

Apartheid's demons: Satanism and moral panic in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The excavation of alternate histories that contradict or complexify the master narrative is a crucial step in the process of decolonization. This paper traces one such story, but of colonizer rather than of colonized, examining some of the symptoms and effects of decolonization on the culture and national mythologies of white¹ South Africans through the prism of an uncanny event that characterized the late apartheid period. Between 1984 and 1992, white media, schools and public institutions were swept up in a Satanism scare. This was a pervasive moral panic that manifested itself everywhere, from government pronouncements to popular magazines and theological tracts, including lurid claims of widespread murder, sexual abuse and other criminal and anti-social behavior. Despite its reach, no evidence of a Satanist conspiracy was ever uncovered and the scare soon slipped entirely from popular memory. This particularized occult moment is thus marked as specifically symptomatic of the moment of late apartheid. Its modalities provide for a reading of questions of race, national identity and historiography, as well as illustrating how the mythic figure of the Satanist became an overdetermined signifier of some of the various phantasmic threats to white South African hegemony: communists, liberals, unruly youth.

Introduction

There is a brief passage in Fanon's "Concerning violence" in which the author discusses the role and relevance of occult superstitions for the colonized native, classing them as mechanisms for the further disavowal of the settler's power, means of containing and displacing the native's murderous rage against her self-imposed overlords and methods of communal identity creation. This world of mysticism and magic is, he writes, yet another fetter that the colonized subject must break:

It has always happened in the struggle for freedom that such a people, formerly lost in an imaginary maze, a prey to unspeakable terrors yet happy to lose themselves in a dreamlike torment, such a people becomes unhinged, reorganizes itself, and in blood and tears gives birth to very real and immediate action (Fanon, 1963:56).

Like the sense of inferiority that accompanies her every interaction with the settler's whiteness, like the traumas of the "native intellectual" who must discover the shared humanity that awaits beyond Enlightenment's clarion call to individualism, this casting off of the bonds of traditional magic and witchcraft is fundamental for the process of decolonization. Eschewing a "permanent confrontation on the phantasmic plane" that hinders the revolutionary process, the people in struggle must turn their attention to more pressing matters (Fanon, 1963:56).

In "The pitfalls of national consciousness," Fanon also suggests that one of the major risks for the project of decolonization was the collapse of secularism, producing sectarianism and then religious revival, with "minor confraternities, local religions and maraboutic cults [showing] a new vitality" (1963:160). This is characteristically prescient in the case of South Africa: one has only to consider the work of Jean and John Comaroff (1999) or anthropologist Adam Ashforth (2005) to encounter the vast affective power of witchcraft beliefs in modern South Africa and the resilient return of "traditional" religion in this country whose struggle terminology was so defiantly Marxist. The occult thus exists in Fanon as a dangerous point of slippage in the process of decolonization, and in modern South Africa as a risky and very real part of day-to-day life.

Yet there is another facet to this notion of the supernatural as it informs the moment of decolonization in South Africa, one that has not yet merited critical consideration, attendant as it is upon a community who are no longer of international interest. The excavation of alternate histories that contradict or complexify the master narrative is a crucial step in the process of decolonization. This paper is an attempt to tell one such story, to relate the forgotten tale of white South Africa's troubled engagement with its own occult demonology as the edifice of apartheid was crumbling around it. It aims also to present a complex and dehomogenized portrayal of the colonizer in contrast to the bulk of literature on the subject, with the assumption that an understanding of the traumas of the colonist can add great depth to an analysis of the conditions under which post-colonial societies emerge.

I will consider the Satanism scare that rocked white South Africa in the last years of apartheid, a powerful moral panic that took hold of the public imagination, harnessing a whole host of folk devils and real enemies into its overdetermined axis. While it took much impetus from concurrent scares in Britain and the U.S., apartheid South Africa's satanic experience evidenced its own set of peculiarities and particularities through which can be read many of the pathologies that attend the

end of whiteness, the symptoms of a society in shock: what Elleke Boehmer calls “this parched place, a society of deadends, closures, multiple restrictions on speech and movement, blockages of every kind, spiritual and political” (1998:52). I will begin by placing the scare in historical context. I will then examine some of its determining factors and consider how the fear of Satanism provided a nexus for a hitherto unconsidered form of resistance to state power within the culture of the colonizer.

State of the nation

South Africa between 1984 and 1994 was in the grip of almost unimaginable change. The period between the second wave of township uprisings in 1985 and Nelson Mandela’s victory in the country’s first multiracial elections in 1994 was fraught with paranoias, perversities and incipient panics as the balance of power swung between the repressive clampdowns of the apartheid state and the vociferous agents of the struggle.

The ANC’s armed winged Umkhonto we Sizwe was causing havoc with guerrilla actions across the country. Grassroots township unrest and violence seemed unstoppable. Cold War engagements in Angola, Mozambique and South West Africa (Namibia) caused continued upheaval and the economy was crippled by international sanctions. The early 1990s saw internecine violence mar the government’s new rhetoric of hope as the ANC clashed with the small but vocal Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party.

The beleaguered state was forced to concede that the structures and methodologies of apartheid were becoming untenable. Survival meant change, but change was slow to come, starting with a series of minor concessions. Two strands of thought made up apartheid mentality: the concept of “separate nations, to save the Afrikaner ‘nation’ from being swamped and to protect its members from black economic competition,” and the “crudely racist belief in black genetic inferiority” (Sparks, 1990:182). Some compromises were made with regard to the latter, with P.W. Botha, the *Groot Krokodil* (Great Crocodile) and last of the great apartheid leaders, straying so far from established Afrikaner doctrine as to call overtly racist dogma “outdated and unnecessary” (Sparks, 1990:182). The despised Immorality Act, banning interracial sexual relations, and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act were both repealed in 1985. However separate development—the policy governing the forced resettlement of blacks into nominally “independent” but economically crippled homelands according to an Afrikaans idea of separate ethnicities (Nixon, 1994:4)—remained on the government’s agenda until late in the 1980s, ensuring the state-endorsed protection of white economic privilege, white land ownership and white monopoly of government and resources. This made a

mockery, too, of the newly sanctioned possibility of interracial marriage: mixed couples could wed, but were forced to abide by a violent separatism in their living options. By the late 1980s, the country had been battered by three successive States of Emergency, suspensions of judicial power and civil law that radically altered understandings of the state's benevolence.

After a stroke in early 1998, Botha resigned as the head of the National Party; reformer F. W. de Klerk became the country's leader in September 1989 (Alden, 1998:272). The way was cleared for the shift that had been coming since the 1976 Soweto uprisings reinvigorated the crippled resistance movement that the state had shattered after Sharpeville in 1960.

A phantom menace

South Africa's Satanism scare took hold in the latter half of this chaotic period, fed by a textbook media panic. In 1993, psychologist Gavin Ivey, one of the few academics to have written critically at any length on the scare, pointed out the "recent claims of...a wave of organized Satanic activity, aimed at overthrowing traditional Christian values and institutions" (1993:180).² Afrikaans publications like *Beeld*, *Rapport*, *Hervormer* and *Die Kerkbode*, the official mouthpiece of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church, the official Calvinist religious body of apartheid South Africa), carried articles on the satanic menace from the early 1980s, but the incidence of these increased enormously by the mid-1980s. Then English language papers, traditionally less conservative, began to catch up: between 1989 and 1992 there were 90–100 archived articles on Satanism per year.³ This number tailed off in 1993, when white focus on Satanism seems to have dimmed in favor of the upheaval of the forthcoming elections.

Much of the fear surrounding Satanism was encoded in worries about foreign films and music, newly inserted into a nation that had, until fairly recently, maintained strict censorship and a prohibitive attitude to American and European cultural products: television, for example, was only broadcast after 1976. Heavy metal bands like England's Iron Maiden, whose growled lyrics were barely decipherable and whose album art featured gargoyles, demons and other signifiers of the occult, became poster children for the moral disaster befalling white South African youth. Copied cassettes of foreign metal bands spread like wildfire, fostering a growing gothic and heavy metal subculture. Black t-shirts, long, dank hair, pentagram symbols and other physical affectations associated with the heavy metal scene became common and, read as signifiers for this new threat by parents and teachers, served as a visual reminder that Satanists were out there.

While similar scares in Britain and the U.S. did involve churches, religion generally performed a secondary role, as succor of victims or moral force of

investigators. The northern hemisphere's witch hunts were largely a legal and psychiatric construct. Elaine Showalter points to the role of therapists and child care professionals in creating the "hysterical contamination" that led to widespread belief in Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) in the U.S. and U.K. (1997:173). In South Africa, however, the scare was literally about fear of the devil, largely managed by churches and the Christian government. Other notable features include demonization of youth culture, a conflation of Satanism with communism and homosexuality and an equation of Eastern religion and mysticism with satanic practice. Also repeated throughout the media coverage is the persistent trope that, although evildoers can be punished for murder, rape, sexual abuse or animal cruelty, Satanism as such is not illegal because South Africa is a country that permits religious freedom. This repeated insistence on the inconveniently liberal policies of one of the most repressive, anachronistic and racialized states the world has ever seen may seem dubious, but is entirely in keeping with white South Africa's unrelenting self-mythology as a Christian nation informed by its impeccable moral standing.

Valerie Sinason, a British psychotherapist who did much to publicize the alleged prevalence of SRA in the U.K., gives the following description of Satanism:

Men and women, dedicated to Aleister Crowley's guiding principle "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law," worship Satan as their god.... They literally turn upside down any moral concept that comes with Christianity. They practice every sexual perversion that exists with children, animals and both sexes. They drink blood and urine and eat feces and insects. They are involved in pornographic films and drug dealing as a way of raising money. They are highly organized [and] successful in their secrecy (1994:3).

South Africa's version of the cult was almost identical: a vast pan-national conspiracy involved with drugs, murder, pornography, child abuse and a panoply of weird behaviors ranging from the anti-social to the illegal. It is worth pointing out that, despite a few scattered examples of criminals who claimed satanic possession as a defense, there has been no evidence of these beliefs.⁴ Adolescents attached to the gothic and heavy metal subcultures were often classified as Satanists by worried adults, and a small number self-identified as such, but none were ever linked to the conspiracy or criminal behavior ascribed to the cult. South African prosecutions of alleged Satanists were limited to grave robbery, vandalism, drug possession and other deviant behavior. This was in sharp contrast to police claims about satanic practice, which included allegations of babies "specially bred for sacrifice to the devil and ritually murdered by having their throats slit and their hearts cut out and eaten" (*Cape Times*, May 19, 1990). In the U.S. and U.K., an embarrassing number of high profile prosecutions relating to child sexual abuse in day care centers

collapsed amidst an almost complete lack of evidence.⁵ A 1994 report commissioned by the British government found no evidence to support any accusations of Satanism or SRA (Showalter, 1997:173). In a magazine interview, Reverend David Nel, a pioneering Satan hunter in the Rand town of Springs, insisted that South Africa was “under attack” from the “biggest threat facing the world today” and estimated that there were more than 200,000 people involved. This would have made up about 10% of the white population, far too significant a figure for such a conspiracy to have gone unproven (*Personality*, March 28, 1987).

This was a moral panic centered around a threat so phantasmic that no proof of its existence has been recorded. The conspiratorial and criminal aspects and thus the degree of danger to the (already weakened) hegemonic status of white Christian South Africa seem to have been completely hysterical. South Africa never fell victim to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, recovered memory, Multiple Personality Syndrome or alien abduction, the other modern epidemics that Showalter (1977) identifies as the descendants of hysteria—so why Satanism? According to Jeffrey Victor, Satanic tales

arise as a response to widespread socioeconomic stresses.... The Satanic cult legend says, in symbolic form, that our moral values are threatened by evil forces beyond our control, and that we have lost faith in the authorities to deal with the threat (1991:221).

Alongside this, the figure of the Satanist provides an object for the displacement of anxiety and the concurrent cohesion of nationalistic sentiment.

Race/identity/nation

Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside, that the “positive” meaning of any term—and thus its “identity”—can be understood (Hall, 1996:4).

Nationalisms are created in the mind. In Benedict Anderson’s formulation, a nation is an “imagined political community,” imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991:6–7). No one member of a nation can know all the other members, yet they are linked together by an idea so powerful that individuals are often willing to kill, or die, for it. How, then, does this imagined idea legitimate itself?

Nationalisms utilize, more than anything else, the idea of naturalness, the idea that the nation is *not* constructed, *not* imagined, that it is as inherent an attribute as, say, one's sex. Afrikanerdom offers myriad examples of how this naturalness is established. Allister Sparks explains the communal origins of the stubborn, individualistic *trekboers* (Afrikaans farmers), whose fierce solitude became subsumed into an ethnic consciousness that created "a single pan-Afrikaner blood brotherhood" (1990:114), "a sense that they were all members of a single nation that had been historically wronged" (1990:118). Leonard Thompson's insightful study *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (1985) examines factors like the Covenant and the Slagtersnek episode of 1815–1816 to illustrate how political mythology created the qualities, histories, duties and responsibilities that defined this new nationalism.⁶ So effective was apartheid's management that, by the 1960s, many white people had largely internalized the ideology (Greenberg, 1987:390).

As the Hall quote above suggests, any identity, in order to constitute itself as natural and fundamental, requires an outside, a group that does not fit within the borders of national identity. We are defined by what we are not as much as by what we are. The creation and definition of the Other, be she gendered, racialized, marked by language, class, lifestyle or any other communalizing factor, allows the concurrent creation and definition of Self. And like the Self, national or ethnic identity is fragile, uncertain, imaginary, always in need of the reinforcement provided by the constant externalizing of the Other. The "minoritization" of a people, writes Homi Bhabha, "must be seen for what it is: the 'other side' of the phantasy of the national 'people-as-one' which disturbs the democratic dream" (1994:202); for the community to be imagined, it must also imagine something outside itself. The imagined community of Afrikanerdom developed initially in response to British rule and the pervasive fear of Anglicization; it was altered, codified and made judicially effective in reaction to the growing tide of black nationalism and industrialization that characterized the start of the twentieth century (see, e.g., Beinart, 1994; Marks and Trapido, 1987). First British, then blacks furnished the necessary material for the creation of nationalist mythology: one as hated ruler, the other bearing the threat of both increased numbers and the horrifying possibility of racial mixing, anathema to the Afrikaans civil religion.

Identity, Hall says, is subject to history and constantly changing (1996:4); and it seems that the constitutive outside of that identity can change, too. At a period in the country's history when the primacy of traditional Afrikaans conservatives is threatened as never before, a new Other emerges; but, crucially, it is a object both internal and external, drawing its affective power precisely from its within-ness. Both in mythic content and in the putative affiliations of its imagined practitioners, Satanism is a child of white South African culture. This new Other is the dark underbelly of Christianity, one that emphasized "renouncing Christ, desecration of Christian symbols...and a blasphemous parody of the Eucharist" (Ivey, 1993:181).

The enemy comes from within, the very mirror image of what we think we are; it provides us with something to cohere against, the necessary external that allows us to know we are unified. The emergence of Satanism provided Afrikaans culture with a vortex around which to fuse. "Identifications belong to the imaginary," says James Souter; "they are phantasmic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal inhabitations, they unsettle the I" (cited in Hall, 1996:16). As such, it seems appropriate that, in the context in question, the mechanism that resettled identity was itself imaginary, phantasmic, cross-corporeal.

Satanism graphically enhanced cohesion among the more traditional sectors of society, who could lament this terrifying danger to the polis and demand a renewal of communal responsibility in the letters pages of popular magazines. These missives abound, in the vein of "Horried Parent," who insisted, "Everyone has a duty to act on this matter immediately. People must write in the strongest possible terms to our MPs until this evil practice is banned" (*Personality*, August 27, 1990). But at the same time as providing a strong impetus for an enhanced "them and us" cognition, this folk devil was also an agent of identity fragmentation: its enticing mythologies drove schisms between the young and old, causing generational trauma that both fed and was fed by the burgeoning fear of unruly youth whose identification with Afrikaner morality and civil religion was notably lacking (of which, more later).

Race, too, is constructed as natural and as necessary for the national, in both white South African and other nationalisms. Racism, Foucault says, is "the break between what must live and what must die" (1997:254)—again, the separation of an inside and an outside, one of which is needed to define the other but remains eternally abjected from its centrality. Racism is the other of nationalism, the necessary condition for its rationality. According to Bhabha:

The nation's pedagogical claim to a naturalistic beginning with the unchosen things of territory, gender and parentage—*amor patriae*—turns into those anxious, ferocious moments of metonymic displacement that mark the fetishes of national discrimination (1994:208).

Race as an essential, unmitigatable quality is a central tenet of the construction of apartheid (Thompson, 1985:102). The Afrikaner civil religion, with its dictum that difference is sacred and its preservation a Christian duty, utilized racial separation to validate its political and economic dominance of land, processes and resources. Where apartheid's judicial structures were the legislation that permitted racist white rule, casual paternalistic racism kept the state alive and vital from day to day. This was an effective tool of South Africa's racializing regime, which "[produced] 'race' as an obvious, natural and seemingly spontaneous feature of social life" (Hook, 2007:217).

The most pressing fear of the grand apartheid regime was *gelykstelling* (equalization), because this would bring on the “mishmash cohabitation” and eventual *bloedvermenging* (blood mixing) that threatened the purity of the race (Sparks, 1990:179). The existence of other races is essential, Foucault says, to safeguard the stainlessness of our own:

Racism makes it possible to establish a relationship between my life and the death of the other... The fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer (1997:255).

This idea of purity suggests that there is an unadulterated, genuine, originary race that must be protected and aspired to. The unpolluted populace must not be infected or otherwise sullied by contact with lesser races; the evocative use of *bloedvermenging* suggests just such an abomination. Illness, weakening, dilution; the discourse of racial purity is full of suggestive terms implying the pathologization and medicalization of the body politic.⁷

In addition to this aversion to racial adulteration, Afrikaner culture had an additional set of encroaching external threats. Fears of homogenization and Anglicization operated in an analogous manner, inculcating a sometimes excessive aversion to the English language and the cultural products of “decadent” foreign powers that threatened the Christian moral rectitude of the white South African state. The discourse surrounding both the importance of Afrikaans as the medium of government and education and the fear of Anglophone influence included suggestions of illness, pollution, dirt, corruption and sickness that characterize the language of racial purity and the quarantined body politic. This same medicalizing discourse operates in the public conversation around Satanism and Satanists. The phantasmic threat contains suggestions of dirt, pollution and illness, of infection, even parasitism, of something impure threatening and entering into the realm of the hygienic.

The Satanism scare was, as I have said, iconographically drawn from similar cultural moments in Britain and the U.S. Yet, South Africa has its own witchcraft, its own practices of *muti* (herbalism) and history of *sangomas* (traditional healers). Unlike in the West, however, traditional African magic does not depend on the idea of Satan. “Properly viewed in its own cultural context, [African witchcraft] is less of a religious aberration than a psychosocial control mechanism” (Sparks, 1990:19). In a country with its own occult tradition, why did an imported version of Satanism take hold of the cultural imagination so convincingly? For white Christian South Africans, the devil was real, an empirical threat to the stability and health of their

souls and their nation; African *muti*, on the other hand, was dismissed as a sort of mumbo jumbo, the superstitions of barbarians, that could be casually ignored, never credited with the possibility that it might constitute a set of religious practices.⁸

A crucial element of the maintenance of Afrikaner political mythology was the belief that “Bantu” tribes and white settlers arrived on the land at more or less the same time. This, along with other half-truths, prevarications and outright lies, was perpetuated by the textbooks used to produce South African history from the very start of the education system until after the fall of apartheid (Thompson, 1985:58–59). Hegemonic systematization in education and public discourse consistently denied any agency or role to Africans other than as impediments or accessories to white progress, or as anthropologically interesting tribal groupings with quaint customs.

And so, similarly, the Satanism scare: the European iconography represents a turning away from Africa and Africanness. When indigenous magic could theoretically suffice as an object upon which to displace irrational fears, then the import of a phenomenon that utilizes foreign content constitutes a notable refusal to look toward black Africa. There is a paradoxical irony operating here: Afrikaans culture, avowed in its determination to avoid pollution by the mores of the decadent West, chooses in every necessary instance Western imagery over African. Why this consistent ambivalence? Because the repressed, phantasmic fears unleashed by the imminent end of apartheid were bound to attach themselves to a displaced object but that object could by no means be solely African; a centralizing of black culture or history is anathema to the very soul of apartheid. This illustrates, too, the splitting at the heart of white South Africa. The construction of Afrikaner identity revolves around a sense of this community as African indigene, as entitled to the land as those black people who, the ideology insisted, had arrived upon it at more or less the same time; and yet this same claimed “Africanness” is consistently turned aside in favor of an affinity with Europe and the “civilization” for which it is a symbol. White South Africa is doubled at its very heart, torn between two identifications, both crucial for its sense of self: it cannot veer too far in the direction of the indigenous, for then it risks a stronger association with blackness than with whiteness.

The Satanist was an *internal* threat. There were few black Satanists; the mythic figure was almost always white. Kobus Jonker, an evangelical Christian policeman and the most prolific and self-publicizing of the “cult cops” driving the scare in the media, repeatedly emphasized its whiteness: while Satanism was common among both English and Afrikaans adolescents, there was, he said, just a small following among coloreds, and he knew of only one black person involved (*Star*, April 20, 1991). When Satanism did begin to cross over into the black South African imaginary, it retained its alliance to whiteness. Under the full-page heading “Satanism hits the townships,” *City Press* newspaper interviewed a Zambian man

who'd been lured in by a group of white Satanists in Johannesburg (April 14, 1991). Other reports tally with this repeated assumption that whites remained the driving force behind the cult even as it spread to black areas. Satanism did, of course, eventually cross over into the black population: Comaroff and Comaroff state, "The most fabulous narratives were about Satanism...it became a popular fixation in the mid-1990s" (1999:286). This new black Satanist, however, was differently constructed, using her skills to gain wealth and sate her material greed in a direct mirroring of Ashforth's (2005) explication of the role of the witch. The terminology remained European-satanic but the contents were altered in line with African occult preoccupations. The white Satanist, having lost her affective power, was subsumed into a larger landscape of black myth.

This insistence on the whiteness of Satanists illustrates the astounding solipsism of white South Africa, its illogical insistence on the primacy of race: surely a hard core group dedicated to the overthrow of the civilized white world would recruit from both white and black communities, rather than simply replicating the racializing discourse of separation that characterized the society it was, allegedly, attempting to destroy? But more than this, more even than the uncanny familiarity of the Satanist, her constant depiction as white changes the nature of the threat she embodies. The Satanist is both inside and outside, simultaneously Other and not-Other, a terrifying challenge to the status quo but nonetheless one that is made safe (or safer) by its inclusion in the categories of nationhood. The Satanist is a *necessary* enemy, one that is terrifying and dangerous but is also manageable, explicable, knowable. Constructed as fundamental Other, she takes up this position easily, forcing the African one more step further from the center. The very whiteness of the Satanist is a racist act, a white self-othering that permits the displaced gaze to continue to overlook Africans.

Better dead than red

The satanic panic was very much a product of the Cold War setting of South Africa's moment of decolonization, its main signifier bearing familiar markers that had long been attached to communists. American rhetoric served apartheid well, with both communism and anti-communism providing polarized structures for the opposing factions to pin their flags to. For a fiercely Calvinist people the threat from godless communists felt all too real and the *swart gevaar* (the black danger) was matched by an equivalent red peril in the popular imagination. Unlike many of the other political mythologies underpinning the state, the communist threat was, to some degree at least, real: the National Party's military establishment was engaged in covert conflicts in neighboring Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe and the still-colonized South West Africa (Namibia), "frontline states" that had once formed its

barrier against the rest of Africa but were now providing shelter for ANC guerrillas (Meredith, 2005:425–426). That same ANC had long been allied to the South African Communist Party (SACP).

It comes as little surprise, then, that the specter of the communist should be one so loaded with affect, with so much power to terrorize. The communist in the popular imagination was a godless, unethical agent provocateur, out to destabilize society by any means necessary. Every social ill, every government detractor, became tarred with the brush of communism. Since coming to power, the National Party “relied upon anti-communism as its most versatile justification for all manner of domestic repression and regional imperialism” (Nixon, 1994:226). Communism became a catch-all description for anti-apartheid sentiment.

Yet, by the time the satanic panic swept South Africa, the international communist threat had been largely eradicated. Events in Eastern Europe and the dramatic fall of the U.S.S.R. destroyed any geopolitical basis for belief in a red conspiracy for world domination. While anti-communist rhetoric continued to hold sway in South African public discourse, it had unquestionably lost some of its nightmarish power.

I am not suggesting that Satanists *replaced* communists as the generic enemy of white South Africa; rather, the unexpected imaginative gap left by the defusing of the larger-than-life communist enemy freed up a certain amount of affect that was then displaced onto another convenient adversary, utilizing similar iconography. Both communist and Satanist are godless, sworn enemies of the church, of the nuclear family, of the structures of white bourgeois society. Both operate shady international conspiracies. Both corrupt the minds of impressionable youth. Indeed, the correlation between them was sometimes made explicit: in 1990, the Minister for Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, told a youth group that Satanism, a “crime against humankind,” and communism, an ideology that stands “totally opposed to religion and the church,” were the major pitfalls facing the nation’s young people (*Natal Mercury*, July 2, 1990). Thus the already overdetermined figure of the communist operates within the threatened and neurotic Afrikaner consciousness as yet another decisive factor lending kinetic energy to the emerging satanic myth.

Teenage kicks

No moral panic can run without objects, without visual reminders of the menace it seeks to contain. Historian George Mosse says that visibility “is the key mode of national identity formation.... It is how citizens *see* themselves and how they *see* those against whom they define themselves that determines national self-perception” (cited in Jeffords, 1994:6). My own memories of growing up in Johannesburg in the 1980s and 1990s are shot through with a constant awareness of the lurking presence

of a Satanist threat, mostly contained in the lanky-haired boys who liked heavy metal and drank beer in Hillbrow bars. In my teens I joined the few other obvious outsiders in wearing black and listening to Metallica, adopting the iconography of that strand of 1980s countercultural rebellion. We black-clad teenagers became the public face of this figure, serving as a visual reminder of the threat that lurked in the country's midst: pale figures deeply incongruous in a land of constant sunshine and a nation that emphasized sport, muscularity and physical prowess, with tanned healthy bodies the sign of success and social inclusion.

Fear of youth and youth culture was a recurrent theme in reporting and commentary on Satanism. As is common in youth-related moral panics, boredom was seen to play a large part: it became popular because young people were "tired of drugs, disco music and the fashions of the nineties" (*Citizen*, May 22, 1990). Kobus Jonker self-published numerous pamphlets on Satanism—among them *Satanisme en die Tiener* (*Satanism and the Teenager*) in 1990, *Satanisme, 'n realiteit* (*Satanism: A Reality*) in 1991 and *Satanism Exposed* in 1992—and each one repeatedly referenced the risks to young people from rock music and amoral television and films. Horror films like *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976) and *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) were continually named as gateways to satanic involvement, with one charismatic preacher even arguing, "The power of Satanism is evident in the arts today. Increasing numbers of movies have satanic themes and music lyrics with satanic recruiting efforts" (Bruning, 1991:6). The crusading anti-Satanist Rodney Seale published an entire book (1988) on the dangers of popular music, citing performers from Bette Midler to Meatloaf as examples of the moral quagmire awaiting the unready.

The frequent lists of warning signs of susceptibility to or involvement in Satanism included a litany of adolescent signifiers, from wearing black to feeling strong emotion: one Satan hunter, in a self-published pamphlet, listed "restlessness, fear, loneliness, anxiety, pride, depression, jealousy" as signs for parents to watch out for (van Zyl, 1988:15). Every adolescent, but most of all those who failed to display the heavily prescribed normativity attached to South African youth, was already marked with the signs of satanic involvement. This phobic response to unruly youth is the diametric opposite of the coherence inspired by the creation of a unifying folk enemy and operates as something of a self-fulfilling prophecy: public demonization of youth behavior engenders the spread of rebellious social practices that take much of their color from media reports about the moral panic.⁹ Thus, nationalistic coherence creates intergenerational trauma, further splintering the once-proud notion of white South African national identity.

It must be emphasized again that there is no evidence of large-scale actual or attempted practice of witchcraft and its attendant criminalities among the gothic and heavy metal teen subcultures. Ivey explains:

White adolescents who, sensitive to the cultural paranoia surrounding Satanism, rebel against authority figures by professing loose allegiance to diluted Satanic ideology and engage in behavior that conservative authorities misconstrue as Satanic...[exhibit a] naïve understanding of Satanism, lack of organized expression and general anti-establishment motive of gaining identity by rebelling (1993:183).

This category of disaffected teens provides another layer for the overdetermined creation of the satanic panic: that of Satanist identification as a site of resistance.

In a paper on the temporality of adolescence in the twentieth century, Pam Thurschwell examines the adolescent as a creature “out of time”, “associated with narrative rupture and chronological refusal,” “anachronistic, or ahead of his or her time, or running out of time—perhaps already nostalgic for the childhood and adolescence he or she is simultaneously eager to leave behind” (2008:1). The teenager, she says, is often pictured “aghast at what appears to be a monolithic adult social order; often he or she, or the narrative that he or she occupies, tries to take evasive action” (Thurschwell, 2008:1). Temporal strangeness is a generic feature of adolescence, one that becomes even more alienating in specific contexts. The teenager in late apartheid South Africa is paradigmatically inflected with a potentially apocalyptic chronology. Her sense of time is stunted and altered both by her adolescent state, a truncated moment in which past and future coexist uneasily within the divided subject, and by the sense of almost messianic time brought on by the concertina’d end of the apartheid behemoth. Elleke Boehmer calls this “cusp time,” the time-out-of-time that characterized late apartheid literary production, with its impossibility of seeing beyond the seismic change on the horizon, a “history” without future, an absolute closing down of possibility, where what lies beyond is only “a gap, the space of which it was impossible to imagine” (1998:45). This moment is parenthesized, a shattering and fragmentation of the narrative that went before it. Within this twisted temporality, the teenager, already impeded in her ability to believe in a future (“I will always be ‘me’, there is no other way I can be”), must locate herself in relation to the powerful hegemony of white South Africa, whose machinations are responsible for time turning in upon itself.

It comes as little surprise, then, that some of those adolescent “refusals of conventional narrative” (Thurschwell, 2008:1) take the form of countercultural identification, of angry youth adopting the uniform of their parents’ worst fears. This is not a resistance to the actualities of apartheid; the system threw up teenage activists aplenty, but those who took refuge in subcultures were seeking alternate exits. Satanic identification in no way indicates the enhanced sense of social justice that was one of apartheid’s less planned effects; rather it is a response to the chaotic and millennial fear of the future that characterized these years. Indeed, adolescent identification with Satanism can be read as refusal to engage with the realities of

apartheid, a chilling indictment of a thoroughly selfish culture—what Sparks calls the “self-obsession that became such a consuming feature of Afrikaner nationalism” (1990:187).

Resistance and (bio)power

Relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State. In two senses: first of all, because the State, for all the omniscience of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other, existing power relations (Foucault, 1980:122).

“Culture itself is, in the last analysis, an ideology,” writes Roland Barthes (2000:81). South Africa’s Satanism scare had ideological effects as well as ideological causes, and these too influenced the position of the pro-apartheid (or at least pro-status quo) white South African in the early years of the 1990s. It seems inevitable that there was some provocative, if unconscious, element to the scare and the enthusiasm with which media and community leaders threw their full weight behind it. “When people lose faith in their authorities,” Victor says, “they will regard bizarre and frightening rumors as plausible because it seems dangerous to disregard them” (1991:222). During the slow collapse of apartheid, many white South Africans were experiencing precisely this lack of faith in government. In some quarters, confidence in the National Party was at an all-time low, as evinced by the burgeoning popularity of far-right spinoffs.

In the U.S., Victor explains, the New Agers and neo-pagans targeted by the Satanism scare were only proxies for fundamental Christianity’s real enemy. “Satanic cult stories are ideological weapons in a conflict among Christians, traditionalists versus modernists” (1991:234). Similarly, in the South African context it is useful to ask whose interests these scare stories served. By painting the newly moderate government and the reformist churches that surrounded it as weak, ineffectual and incapable of protecting the population of true believers, the press and community leaders who fueled the fire of the panic removed a degree of credibility from the disappointing government, at least in the eyes of the formerly loyal Afrikaner population. In this sense, the Satanism scare functioned as an effective ideological tool for separating the meat of the state from the bones of the people.

Foucault understood the bio-power of the modern state as one that operates in every sphere of the citizen’s life, from birth to death, the “growing inclusion of man’s natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power” (Agamben, 1998:119). Every aspect of life is regulated, accounted for, made statistical,

medicalized. This understanding of state and social power is extremely useful for an analysis of apartheid South Africa, which made its control and regulation over the lives of its subjects quite visible to the historical eye.¹⁰ South Africa's laws

set specific limits to racial contact in almost every aspect of life—in housing, education, employment, entertainment, sports, public amenities and personal relations. They gave legal force to apartheid on park benches, in buses, taxis, and railway waiting rooms, in theaters and concert halls and even the ocean (Sparks, 1990:189).

From the personal to the public, the sexual to the creative, every possible aspect of life was manipulated and legislated by the state in its attempt to control the freer flow of people, ideas and status that was stimulated by modernism and industrial capital.

A Foucauldian understanding of the operations of power entails a combination of both macro-politics, associated with the judicial and administrative structures of state powers, and micro-politics, i.e., governance of the self, community, family, workplace, smaller structures of power that often work in conjunction with, enhance and extend the bio-power of the state (Hook, 2007:224). Similarly what once functioned as the religious pastorate, concerned for the individual's spiritual journey, has reconvened itself in modernity as a variety of structures of gentle care, from the work of teachers and doctors to that of philanthropists and state welfare apparatuses (Hook, 2007:239). What the Satanism scare effected in some measure was to detach these smaller structures from the bio-political aims of the state and the process of decolonization with which it had become inexorably involved. The micro-politics of communal and religious leaders and the popular press began, to a degree, to separate themselves from the aims of the now untrustworthy state, focusing instead on a quasi-mythological threat to the holistic wholeness of the community, while the secular pastorate, instead of operating as one with the state's structures of care, removed itself from these larger concerns to focus on a new, insular threat that seemed to bypass government capacities to care for the populace. This, in turn, had a destabilizing effect on the state's macro-political strength. The micro-political structures of Afrikanerdom experienced a detachment of affect from belief in the moral rectitude of the National Party government to a fear of a greater terror that government seemed helpless to halt.

In Foucauldian terms, "oppressive measures are in fact productive, giving rise to new forms of behavior rather than simply closing down or censoring forms of behavior" (Mills, 2004:34). As contrary as it may seem to a post-apartheid understanding of the injustices of South African racial history, the refusal of conservative Afrikaners to meekly go where their government led is as much a form of resistance to power as the ANC's and related movements' fight against the

apartheid state. The satanic panic was a productive effect of power, something created by the state's attempt at repression of dissent. It established a destructive discourse of fear, horror and terror that pointedly countered the de Klerk government's own newly acquired democratic credentials, imbued as they were with the language of hope, in what Nixon calls "ideological cross-dressing" (1994:223). The apocalyptic rhetoric of the Satanism scare also ran distinctly counter to the messianic fervor that surrounded Mandela in the international press, both before and immediately after his release (Nixon, 1994:175–192). The epidemic of satanic panic that swept white South Africa was thus both symptomatic of the millennial fears that characterized the process of decolonization and indicative of the schism that marked the once-solid bedrock of Afrikaner nationalist identity, forced into disjuncture with itself by the crushing process of history.

A final word

Terrorists, communists and foreigners, violent blacks, unruly youth and interfering liberals—all the multitudinous menaces that threatened the sanctity of Afrikaner nationhood were condensed and codified into the mythic cultural Other of the white Satanist, a paradoxical figure of both hatred and unity, providing a point of identification but also various intergenerational and inter-structural schisms within an ethnic identity under immense stress during an historical moment that proved to be the foretaste of the seismic social change of decolonization. And then, with the realities of transition, the exorcism of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings and the rising rates of crime and disappointment that have characterized the years since the euphoria of the Mandela period ended, the Satanists withdrew, passed from the communal memory to be replaced on the front pages of a new breed of sensationalist tabloid by *sangomas*, *muti* and other signifiers of indigenous witchcraft. Having filled their role as the object of affectively disengaged ethnic terrors and displaced fears of the future, white Satanists retreated to their mythic lair, leaving their failed conspiracies behind them, nothing but a slowly filled gap in the complex and ever-evolving cultural landscape of a rebaptized South Africa.

NOTES

¹ I have chosen throughout to utilize the racial terms that were both common and official parlance in apartheid South Africa, and are still widely in use now: thus, people are referred to as black, white and colored (mixed race).

² Jean and John Comaroff mention the extremes of the British Satanism scare at some length in their seminal paper on occult economies in the South African postcolony (1999:282); yet, they relegate white South Africa's concurrent scare, which scaled the same heights of excess, to a small footnote about the mid-1990s, an addendum to the black occult structures that concern them (1999:299). This is characteristic of the cultural amnesia that followed the scare; once its original energy had wound down, it passed speedily from the front pages and the memories of white South Africans.

³ Reporting on the scare was common across all sectors of the English-language press. High-minded broadsheets like the *Mail & Guardian* and *Business Day* limited their reporting to legal cases and governmental or official pronouncements on Satanism, while popular dailies like *The Star*, *The Argus*, *Cape Times* and *The Citizen*, as well as the profusion of countrywide local press, afforded instances of alleged Satanism and the panic surrounding them full newsworthy status. The scare was also a consistent feature in the pages of influential "family magazines" like *Huisgenoot*, *You* and *Personality*.

⁴ See, for example, the 1992 Orso case, when Cape teenager Angelique Orso and her boyfriend Lawrence van Blerk blamed their violent murder of her mother on demonic possession (*Cape Times*, September 23, 24, 26, 1992). The demonic defense was not accepted by the court.

⁵ For a convincing description of the numerous flaws in the only successful U.S. prosecution of an alleged Satanist, see Wright (1994).

⁶ Stolid Afrikaner unity was, in truth, largely illusory, a construction that defined nationalistic feeling but did not bear up to serious scrutiny (see Bonner, Delius and Posel, 1993:3; Marks and Trapido, 1987:15–25). Nonetheless, it remained a crucial and oft-repeated trope of national self-identity.

⁷ The requirement of maintaining racial purity was applied to blacks as well as whites: the homelands system was an attempt to sequester Africans in an imagined pre-industrial tribal past, thus keeping them "pure."

⁸ See Adam Sitze (2007) for an analysis of how the juridical conception of "reasonableness" was used to discredit African witchcraft beliefs in an early twentieth-century South African murder case.

⁹ It has not been possible to address contemporary youth responses to the Satanism scare. Records of these are few and far between, barring a spate of letters sent to newspapers and popular magazines in defense of role-play games like *Dungeons and Dragons*. Unlike adolescents in similar subcultures elsewhere, white South African youth did not have access to a thriving magazine, radio or television culture, and there are few direct records of their self-definitions.

¹⁰ I say subjects rather than citizens advisedly; those who attracted the most control were precisely those whom the state wished to strip of citizenship, to remove

from the nomos of political and social belonging and reconstitute in a series of fragmentary, imaginary and doomed "tribal" enclaves.

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