti-Hegelian Sense of History

Because coloureds understand themselves as alienated from the "new" nation, the ANC's strategy of shaming coloureds into voting for it failed—or at least failed to capture the votes of Cape Flats residents. Speaking on the eve of the election, the ANC chairman Patrick Lekota, implicitly addressing the coloured constituency, labeled the province's

1994 vote a "big scandal."¹³ "History," Lekota warned, "would not forgive the people of the Western Cape if they voted the New NP back into power."¹⁴ Girding Lekota's racially loaded (and coded) critique of the coloured community is a singular conception of black "history," an understanding that essentializes and homoge-

nizes the anti-apartheid experience. Whose "history" would be morally offended if coloureds, whom Lekota the euphemistically refers to as the "people of the Western Cape," voted "discrepantly"? Does the post-apartheid condition allow for only a singular "history"?

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Is the ANC the only party sanctioned by anti- and post-apartheid "history," and therefore the only party for which coloureds should vote? Does this invocation of "history" both confine democratic choice and substitute for a serious engagement with the complex politics of the coloured community? Is "history" the civil rendering of that most stinging of indictments, that coloured racism propelled the NNP into office? Such is the stridency of Lekota's position that his pronouncements offer no ideological accommodation for coloureds but a justification for this community's fears. The ANC chairman's rhetoric contains within it the threat that in post-apartheid South Africa coloureds will once again become an oppressed minority, oppressed this time not by a minority white regime but by a majority black government.

Nationally disempowered, coloureds have shown themselves to be distrustful of a post-apartheid political discourse that seemed only nominally to include them or to berate them—as Lekota does—for not fulfilling their historical responsibilities. By voting against the ANC, coloureds have, in the implicitly Marxist terms of the party's chairman, taken their place outside on the wrong side of History. Perceiving themselves as nationally isolated, large sections of the coloured community have retreated into the laager of "racial" solidarity. Neither black nor white, disenfranchised by apartheid and physiognomically, ideologically, and culturally prevented from gaining easy access to a post-apartheid "blackness," coloureds have refused to cede the only seat of office they can realistically claim. Angered by the implementation of a policy of affirmative action they believe applies to "Africans" and holds out no promise for them,¹⁵ without the material resources that the majority of whites have access to, without the relative economic wealth of the Indian community, the embattled coloured community has been compelled to negotiate its place

on the post-apartheid landscape. Coloureds' understanding of the contemporary political climate is devoid of any sense of Hegelian historical inevitability—they have no sense of manifest destiny, of an unstoppable "progress" through the unfolding of political events, of ascending to power. Instead, their sense of the future is (and has been) so precarious that coloureds have looked backward, turned against their own history (of deracination, discrimination, injustice by the NP) in order to chart a tentative course into a post-apartheid world that holds little promise for the township residents of the Cape Flats.

Historically, hybridity has always rendered their position more tenuous, more ambiguous, more likely to require adjustments and accommodations with the powers-that-be—regardless of the ruling bloc's racial identity. Coloureds have always had to negotiate with power—from variously disenfranchised locations—because hegemony has never been an option for them. Even in the Western Cape, where they are at their most politically commanding, their ultimate authority relies on their capacity to make deals with whites—they cannot rule on their own. Their place in South African history is contingent; their political agency has always been limited and uncertain. If they have a fear of "History," it is explicable. Their understanding of political events is characterized by a wariness and defensiveness born out of the repeated experience of marginalization: Outside of the Western Cape, they have rarely been at the center of the political fray.

It is understandable, then, that in place of Lekota's grand narrative of "History," coloureds in the Western Cape are intent upon making a history that is outside the Hegelian paradigm. By voting their fear, coloureds, paradoxically, hope to overcome—or at least palliate or ameliorate—that selfsame fear; by voting against blacks, a propensity inscribed with a racial (if not al-

ways overtly racist) dimension, coloureds can exercise political "authority" over blacks and thereby secure their own future in the province. The elections in the Western Cape offer coloureds the unusual opportunity to chart their own political destiny, instilling a rare measure of agency in this community. Contrary to Alan Paton's idyllic description of "the Cape" (as Hofmeyr experienced it in the first decades of the twentieth century), this is—and has always been, some would argue—a region where the "problems of history and race" have shown themselves to be at least as "bitter" and contentious as those of the "hinterland."

Even though coloureds previously constituted a crucial segment of the oppressed, the historic memory of anti-apartheid activism has not (yet) been able to overcome the expectation of post-apartheid "disenfranchisement." In the post-apartheid moment, coloureds have enjoyed the privilege of the universal franchise, but their experience has remained peripheral to the "new" black nation. It is only, ironically, by voting their racial difference that they have made their mark on the post-apartheid dispensation; it is only by rejecting full and unqualified integration into the nation that they have become a part of the national discourse. By announcing themselves as "disjunctively black" (that is, with a problematic capacity for identification with the white-dominated NNP, and DP, to a lesser extent), coloureds have given voice to the challenges of constructing a "rainbow nation of God"—to invoke Archbishop Desmond Tutu's deeply religious and metaphoric desire for racial unity. Coloureds, people of so diverse and varied hues who span almost the entire spectrum of that "rainbow," seemed to insist that this imagined nation could not be achieved without understanding how the constituent parts of the racial whole related to each other—or more precisely, how those parts did not re-

late, or only related in certain moments or modes, or in response to certain kinds of interpellations rather than others, to each other. But even though coloureds reframed the national discourse on race and voting patterns, it is still unclear how—if at all—these issues will be taken up. Will the Western Cape remain a political itinerant? Will coloured idiosyncrasy and "difference" be offered as an all-encompassing explanation for its "aberrant" voting tendencies?

The Complications of Coloured Working-Class Politics

Nowhere is coloured disjunctiveness demonstrated more instructively than in the bifurcated allegiances of unionized coloured workers. Members of COSATU, the ANC's alliance partner, these subjects would be presumed to be endemically sympathetic to the governing party. Ironically, however, "Many of the New NP supporters, especially women, are employed in the clothing industry and are members of a union that is part of COSATU. . . . Yet they form the backbone of the New NP support. The cry on the ground from coloured people living in the dusty townships of the Cape Flats remains 'better the devil we know.'"¹⁶ Although they are progressive on the labor front, there is nonetheless a telling inconsistency in their politics. This apparently irreconcilable ideological split between a commitment to trade unionism and recalcitrant voting tendencies suggests that working-class coloureds—especially but not exclusively—have a complicated sense of both political hierarchy and identity. This constituency is prepared to affiliate itself with an ANC-aligned union, COSATU, but these workers from the Cape Flats are not willing to trust the ANC with governing "their" province.

The most remarkable aspect of coloured support for the old apartheid regime is that the NP was responsible for several acts of vi-

olence against the coloured—and other disenfranchised—communities. Shortly after it came to power in 1948, the NP destroyed coloured families with the Population Registration Act (which created the four racial categories and a piece of which left this hybrid constituency especially vulnerable to the interpretation of apartheid bureaucrats); it removed coloureds from the common voters roll in the Cape Province; and it instituted the Group Areas Act, which radically reorganized the nation's geography according to the racist precepts of the Population Registration Act. The most psychically damaging of these laws, the Group Areas Act has left a memory of legislatively engineered deracination that is still vibrant in the community but has not prevented members of the working class—that constituency most affected by NP uprooting—from voting for a party that threw them out of their homes on the fringes of downtown Cape Town. Coloureds, a journalist implied, suffer from an especially intriguing and selective variety of political amnesia: The “hurt of being removed forcibly from their homes in areas like District Six, Harfield or Claremont seems to be forgotten.”¹⁷ District Six, which borders on the southwestern edge of the city of Cape Town, has assumed mythic status in the coloured imaginary. Until its demolition in 1966, it housed the most vibrant coloured community and it has subsequently been celebrated and mourned in literature, drama, and music.¹⁸

Coloureds, however, have not so much “forgotten” District Six as they have weighed the brutalities of the NP past against the expected injustices of the ANC-dominated future. In this scenario, the NNP “devil” seems the safer historical bet. In any case, the NNP is a party substantially reduced in power: nationally impotent, extremely dependent on the coloured working-class vote to remain in regional office, likely to remain regionally “dominant” not by itself but able to govern

only through coalition, the NNP can be read as an organization with its atrocities behind it. The NNP past is explicable, if by no means justifiable, whereas the prospect of an ANC future is too filled with uncertainty; the ANC is a black-dominated party that could easily overwhelm the coloured community and has already done so in all the other regions of the country where blacks constitute the majority. In provinces such as Gauteng, there is no audible coloured public voice—there coloureds are a publicly silent minority.

If the NNP is the “devil,” familiar to the coloured working class because it shares with this party an affinity for Afrikaans as both a language and a culture (coloureds have, at some points in South African history, been figured as “brown Afrikaners), the ANC is not so much “satanic” as apocalyptic. For the majority community in the Western Cape, ANC rule in the province would signal the ignominious “end” of a collective coloured public voice in South African politics. A fear of political “extinction” is, of course, an anxiety for all coloured constituencies, so that in crucial ways the NNP “represents” a spectrum of the community much broader than simply the working class; because the Nats offered (and continue to offer for some constituencies) themselves as a counterweight to the ANC, the NP was a beneficiary of a huge number of coloured votes in the 1994 election, a moment when the middle class did not have the DP as a real political option.

However ironic it might be that the “Nats” have been reconstructed as the standard bearer for this community, there is now so much congruence between the NNP and the coloureds (especially the working class) that its electoral defeat by the ANC would signal the public disappearance of this minority constituency. The “devil,” in this case, is not only known but is certainly preferable. The “devil” is afforded that rare and paradoxical emblemization: Ward off a political evil

even greater than yourself, that which is not known ("better the devil you know than the one you don't") and is consequently more frightening. As much as anything, this incomplete aphorism reveals the depths of coloureds' fear of their region's black citizens, a province where the "ANC raked up about 90 percent of the African vote."¹⁹

Fear of a Black Planet: Or, You Are Who You Vote For

Divided into two main constituencies, the coloured middle class is split unevenly between a progressive, leftist, mainly pro-ANC grouping and wealthier, more conservative suburbanites who share their working class's trepidation—if not the voting predilections the second time around—about the ANC. Relatively well educated, certainly in relation to its black if not its white peers, this latter segment of the coloured middle class has increasingly distanced itself from the rhetoric of the NNP. For this suburban constituency, the 1999 elections represented the opportunity to find a political home: a party that would protect its investments, guarantee its safety in one of the most violent societies in the world,²⁰ and address it in a discourse untainted by the racist history of the NNP. Much like the bourgeoisie in many European and postcolonial countries, this post-apartheid South African middle class wants all the trappings of civil society—a liberal democracy founded upon individual rights, a polity not driven by the ethnic and racial identities that gird South African elections.

Except for the issue of prosperity, which the NNP repeatedly stressed (taking credit for the not-unremarkable economic accomplishments of the Western Cape), "The Western Cape is one of the wealthiest provinces—second only to Gauteng—and last month a leading business magazine awarded Mr. Morkel

[the NNP premier of the region] the Golden Arrow Award for the best-run province."²¹

The NNP could not deliver to this constituency. The coloured middle class reads the political landscape from a vantage point very different from that of both the NNP leadership and its own working class. In the buildup to the election, the NNP seemed to be aware of this middle-class drift away from it and many of its campaign slogans seemed aimed at this crucial constituency. In its April 1999 mouthpiece, awkwardly entitled "The New NP News," the headlines proclaimed the "Western Cape a jewel" and boasted of a growth rate of 4 percent, "the highest in the country."²² But the coloured middle class sees the NNP as the party of the past, an organization it could support in the interregnum and the first democratic election but that will not serve its interests in the future. When a local newspaper commented that the "Democratic Party . . . appears to be making inroads especially into the NNP's support base,"²³ this was the constituency the writer had in mind.

With its slick and aggressive advertising campaign, with its promise to "fight back" against crime and corruption and its insistent liberalism (it is, in moments, a philosophy indistinguishable from that of the ANC, especially in economic terms), the DP offered itself as a better political fit for the coloured middle class. The DP, furthermore, has another advantage over the NNP: "culture," for want of a more apt description. Predominantly English speaking and professional in profile (teachers, doctors, lawyers, middle managers), "culture" distinguishes the coloured middle class from not only its own (mainly) Afrikaans-speaking working class but also from the traditional profile of the NNP—and, to a far greater degree, from the old NP. More than anything, the NP was the party of the Afrikaners; its 1948 victory over the United Party (UP) of then-Prime Minister Jan Smuts, South Africa's highly re-



Coloured Youth at Play in the Cape. Photo by Kristen Clarke.

garded wartime leader, not only inaugurated the policy of apartheid, it also marked the triumph over the largely working-class and lower-middle-class Afrikaners over the native, British-identified, middle-class English speakers; this anglicized constituency

criticized for what many perceive to be his cynicism.

English functions, in this regard, not only as a language but as an ideology. It represents an affiliation with the liberal traditions of Britain and the United States, it suggests a

was one with which the coloured middle classes of the first half of the century were closely aligned.²⁴ Until the early 1950s, when the NP removed Western Cape coloureds from the common voters roll, this middle class was extremely supportive of the UP and played a small but significant role in the party's election victories. In a historical sense, the coloured middle class's transference of allegiance to the DP in the second post-apartheid election signals a "return" to its political roots. It should be said, however, that the DP of the 1990s is not the UP of the 1940s and 1950s—the former lacks the clear, if problematic, political principles of the latter. In fact, the DP leader Tony Leon has been roundly

cosmopolitanism, a worldliness that is foreign to both the NNP and the coloured working class. The lingua franca of the DP, English makes the Democrats the "natural" political home for this coloured constituency—both because it conducts its business principally in the home language of the coloured middle class and because the party is its political metier. The sophisticated, postindustrial, global culture symbolized by the DP, with a leadership derived mainly from the professional classes (more affluent but ideologically similar to the coloured middle class), enables this coloured constituency to situate itself outside of the racial binary that dominates Western Cape politics. It allows the coloured middle class to transcend race through ideology—and class, of course. One of the most important political developments of the 1999 elections was that it facilitated the transformation of the coloured middle class from an ethnically—or racially—based constituency into, as Marx might have it, a class to and for itself. It has put ideological distance between itself and the Nats, and its relative material wealth and its cultural capital has enabled it to remove itself—in significant measure, if not totally—from a too-easy association with the coloured working class. This is a constituency that can be addressed by the DP in ways unavailable to township residents; this is a constituency for which the NNP only has limited appeal, unlike the almost "dependent" relationship the Cape Flats townships have to the Nats. Unlike the coloured working class, middle-class coloureds have dispensed with—or are in the process of dispensing with—apartheid's racial categories and they are now moving into a "postracial" future, one where class and not race is the primary determinant of political identity.

Even though the DP has little chance of assuming power nationally or even regionally (unlike the NNP), it nevertheless performs a

pivotal function in a post-apartheid society. Because the "new" nation seems as yet (or is that increasingly?) unable to produce a viable opposition to the ruling ANC in the second democratic elections, the DP has, particularly with the decline of the NNP nationally, eagerly stepped into this breach. By promising in its campaign slogans that "It's time to fight back" and "Only the DP has the guts to fight back," the DP is reiterating one of the basic tenets of liberal democracy: It is a system that believes in checks and balances, not the least important of which is a strong opposition to keep a keen eye on the ways in which the government, and the country, is run. Since the ANC has virtually a two-thirds majority, the government is especially in need of a vigilant opposition. Unless, a newspaper headline recently warned, South Africa "produce[s] a fresh and vigorous opposition worthy of our name" by the next election (scheduled for 2004) "our democracy will be in peril."²⁵

Whether this "peril" is real or imagined is not so much insignificant as obscuring the greater issue: There is an anxiety about black ANC rule that is best described as "postcolonially orientalist" in nature. The "fear of a black planet," as the rap group Public Enemy would have it, found articulation during the election as opposition parties such as the DP, the IFP, and the NNP cautioned against the possibility of an ANC two-thirds majority. If the ANC obtained this magical figure, the "only substantial check against ANC power will come from the independent institutions established to monitor government—the Auditor-General, the Public Protector, the Health Commission, and, most importantly, the Constitutional Court."²⁶ Since the ANC would be in a position to determine the function and composition of these "independent institutions," the capacity of the "Constitutional Court" to act as public watchdog—to serve the national and not the party interests—would be severely compromised, if not

utterly jeopardized; with a two-thirds ANC majority the very independence of these public bodies would already be highly compromised. Although these concerns are not without their validity (the ANC has shown itself to be, in moments, corrupt, reluctant to accept responsibility for the failures in and of government, and even incompetent), the unspoken specter motivating these uncertainties is obviously the postcolonial world, especially sub-Saharan Africa. With the violence that is wracking neighboring Angola in the northwest (in large measure resulting from the earlier sponsorship of the apartheid government), the excesses of Robert Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe in the northeast, and the devastation that continues to mar life in central Africa (the ethnic clashes that killed millions in Rwanda and Burundi, the dictatorial impulses of the Congo's Laurent Kabila that makes peace in the region almost impossible), South Africans have a clear idea of how their nation should not be run. In these three sites, the orientalist fantasy (overwritten by the Conradian turn of events in the Congo) of Africa's excessive capacity for chaos appears to have been fulfilled.

With its more-or-less peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy, with its massive wealth and its sophisticated infrastructure relative to the rest of the continent, with its powerful links to international capitals (if not always ready access to global capital), South Africa sees itself as continental leader. Thabo Mbeki's notion of an "African Renaissance," however flawed and unconsidered it may be, is founded upon the idea that through South Africa's vision it will refute orientalist fantasies of the continent as a dark and unmanageable space. But by repeatedly invoking the dangers of a "one-party state" (such as Zaire and Malawi once were and Zimbabwe has literally become), DP and the rest of the opposition are raising the apparition of how South African society might degenerate

if the ANC is left unchecked. Opposition here is only secondarily about providing an alternate form of government; it is principally about playing the race card through the deck of postcolonial failure in the continent. Coloureds, who are already addressed as different by both the NNP and the DP, are implicitly provided with yet another way of marking themselves off from the majority of their fellow South Africans by evoking the failure of postcolonialism as an inherently raced—which is to say, black—phenomenon. The orientalist critique of the ANC offers itself as the term through which coloured racism and fear can effectively be melded; through orientalism coloured "fearfulness," to use a composite term, can simultaneously be denuded of its pejorative connotations and succinctly articulated.

Positing the ANC as a postcolonial government allows for the uncomplicated specter of blackness—however "erased/eraced" that community might ostensibly be—to be deployed against post-apartheid South Africa. Ruled by a black majority, the "new" nation is inherently given to bureaucratic incompetence, chaos, death, destruction, and corruption. Orientalism enables coloured "fearfulness" to disguise itself and its own deep psychic and ideological fissures (where does fear end and racism begin?).

But situating the ANC as a postcolonial government and the NNP (and the DP) as the "guardians of democracy" is so politically hyperbolic and incommensurate a representation that it draws into question nothing so much as the condition of colouredness. After all, what the specter of the emaciated "devil" brings into focus is not so much the NNP but the concerns and anxious hopes of its power base. The "devil," familiar to all South Africans and a political threat to no one (not even in the Western Cape), has been recruited to the cause of giving public voice to the multivalent anxieties and uncertainties of

(mainly) the coloured working class. The historical tide has turned and the "devil" is now, somewhat unwittingly and with no small amount of mutual expedience, in the political employ of those it once ruled and oppressed.

Notes

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1. "Turnout Will Be Key to Power Balance," *The Cape Argus*, May 6, 1999, p. 2.

2. See Shula Marks's essay, "Natal, The Zulu Royal Family and the Ideology of Separation," *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, edited by Williams Beinart and Saul Dubow (New York: Routledge, 1995), for an overview of the history of Zulu "separatism."

3. In KwaZulu Natal, the IFP won more than 42 percent of the vote, as opposed to the almost 39 percent of the ANC.

4. Several journalists reported that Buthelezi would be offered the vice presidency in exchange for an ANC premiership in the province. This deal fell through with Buthelezi remaining a cabinet minister and Inkatha ruling KwaZulu Natal.

5. "And the Big Winner Is . . . Apathy," <http://sun-times.co.za/1999/06/06/news/cape.nct07.htm>.

6. "'Bitchy' DP Sparks Fallout with Morkel," *The Cape Argus*, April 26, 1999, p. 5.

7. Arthur Nortje, "Pornography: Campus," in *Dead Roots* (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 17.

8. See F. van Zyl Slabbert and David Welsh's *South Africa's Options: Strategies for Sharing Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979) for an interesting suggestion as to how minorities can be protected in democracies that are intensely raced but where the discourse of nonracialism dominates. Making the argument that all power is political, van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh argue for the protection of minorities. Although this reading of the South African landscape is flawed (whites may be a political minority, but they are by no means economically or culturally vulnerable), this argument has real resonance for the condition of the

coloured community. Here is a constituency that is a genuine minority, and the need to protect it in raced terms offers a signal way to engage the complexities of this constituency's position in the post-apartheid dispensation.

9. "And the Big Winner Is . . . Apathy."

10. At the height of anti-apartheid protests in the 1970s and 1980s, the NP regime coined the Afrikaans phrase "swart gevaar," which translates literally as "fear of blacks," to explain its determination to avoid a black majority government in the country. This phrase was often used in conjunction with "rooi gevaar" ("fear of reds," which is to say "Communists"), as the government suggested that the anti-apartheid movement was controlled and sponsored by Moscow.

11. "Callers Seek New NP Assurance on Crime and Colour-Coded Jobs," *The Cape Argus*, May 20, 1999, p. 2.

12. "Don't Fight Blacks," *Mail & Guardian* 15, No. 23 (June 11-17, 1999), p. 22.

13. "Don't Put Nats Back in, Lekota Warns," *The Cape Argus*, May 26, 1999, p. 2.

14. *Ibid.*

15. See "Callers Seek New NP Assurance on Crime and Colour-Coded Jobs," p. 2.

16. "Victory Still in Balance—Survey: Undecided Coloured Voters Believe No Party Has Their Interests at Heart," *The Cape Argus*, May 13, 1999, p. 3.

17. *Ibid.*

18. See, for example, the fiction of District Six-born authors such as Richard Rive and Alex La Guma. See also the writing of James Matthews.

19. "And the Big Winner Is . . . Apathy."

20. In a preelection op-ed piece, the NNP, arguing for the return of the death penalty, pointed out that South Africa has the "second highest murder rate in the world." The country also has the highest percentage of rapes internationally. See "Bring Back the Death Penalty, Says NNP," *The Cape Argus*, April 26, 1999, p. 16.

21. "Turnout Will Be Key to Power Balance," *The Cape Argus*, May 6, 1999, p. 14.

22. *The New NP News*, Edition 2, No. 2 (April 1999), p. 1.

23. "Turnout Will Be Key to Power Balance," p. 14.

24. See Gavin Lewis's *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African "Coloured" Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) for an account of this coloured-UP "alliance."

25. "When Opposition Becomes a Conspiracy of Dunces," *The Sunday Times*, May 30, 1999, p. 1.

26. *Ibid.*