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*Os Percelie Die Valley, We Rule this Place:*  
Coloured Identity and Religious Diversity in  
Cape Town

MA Dissertation

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A dissertation submitted in *fulfilment* of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
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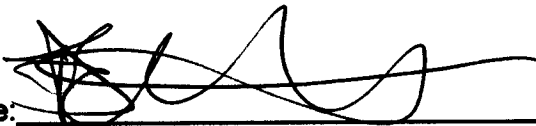
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do hereby declare that I empower the University of Cape Town to produce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents of my dissertation entitled

Os Percelie Die Valley, We rule  
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## Abstract

The significance of religion within the Cape-coloured community in the twentieth-century forms the primary subject of this thesis. It analyses the relationship between the practice of coloured identity and notions of the city, as well as the city's bearing on the expression of coloured identity. By looking at such things as the history of coloured identity, the notion of District Six as sacred space, popular cultural expression like the Minstrel Carnival, and the mediation practices employed by the local tabloid print media, it proposes that the invocation, contestation, and negotiation of religion on the part of the coloured community is central to understanding the fluid and dynamic expression of coloured identity in the city. Overall, it contends that the academic study of religion presents itself as a valid theoretical framework for discussing and understanding coloured identity in non-essentialist terms.

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During the 1990s, when the apartheid era officially came to an end, we moved to a previously all-white area, and I was enrolled in a white school, which was commonly referred to as a Model C school. The few children of colour attending this school at the time were Indian and coloured, and in hindsight, life at school was like a microcosm of South African society at the time. Around the time of the 1994 elections, the school introduced isiXhosa classes as a compulsory part of the curriculum across all grades. At the same time, the content of some of our subjects also started changing. In history, for example, we learned about the Xhosa cattle-killing, and in English, we were asked to write essays about the Rugby World Cup, and the African Cup of Nations, two sports events that defined the effervescent national *zeitgeist* at the time.

Religion was a very important facet of my family life as a child. The Anglican Church's doctrine and teachings were an inseparable part of what it meant to be an adult. At church, on Sundays, this authoritarian, paternalist notion of the divine was affirmed on many fronts. For example, Mass was always shrouded in an atmosphere of restrained piety, where the congregation was led by a robed and distant minister. At home, confirmation became a major rite of passage. If you didn't get confirmed, I was told, you couldn't get married and neither would you be buried. Confirmation was not so much about a religious rite of passage, but as a public event that mediated one's relationship in the community, which suggested religion was underwritten by the implicit question 'what will the community think?' But there were also Muslims in our community and from an early age I knew that Islam and Christianity were somehow related. Yet Muslims were regularly spoken about in derogatory terms, and their religious beliefs and practises derided as alien and demanding. Most other religions were referred to in this way, with a religious myth or ritual cited as evidence of the falsehood of a tradition. There were real religious differences in the coloured community, signalling the significance of religion as a force in society. How did people come to understand their religious identities? How were religious identities taken up and enacted? How did these alternative identities contribute to what it meant to be coloured?

Over time, the number of coloured learners gradually outnumbered white learners, as more and more families living in distant parts of the city opted to enrol their children in a school with better facilities. For some learners, like many of my closest school friends, the journey to and from school entailed an hour-long bus ride from the coloured township of Mitchell's Plain. It was no coincidence that most coloureds lived so far away. Apartheid urban planning played a major role in reinforcing racial categories in Cape Town. It was difficult to dispute the notion that whites were superior to coloureds, and blacks inferior, when it was plainly visible that whites lived in nice suburbs and in posh homes, while the only blacks one encountered were petrol attendants and day labourers. Urban planning had been coupled with labour-preference policies so that race and class became linked and virtually interchangeable. The relationships between race, class and urbanity in Cape Town certainly require special attention.

Only once I travelled to other parts of the country did it become apparent that South Africa was a very different place to Cape Town. Elsewhere, there was widespread racial integration, and the coloured population were very different from my people at home. Not only did the experience rattle my beliefs about society, strangely, it also affirmed my connection with Cape Town: I wasn't just coloured, I was a Cape coloured. In part, this popular belief had to do with the predominance of coloureds as a race group in the city. But there are other factors also, which necessitates that attention be paid to what the special relationship between coloureds and the city was, how it came about and what its sources were.

On the Cape Flats, for children, recreation revolved mostly around the street. Otherwise you were watching TV. Many of the children's programs aired on public TV during the late 1980s and early 1990s were locally produced, and in large part, Afrikaans medium. Even foreign cartoon shows were sometimes dubbed into Afrikaans to suit local conditions. My friends and I, however, could not be bothered that our favourite TV characters like *Benie Boekwurm*, or the furry creature, *Zet*, spoke Afrikaans, considering how familiar we were with the language. In hindsight, however, it is hard not to think that this seemingly innocent media format subtly promoted a nationalist ideological agenda.

In post-apartheid South Africa, we have seen the role of the media in society becoming the subject of considerable public debate. For example, leading figures in the public broadcaster have roundly made it clear that the national media machine was considered to be the mouthpiece of the ruling party. On the other hand, looking at the *Sunday Times Heritage Project*, social initiatives driven by the independent media industry were also engaging in the process of shaping burgeoning notions of nationhood, nationality and citizenship. This new interest in the media raises a range of questions around the role of the media in shaping specific identities. For example, how did the media influence or shape ideas of identity, and specifically, coloured identity? How was the media perceived and engaged within the coloured community? Finally, what sentiments have the media created around notions of religion?

### **Theory and Method**

To engage with these basic questions, and address my primary research terms, I have relied on theory from two fields of study. As a student of religion, I have been trained in a tradition that views religion to be a uniquely human phenomenon that manifests in a variety of ways, in all areas of society where humans happen to engage in practices of ultimate meaning. Theoretically, this view has come to be associated with what has been called the phenomenological tradition. This tradition drew impetus from the brand of philosophical phenomenology developed by Edmund Husserl, emerging as the theoretical concept of understanding religion as a phenomenon, or *noumena*, that was distinct from, but still related to, concepts of the divine, or *nouminos*. Historically, it was believed to have been pioneered by the Dutch theologian, P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, while the true founders of the tradition are considered to be Rudolf Otto (1950), and Gerardus van der Leeuw (1938) (Strenski, 2006; King, 1995).

In practice, methodologically, scholars sought to categorize and typologize religions and religious phenomena according to their similarities and differences, which were identified through a rigorous process of detailed description and systematic comparison. Significantly, this process was to be informed by the concepts of *epoche*, meaning to suspend judgment and exercise empathy, and *eidetic* vision, or an intuition of essences,

so as to preserve religion's irreducible qualities, while at the same time retaining the ability to recognize its presence hidden within phenomena under investigation. The phenomenological tradition, therefore, was defined by its emphasis on the notion of religion being a phenomenon that could not be reduced to its manifestations, the philosophical principle of empathy, and a methodology which entailed description, comparison, and classification (see Smart, 1973; Ryba, 1991; Waardenburg, 1978; Honko, 1979; and Pettersson and Akerberg, 1981).

These basic ideas also infused Comparative Religion and the History of Religions, two closely related methodologies commonly associated with the work of Mircea Eliade. The History of Religions approach was founded upon the theoretical opposition between the notion of religion as a historically situated, stable object of rational inquiry, and religion as a historically unstable, multivalent human phenomenon. In this way, scientific knowledge *of* religion was generated using a scientific method that was *about* religion. Methodologically, therefore, research entailed engaging in an inductive, intuitive process of description and comparison of similar religious phenomena, paying no heed to their date or geographical location, that strived for an empathetic grasp of the sacred, and isolated new objects of scientific knowledge (see, Sharpe, 1986; and Wach, 1958). Through this methodology, Eliade (1958) illustrated that spaces and objects were frequently ascribed with religious significance as a 'centre' that functioned as the pivotal axis of the world and linked both heaven and earth. Furthermore, religions also frequently had a concept of sacred history, or a mythical story of beginning, that described the divine creative processes through which the world and humans came into being, and which served to explain the nature of the present world. Australian aborigines, for example, believed that the world was created in the dreamtime when their mythical ancestors first roamed the earth and transformed it through their interaction with the material world. Uluru, otherwise known as Ayers Rock, for example, was created when two boys were playing with mud, while its curvatures and nuances could be ascribed to the work of other mythical ancestors (Whitaker, 1994). In the case of the San of southern Africa, the world came into being through a process of cosmogonic inversion, where the animals of the first order of existence were transformed into humans and vice versa. It

was for this reason, the San believed, animals could reason and communicate in the same way as humans (Lewis-Williams and Pearce, 2004). Overall, it is this theoretical stance that informs my use of the term religion, and the overriding methodology I will adopt when employing it as an analytical tool.

Identity is my second primary research term. In order to address it, I have drawn on theory with a social constructionist bent. Social constructionism is grounded in post-structuralist theories of sign systems and language, in that, as a basic premise, it posits that meaning is the product of communal practices of signification. It was Thomas Kuhn (1962) who first pointed out the significance of this distinction when he observed that science operated on the premise of the scientific community's shared commitment to a paradigm. A paradigm was the set of basic assumptions about what is known, how that knowledge is known, and what the legitimate 'procedures' are for the production of knowledge and the form of conduct and behaviour that stemmed from these assumptions. In this way, new scientific knowledge was not discovered so much as it was brought into being: new knowledge was only significant as far as it was scientifically meaningful. By extension, objects drew their meaning from the shared set of assumptions that formed the context within which they could be understood. Significantly, as Wittgenstein (1953) suggested, this went against the grain of the structuralist perspective of language, as, under these conditions, there is no separation between language and a language user. Language was therefore a relational process, a social performance, a game, where speakers checked and negotiated the meaning of words against the shared set of assumptions held by those with whom they were in conversation.

More than just a means of negotiating reality, language was a practice imbued with power, since specific ways of speaking legitimated certain meanings and brought things into being. Wittgenstein (1953) originally suggested these ways of speaking be called 'forms of life', or frames of reference within which words could be understood, but it was Foucault who claimed it was more appropriate to speak about these forms of language as discourses, or "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972: 49). Discourses were historically located, coherent systems of meanings that produced

ideological effects, by supporting institutions and, therefore, reproducing extant power relations (Parker, 1992). For example, as Miles (1989) argued, racism could be understood as a discourse in that it involved “particular representations of real or imagined somatic features and attributions of negatively evaluated characteristics”. In practice, it therefore entailed processes of racialization, or practices of signification that defined the self and the other based on a set of assumptions about race and racial characteristics; manifest in various forms ‘institutional racism’; and ideological articulation, where the ‘race and racism’ discourse linked and supported other discourses like sex and gender (cited in Foster, 1991: 203).

These insights were highly significant for identity studies because they destabilized the taken for granted, essentialist assumptions about the primacy of human identity. Man, woman, Caucasian, heterosexual, and so on, were concepts no longer located within human beings, but rather, meanings within which humans were located. Constructionists therefore proposed that subjectivity be used as a substitute, since it denoted the constructed nature of human identity. Harre and van Langenhove (1999), for example, argued that self-identity emerged from the set of discursive positions within which human agents were located. This sense of being emerged from discourses revolving around human embodiment as a point of view and a material location; the notion of being temporally located; human location in moral space, referring to the notion of humans as responsible agents and moral actors; and a location in social space, or the network of people ordered by category relations. Feminists latched onto this argument, furthering the challenge on essentialist perceptions of identity by highlighting the ideological qualities of constructed subjectivities (see Bohan, 1992; Gergen, 2001; Hekman, 1995; and Kitzinger, 1987). Therefore, firstly, subjectivities came into being through discourses that covertly legitimated the position of the socially dominant. As Judith Butler points out,

gender ontologies always operate within established political contexts as normative injunctions, determining what qualifies as intelligible sex, invoking and consolidating the reproductive constraints on sexuality,

setting the prescriptive requirements whereby sexed or gendered bodies come into cultural intelligibility. (Butler, 1999: 131)

And secondly, they were a site of political struggle, which meant to say, that “the deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is located” (Butler, 1999: 131). Subjectivities were therefore ideologically charged fields of signification in which human agents negotiated their subject positions. Social constructionists have adopted the research methodology of discourse analysis to engage the notion of subjectivity. Discourse analysis aimed to “provide an account of how ‘objects’ in the world are constructed against a background of socially shared understandings which have become institutionalized and gain factual status”. In this way, it addressed the twin principles of social constructionism, by helping to sketch the ‘conditions of possibility’ for subjects, and attending to the “political aims of disrupting the oppressive and exploitative effects associated with institutionalized discourses and forms of life” (Durrheim, 1997:181).

### **Research Questions and Chapter Outlines**

It is now widely accepted that the academic debate about coloured identity is firmly couched in social constructionist terms. Despite the persuasiveness of this perspective, it is hard to dispel the idea of there being a sense of shared identity displayed by the coloured community, or the idea that there is a common worldview, a spirit of togetherness that was alive, living, playing itself out in ordinary life all across Cape Town. Naturally, such notions of coloured homogeneity have been described as baseless and romantic and have been discredited on the grounds that they were founded on faulty essentialist concepts of race and identity. Some would even argue that the phrase coloured identity be dispensed with because of its essentialist connotations. I wish to challenge this argument, and claim that it is possible to speak of coloured identity without resorting to essentialist reductionism.

In this thesis, I will examine how the negotiation of coloured identity in Cape Town shaped notions of the city, and how the city influenced the negotiation of coloured

identity. I will show that religion played a central role in this complex relationship by describing the multiple and fluid ways in which the coloured community drew on religion and religious resources to make and remake notions of colouredness and the city. By looking at coloured identity in this way, I wish to show that the academic study of religion is a viable alternative theoretical framework for discussing coloured identity in non-essentialist terms.

Drawing exclusively on textual evidence, each of the four chapters in this thesis variably reinforces this point.

In Chapter 1, I deal with the subject of coloured identity. As an alternative to a conventional literature review, in this chapter I frame my discussion of major theories of coloured identity in a historical overview that starts with theories dealing with the emergence of coloured identity in the nineteenth century. From there, we continue through twentieth-century South Africa, looking at how different theories of coloured identity came to the fore, then faded into the background as social and political conditions changed. Finally I round off by reflecting on more current developments in the field.

Chapter 2 engages the issue of space and identity, specifically the notion that the coloured population has had a special relationship with Cape Town. Here I will argue that this was a valid observation, demonstrating, firstly how it played a significant role in political contests over resources in the city. Secondly, I will argue that this notion crystallized in the coloured psyche around the historical event of the forced removal and demolition of the inner-city suburb of District Six. Specifically, following an analysis of literature dealing with District Six using the methodology of comparative religious studies, I show how the District Six story was held together by categories of sacred space which served to mediate the coloured population's relationship with the city and challenged the city's marginalizing modern urban profile.

In the third chapter I discuss the relationship between religion, culture and subjectivity. Drawing on a variety of examples, including the Minstrel Carnival, Cape Flats gang culture, and the revivalist Khoisan movement, I try and assess the significance of religion as a cultural force in the coloured community, focusing on the subjectivities that became available for members of the community and how they were enacted and remade in society.

In the fourth chapter, I look at the print media. Specifically, I will focus on one of the more popular tabloids, the *Daily Voice*, as the newspaper explicitly marketed itself as a paper for coloureds, using street slang in its headlines and copy, and covering human-interest stories that appealed to the working-class coloured community. Using the *Voice* as a case study, I examine how practices of mediation, news production and journalism constructed particular local identities. Furthermore, I explore the idea of religion as a practice of mediation by analyzing articles from the *Voice* that deal explicitly with religion, but also reflect on the more general question of religion as a practice of mediation.

I started this introduction by providing a romantic account of my personal life and experience, but, in so doing, I in no way wish to suggest that I have a privileged perspective on the subject matter. Furthermore, neither here, nor anywhere else have I forwarded my own definition of coloured identity. In so doing, I have tried to emphasize the term's variable shifting meanings, and, touching on the first point, reinforce the idea that there can be no substitute for quality research. More than anything else, I have tried to formulate a stimulating and readable argument that stretches the boundaries of academic convention and demonstrates the usefulness of the academic study of religion.

## Chapter 1

### A Different Hue:

#### A History of Thinking About Coloured Identity

##### Introduction

At the outset of his acclaimed account of coloured politics and political movements, Gavin Lewis swiftly moved to attend to the tricky etymological relationship between the adjectives black and coloured. To indicate that they were distinctly different terms he employed carefully considered lexical modifications, so that, in his text, the term coloured would appear “with a capital C in order to avoid confusion with ‘coloured’ as meaning black”, which referred to “all those people not white” (1987:1). Taking a more cautious approach, Denis Constant-Martin (1998), broaching the topic of Cape Town’s New Year’s festivals, instead opted to employ the term coloured without inverted comma’s, qualifying his decision by stating that “this of course does not mean...any adhesion to or support for ideologies and behaviours separating human beings in terms of ‘race’ or culture” (xxi). In the post-apartheid dispensation, “where both racist and politically correct conventions of the apartheid era” had broken down, Mohammed Adhikari (2005), in his discussion of coloured identity during the twentieth century, chose to also capitalize the C, partly as an indicator of the “normalization of South African society in the post-apartheid period and partly in recognition of a growing grass-roots sentiment” of racial homogeneity (xiv,xv). The political sensitivity and lack of academic consensus regarding how the term coloured was to appear in print indicated that coloured identity endured as a problem in South African society and academic literature.

Lexical qualifications aside, simply, the socially accepted definition of the term coloured was that it referred to a person of mixed race. It is therefore similar to adjectives employed in other regions in reference to mixed-race groups, like the Creoles of Mauritius, or the Mullatoes of Brazil. At the same time, it differed from its internationally accepted use as a reference to people of African origin, typical, for example, in the

United States of America where it was reserved almost exclusively for African Americans. In other words, “the term ‘Coloured’ in the South African context refers to those people often described in other societies as mixed race, mullatoes or half-castes” (Lewis, 1987:1). As a mixed-race group, the coloured population could lay claim to a genetic heritage that spanned indigenous primal groups like the KhoiKhoi (previously known as the Hottentots), or Khoekhoe, of the Cape Peninsula, but also foreign sources stemming from white Europeans, and slaves forcefully brought to the Cape from different parts of Africa and South East Asia. Beyond genetics, “the Coloured category has also generally been taken to include a number of distinct subgroups, such as Malays, Griquas, Namas and Basters” (Lewis, 1987: 1). In terms of religion, in contemporary South Africa, the coloured population predominantly subscribed to the Abrahamic faiths of Islam and Christianity, with Christianity being the religion of choice for more than two thirds of the population, and Islam representing the faith of about one quarter (South African Census, 2001). The coloured population was a minority in South Africa, historically, never numbering more than about ten percent of the national population. They resided mainly in the south-western part of the country, with the highest concentration located in the city of Cape Town. Encompassing a potpourri of racial, cultural and religious sources, coloured has endured as the socially accepted term for this unique segment of the South African population.

From the outset, however, both coloureds and intellectuals dealing with the subject of coloured identity have been perplexed by its apparently contradictory nature. How was it that such a heterogeneous mix of people was able to share in a homogenous experience? The coloured people certainly were one important source of data for dealing with this. In that case, it meant asking how did coloured people understand and experience their group identity? What did it mean and how did it make sense to them? These were but some of the important and sometimes tricky questions swirling about the academic debate surrounding coloured identity. It was imperative, therefore, that any sustained discussion of coloured identity firstly sought to address the basic terms and conditions of the subject. In this chapter, we will engage with the concept of coloured identity by laying out a critical historical overview, spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, canvassing

the predominant theoretical trends in the debate about the source and nature of coloured identity. I will also touch on the elements that contributed to its perception in South African society, and contrast this with what coloured identity meant to coloured people and how they participated in shaping their concepts of themselves. Finally, I will reflect on the idea of colouredness as problematic, by identifying theoretical flaws appearing in the literature dealing with the subject. Overall, I will advocate a theoretical approach that argues for a fluid concept of coloured identity and which privileges the role of the coloured experience when dealing with the subject.

### **Coloured Identity in the Nineteenth Century**

More than a blanket term for a collection of splinter identities, coloured identity was the product of a heterogeneous mix of sources, melded under distinctive socio-political conditions, that was greater than the sum of its parts. The emergence of coloured identity as a distinct social identity during the nineteenth century sheds light on the conditions and processes involved in cultivating a sense of social solidarity that ultimately enabled the term to encompass an array of cultural, racial and religious resources. One theory therefore posited that coloured identity was a socio-political construct that came to life as a result of defensive political manoeuvring of elite members of Cape Town's heterogeneous black population in the context of the racially oppressive social environment of late nineteenth-century Victorian Cape Town. According to this thesis, the commercially and politically advanced members of Cape Town's black community had been groomed over the course of the nineteenth century with political means and awareness so that by the early twentieth century, in the face of a looming socio-political environment that seriously threatened their social status and commercial interests, they looked past their differences as distinct groups, and marshalled their political energies under a unified coloured social and political identity. Gavin Lewis' introductory discussion of the establishment of the first notable coloured political party, the African Political Organization (later changed to the African People's Organization) in 1902, illustrates this argument well.

The coloured population originated not long after the arrival of the first Dutch settlers. Over time, “a continuing process of absorption and miscegenation between European colonists, the remnants of the indigenous Khoisan peoples of the Cape, and the East and West African, Madagascan and East Indian slaves whom the colonists imported, produced . . . a heterogeneous collectivity of ‘people of colour’ in the colony”. Working alongside common slaves in the Dutch colony, this group largely remained trapped in the oppressive system of indentured slavery. This highly “restrictive political and socio-economic environment” meant most attempts to socially mobilize and rebel were either prevented or quickly stifled. At the same time, besides the common element of bondage, as a result of their “heterogeneous nature”, “those people loosely described as Coloureds” had little other common cause around which to organise themselves, indicating that at the start of the nineteenth century, they “lacked any strong unifying sense of Coloured identity” (Lewis, 1989: 8).

With British occupation of the Cape in 1806, and the gradually implementation of their liberal political system, the situation of the local black population changed significantly. The abolition of slavery in the 1830s, the introduction of representative institutions based on the non-racial franchise “open to all adult males who fulfilled certain property and wage qualifications”, and the eventual establishment of representative and then responsible government in the 1870s, meant that, gradually, over the course of the century, the local black community were increasingly being incorporated into civil society and the British political complex. The shift in circumstances, understandably, led to growing idealistic aspirations of racial and civil equality amongst the ex-bonded, aspirations that were fuelled by the margin of political clout they wielded. This growing self-awareness was therefore underwritten by a hegemonic faith in what was known as the Cape liberal tradition. The liberties afforded by this body of legislation, in total, were understood to refer to the large tradition of Cape Liberalism, while the small tradition referred to the phenomenon of white parties aligning with black constituencies on the premise of advancing the latter’s interests. In total, this context, coupled with politicization by white parties and endemic political mobilization, led to an increasing sense of political self-awareness amongst a small segment of the educated, middle and

upper class (commonly referred to as elites) members of the black community who qualified to participate in the political process.

Access to the political process, however, was complicated by, and implicated in, emerging distinctions of race and class in the city. In the first instance, "liberalism in the Cape linked political rights to property-ownership" and eventually literacy as well. These basic criteria for qualifying for the vote, epitomised in liberal claims for social equality amongst all civilized men, indicated that, theoretically, race had been despatched as a criteria for civil status. In reality, however, local concepts of race had a significant bearing on the civil and social status of elites since their social stature was also derived from a variety of non-economic status markers like education, lightness of skin tone, and mastery of the English language. Significantly, these markers pointed to the central problem elites faced: on the one hand they shared a degree of civil status on par with whites, yet were still considered to be black. In the face of this dilemma, "for the majority of politically active Coloureds living in the colony, the only viable option given the fact of entrenched white dominance, was to seek a share of white privilege" by breaking all ties with their black heritage, "associated as it was with slavery and social inferiority", and assimilating into the white community. Assimilation was therefore the expression of elites' enduring aspirations "towards integration into white society, with all the privileges this implied", over and above the establishment of "a separate Coloured identity with its negative social implications". Not only was this ethnic identity considered inferior, but mobilizing along ethnic lines was perceived as having serious negative consequences, the extreme case being British authorities rescinding their patronage in the freedoms afforded by the liberal tradition, and the civil and material benefits that accrued from them.

Only once the rhetorical façade of British liberalism started flaking away during a three year period coinciding with the Anglo-Boer war did elites start to "contemplate seriously the establishment of separate Coloured political organisations to defend and advance their interests as a group". During the last few decades of the nineteenth century, British authorities increasingly sought to "entrench their political and economic dominance" through proposals to raise the franchise qualifications, and moves to segregate education.

The local black population therefore experienced their discrimination as wholesale, and saw unified political action as the only means of securing their interests. The sprouting of African-American ideas of race pride, rejection of racial inferiority, and temperance, commonly associated with the work of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois, also contributed to elites mobilizing along ethnic lines. Having been promoted through a multitude of political and social forums and media established by F.Z.S Peregrino, an educated immigrant journalist, at the turn of the century, these ideas were to “provide the ideological basis for the Coloured elites to organise on the grounds of their shared ‘blackness’ and to encourage their mobilization as Coloureds to work for their amalgamation as a group into the dominant white society”. Mobilizing around the label coloured was therefore highly significant, because it subtly communicated a multivalent racial distinction from blacks, and a civil and social relationship with whites, and in some ways, articulated a shift in elites socio-political priorities, as it meant subordinating aspirations of gaining a share of white privilege for the more urgent goal of defending their present material interests and social status. Overall, coloured identity was the distilled outcome of political mobilization that connected the social experience of the subordinated classes with their aspirations for civil status and recognition by white authorities (Lewis, 1989: 7-17).

The historical evidence would certainly suggest this theory could be implicated in the process of an emerging coloured identity. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that it was the only factor behind its emergence. Even if situated in a broader socio-cultural context, after close examination, this line of thought was flawed at a theoretical level. For example, to argue his case for the relationship between coloured identity and ethnic political mobilization, Lewis drew on a dual process theory which illustrated that coloured identity was the product of the antagonistic, dialectical interaction between the race-based measures of political management and control imposed by white authorities from above, and the oppositional socio-cultural and political action initiated by coloureds from below. One therefore had to accept that “Coloured identity is a white imposed categorization”, but also acknowledge that it was not a wholly negative label since it had been ‘adopted by different segments of the coloured population for a variety of reasons’

(4). This type of argument was replicated by Goldin (1987), who drew on a similar dual process theory to illustrate the role of politics and economics in determining coloured identity during the latter part of the twentieth century. In his argument, Goldin distinguished between the two spheres of action by calling the socio-economic measures imposed by successive white governments *restructuring*, and the coloured political response *resistance*. While these dual process theories reserved a space for coloureds efforts to define and assert themselves, this was overshadowed by the implied assertion that white authorities had the strongest influence over how colouredness was ultimately understood, primarily because coloured political action was framed as being passive and reactive. The oppressive and racially divisive quality of the politics practised by successive regimes over the course of the twentieth century certainly warranted a look at the role of politics in shaping coloured identity. But any approach to this subject had to privilege the coloured people with whom the label resonated most deeply, and their self-motivated, active processes of self-understanding and social expression.

The history of coloured identity proposed by Bickford Smith (1995) was a good example of a more critical approach to the subject. Bickford-Smith argued that coloured identity could be better understood as a unifying ethnicity that couldn't simply be reduced to the efforts of "elite ethnic mobilizers", or processes of "dominant class racializations". In this sense, working from a more nuanced social-life perspective, it could be viewed as the product of "a dialectical relationship between racialization by whites and self definition" (445). According to this thesis, over the course of the nineteenth century, as a result of key cultural, political and economic factors, Cape Town's heterogeneous black population gradually grew in its experience of homogeneity, so that by the end of the century the term coloured epitomised this experience as an ethnicity. The ethnic label therefore came to describe local blacks' common historical origins, their unique social experience of bondage and white oppression, their light brown pigmentation, and their self-motivation towards preserving their socio-economic interests as a group.

The first seeds of this ethnicity were sown in the early part of the nineteenth century when members of the heterogeneous local black population came together to celebrate

the New Year's carnival. In simple terms, the carnival was a festival that ran throughout the month of December "with a commemoration of Emancipation Day" on the first of the month, "and carried on to the 'big days' of Christmas and New Year, the traditional slave holidays" (Bickford-Smith, 1995: 443). The festival culminated on *Tweede Nuwe Jaar*, the second of January, when Coon troupes paraded and performed in their colourful gear through the streets of the city. Overall, the New Year's festival consisted of three different artistic ensembles, Malay Choirs, Christmas Choirs and Coon troupes, each with their own musical repertoires, celebrated on different occasions during the festival period, that in total formed a unique local harmony that constituted the New Years festivals. This was a time of celebrating "shared heritage of bondage", and asserting "an alternative and potentially oppositional culture", which manifest in popular carnival songs that sometimes parodied the dominant classes, but also in the form of the event itself, as with the marching through the city centre as a form of claim-making over a space participants otherwise experienced as exclusionary (Bickford-Smith, 1995: 444). As an occasion where Cape Town's diverse black population congregated around their collective experience of subordination, the New Year's festival helped establish a cultural common ground by evoking the experience of a "broader communal consciousness".

Significantly, this communal consciousness was amplified by the increasing racialization of work and public spaces, which resulted in a sharpening of distinctions between local and foreign blacks. Legislatively, towards the end of the nineteenth century, whites were increasingly being privileged for skilled work, while African workers migrating to the city from the Eastern Cape in turn placed further pressure on local black workers. White craft unions and training institutions started excluding all blacks gaining artisan skills in order to preserve their economic interest. These measures were supplemented by legislation preventing blacks from gaining certain forms of employment. While blacks were lumped together in terms of exclusionary policy, encounters between black workers from outside the city and locals in the work place helped harden the apparent racial differences between the two groups. The influx of black workers from the economically deprived Eastern Cape into the city led to increasing tension, and even open hostility, between the two groups, since local workers "were being replaced by cheap African

labour” and put in “supervisory” positions over African labourers. Working alongside each other, locals, furthermore, noticed that black African workers had a different set of “shared origins to most local blacks, and with their own cultural practises including a Bantu dialect” (Bickford-Smith, 1995: 451). These racial distinctions were amplified by legislation that prevented black Africans from purchasing alcohol, segregating them to exclusive locations, and barring them from engaging in sexual liaisons with white prostitutes. In the case of liquor sales, then, “both liquor sellers and magistrates had to distinguish between ‘Natives’ and other blacks and act on those distinctions”. According to one British authority at the time, when in doubt about the race of a person of colour “appearance, hair, colour and other signs” were to be used to decide whether the person was “a Cape boy” or a member of “one of the Bantu tribes” (Bickford-Smith, 1995: 451). These incidents therefore served to racialize the endemic community consciousness of locals, so that the label coloured was adopted partly as an indicator of the “fact that shade of pigmentation closely correlated with [their] historical and contemporary experience” of social life in the city (Bickford-Smith, 1995: 451).

These antecedent factors were pivotal to the completion of the process of a coloured ethnicity, which came in the form of ethnic political mobilization. While coloured ethnic mobilization operated in the context of increasing white oppression, this wave of political activity was not simply passive and reactive as has generally been assumed. Coloured political mobilization, it could be said, was driven by a growing sense of self-awareness that merged with a maturing, proactive sense of political self-confidence.

It was the vigorous social assertiveness of the Cape Malay community that helped unify the coloured community and set the trend for later coloured political organization. By the 1880s, the Muslim community’s economic and cultural livelihood was under serious threat. Not only were they being pushed out of their niche occupations as a result of the increasing segregation of labour, but their traditional burial grounds near the city centre, close to what was known as the Malay quarter, was under threat of being closed. In response, elite members of the Malay community initially resorted to appeals to prominent British officials, and pledges of support to white parties whom would advance

their cause. This represented the pragmatic expression of their faith in the “legitimacy of the non-racial Cape constitution and the reality of equality before the law”. With these channels yielding little success, and in the face of the “increasing hostility of English racism”, Muslims became more resolute in their efforts to achieve a degree of socio-political autonomy and independence. They therefore resorted to boycotting participation in the political process altogether when the white politicians they had supported failed to deliver, and violent protest when their appeals to high ranking officials about the closure of their cemeteries were ignored.

Altogether fed up with depending on the grace of white authorities, the Malay community advanced its own parliamentary candidate, Achmat Effendi, for the 1894 local parliamentary elections. This seemed a promising alternative since a technicality in the Cape voting system meant eligible voters in their constituency had the clout to secure a coloured parliamentary seat. But British authorities hastily put paid to the plan, amending voting legislation so as to prevent Effendi from standing any chance in the election. “Nevertheless, Effendi went ahead with his campaign, overtly appealing for support beyond the Malay community”, marshalling support on promises “to look after all his constituents irrespective of religion” and advocacy for the “compulsory education for all” races. More than just a drive for political power, his campaign was therefore also a political process of shaping an inclusive coloured ethnicity. More significantly, as the epitome of the Malay’s political programme, his campaign highlighted the proactive and self-assertive quality of coloured political mobilization at the time (Bickford-Smith, 1995: 443-461).

The increasing political assertiveness of segments of the coloured population was supplemented by the flourishing of sporting clubs and vigilance and temperance societies aimed exclusively at coloureds. These organisations “provided the means of developing and sustaining” the values of the coloured community, and, ultimately, helped consolidate “an overarching sense of class and community” that cut across race and class lines (Lewis, 1987: 14). The late nineteenth century was therefore a period vibrant formal political and informal social activity in the coloured community. It ushered in the first

few political parties focussed exclusively on the coloured population, most of which were short-lived. Against this backdrop, the first truly significant coloured political organisation, the African People's Organization, was established in 1902, operating in its early years from the political premise of the promotion of "Coloured ethnicity as a group identity that could unite communities of the ex-bonded", and the defence of the status of relative privilege enjoyed by Cape coloureds (Bickford-Smith, 1995: 461). Coloured political mobilization at the beginning of the twentieth century therefore confirmed and authorized the beliefs of both the elite and working class segments of the coloured population, shaped gradually over the course of the nineteenth century, that they were a unique ethnic group deserving of social and civil recognition on par with whites.

Despite its expansive evidence base and keen focus on the subtleties of social life in the city, this theory was problematic because it was premised on the notion of ethnicity, a term that was loaded with racial connotations that implied colouredness was static, unchanging and fixed in individuals. Similar criticisms have been forwarded against other theories of the subject that were based on the notion of identity. Overall, while theories of political mobilization and ethnicity proved unsuccessful in providing a final explanation of what coloured identity really meant, when juxtaposed, they narrated a historical tale that suggested coloured identity was not so much a social identity constructed in unique circumstances, but rather a social construct that operated as a social identity. During the twentieth century, these and other more sophisticated ideas of what coloured identity entailed started emerging. Coloureds were steeped in this contest of negotiating its meaning, advancing varying explanations of what the label meant according to the socio-political conditions at the time.

### **Coloured Identity in the Twentieth Century**

As the heterogeneity of the coloured population would suggest, coloured identity had wholly different meanings for different segments of the population. Coloureds also frequently changed their minds about who they were and where they came from. In his book-length analysis of the history of the idea of coloured identity, *Not White Enough Not Black Enough*, Mohammad Adhikari (2005) asserts that the idea of what coloured

meant to coloureds changed markedly from the 1930s up until the 1990s. At different times, as we shall see, the predominant view of what coloured identity entailed, according to coloureds themselves, shifted between essentialist, instrumentalist and social constructionist theoretical perspectives.

The most basic theory of coloured identity, advanced formally in the early twentieth century, was that the coloured population emanated from the miscegenous sexual liaisons between black indigenous people and the first European settlers during the seventeenth century. Propositions such as this, where coloured identity was believed to be racially founded, Adhikari termed the essentialist thesis. Appearing in various forms and guises, from optimistic progressionist to the more cynical radical perspectives, the essentialist thesis largely dominated the coloured debate and discussion during the twentieth century. By the late twentieth century it had become widely accepted in South Africa that coloured people were the product of race mixture. Van der Ross provided an apt summation of its popular purchase when he stated that “[m]any people believe that somewhere in the past, perhaps about three hundred or two hundred years ago, there was a measure of racial mixture, and that this fairly restricted amount of mixing produced a number of people of mixed blood, which number then went on to multiply to the number of coloured people today” (1979: 5).

Even Richard Rive, a prestigious coloured literary figure, who publicly rejected the label coloured as a self-descriptor, subscribed to this argument. For example, reflecting on his family tree, early in his autobiography Rive noted the mixed quality of his genetic heritage. He was clear about the fact that he was of “*mixed* parentage” but not so sure about his “ancestry” (1981: 3, original emphasis). For one, looking at the picture mounted on the wall in his childhood home, it was evident that his maternal grandfather “was white”. Possessing no similar evidence of his maternal grandmother other than his mother’s “bronze” skin and a scant reference to the region from which she came, Rive deduced that she “must have been Black or Brown” (1981:3). His paternal side of the family proved to be more difficult to work out. The knowledge of whether there were black, white or brown streams of blood flowing into him from this side would always

remain a mystery since his knowledge of this side of the family was simply too limited. By charting his genealogy in this way, arguably, Rive was also making a case for the essentialist thesis as being the central idea behind coloured identity.

When reduced to its basic essence, the essentialist thesis came down to the chromatic equation of black and white makes brown. Its appeal stemmed from the fact that it correlated coloured identity with the popular idea of the origin of the South African nation, and qualified it using the commonly understood register of race, race purities and miscegenation.

Historically, the term miscegenation was first cited in 1864 in the context of the American Civil War and the ensuing debate about the civil status of slaves. Here, miscegenation was invoked as an ambivalent term that played on the grounds for possible political union between the warring Northern and Southern factions, and the question of race mixture between white rulers and black slaves. In this sense, it formed part of an argument that claimed “a cross with civilized races makes an aboriginal race more fertile” and an “audacious attack on pro-slavery anthropologists . . . that claimed inevitable decline to be the effect of the mixing of races”. In advancing their cases, opposed factions often argued that emancipation really revolved around issues of white sexual dominance and control. The pro-slavery Southerners argued that Northern Abolitionists’ drive to free slaves was motivated by sexual desire to legitimately possess slave women. Socially, furthermore, they claimed emancipation would result in the abominable situation of “sexual pandemonium between black men and white women”. This “phobia and fascination that the idea of miscegenation” raised in the white population therefore indicated that racism was premised on the “structure of sexual attraction and repulsion” epitomised by “the sexual desire of white men for black women” (Young, 1995: 144-150).

Alternatively, miscegenation, rooted as it was in the language of Social Darwinism, an ideology which described “social evolution in terms of laws of natural selection and stressed the importance of biological inheritance”, was socially perturbing for whites

because it was widely believed the progeny of black and white parents would be physically and mentally degenerate (Dubow: 1995, 120). This fear of biological deterioration could be traced to the concerns of British public officials and intellectuals about the state of advancement of the white civilization in the late nineteenth century. While British upper classes celebrated their biological superiority and dominance over other races of the colony, they were confronted with the disturbing fact of a growing urban white working class proletariat that mingled freely with workers of other races at home. What consequences would this interracial mingling have for the white civilization as a whole? It was concluded that not only would the product of miscegenous relations be degenerate, but it would lead to defective genes from black races infiltrating the white population, leading to its gradual increasing weakness and eventual demise. These negative connotations have been identified as one source of the shame and guilt that came to be associated with coloured identity (Adhikari, 2005; Erasmus, 2001). Overall, by playing on Victorian “anxieties relating to sexuality” as a logic for understanding genetic deterioration and social contamination, miscegenation “operated in the private arena as well as the public domain” as an ideology that linked ideas about race purity with social order (Dubow, 1995: 181).

By making it an offence for black Africans to engage in sex with white prostitutes in the late 1800s, British authorities at the Cape signalled that fears of miscegenation played an important role in constructing and maintaining a social order based on racial hierarchy. Following the establishment of the South African Union in 1910, other pieces of legislation focussed specifically on curbing sexual contact between the black and white races, commonly called the Immorality Acts, were developed and deployed. The first of these was implemented in 1927 and outlawed carnal relations between whites and blacks outside of matrimony, while in its final, more consolidated form as the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, sexual contact between whites and blacks both within and outside of matrimony was outlawed. As in the case of their British counterparts, these measures represented the fears of Afrikaner authorities about the threat of the degeneration of the purity of the Afrikaner race in the urban environment. Afrikaners, motivated by civil religious beliefs of being a chosen people (Moodie, 1979), perceived miscegenation as a

serious threat in the decade preceding the Second World War. A large population of unskilled impoverished Afrikaners had migrated to large urban centres in search of work as a result of an economic depression during the 1930s. Residing in close proximity to blacks, and competing with them for the same employment opportunities, this segment of the population became a serious risk to the purity of the race through interracial sexual contact, and social demise in terms of a lowering of class status. In tackling these issues, more legislation was implemented to segregate the labour market and improve the chances of whites gaining skilled employment, as well as increasing segregation of urban areas. Miscegenation therefore provided an ideological base for the increased application of racial dominance and control of South African society (Dubow, 1995).

An alternative, yet equally popular, line of analysis Adhikari calls the instrumentalist approach. In its simplest form, the instrumentalist thesis posited that coloured identity was a fictional creation of white supremacists. Proponents of this argument often pointed to the Population Registration Act of 1950, a legislative measure aimed at racially classifying South Africans according to race, as the true origin of coloured identity. In that preliminary edict, the state defined coloureds as people who were obviously neither white nor black, or whom were commonly accepted to be apart of the coloured community. It should be noted that the act had been preceded by other classificatory references and documents. Nevertheless, by pointing to this official documentary evidence, proponents of this argument identified the ideological qualities of coloured identity as a racist fallacy and political construction, and implicated it in political processes of dominance, coercion and oppression orchestrated by white supremacists.

As an advanced and sophisticated version of the instrumentalist thesis, Thiven Reddy's (2001) argument for the "constitution of coloured subjects" illustrated its basic premises of placing emphasis on political texts, ideology, and the function of coloured identity in the greater South African racial and political landscape. Working from a post-structuralist theoretical background underpinned by the work of Foucault, Derrida and Judith Butler, Reddy argued that a discursive analysis of the South African Native Affairs Commission Report (SANAC) (1903-5) and the Population Registration Acts revealed that the

category coloured was a central component in the system of racial classification that underwrote the organisation of apartheid civil society. As key state texts focussed on race classification, they highlighted the arbitrary relationship between group labels as signifiers, and the people they were meant to signify. More importantly, as “documents produced close to or within the state’s ambit”, they illustrated how the state “constituted social relations of civil society” on the basis of these arbitrary classifications. The SANAC report, for example, was produced as a road map for the imminent constitution of the South African state in 1910, and focussed on devising the best means of governing and economically exploiting the black masses. When it came to the classification of coloureds, the commission’s decision to classify them as natives revealed the document’s underlying essentialist worldview, based as it was on the idea of race purities, which the label coloured at once confounded and brought into clear focus. The decision was also motivated by the commission’s pursuit of formulating a common political language for speaking about blacks.

In contrast, the Population Registration Act’s classification of coloureds was underpinned by the “social and political discourses” that constituted civil relations, since its primary definition was based on the idea that coloureds were people “generally accepted” to be so, a classification which drew its meaning from the wider political landscape. The legal practise of racially classifying the population as a whole, however, allowed the apartheid state to penetrate deeper into civil society, and helped “establish a material basis for its own categories of subjects” that crystallized the relationship between label and group through the racializing the experience of everyday life. In this way, the Population Registration Act helped accomplish the certainty of race classification as it “used the racial signifier as if the words conveyed an unproblematic reference to a real existing ‘thing’” with an essence. The label coloured, however, was problematic since its essence was not pure, but of a mixed quality. Overall, then, as the unclassifiable, the category coloured resisted the dominant racist discourse, while at the same time imputing the entire classificatory system with meaning (Reddy, 2001: 64-79).

The instrumentalist argument, however, failed to take into account the messiness of the state's classifications and the problems that arose when they were applied. For example, while the Population Registration Act of 1950 simplistically defined "a Coloured person" as being "a person who is not white or Bantu", it soon became clear that this definition didn't capture the essence of what the state had implied. Upon revision, "Coloured" was clarified and subdivided to include different sub-groups like Cape Coloured, Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, "Other" Asian, and "Other" Coloured. Despite having been sharpened, in practise, classifying individuals according to their visible racial features proved highly problematic. In the hopes of a better standard of living, coloureds frequently challenged the state's ineffective classification system, and often succeeded in being reclassified as white. Reddy, however, interpreted these reclassifications as examples proving the arbitrariness of the signifier coloured. More significantly, as the special Theron commission on the state of the coloured people pointed out, the state's classificatory schemes, sometimes based on line of descent and sometimes on visible features, tended to contradict themselves. Commissioners therefore pointed out that "a "Coloured" in terms of the Population registration Act [could] cohabit with a "White" person in a "White" area, but not own property there". Similarly, "Bantu" women [were allowed to] live with their "coloured" spouses in "Coloured" areas but Bantu men [could not] do the same" (Theron Commission, 1976: 8). The apartheid state's version of who the coloured people were and what coloured identity meant was therefore not as simple and straightforward as instrumentalists' first suggested.

While defined from above towards the end of subordinating coloureds, instrumentalists recognised that coloured identity could provide a viable theoretical platform for political resistance. In order to resist state oppression, and if the coloureds were to be emancipated, then the authoritative definition, firstly, had to be rejected, and, secondly, be replaced with a more acceptable social identity. During the twentieth century, groups adopting versions of this argument advanced a number of substitute identities. More often than not these substitute identities were black African in colour. For example, during the late 1970s, specifically after the 1976 student uprising, instrumentalist thinking was fuelled by and became closely aligned with the social philosophy of Black

Consciousness. The Black Consciousness movement represented a promising opportunity for coloureds to express their solidarity in oppression with black South Africans simply because the Black Consciousness movement was premised on a philosophical conceptualization of race and racial oppression which was relevant to all South Africans of colour. According to Steve Biko, the movement's founding father, "being black [is] not a matter of pigmentation—being black is a reflection of a mental attitude" (2004: 52). Black Consciousness espoused that the source of racial oppression in South Africa resided in the oppressed group's dark skin pigmentation. The purchase of the instrumentalist thesis began to wane from about 1990, once the liberation struggle, driven by a unified front of open defiance during the 1980s, had seemingly yielded success. Subsequently, this resulted in colouredism, or the increased advocacy of colouredness amongst members of the coloured population whom had previously denounced the idea. In the process of negotiating the state of the imminent democratic South Africa, this social assertiveness was the pragmatic expression of the coloured population's claims on the nation (Adhikari, 2005). The political potential of the term could therefore be employed towards various ends, on the one hand, towards liberation from oppression, or, on the other, in service of highlighting one aspect of the diversity within the South African nation.

By the late twentieth century, not only were coloured people developing new ideas about themselves, but coloured intellectuals were also working on new ways of thinking about coloured identity. Looking at the work of their predecessors, and the situation of the coloured population in democratic South Africa, a new brand of thinking based on the idea of coloured identity as a social construction began to emerge. Disgruntled with arguments that implied coloured identity was fixed and static, and which generally denied "Coloured people a significant role in the making of their own identity", the social constructionist approach served to "demonstrate the complexity of Coloured identity" and "stress the agency of Coloured people" (Adhikari, 2005: 35). As a concept with real social significance, coloured identity was viewed as being fluid and dynamic, residing in the meaning systems shared and recreated in society. Since the concept was most pertinent to them, how coloureds articulated and rearticulated the notion of a coloured

identity was an important element in shaping its social meaning. In practise, from this theoretical bent, generally speaking, analysing coloured identity could entail describing the source and characteristics implicit in the idea of a coloured collective consciousness, in the form of a social identity, or an analysis of how individuals understood and negotiated the concept of a collective identity in their everyday lives as a subjectivity. Adhikari's (2006) use of a joke to demonstrate popular racial stereotyping of coloureds, and Clint Maggot's (2003) discourse analysis of coloured subjectivities of high school pupils are two succinct examples of these varying approaches.

To illustrate the racial stereotypes that came to dominate the coloured psyche, their significance in reinforcing the South African racial hierarchy, and how coloureds "negotiated this racialized social terrain to forge their own identities", Adhikari (2006: 143) drew on an apartheid era joke that satirised the notion of coloured people as the product of miscegeny. His argument hinged on the observation that the popularity of the joke and its humour were premised on the store of shared assumptions about race and social status in South African society. By unravelling the web of assumptions behind the joke, by contextualising them historically and clarifying their significance for coloureds, he demonstrated how it helped construct and perpetuate ideas that coloureds were hybrid, of illegitimate origins, and a marginal social group tainted with the stigma of "residual savagery" (Adhikari, 2006: 143).

In contrast, Clint Maggot's discourse analysis of interviews conducted with coloured high school learners in post-apartheid South Africa revealed that the learners did not always rely on the stereotypical discourses commonly associated with coloured identity when probed about their views on the subject. He identified three source discourses that informed the different subject positions they variously adopted. The "Apartheid discourse" was related to ideas of racial hierarchy and social division based on essentialist notions of race purities. It contrasted with the "New South Africa/Happy Family" discourse which was associated with ideas of togetherness, similarity and an essentialist disavowal of race. The "Individuality" discourse constructed race as "fluid, and being based on social indicators, which were adaptable. So, when colouredness was

positioned in the Apartheid discourse it was made to appear fixed and associated with feelings of inferiority shame. In response, learners sometimes drew on alternative discourses of resistance. When they drew on the romanticising discourse colouredness was made to seem preferential and likable. Another resistance discourse which emerged was called in-group Othering. It revolved around the use of the word “gam”, a colloquial term that served as a catch- all label for the negative stereotypes associated with working class coloured identity, and the derision and Othering of those who may have aligned themselves with this subjectivity. Overall, however, it appeared the learners continued to struggle with the contradictory and ambiguous essentialist qualities long-related to the experience of colouredness. Whether approached from the angle of a social identity or subjectivity, the social constructionist approach indicated coloured identity was a concept engaged in small-scale interpersonal situations where broader meanings about the term were negotiated, resisted and recast.

Explaining coloured identity in non-essentialist terms also provides a platform for engaging some of the major theoretical problems associated with some of the theories covered in this chapter. Firstly, at the outset, it was claimed that both the term coloured and the notion of coloured identity were problematic. This problem could be reduced to the question of the essence of coloured homogeneity. From a social constructionist point of view, rather than being a problem of homogeneity, this was a problem of viewing coloured identity in essentialist terms. Secondly, by extension, this essentialist preconception was reified in the conventional body of literature by the practise of using the terms coloured and coloured identity interchangeably as if coloured identity resided within coloured people. It is for this reason that Clint Maggot qualifies his use of these terms, when he states, “I use the word colouredness, rather than coloured identity because I am aiming to highlight not only how coloured identity is constructed, but also how this constructs the experience of colouredness” (2003:15). Thirdly, we have seen in both formal theory and wider society that colouredness was often reduced to the idea of mixed race. This denied the social dynamics of coloured identity, the conditions under which it was shaped, and the agency of the coloured people in this overall process. Fourthly, coloureds were frequently denied a margin of agency. In the instances where coloured

agency was referenced, in many cases, it was done in a paternalist fashion, or reduced coloureds to apparently authentic cultural artefacts, rather than paying attention to the ways in which coloureds created meaning in society. Finally, theories of coloured identity tended to play down the role of coloured people in South African society, helping to perpetuate the belief that they were a marginalised group. Acknowledging their existence in society and the social significance of their ways of generating self-understanding, we have seen, has real potential for helping South Africa come to terms with its racist social order.

### **Conclusion**

In the form of a historical overview, this chapter has briefly canvassed some of the prevailing intellectual views of coloured identity. It was shown to have emerged during the late nineteenth century in Cape Town as a result of a coalescence of cultural and political factors melded under conditions of white oppression, and promoted organically by members of the ex-bonded community. Over the course of the twentieth century dominant views of coloured identity oscillated between essentialist, instrumentalist and social constructionist theoretical perspectives according to the socio-political climate. It ended with a detailed critique of the problems related to the standard body of literature and theory on the subject, and overall, proposed an understanding coloured identity that was the malleable product of its bearers which was constantly being made and remade.

## Chapter 2

### A Place to Call Our Own:

#### District Six, Sacred Space and Identity in Cape Town

##### Introduction

In 1965, Harvey Cox observed that the modern era was characterised by “the rise of urban civilization and the collapse of traditional religion”. From this perspective, he noted, the modern city was the ideal representation of the modern age because it was founded on secular ideals. Secular in this case referred to a society’s predominant worldview, and the prevailing value system underwriting the city’s existence as a man-made material structure. By extension, then, modernity could be analyzed historically according to the presence of religion in urban space. The city could therefore be compared to the spatial arrangements of the tribe and the town. As the most basic spatial order, the tribe was characterised by a collective of small clan-based groups who participated in a localised subsistence economy, sparked mainly as a result of an abandonment of superstitious beliefs for real religion. The town, epitomised by the Greek *polis*, succeeded the tribe as a spatial order, and was made up of a conglomerate of tribal communities unified through their subscription to a new religion that centred on devotion of a common divine ancestor. The town was therefore a charged space, since the “founding of the polis was a religious act”, and to be a member of this new community “was to be a member of the new cultus” (Cox, 1965: 8). The urban space of the town was therefore characterised by a social order where political and intellectual authority were intertwined with religion. In contrast to the spatial formation’s of the tribe and the town, as the epitome of the age of modernity, the city was the material “field of human exploration and endeavour from which the gods had fled” (Cox, 1965: 1).

At the start of the twentieth century, Cape Town’s municipal authorities were struggling to deal with deteriorating urban conditions in and around the city centre. The city’s squalid state could be put down to the large population of black and coloured workers residing in the area. As the commercial and administrative hub of the province, flanked

on one side by a busy trading port, and an expansive industrial area on the other, the city centre offered workers a number of employment opportunities but also assured them easy access to their places of work. This commercially orientated spatial arrangement, designed to promote the flourishing labour intensive factories and industry located in the centre, was typical of Victorian cities. So too were urban decay and squalid urban conditions. The situation was compounded by a legacy of bad urban planning, since, Cape Town's urban space had expanded haphazardly as and where space allowed from the time it had been established as a separate dwelling area for Dutch free burgers in the seventeenth century. At heart, it still retained its original Dutch urban heritage, with a grid-iron road pattern, but, under British rule, urban development continued around the old town in a way that suggested the new Victorian planning model had simply been imposed on its predecessor and the majestic surrounding landscape, dominated by Table Mountain. In the early twentieth century, then, looking at the consequences of the city's disorganized urban design authorities recognised that, in future, urban planning had to be managed more carefully.

The first wave of urban renewal was initiated in the 1930s when the South African Railway embarked on its plan to construct the Duncan dock. This was an immense project which entailed claiming space from the ocean, and making room for a new central railway station. At the same time, authorities seized upon the opportunity to deal with the scourge of overcrowding, and improve the city's aesthetic profile. To address these issues city authorities turned to the ideas of the modernist Swiss planner Le Corbusier. As "the urban planner of monopoly capital", Le Corbusier viewed urban space in functionalist terms, and placed emphasis on efficiency, order and control in his designs. The city was to be an ordered space where capitalism was to flow freely without hindrance. Maximizing a city's economic potential required, in the first instance, that development be initiated on a clean slate, starting with the city centre, so as to replace "the accidental layout of the ground" and overcome the haphazard flaws of extant planning models. By default, this entailed clearing out the city's residential population. In contrast to the densely populated Victorian city, therefore, the modern city was a low-density, efficiently functioning commercial centre (Pinnock, 1989).

By extension, if the city centre was to be cleared, new residential areas would have to be constructed in the suburbs to accommodate the working classes. "The 1947 Foreshore plans of the City Council" therefore "included a regional diagram for "defined communities", which contained "ring roads and radials with neat self-contained townships in between" (Pinnock, 1989: 157). The new diagram indicated that local planners drew their inspiration from the overseas planning models of the Garden City and the Neighbourhood Unit when preparing accommodation for the proletariat. The Garden City, an English urban design, for one, had been successfully piloted in the 1920s already, forming the conceptual basis of the suburbs' of Maitland, Pinelands and Langa. Conceived by the British town planner Ebenezer Howard, the Garden City was an urban reformist planning model that aimed to address "the overcrowded, polluted, unsanitary conditions of Victorian cities amid fears of working class revolt" (Pistorious, 2002: 41). To relieve the burden from the city centre, Howard proposed the idea of developing a network of rail-linked, low-density, self-sustaining towns on the outskirts of the city. The Neighbourhood Unit, on the other hand, hailed from America, and was designed with the intention of promoting the development of cohesive communities by constructing inward-looking, self-contained residential areas that were enclosed in an expanse of undeveloped grassy terrain or green belt.

With the rise to power of the nationalist government, and the implementation of the Group Area's Act of 1950, the broader scheme of modern redevelopment was implemented with greater expediency, mainly because apartheid ideologues came to recognize that modern urban designs could also be used as a tool for urban segregation. Under the apartheid regime, the program of urban renewal in Cape Town became synonymous with the state's separate development policies, as it wove racial oppression into the material foundation of the new city. In the city centre the process of clearing out the black and coloured working classes and relocating them in the townships was accelerated by the Group Areas Act (see Field, 2001). While at the periphery, townships were built using designs that merged and modified the planning concepts from the Garden City and the Neighbourhood Unit with the new racial ideology, in effect resulting in residential areas that materially reinforced racial discrimination. Three features of the

new townships bore this out. Firstly, their location on the periphery of the city spatially asserted white supremacy over the city centre. Secondly, townships were often bounded by large swaths of open land, or buffer strips, so that they were cordoned off from other nearby suburbs and readily available for stationing armed forces in times of unrest. Thirdly, by planning only one main road entrance and a maze of interlinking roads within, townships were designed to more or less trap their residents and force them to develop a racially defined sense of community. Overall, therefore, the apartheid state capitalized upon the original grand plan to modernize the city, steering it in such a way that its racist ideologies linked the remodeling of the city centre with the forced relocation of inner city communities, and the creation of the outlying townships

The most notable example of this merger of forces, arguably, was the forced removal and relocation of the inner-city residents of District Six. Located near the city centre, District Six was populated predominantly by working class coloureds, but also included small white, black and indian communities. The District was a classical example of Victorian urban planning where the working classes overwhelmingly populated the city centre or its nearby surrounds, eventually resulting in overpopulation, squalor and decay. So, from the late nineteenth hundreds already, District Six had been identified as an overpopulated slum. Despite repeated concerns about the state of the District, neither landlords nor the municipality chose to implement measures to improve residents squalid living conditions (Bickford-Smith, 1990). It was therefore under the auspices of slum clearance, as part of the process of urban renewal and racial segregation that District Six was reclassified as a white area in 1966 (Hart, 1990). This initiated an era during which roughly fifty thousand working class coloureds were forcefully removed and relocated *en mass* to the Cape Flats, their former community demolished to make way for redevelopment. By the late 1980s all that remained of the suburb were a few Muslim and Christian places of worship dotted on a largely barren and desolate expanse of building rubble.

Considering how significant modern planning concepts were in the overall redevelopment of Cape Town, it would appear that Cox's theory about the modern city was applicable locally. This was borne out in two ways. Firstly, it was pointed out that

the local program of urban renewal was based primarily on modernist urban planning concepts. Indeed, every stage of the process was pervaded with the modernist ideology of efficiency, order and control. Modernist spatial planning was aimed at promoting capitalism at all levels of society, from the grand concept of the city as a functional commercial centre, to the idea of the township home as a functional living space. The city's urban space was therefore organized to reinforce the binary of worker and employee, eventually expanding to include those of white versus black and oppressor versus oppressed. In this way, modern ideology became deeply imbued in the foundation of the city. Secondly, the overall pattern of urban renewal, flowing from the centre towards the periphery, could be read as a metaphor for expanding secularism with progress and development overcoming tradition, culture and religion. By the end of the twentieth century, then, Cape Town could confidently claim the title of being a modern city.

In this context of modernising Cape Town, and the forced removal of the residents of District Six, the idea of Cape Town being the natural home of the coloured people started emerging more widely. One could even say it crystallized around District Six. In this chapter, I wish to explore the idea of District Six mediating the relationship between coloureds and the city. More specifically, by drawing on theory and method from the study of religion, and a comparison with categories of sacred space emerging from Judaism, I wish to argue that the coloured community's connection with the city stemmed from the construction of District Six as a sacred space to which coloureds were intimately bound. To begin, therefore, we have to look at the urban situation in Cape Town since 1994 and gauge the significance of the idea of coloureds having a special relationship with the city.

### **The Urban Political Economy**

For most of 2007, predominantly coloured backyard dwellers in the Cape Flats township of Delft watched as day by day new brick and cement houses were being erected as part of an expansive new provincial housing project. As part of a broader state-driven initiative aimed at improving the living standards of South Africa's impoverished masses,

the new housing development was the material fruition of the spirit and ideals guiding South Africa's democratic dispensation. The Delft backyard dwellers had a stake in the new homes as they were a primary example of the effects of the apartheid government's housing and economic strategies. Many community members had also applied more than a decade ago already to the municipal housing department for housing allocation. To their dismay, however, the provincial housing department declared that the new houses were destined for black African shack dwellers from another part of the city. In early December, the community's patience with the provincial housing department ran out and they stormed the nearly finished building site and claimed the houses for themselves (*Cape Argus*, 21 December 2007).

As part of a wider trend regarding housing and residence in Cape Town, the Delft community's actions contributed to a growing perception of the city's urban space as a racially volatile and fiercely contested political arena. For example, in the aftermath of the illegal occupation, community members claimed they had been spurred on by a local ward councillor who argued that the blatant social neglect of the circumstances of the coloured people on the part of the state and the province justified their right to claim the homes (*SAPA*, 21 December 2007). During the early 1990s, politicians had identified the coloured community's sentiments about housing and the racial profile of Cape Town's urban geography as valuable political capital. This was initiated by the National Party, a traditionally white Afrikaner organization that swept to power in the Western Cape during the 1994 elections on the back of a political campaign that argued coloureds would be drastically marginalized by the predominantly black African National Congress (ANC) government if they came to power. Since the ANC government had largely failed to wrest control of the Western Cape province and the city of Cape Town from white opposition parties since then, the region has gained a reputation of being anti-black and the city of Cape Town specifically "not sufficiently "African" or accommodating to "African people" (*Mail and Guardian*, 15 March 2007). The socio-political volatility playing out in Cape Town's urban space therefore contributed to its distinguishing image as a rebellious South African city.

During this time, there has been a growing perception that the city's tarnished image was somehow related to coloured identity. For example, when analysts engaged the subject of the coloured community's political decisions, Cheryl Hendricks argued, the debate was overwhelmingly characterized as revolving around coloured identity. Foreclosing the argument in this manner, she contended, was problematic for a number of reasons. In the first instance, since coloured identity was made to appear contentious and problematic, it suggested that coloured people were somehow flawed. Furthermore, this approach overlooked the "larger context of identity constructions in South Africa", and failed to "adequately address the issues that generate conflict in the Western Cape" (Hendricks, 2005: 118).

She asserted, instead, that the rapidly changing socio-political conditions in the Western Cape in the post-apartheid era held the key to understanding coloured voters' frustrations with political authorities. Two things stood out when one adopted this view. Firstly, since the early nineteen nineties, the coloured community increasingly came to believe local government authorities allocated houses preferentially to residents of black informal settlements, or shack dwellers. Secondly, coloureds perceived affirmative action as a discriminatory and disenfranchising social policy as they believed they were not "black enough" to gain access to these employment opportunities. Overall, Cheryl Hendricks (2005) demonstrated that proponents of the reductionist idea that the city's negative image could be traced to the notion of coloured identity had failed to engage with the coloured community's relationship with Cape Town.

In early 2008, only a few months after taking illegal occupation of the provincial housing development, the Delft backyard dwellers were dramatically evicted in a well organised police crack operation. It was in the context of the community's dire circumstances not long after their eviction, that a popular local tabloid, the *Daily Voice*, offered a striking alternative interpretation of the nature and source of the coloured community's political inspiration. Carrying the headline "Invincible Cape Flats Spirit", the editorial of 21 February 2008 read,

after surviving rubber bullets, stun grenades and being moered (beaten), the mense (community) tried to get their lives back to normal the very next day. That's if you can call sleeping on the pavement with all your possessions and k@kking [defecating] in the bush normal. But this is spirit of the Cape Flats.

This "indomitable spirit", it continued, had become entrenched in the coloured psyche as a result of centuries of oppression, marginalization and dispossession "at the hands of Dutch invaders, white racists" and presently "*slapgat* (lazy/unconcerned) politicians". It was the same spirit "that kept people's dreams alive of one day returning to a free and non-racist District Six". The case of the Delft backyard dwellers therefore proved the historical fact that "we [the coloured people] on the Cape Flats are survivors", and because of that enduring hardy spirit "we will be around longer than the two-faced lying politicians and their promises". According to the *Voice*, therefore, the backyard dwellers' actions were motivated by internalized beliefs and feelings stirred by a history of racial oppression and marginalization that revolved around space in Cape Town.

The awe and reverence that surrounded the subject of 'District Six' indicated that it played a highly significant role in local ideas about coloureds and the city. As has been mentioned, 'District Six' referred to the forced removal of the so named inner city suburb. It was undoubtedly the most evocative example of racial oppression and marginalisation in the coloured psyche. As it was deployed in the *Voice*, however, 'District Six' became a focal point for the history of urban marginalization endured by the coloured community, and the imagined centre of socio-political liberation in the future. In other words, it was a symbolic space that mediated the idea of coloured identity being situated in the social experience of the city.

### **Remembering District Six**

The symbolic significance of District Six could be traced, first of all, to the labour District Six evictees invested in formulating meaningful stories about their forced removal. For example, after having been relocated to the distant coloured township of

Mitchell's Plain, Mrs Hettie Adams, a former resident of William Street District Six, frequently referred to her experiences of 'the life and times in District Six' when trying to make sense of her difficult living conditions on the Cape Flats. Having to travel long distances to work, struggle with hostile neighbours, and live in constant fear of criminal elements, life in her new neighbourhood seemed to be the total opposite of that in District Six. "There is so much that is not right here in Mitchell's Plain", she complained. "In District Six", for example, "everyone would lend you things, do shopping for you, but in Mitchell's Plain no one will lend you a match". Furthermore, "people never fought with one another, no one ever went to jail because of a neighbour". In comparison to the warm and friendly social environment of District Six, the best way to describe Mitchell's Plain was to say that "here you feel hate" (Adams, 1988:71-72).

Situating one's biographical narrative in an evaluative 'then and now' story arc was a common feature of District Six evictees' narratives about the experience of forced removal. For example, Henry Trotter (2006) has shown that when asked to share their memories of District Six, evictees frequently drew on three distinct yet interrelated narrative themes to express their feelings. When prompted, evictees typically provided an idyllic, utopian account of life and circumstances 'back then' in District Six. This nostalgic recollection, firstly, served as a form of counter memory because it challenged the "official transcript" – which claimed that District Six was a crime infested slum - developed and broadcast by state officials to justify its clearance. Secondly, evictees pleasant image of District Six was often used to compare, in an evaluative manner, the difference in the quality of their lives following relocation. In this way, eviction became a turning point marking the start of their social demise. Thirdly, by expressing their memories of District Six in resistance to the official transcript, and using them to make meaning of the present through comparison, overall, "as a means of grieving and coming to terms with their loss", evictees hoped to commemorate the collective experience of their destroyed communal home (Trotter, 2006: 19).

The significance of evictees' stories, Trotter concluded, was that it inverted the system of power relations aimed at subordinating the coloured community, coalescing ultimately, in

the form of a powerful claim over the city. Firstly, the District Six forced removals were an extension of the Group Areas Act, a measure aimed at giving “concrete expression to the [otherwise arbitrary] coloured racial category”. It was therefore intended to enforce an artificial sense of groupness and urban and social boundedness that had previously been absent. Yet within these confines evictees organically cultivated their collective memories of District Six through day-to-day, face-to-face interaction in a way that effectively ‘constituted their given situation with affirmative content’. These conditions, overall, allowed for the emergence of a shared sense of Coloured identity that went “beyond mere instrumentality”. Secondly, the organic proliferation of evictees’ commemorative narrative “beyond the confines of the townships” has resulted in it becoming, in a sense, “the story of Cape Town itself” (Trotter, 2006: 34). Refracted through the mimetic prism of District Six, the coloured community’s day to day negotiation of life in the city, overshadowed as it was by the racist political conditions of apartheid and the harsh urban environment of the Cape Flats, affirmed the concept of coloured identity’s intimate bond with the city, and reinforced the coloured community’s claim to the city.

### **District Six, Sacred Space**

Besides retelling her story, Mrs Adams found solace in religion. Why were things so terribly bad in Mitchell’s Plain, she despondently exclaimed? “It is all the fault of forcing you people away from your real home”, her Jewish employer declared (Adams, 1988: 70). On another occasion, her employer was able to comfort Mrs Adams by quoting from Shylock’s speech from *The Merchant of Venice*.

I am a Jew! Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.

This Judaic advice resonated deeply with Mrs Adams on a personal level, and when her employer went on to read “other things about the Jews”, she was able to recognise its wider social relevance, as it “could be about us in South Africa” (Adams, 1988: 73). The significance of this religious counsel, arguably, could be seen in her understanding of the relationship between her own situation of escalating domestic upheaval, and the coloured peoples’ wider scheme of suffering, as being related to their eviction from District Six. “My house is broken, my garden trampled, the furniture wrecked. I have no insurance. And all because we’re not in William Street [District Six]. It seems it is always us coloureds who must carry the load” (73). Her careful reflection therefore suggested that age-old Jewish teachings could serve as a valid religious supplement for interpreting reality in twentieth century Cape Town.

As a resident of District Six, Mrs Adams would have frequently come into contact with Jews and the Jewish faith. The District was well known for its religious diversity, boasting a population whom largely subscribed to Islam and Christianity, but also a minor contingent of Jews and Hindu’s. The District Six Jews were mainly of Eastern European origin, having arrived at about the turn of the twentieth century. They opted to settle in the district because of its convenient location, and the low cost of living. By this time, there was already a well-settled Cape Jewish population, which had consecrated the Gardens Synagogue in 1867. By the 1930s, the Jewish population had left an indelible mark on the District, having established some nine synagogues in and around the area, as well as a number of businesses that spanned from retail to rentals. Mrs Adams’ experience with Jews in the mid twentieth century, therefore, would have been confined to encounters at some of the many Jewish-owned shops, and the strange Judaic signs and symbols still faintly visible on some of the buildings, as, by that time, the majority of the original Jews had moved to more affluent areas of the city following their commercial success (*Cape Argus*, 21 January, 1989; Mendelsohn and Shain, 2008).

Generally speaking, Judaism could be described as a religious tradition that revolved around the intimate relationship between space and identity. For example, in his discussion of sacred space, Jonathan Z. Smith (1978) argued that its revival as an

analytical tool in the academic study of religion “has become more than an academic enterprise”, especially in the case of Judaism. With the “repossession of the Land of Israel in 1947, and the repossession of the site of the Temple in Jerusalem in 1967”, Jews had rediscovered a sense of “cosmic orientation”. This rediscovery required that Jews adopt “a new mode of being”, which, significantly would speak to the situation of Judaism after the Holocaust. The concept of sacred space was therefore fundamental for negotiating Jewish identity. Considering that a similar relationship seemed to exist locally, categories and structures of sacred space in Judaism could perhaps shed more light on this bond. Therefore, by adopting the “historian of religion’s privilege of disregarding chronological and geographical considerations, of comparing and bringing together, as revealing texts from widely different periods and contexts” regarding District Six, and comparing them with Smith’s analysis of categories of sacred space present in Judaism, I want to explore the idea of District Six as a sacred space (Smith, 1978: 105-108).

### *Fairyland*

The wealth of historical material on District Six make it clear that it was remarkable, different, set apart. In the memory of its former residents, it was ‘that other place’. When you entered District Six you entered *Fairyland*, as graffiti inscribed at its entrance once exclaimed. For one, it was a “place of terrific contrasts” (Mrs S.N. cited in Swanson and Harries, 2001: 69). It was a timeless urban world of ‘crazy architecture’, where beautiful old Victorian style buildings stood alongside rundown dilapidated tenement blocks, across from which may have stood a modern cinema and a nineteenth century church. When spied from above it looked like “a confused and disorganised abstraction of rusted roofs, turrets minarets, towers, arches, ornate facades, colonnades and Gothic spires, dazzling in their variety and colour” (Breytenbach, 1970: 6). Socially, while it was overwhelmingly populated by working class coloureds, District Six was also strikingly cosmopolitan, non-racial and classless. “A child growing up [in District Six] might be the progeny of a West Indian seaman and a migrant Coloured woman from the rural Southwestern Cape. Its schooling would be mostly meagre, but varied in choice: taught

by Germans in a Lutheran School, Irish Nuns in a Catholic School, or Scottish masters in a Dutch Reformed Church School which enrolled poorer Afrikaner, Jewish and Coloured pupils" (Nasson, 1990: 64).

Despite its terrific social contrasts, as one former resident put it, "District Six was a community" (Mrs S.N. cited in Swanson and Harries, 2001: 69). It was animated by a profound sense of homogeneity "that created a sense of belonging; it had a mind and soul of its own" (Rive, 1990: 112). Visitors therefore couldn't help but describe it as a place "that was vibrant, colourful, and full of history and character" (The Star, 1 May 1979), or "a place of love, tolerance and kindness" (Schoeman, 1994: 43). It was a charged space; it pulsed with life, and had a soul, or spirit, that was almost tangible. The streets were always "crowded, full of noises, full of people, full of friends" (Adams, 1988: 63). Here, it was as if there was a "band all around" and people would "dance, guma" in the street (Jeppie, 1990: 85). You could say it was animated by an ethereal "rhythm" that was "living"; a "beat of the people all around" ("Klop Klop" written by David Kramer and Taliep Petersen, 1989). The 'spirit of District Six' was infectious. It was in the streets, structures and buildings, and saturated the ground upon which District Six was built, transforming its very material constitution, so that it became "set apart from other residential areas" (Nasson, 1990: 64). Indeed, it became "more than a geographically defined area" that was sacred to coloureds, as their homeland (Rive, 1990: 112).

In Judaism, Smith (1978) noted, the most basic way of speaking about Israel was by referring to it as a strategic hamlet, or enclave, an oasis of order and meaning in a wilderness foreign and demonic forces. The sacred space of the enclave, however, had to be founded, or established, as the place for human dwelling separate from the outlying chaos. One of the ways the sacred significance of Israel had been established was through "living in relationship" with the land, forging a historical bond with it that ultimately transformed it from being the "uninhabited wasteland into a homeland" (110). In the same way, many residents frequently stated that despite the fact that they lived in poverty, or that circumstances were bad, they had built everything in the District, marked and made everything, just through being there.

Mythically, Israel was believed to be the centre of space, radiating potent centrifugal force throughout the cosmos. Since the Ark of the Covenant was situated in the holy of holies, which was situated at the very centre of the temple, in the centre of Jerusalem, which was at the centre of Israel, which was believed to be the centre of the earth, it was as if concentric circles of blessing were radiating out into the world. In a similar manner, “the true Cape spirit” was believed to be located in Hanover Street (the District’s main arterial and commercial centre), which was at the heart of District Six, which was in the heart of the city. Ultimately, it would extend out to all corners of South Africa. And when you entered the confines of District Six, as in mythical Israel, you roamed in a place that was “pre-eminently real”, a place that was marked with a “superabundance of reality”, that expressed itself in three distinct ways (Smith, 1978: 113).

Firstly, in District Six, one’s senses were overwhelmed. As we have already seen, sights and sounds were more prominent here. You were particularly struck by the food in District Six, which was always of a better quality, more aromatic, and more scrumptious and appetising. Here you would be able to find ‘the best peanuts in town, the freshest full cream milk and lovely cakes’ (Fortune, 1996: 62-64), and when it came to crayfish, a crustacean delicacy, “it was not the small shells you get now...they were big shells, and big legs” (Mr O.A. cited in Swanson and Harries, 2001: 76).

Secondly, in a social environment marked by widespread abject poverty, District Six was a place of abundance and generosity. You could acquire almost anything here, as the lists and lists of consumer goods annotating many former residents’ biographies indicated. And there was always more than enough for everyone. For example, when it came to food, “neighbours often made contributions to help” each other out. Furthermore, “if people had food left over, it was common practice to send it over to those who didn’t have”. In District Six, therefore, “you never needed to starve” (Fortune, 1996: 97). Local shop keepers would also often give away sweets and other luxuries, *passela*, for free, to children who came to buy goods for their parents. This spirit of generosity was so pervasive that District Six was otherwise known as Kanaladorp, which stemmed from the Malay word *kanala*, meaning ‘to help each other out’ (Bickford-Smith, 1990: 36).

Finally, money had radically increased in worth. Trotter pointed out that “even though some families have more now than ever before, this still presents the past as an epoche of abundance compared to today’s scarcity”. As one of his interview subjects put it, “My father earned little, but we had all the comforts” (2006: 17-18). For a few cents you could buy “a bag of sweets that could last you for days” (Fortune, 1996: 62). And even “the meanest coin meant something...even a half cent had worth” (Breytenbach, 1970: 3).

“The land of Israel”, Smith noted, “is understood to be the centre of time as well” (1978:115). In this case we find the centre resonated with potent centripetal forces, ‘attracting to itself, to the site of the Temple, to the primeval stone, the Stone of Foundation, which stands at the base of the Temple, all of the important creation events of Israel’s traditions’. The Foundation Stone was like “a ‘dreaming’ in the sense that the Australian aborigines use the term, that is, a track or sign left by a primordially significant being in mythic time” (1978: 115-116). And in District Six, it was at the famous Seven Steps, a flight of granite steps located in the heart of Hanover Street, where time began, would end, and ultimately begin anew. The lyrics of Kramer and Petersen’s Seven Steps of Stone (1989) captured this poignantly.

It was here you must remember  
 That our children played their games  
 And the skollie gangs smoked dagga  
 Young lovers scratched their names

These stone steps bear the memory  
 Of our people scattered wide  
 Been worn away by the south east wind  
 And the tears our children cried  
 They’ve been smothered by many footsteps  
 Of those who once lived here  
 Let them not be forgotten  
 Even though they disappear

The children will revenge us  
 For better or for worse  
 For they can clearly hear the steps

And understand its curse  
 For they too have been broken  
 And scattered like the bricks  
 The stones cement and concrete  
 That once was District Six

The steps were a common point of reference for former residents, and, as material objects that bore the weight of the community over so many years, it was as if they were inscribed with the very life of the community. In time, when the District had been reduced to a barren wasteland where only shadowy howls of the old community remained, they would take on even greater significance.

### *Wasteland*

The total annihilation of District Six was a slow drawn-out process. Impending doom had been visible on the horizon long before the first bulldozers and Group Area's eviction officers had arrived, appearing in the form of the evil, insidious apartheid segregation laws that encroached ever nearer. Beyond the confines of the district lay a world shrouded in the dark spectre of evil; it was an alien place of oppression, degradation and shame. "Then afterwards they marked all that. This is for Europeans, this is for coloureds. They even marked the benches on the station...I felt embarrassed. I felt so ashamed. I just ran [home]" (Mrs G.J. cited in Swanson and Harries, 2001: 77). As a young adult, Linda Fortune also started to notice it.

As I started to work and move outside District Six, I had become more and more aware of the apartheid laws that were being enforced. In the District

the colour of one's skin never counted. At work we had to use separate toilet facilities; there was hardly any eating place in town where we could sit down and have a meal. (1996: 118)

Evil, therefore, first entered the District through frustration and concern about life outside, before becoming fearful rumour and gossip that revolved around the fate of life inside. For example, since he worked at the Supreme Court, Sammy, Hettie Adams' brother, had long heard about the plans to declare the District white, and with every passing day as the rumours continued to circulate his fear mounted, eventually exclaiming to his father, "Dadda, I live in a hokkie (shack), but I love it, I made this little kitchen, and Dadda they are going to come and chuck us out. I am telling you it is all the talk!" (1988: 51). As another resident put it, "I was so frightened. I was so scared" (Mrs G.J. cited in Swanson and Harries, 2001: 77).

The official declaration came as expected, marking the start of a protracted period of destruction, violation and suffering. This was the time of the bulldozers. As Adam Small, a local poet put it,

They came right in,  
And knocked flat  
Everything here  
All, all,  
Houses, hearts  
The lot,  
Everything,  
God!

(Small, 1973 cited in Hart, 1990: 130)

These machines crushed houses, buildings, but also the coloured psyche. Father Peter Stien, a priest visiting the area at about this time couldn't help but notice that the "District reminded him of the bombed out towns in England where he had worked with youth after

the war". This would explain why local "children all showed symptoms of war psychosis" (*Cape Argus*, 11 August 1979). Concerned groups and organisations soon stepped in to help the "bulldozer kids to forget their environment of destruction and insecurity" (*Cape Argus*, 29 December 1979).

The government wasn't just destroying buildings and homes; they were destroying families, the community, District Six. It was a violation of the land; this was "the rape of District Six" (*Cape Times*, 21 June 1982 cited in Hart, 1990: 134). As James Mathews, a former resident and acclaimed poet put it,

Mechanical monsters  
With rapacious lust have ravished  
The beauty of district six.  
(cited in Hart, 1990: 117)

Sexual assault was a powerful metaphor signifying the violation and transgression of that which was pure and sacred. Indeed, the mystical traditions in Judaism affirmed the awesome significance of sexual union, since it was the unending intercourse of the cherubim on top of the Ark in the Holy of Holies that maintained the order of the cosmos, and of "YHWH having nightly intercourse with his bride on the 'couch' of the site of the Temple in Jerusalem" (Smith, 1978: 115). This was a time of hopelessness and despair, where indomitable forces of evil were desecrating the spirit of their home.

And, as if to salvage the last vestiges of their pride, old, long time residents simply expired rather than be forced out of their homes. As Richard Rive (1996), a former resident noted, "many died spiritually and emotionally. Some, like my mother also died physically although she was fortunate not to be alive to see the wholesale destruction" (126).

Ultimately, the land became contaminated with the people's pain and suffering. They had stained it with their tears. After their eviction, Sammy would return to their old

neighbourhood on weekends while some of the buildings still stood, just to sit and look and cry (Adams, 1988). Large corporations, like the Shell Oil Company, shied away from buying and building there, affirming the belief that “a stigma attaches to association with the tainted ground of District Six” (*Cape Times*, 3 December 1979). The land had been cursed. A plaque inscribed on the side of the Methodist Church in the district commanded,

All those who pass by remember with shame the many thousands of people who lived for generations in District Six and other parts of the city and were forced by law to leave because of the colour of their skin.

Father forgive us . . . (cited in Hart, 1990: 135)

When asked about the planned erection of a Technikon on the land during the late 1970s, Mr Mogamat Bekker, a resident in the area stated “they can build it, but it won’t stand for long. There’ll be a curse on it” (*Cape Argus*, 10 October 1979). Similarly, Linda Fortune’s mother prophesied to a forceful Group Area’s officer, “the ground in District Six is going to lie empty for many years to come” (Fortune, 1996: 127). This was a haunted place, a place of the dead, “a vast cemetery” (Rive, 1990: 111), where residents rather died than face the ignomy of being forcefully evicted. “We went up there the other day”, one visitor said, “and I got goose bumps. It was as if I could feel the spirit of the people. But someone from the Technikon came up to us and said we should leave the area and we needed a permit to be there” (*Cape Times*, 17 March 1987). This was forbidden ground, saturated with destructive religious power, and where dangerous forces roamed. At about the same time, another curious visitor to the site found the mangled leg of a doll in amongst the rubble. It made her burst into tears, and lament, “everything that grows there now is stunted and gnarled like that dolls leg” (*Cape Argus*, 15 March 1987).

But if tamed, this religious power could be used for the good. When the state planned to raze a number of homes as part of the Technikon project, members of the Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church decided to stage a protest that would draw on the power of the soil. At a special service held on a barren plot adjacent to the church, clerics and residents

scooped up the soil and placed it in a chalice which was then blessed by Bishop Lesley Stradling, former Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg. The consecrated soil was then sent off in sachets to different parts of the globe, where ministers were instructed to use it in similar services to highlight the plight of the District Six residents (*Cape Times*, 17 September 1979). Overall, however, it seemed a powerful religious ceremony was required to set the forces lurking in the ground to rest. It was notable that in the twenty-first century, other than the Cape Technicon building, a few old religious structures, and a small housing development built as part of a fiercely contested land reform initiative, the wasteland that was once District Six remained largely undisturbed.

### *Exile*

To be exiled is to be cut off from the land, from the blessing, from the ancestors, from history, from life, from creation, from reality, from the deity. It is to enter into a new temporal period palpably different from that which has been before. It is to descend into chaos. (Smith, 1978: 120)

“And so”, the Cape Town poet Adam Small opined, “District Six has turned out to be a place and time with *diaspora* . . . in the towns and townships of the Cape Flats” (Wissema and Small, 1986: 11). To be in exile, to be in Diaspora, on the Cape Flats was to dwell in a different place, a place of chaos and disorder, a place without meaning, without blessing, without holiness. “Here” in Mitchell’s Plain, Hettie Adams complained, “the choir cant even sing, they’re so out of tune. It doesn’t make you feel like you’re in a church. In St Mark’s [in District Six] it felt holy” (1988:76). The Flats “was a barren land. There was nothing” (Mr K.T. cited in Swanson and Harries, 2001: 78). Or, to put it simply, “the desolate Cape Flats had no soul” (Rive, 1996: 127).

This was a hostile environment; danger, death and disease lurked everywhere. Nowhere was safe. It was a place of “violence, sickness, deaths”, where “even with the doors locked, bolted...you were still not safe” (*Cape Times*, 3 October 1974 cited in Hart, 1990: 129). And it was a time of mourning, of yearning to go back to the land. “Please

give us back the one place that we, our children, the aged and the poor need so badly. Give us back District Six" (Ibid.). The city became shrouded in an unbearable cacophony of grief and sorrow; "give them back their beloved district" many white individuals and organisations pleaded (*The Star*, 1 May 1979).

Yet in some ways, District Six was already with the people. It was as if they had packed it up and took it with them in the form of their memories, in the same way the exilic Jews transported Israel in their sacred texts. It told of the past, but in the vast expanse of de-creation and chaos, it became a polestar, a compass leading the way back. As one evictee put it, "you can take the people out of the heart of District Six *ou pellie*, but you'll never take District Six out of the heart of the people" (*Cape Times*, 8 March 1966 cited in Hart, 1990: 123).

To recover one's identity, to re-establish one's place in this vast expanse of meaninglessness required reconnecting with the land. One means of re-establishing a connection was to recover the sacred objects of the past. For example, in 1987, the Cape Town City Council embarked on a search for the famous seven steps, only to find they had lost all but two of them. Once the demolitions started, the council had planned to recover and restore the steps as part of a monument, since they "were such a valuable cultural landmark and symbol of the once vibrant community and their forced removal" (*Cape Argus*, 9 May 1987). But, as we have seen, the steps were more than a cultural landmark; they resonated with potent religious significance. To the people of District Six, they were like the "Ark of the Covenant". "Only, the writing on the stone was something less overt than with Moses: and yet as real as that ancient imprint of Jehovah" (Wissema and Small, 1986: 11).

"Most particularly, as is widespread in the history of religions, exile may be overcome in moments of sacred time" (Smith, 1978: 124). Sacred time was a timeless, extraordinary realm where the sacred was brought into being through careful ritual performance. Two occasions where sacred time was generated was firstly in the District Six museum, and secondly, in commemorative cultural productions, like novels, poetry, and plays. The

District Six Museum, as a structure, as a space, created a temporal vortex that drew one into the mythical time and landscape of District Six. It officially opened its doors in 1994, but originated in the late 1980s as the concept of the Hands Off District Six campaign (Jeppie and Soudien, 1990). It was erected in the Methodist Church, which was a struggle church during the 1980s, and was located in Buitenkant Street, on the periphery of the old District Six. Approaching the site, a plaque on the outside of the building inscribed with the opening phrase “all who pass by remember . . .” initiated one’s mythical journey. At the entry point one was greeted by a former District Sixer and invited inside. Upon entry, one would be confronted with the Museum’s exhibition statement, here abbreviated,

In this exhibition  
 We do not wish  
 To recreate District Six  
 As much as to  
 Repossess the history of the area  
 As a place where people lived,  
 Loved and struggled.

These words reordered time, so that one was transported into a new temporal domain, a temporal reorientation that brought the past into the present, and transported one (as a signifier of the present) into the past. This was reinforced through the objects on display, and the interactive map of the District where District Sixers were encouraged to write their names, mark their homes and other landmarks, as well as talk about their experiences. As Charmaine McEachern put it, “the map works as a mnemonic, which both allows the recall of the place but also puts the rememberer back into it, as they literally have put their names back into District Six by writing them on the map” (1998: 506). Engaging and negotiating the map became a kind of ritual, where, District Six was evoked as a sacred space in the realm of the personal and located in the past, but situated and contextualized it in a public space in the present through practises that perpetuated it into the future.

Of the many cultural productions commemorating District Six, the popular musical *District Six*, written and staged by David Kramer and Taliep Petersen in the 1980s, arguably, marked the public revival of District Six story. Kramer and Petersen had met by chance in 1986, when, coincidentally, they were both busy working on a play about the district. By this time, Kramer was already an iconic figure in South African popular culture, having made a name as the theatrical focal point of a widely acclaimed ad campaign for a Volkswagen family motor vehicle. Having been born and raised in District Six, Petersen's entertainment skills emanated from the suburb's vibrant artistic climate where he sang in talent contests and played music during the traditional New Year's festivals. After the opening of their inaugural work, Marianne Thamm declared, "District Six lives!" It lived "not only in the hearts and minds of the community that lived there", but now also survived "on stage", she went on to explain. This musical rendition of the District's life and culture had "immortalized the music and people of District Six" and was "the definitive monument" (*Cape Times*, 13 April 1987). The play was deeply rooted in the spirit of District Six since Taliep Petersen had grown up there, and many of the cast members also grew up there. And when it came to the choice of venue when travelling to other parts of the country, its producers tried to act within the spirit of its former residents (*Cape Argus*, 12 February 1988). While foreign reviewers sometimes lambasted the play, saying, for example, that it was the "most perfect clash between form and content", in Cape Town, the play evocatively recreated the past, and took the audience on a turbulent emotional journey that they experienced in the present (*Cape Argus*, 6 September 1988). As one of the cast members put it around the time of its first stage appearance,

Ever since the show opened people have cried like you won't believe when we sing *Seven Steps*. A lot of people who lived out in District Six find it [the play] a very emotional trip. They relate to whatever's happening on stage. (*Cape Argus*, 26 May 1987)

The ultimate reconnection, however, was through the real recovery of the land, of being able to reoccupy it again. But reuniting with the land was a volatile process steeped in

religious power. For example, recognizing that the “District Six story was a symbolically contested space with many competing truths”, Shamiel Jeppie and Crain Soudien argued that the suburb presented itself as a “momentous prize in the scramble and struggle for symbols amongst the stakeholders for a future South Africa” (1990: 13). This “small patch of ground”, they claimed, was of momentous importance because it was marked by a bitter past and, as a barren wasteland, served as a daily reminder of apartheid’s most heinous face. Few places, therefore, had better credentials as a healing symbol for a new reconciled South Africa. With proper care, reconnection with the land therefore could activate potent healing forces that would radiate to all corners of the nation.

### **Conclusion**

Former residents of District Six drew meaning and inspiration from their former home, and expressed their feelings about the important role it played in their lives by sharing their memories with others. The scale of the old community’s tragic experience meant that the public was forced to listen. On one level, their communal narrative, or, the District Six story, was meaningful in and of itself, as the painful history of urban segregation. Yet many who encountered the District Six story were moved in a way that suggested it was more than a communal memory. It had a deeper meaning that could be detected in the way the District Six story was told, about how things were magical in the beginning and hellish in the end, and the abundance of sparkling references to life in and around the heart of the city. The story could be felt in the emotive nuances and subtle inflections generated by the evocative language with which it was told.

The District Six story was about how a community came to occupy a special place in the world simply by living and being there, so that it came to define their unique place in the world, and came to explain how the world worked, so that, ultimately, just dwelling there gave them a profound sense of humanness. Ultimately, it was their story of having been stripped of their humanity through forced removal, demolition and banishment to a dehumanizing world, and then recovering a sense of dignity and humanity from within this experience of humiliation and dispossession by invoking the spirit of their former home. It was therefore significant for two reasons. Firstly, District Six meaningfully

linked the communal experience of urban transformation with the wider processes of a transforming city and society. It was therefore their story about Cape Town, the modern city. Secondly, looking at the story's religious overtones, it could be read as a counter-metaphor for an alternative religiosity, as it was developed on the margins and spoke about the centre. As St Augustine of Hippo put it to his contemporary, Varo, "true religion owed its foundation to no city; it was itself the foundation of a wholly celestial city" (1958: 126).

## Chapter 3

### Religion, Culture and Subjectivities:

#### Religious Ways of Being Coloured, Coloured Ways of Being Religious

##### Introduction

The coon carnival, an annual Cape Town New Year's festival celebrated by the city's coloured working class, has been widely recognised as a pivotal event on the city's heritage calendar and a highly important occasion in the cultural life of its residents (Jeppie, 1990; Martin, 1999). Festivities traditionally begin on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December with Malay Choirs or *nagtroepe* (night troupes) marching in chorus through the streets of working class suburbs, stopping periodically to partake of the food and beverages generously laid out by residents. Donning shiny satin uniforms and with their faces colourfully decorated, coon troupes from across the Cape Flats congregate on New Years day in local stadia to compete in carnival competition. On the following day the coons take to the streets, marching through Cape Town in celebration of *Tweede Nuwe Jaar*, or the second New Year. Traditionally the march starts "from the former limits of District Six . . . through [the city] centre, then Bo Kaap, to Green Point [Stadium]" (Martin, 1998: 1). Having been observed for more than a century, the coon carnival has become a firmly established part of the life of the city through the continued recognition of its significance as a hallmark of the city's cultural life by both local and foreign spectators.

In his analysis of the event, Martin (1999) traced the interface between the aesthetic transformations of the style and content of the carnival and its cultural and social significance as an expression of a local "Creole culture" from its inception until the late twentieth century. The historical roots of the carnival itself provide the foundations for the emergence of this Creole culture because:

After the slaves were set free, there happened a fusion between the celebration of the emancipation anniversary and the New Year. New Year festivals, picnics weddings were times for singing and dancing,

for visiting friends and partaking in food and drinks, traditions which are common to civilizations of Asia, Africa and Europe and may have provided one of the “overlapping areas” from which Creole manifestations can develop to form an original culture. (Martin, 1999: 10)

Bickford-Smith (1995) has made a similar point, as we have seen, arguing that during the early nineteenth century the carnival was the occasion where the first sentiments of a community consciousness were galvanized amongst Cape Town’s diverse black population. More than coming together around their common experience of bondage, marginalization and white oppression, Martin asserts that the Creole culture underwriting the event provided the forum for consolidating social links between these diverse peoples, and an avenue for new cultural production. Initially, during the early nineteenth century, the festivals represented but one manifestation of this new Creole culture, over time, with increasing social investment in the New Year celebrations, the carnival emerged as one of the primary occasions for re-articulating this Creole culture.

The aesthetic history of the carnival demonstrates that it eventually came to be dominated by elements of American minstrelsy and specifically the figure of the coon, yet still retained an artistic eclecticism reflective of the underlying local culture. In this way,

One may assume that the social meaning of the main public event where this Creole culture was displayed, the New Year festival, was not radically altered by the inclusion of elements of minstrelsy, but, on the contrary, that minstrelsy contributed to refine its meaning. (Martin, 1999: 12)

Ultimately, minstrelsy, through the figure of the coon, was to provide a forum for the practitioners of this Creole culture to celebrate their heterogeneity and transcend their apparent racial inferiority as coloureds. The coon “embodies at the same time elements which express self-deprecation affecting important numbers of coloured people in Cape

Town, and elements which symbolically contradict the inferiority feeling by building bridges with modernities invented in Creole societies and by identifying with their musical ambassadors” (Martin, 1999: 12). Signifying ambiguity, the coon was therefore an important social symbol. For example, it also symbolized the ambiguous racial connotations commonly associated with coloured identity. The real significance of the coon, however, was that it was a powerful symbol of change since it referred to the subversion of the conventional order of power which occurred during festival time.

The twentieth century saw the carnival being heavily constrained by increasing racist urban and social segregation. In this context the carnival became a politicized event. Martin points out, however, that despite the politicization of the festival, it should not be myopically construed as either a functionalist or symbolic form of resistance, or even a form of humorous hegemony. The political character of the carnival, was of a nature in which “adaptation and resistance to the system were inextricably intertwined” (Martin, 1999: 15). Therefore, while celebrating the carnival during apartheid became a difficult moral dilemma for the coloured working class, the social and cultural benefits which accrued from observing the tradition seemed to contradict and challenge the philosophical potency of the state’s aspirations. Firstly, it formed a vital part of “an ensemble of values and practises which [tied] together members of a community”, playing a critical role in forging social links, stimulating social cohesion “amongst a people whom were forcibly brought together”. The carnival was therefore a particular cultural product of a unique people. Secondly, the carnival had the characteristics of a religious renewal festival, since it ‘came back every year at a fixed time historically associated with freedom’, which further affirmed the “permanence of the community of those who celebrated them” (Martin, 1999: 16).

Significantly, Martin’s intention of revealing the carnival’s socially unifying potential elided the fissures that existed amongst the totality of members participating in the festival. The New Year’s festivals consisted of an ensemble of three distinct artistic groups, each with their own celebrations and competitions, which collectively made up the New Years festivals. These are the Malay Choirs, the Christmas Choirs and the

Coons. Each group have distinctly different aesthetic repertoires. This fact brings into question the assumption that these groups shared the same perspective on the coons and the New Year's festivals. For example, some members of Malay choirs felt that Coons are "unruly, low class people, bunches of gangsters, a far cry from the respectability and honesty they want to embody". According to one member of the Cape Malay Choir Board, who officially represented the Cape Malay Choirs, "[w]e go to more decent type of singing competitions". While the same board member went on to say that he couldn't "see any opposition" between the two groups, since "[coon troupes] have their own dates and their own festivals and . . . their own followings . . . the Cape Malay Choir Board also [had] their own following" (Martin, 1999: 24). Each group also had different membership criteria. Malay choirs, for example, were more conservative and exclusive about their membership than coon troupes, since their members were predominantly Muslim and middle class. Similarly, Christmas choirs had a predominantly Christian membership. In the broader aesthetic arc of the New Year's festivals, held together by a unique local artistic polyphony between the coons and the choirs, there were outstanding differences between the various bodies which served to maintain their individual distinctiveness. These differences were calculated in terms of class and religious opposition.

Martin therefore argued that coloured identity, as far as it referred to social homogeneity, could be accounted for in cultural terms. Creole culture was an organic ensemble of beliefs, values and practises produced by the Cape's diverse black population, that, over time, through careful annual recollection, aided the emergence of an autonomous coloured identity. Creole culture was also a location of struggle, where the marginalized working-classes struggled with the dominant classes, and state authority, but also where the diverse groups participating in the festival struggled for cultural dominance. Culture was therefore an important element of coloured identity, and, provided a window into working class coloured identity in the making. Significantly, the carnival was also permeated with religious overtones, which, arguably, had a bearing on coloured identity. At the same time, it was but one amongst many arenas of urban, coloured, working class cultural life that seemed to be tinged with uncanny religious meaning. For example,

religion seemed to make a ghostly appearance in the criminal practises of Cape Flats gangsters, while it was starkly present in the aspirations of local church leader's attempts to convert these criminals to a life of Christ. In another instance, an ancient Khoi-San ritual of social crisis, that served to help the social unit change and adapt to the harsh nineteenth-century white European Cape environment, it was argued, led to the virtual evaporation of coloured ethnicity, while the revival of this ritual practise in the late twentieth century, conversely, held the key to recovering a lost authenticity. On the Cape Flats, religion was alive and present, not only in churches, mosques, or synagogues but was being made and remade out in the streets with the people. Therefore, the relationship between religion, culture and subjectivity, as manifest in the examples cited above, will form the central subject of this chapter.

### **Being Deviant, Being Men**

One of the striking images in Martin's book on the carnival is of a troupe huddled against a mural depicting the majestic Table Mountain. The troupe's banner elevated above them shows two coons standing alongside each other, a pair of white doves between them, and two white ribbons, inscribed with the words "Seasons Greetings" and "Peace in our Land", connecting them. Fully clad in their minstrel outfits, with hats, braces, stripped canes and accompanying band instruments, some of the troupe members invoked their theme for that year by holding up two fingered peace signs. The accompanying caption read, "rival gangsters in Lavender Hill, who laid down arms to form the New World Classic Entertainers, practise together before a competition" (Martin, 1999: 22). Members of the Mongrels, Mafia's and Yuru Cats gangs had in 1994 "exchanged their zipp guns, pangas [machetes] and knives for guitars, banjo's, drums and trumpets" (Martin, 1999: 45). The picture therefore served as a graphic illustration of the close relationship between coons and gangsters. Just like these gangsters, other gangsters also became members of coon troupes, sometimes taking on the responsibility of orchestrating the administrative and artistic repertoires of the troupe as owners and leaders. In order to do this, these leaders would sometimes exploit their troupes economically through marketing drugs and alcohol to this captive audience. Funds and leadership skills were therefore combined and employed in ensuring the production of the troupe's colours,

which the troupe leader chose, as well as playing a role in shaping the overall musical ensemble. In this way, troupe leaders made sure the symbolic wild performances of their troupe, almost running amok in the city streets during peak festival time, had a distinctive artistic synchronicity and flare. All coons, however, were not gangsters. Yet, if we consider the historical circumstances and socio-economic environment within which coons and gangsters operated, it is fair to conclude that “the relationship between coon troupes and gangsters has always been close” (Martin, 1999: 43). In this picture, however, the potential of the New Year’s festivals to bring peace and harmony to communities otherwise riven by gang violence is evidenced by its ability to transform violent men into a harmonious group of artists.

Just like the coons, gangsters have a long history on the Cape Flats. The academic fascination with gangsters is visually manifest in Don Pinnock’s 1984 history of gangs on the Cape Flats. The gallery of images in that book showed members of the Scorpions gang in a variety of poses. In various scenes they are shown smoking a cannabis pipe, or perched over the balcony of their territory marked with the gangs’ insignia. In another picture, Scorpions gangsters stand around in their finest attire staring straight into the camera as if they were models showing off the latest in street couture. Images of gangsters were virtually indispensable in publications memorializing Cape Flats suburbs. Whether portrayed as ruffians or smartly dressed gentlemen, gangsters have emerged as an enduring figure on the Cape Flats.

More focussed analyses of gangs and gangsters have shed light on their macabre practices. In his 2004 book, *The Number*, Jonny Stienberg narrated the harrowing and complex biography of Magadien Wentzel, a former prisoner and Cape Flats gangster. As much as it was a revelation of Magadien Wentzel’s life, the book also revealed the mythical origins, secret rituals and lore of the prison Number gangs. These revelations disclosed prison gangsters’ dexterous and elaborate weaving together of elements of traditional African culture and religion with Christianity, against a mythical background featuring important South African historical places and figures in a way that justified their activities, maintained their social organization and perpetuated their existence. In

this way, Steinberg pointed out a previously unidentified form of religious creativity operating in the extreme margins of society.

According to Steinberg, the Number gangs' mythical narrative of origin began during the early part of the nineteenth century, in the Transvaal, where young black men from the rural areas were attracted to the Witwatersrand goldmines in search of employment. The conditions on the mines, however, were oppressive and exploitative. A prophet named Po, who resided in the hills above the mines, noticed the steady stream of job seekers making their way to the mines on the winding road that lead from far. He was appalled by the dehumanizing nature of the work and started dissuading some of the men from going to the mines and remain with him. The seer organised his new recruits into a band of robbers, dividing the fifteen men from the road into two camps; a group of seven led by a man called Kilikijan, who was to work by day, and a group of eight led by Nongoloza who was to work by night. These men were to be the mythical progenitors of the 27 and 28 Number gangs. The group stole from the mines and robbed the men that used the road to and from the mines. They also stole the rank structure, weapons and uniforms of the colonial forces in operation at the time. By appropriating and adopting this new organizational style, uniforms and weapons, the group transformed from being a band of ordinary robbers into a rigidly organised, hierarchical unit of soldiers. During this time, Po also ordered the gangs to make two copies of the gang's law, one inscribed on a rock, and another duplicate on the hide of a bull, which each party could keep and refer to for future instruction once they had gone their separate ways. But an accident meant that the half the rules transcribed on Kilikijan's rock was lost, having been washed away in a river after rolling down a cliff and smashing to pieces in the water. Controversy over the content of the lost laws then became the main site of conflict between the 27s and 28s gang members, since, as the mythical narrative continued, Kilikijan caught Nongoloza engaging in sexual relations with one of his subordinates, a practise that Nongoloza justified on the basis of the laws. Since those mythical days, the 27s and 28s gangs have continued to dispute the authority of the legitimacy of sex amongst men.

The problem of sex amongst men sat at the heart of a broader thesis on the Number gangs, which claimed that gangs mediated the construction of a particular kind of hyper masculinity by using religious resources to harness and transform violence from a destructive into a productive force (Stienberg, 2004, see also Gear and Ngubeni, 2002; Lockwood, 1980; Connel, 1995). The use of violence in making men was exemplified in the traditional initiation ritual new recruits were to undergo in order to be inducted into the Number gangs. These initiations conformed to the three phase structure of initiation – that of separation, transition and incorporation – pointed out by anthropologists of religion (Van Gennep, 1960).

In the beginning, recruits were tested verbally in the form of a riddle designed to assess their courage and loyalty, but also to determine which branch of the gang they would potentially join. Once screened, their formal initiation began with an order to stab a prison warder. They were informed about where and when the stabbing would occur, and that they would be given a special knife with which they were to perform the deed. The ritually prepared blade was carefully wrapped by the gang's the gang's Nyangi, or sacred specialist, so as only to reveal a little more than the tip of the blade. With this weapon the recruit was to inflict only a flesh wound on the warder, usually having to stab them in the fleshy part of the back of the shoulder. Stabbing a warder, during the apartheid years, would usually result in the inmate being severely beaten and being separated from the rest of the prison population and placed in solitary confinement, or *agter die berge* (behind the mountains) as it was referred to in prison gang patois. Inmates in solitary confinement were fed a saltless diet designed to physically debilitate them. Recruits had to endure their beating stoically, and see their period of solitary confinement through without succumbing to physical weakness and frailty. The recruit's period of separation and transition was complete only once they walked out of solitary confinement revitalised and strengthened, like new men. If they had strictly complied with these ritual requirements, recruits were formally incorporated into the Number gangs through an elaborate initiation ritual where they were assigned their rank, dressed in a symbolic uniform, armed with a symbolic weapon and given the title of *Ndota*, which meant man in Zulu (Parker Lewis, 2006). Overall, prison Number gang's induction rituals revolved

around the construction of new men through initiating them into the mysteries of violence as a transformative power.

Street gangs in Cape Town also drew on the power of myths and rituals to transform their ordinary local congeries into extraordinary collectivities practising the divine secrets of crime and deviance in extraordinary places. As Chidester (2000a) has pointed out, “The gangs of the Cape Flats operated like religious organisations by appropriating and reinterpreting sacred symbols, generating, in the process, distinctive myths and rituals”. The author used the example of the Americans gang, “based in the Coloured township of Manenberg”, to show how the gang’s creative use of the symbols of blood and money operated in their “expansive spirit of extending their influence over space”. For example, the sacred truth of money was evidenced in the American flag since the gang understood the white stripes on the flag to signify “the clean work – not wage labour, but organized criminal activity – that generated money, while the red stripes designated the dirty work of blood, the work of violence, killing, and coercion that was required to support the clean work of making money”. The gang drew on the power and authority of the USA through appropriating and reinterpreting many of its national symbols like “the bald eagle, the Statue of Liberty and the motto of the United States” which they ‘altered to read’, “In God We Trust, In Money We Believe” (Chidester, 2000: 32-33; 2005: 111-115). Gangs on the streets therefore mimicked their incarcerated brethren when they recognised and utilized the awesome forces of wealth and power hidden in American national symbols when asserting their claims over urban space, and reinforced the idea of their veritable superhuman authority as Americans gangsters.

Cape Flats gangsters, however, were not unique in their creative application of religious resources. In America, Latino street gangsters practised their own kind of religious creativity, applying them in ways that reaffirmed the potential of these local activities to produce new and alternative forms of humanness and subjectivity, and transform spaces that were subordinating, marginalizing or degrading. In the case of The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (ALKQN), a New York social movement that was formerly a street gang, the connection between the street and prison was vital to the re-appropriation

of their members Latin identity. In a socio-economic environment shaped by the forces of “globalization, neoliberalism, corporate capitalism, imperialism, and militarism” which served to hold these working class Latin Americans in economic, social and political servitude, the ALKQN drew on the power of a spirituality of liberation to reclaim their identities. They utilized a “spirituality of liberation to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct their collective identity”, so that it became a “psycho-social force” which they could use “to search for and preserve their collective identity at the same time that they struggled to resist forces of oppression rejection and marginalization” (Barrios, 2007: 32). In the traditions of the ALKQN, Kingism and Queenism formed “a path to identity in which Kingism/Queenism is a spiritual syncretism that developed and preserved the collective identity of the ALKQN” (Barrios, 2007: 32). This was most clearly revealed in the ALKQN myth of origin, which could be found in the ALKQN Bible. It stated that

Kingism as a religion, as a belief, as a way of giving our blessings to the Almighty and as a way of showing love and respect to ourselves as a Latino Nation did not take form or was revealed to us until 1960, at the State Ville Correctional Centre in Chicago to King Crazy Dino...So with members from 5 different Latin King Tribes incarcerated there at State Ville the task of putting down our religion was revealed to King Dino. Our means of giving worship and blessing to the Almighty Latin Kings shall be known as Kingism...Kingism should be the glue that hold us together, the faith that is unshakeable, so we give to those that came before us and showed us the righteous path to the Almighty. (Barrios, 2007: 233)

Locating its origins in the divine revelation made to King Crazy Dino within the confines of prison, the beliefs, rituals and traditions of the Nation have been transported outside of the prison onto the streets of New York and provided Latin Americans with a new way of being human, transforming them from being impoverished and marginalized ghetto dwellers into royalty.

Conventional criminological research has generally suggested that gangs have appealed to working class and marginalized groups because they provided a lucrative means of financial income, fostered a sense of belonging and cultivated a strong sense of identity (see Hagedorn, 2007). In the local arena, criminological research has generally followed this international trend arguing that the widespread prevalence of gangsterism amongst coloureds was as a result of endemic and external socio-economic factors which were related to "population stability" (Leggett, 2004). For local coloured men, gangsterism certainly held out the benefits of status, power and authority, all of which were related to local conceptions of masculinity. As Salo (1999) has shown, the Cape Flats gangster masculinity afforded coloured men a way of reasserting their dominance in a socio-economic environment which traditionally privileged coloured women. Coloured boys, Pinnock (1994) has argued, considered gang membership to be a highly meaningful event in their lives, since to them, induction into the gang represented a formal rite of passage into manhood. Diverting them from gangs, he further suggested, meant developing new rites of passage that would transition boys into healthier, socially constructive masculinities. The motivational factors behind gang membership were therefore closely linked to the lived reality of working class coloured men.

Crime and deviance, however, certainly did make gang membership both lucrative and enticing for coloured boys, but it was the brand of masculinity which sat at the heart of the formality in which gangs structured their criminal activities and strategically practised being deviant that significantly contributed to their allure. Through the use of religious resources, gangs transformed criminal deviance into an alternative way of being human in a world in which they perceived themselves to be dehumanized. Prison, it was regularly mentioned, was an environment where inmates' lives were wholly at the mercy of warders, while on the streets, coloured people considered themselves second-class citizens shunted to the margins of their city. Gang identity, therefore, also linked to complex processes of claiming of space. It was, however, firmly premised on members being initiated into beliefs and practises focussed on exploring the mysteries of crime and deviance and the transformative powers of violence. Ultimately, it was in the rites of initiation that the real depths of gang affiliation were laid bare, since initiation not only

spelled a new life for gang members, but also marked their lifetime commitment to the gang. Since members gave their lives to the gang, in theory, death became the exclusive passage out of gangs. Members either gave their lives willingly, dying in the service of the gang, or unwillingly at the hands of other members when they tried to abstain from active membership. The shadow of death that hung over initiation therefore transformed gang criminal deviance into a stake in members' very existence.

### **Contested Conversions**

The limit of this affiliation was tested, however, in situations where gang members reconsidered their commitment and sought ways to leave gangs alive. On the Cape Flats, it appeared that conversion to Christianity became a viable means of leaving gangs. Rashied Staggie, "the country's most notorious gangster" during the 1990s, set a trend in this regard with his conversion to Christianity in 1999. "Born into a devout Muslim family", Staggie became the "multimillionaire leader of the Hard Livings gang", ultimately rose to notoriety as a result of brutal gang conflict with the group People Against Gangsterism and Drugs in the mid 1990s. In light of mounting pressure from this organization and increasing attention from South African law-enforcement agencies, Staggie eventually fled the city. Having been inspired by the "spiritual reawakening" of his wife, Staggie ultimately converted to Christianity at the Shekinah Tabernacle in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town in August 1999 (*Cape Times*, September 9 1999). From his own account, Staggie's conversion conformed to the traditional view of conversion, one which draws impetus from the conversion narrative of "Paul on the road to Damascus". This archetype described conversion as being the occasion where "an ostensibly powerful man was totally incapacitated by the actions of an external agent focussing on him as an individual". In this way, conversion was assumed to be a "predestinational", psychological event that "caused the subject to change their beliefs immediately, and that behaviours congruent with the new beliefs then were developed" (Richardson, 1989: 219). Many Cape Flats gangsters lives meandered along this religious path of being born Muslim, joining a gang, and then converting to Christianity (see Steinberg, 2004). Gangsters therefore secured their liberation by harnessing the promise of spiritual salvation inherent in Christian conversion.

The stark contrast between gangsters and 'reborn' Christians meant that these conversions were shrouded in the aura of the miraculous because they were truly extraordinary. The authenticity of divine influence in these conversions, however, was often viewed with suspicion since gangsters usually converted at times that seemed providential or beneficial to their mortal interests. Staggie's case was viewed with similar suspicion (*Cape Times*, September 9, 1999). The moral redemption that a new Christian religious identity afforded was therefore perceived to be a powerful form of social capital open to abuse. Indeed, for these local converts, conversion not only provided the benefit of moral redemption from their criminal pasts, but also a means of transforming that past through religious reinterpretation (Snow and Machaleck, 1984). For example, Rashied Staggie's religious conversion was sometimes invoked in court cases brought against him as a form of testimony that weaved his violent criminal past into a broader narrative that reaffirmed the power of his conversion and the moral purity of his new life in Christ. In 2003, for example, when Staggie was facing charges of kidnapping and gang rape, "a church pastor and a religious counsellor" testified to Staggie's character. Pastor Henry Wood "said Staggie had not only opened the door for him to the gang underworld, but had also brought about the spiritual conversion of gangsters". Furthermore, Pastor Wood testified that "Staggie had invited him to an underworld Cape Flats shebeen known as "The Hok", and after much prayer Staggie had transformed it into a church". Counsellor Joseph Raath testified that "before his reform [Staggie] was unable to look me in the eye during meetings, but now he does so with ease", claiming furthermore that Staggie had the charisma and "the ability to change the lives of underworld gangsters for the better". Based on his evaluation of Staggie's moral character, Raath boldly announced, "In my opinion, there is an innocent man in the dock" (*SAPA*, 6 February, 2003). This kind of testimony took the form of a conversion narrative that reasserted Staggie's religious conviction and authenticated his new religious identity. Staggie's personal account of his conversion also became a powerful tool in the struggle to bring peace to gang-infested neighbourhoods in Cape Town and other parts of the country. Superintendent Wicus Holtzhausen, "a police spokesman who headed up [an] anti-gang" operation, however, said that "he could not comment on Staggie's spiritual claims" in light of a robbery trial against him but did go on to say that "the violence [in the Western Cape] ha[d] not

declined as a result of Staggie's conversion" (*Sunday Times*, 21 November 1999). The police officer therefore masked his suspicions of Staggie's conversion by drawing attention to the comparative logic that tacitly underwrote the veracity Staggie's conversion, a logic that seemed to correlate his change with that of the criminals and gangsters with which he used to associate. Whether or not Staggie's conversion effected positive social change, the practice of publicly recounting his conversion narrative became a kind of ritual of personal transformation in and of itself, one that reaffirmed his commitment to his faith and authenticated his new religious identity (Stromberg, 1993).

While the direct efficacy of a convert's confession and testimony was debatable, these narratives did marshal a margin of social utility simply because they were compelling. Converted gangsters were strategically deployed at important community rallies and marches as evidence of the possibility for personal change, and as live testimony of the redemptive power of Jesus Christ to catalyze self transformation. For his significant role in this regard, Pastor Wood claimed Staggie was an "asset" to gang infested communities" (*Cape Argus*, January 28 2003). As powerful live evidence, converted gangsters therefore became a form of religious capital that could be employed in the aims of advancing Christian interests.

In the working-class suburbs of the Cape Flats, Christian churches interested themselves in the moral and social welfare of the community. They attended to a variety of social ills endemic to Cape Flats communities; amongst other things, in the democratic era, the sale of drugs and sporadic gang violence were viewed as the most immediate and serious threats. Gang violence seriously upset community life since rival gangs often contested their differences with gunfire in the streets, with little regard for innocent bystanders. During these times, churches would often be at the forefront of initiatives to restore peace, for example, through mediation and negotiation between rival gangs. In the case of the prevalence of drugs, churches were actively involved in marches where community members and other religious organisations marched in the streets and confronted local drug dealers about their activities. This kind of religiously sanctioned community action became prevalent towards the end of the twentieth and start of the twenty first centuries

in Cape Town. Since churches acted in the interests of communities, and since communities were mostly populated with Christians, working class Christians understood their religious subjectivities to be related to “this worldly concerns” like fighting crime or building community networks (Bekker and Leilde, 2004). Accordingly, there existed a complex and intimate relationship between the notions “Christian” and “coloured”. Christian values permeated various parts of coloured social life. It found its roots in the rise to supremacy of Christianity as the dominant religion at the Cape during the nineteenth century, and it expanded in the socio-political struggles over capital, power, and freedom that were contested through strategic negotiations of religious oppositions.

### **Religious Economics, Ethnic Equations**

Local Christian subjectivities emerged from complex oppositions erected in the service of strategic connections between class and religion. In that oppositional logic, which operated during the first half of the nineteenth century amongst the slave and autochthonous peoples of the Cape, religious conversion formed the socio-economic partition that demarcated the lines between slave labourers, Christians, Muslims and colonial oppressors. Robert Shell (1997) has explored this competitive religious economy from the middle of the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, stating

In Cape Town one may speak of some real competition for souls between Christianity and Islam...The policies of the ruling [Dutch East India] Company and the labour policies of the European settlers favoured and hindered—at different times—the growth of both religions, as did complex interlocking social processes of slavery, manumission, emancipation, and marriage. (Shell, 1997: 268)

Complex socio-political relations, therefore, revolved around the various forms of religious induction and conversion. For example, for the slave population, initiation into Christianity through baptism represented a direct avenue to liberation, because, in those circumstances, Christianity signified being fully human. One way in which slave owners tried to keep their slaves indentured was to prevent them from being initiated into the

Christian celebration of Jesus Christ's liberation of all humanity. This matter was, however, complicated by the theological precepts to which slave owners themselves were bound. The Christian worldview which slave owners prescribed to at the time subscribed that any slave child born into a Christian household was, at the cost of the slave owner, to be raised and educated in the Christian faith and eventually manumitted. This was a costly religious mandate. Slaves were commodities and freeing them represented a significant loss in both economic value and labour power. In response, slave owners not only tried to prevent their slaves from entering the Christian faith, but also encouraged them to convert to Islam. Besides the eventual economic saving, Muslim workers were also preferred amongst employers in the wine industry in rural areas since they were of sober habits and therefore could be entrusted with responsibilities vintners otherwise considered risky. Religious oppositions in this case therefore also operated in the interests of capital, with conversion emerging as a veiled site of socio-economic and political contestation. The tense relationship between conversion and capital was further amplified by the practice of local free Muslims purchasing the freedom of slaves. A slave's liberation was, in these cases, granted neither on the grounds that they were Muslim nor that they were eventually to convert to Islam. This humanitarian endeavour on the part of the Cape Muslim community was perceived as a kind of religious threat by Christian missionaries during the early nineteenth century, since missionary societies often cited Muslim benevolence as one major influence in their inability to persuade slaves to turn to a life of Christ. Sociological factors aside, religious oppositions orbiting around conversion also served to sharpen the distinctions between Muslim and Christian people of colour, enduring into the present in concerns about member attrition amongst leaders of the local Christian community (Bekker and Leilde, 2004).

Ultimately, Christianity was to have a more indelible impact on the mixed people of the Cape, sweeping through the population with the promise of salvation that was multivalent, and the social rewards of dignity, respect and civility – of a new humanness in Christ – which they were otherwise denied. During the turbulent religious and socio-political context of the first half of the nineteenth century, Islam gained a significant number of converts amongst the mixed and slave populations at the Cape, claiming to be

the faith of “over one third of the town’s population by 1842”, yet by 1913 the first national census indicated that “[a]mong the “Coloureds”, Muslims numbered only 6.15 percent” (Shell, 2001: 357; 1999: 277). Christianity’s eventual supremacy was related to the influx of European Christians from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, more strident missionary activity and the ultimate decimation of the culture, language and religious beliefs of the Khoisan of the Cape Peninsula. Christianity therefore became concretised as the main belief system of the mixed people of the Cape, exerting a considerable influence over their beliefs about the divine, their social world view and cultural value systems.

People of colour drew on their religious beliefs when they advanced their ethnicity as being unique and worthy of acknowledgment. As Bickford-Smith (1995) has pointed out the term coloured emerged during the early nineteenth century when people of colour tried to express their social concerns with whites, protests which implicitly enrolled the primary source of human authority whites drew upon in their assertions of dominance, that being their Christian religion. People of colour contested the ethnic connotations associated with being Christian, appropriating and reinterpreting it towards the ends of communal affirmation. The notion of “coloureds as Christian” has therefore become widely accepted as a result of the mysterious associations struck between the notions of race, religion and class which took place within matrices of power that operated against people of colour.

Christians of colour understood their religious identities as different from European Christians but also because as distinct from Cape Muslims. In the case of the latter, the association between religion and ethnicity played an equally important role in shaping the terms of what it meant to be Muslim or Christian. Certainly, these associations were related to and formed part of broader colonial aspirations of containment and control of all people of colour (Chidester, 1996). Sharpened with scientific authority, terms like race and ethnicity were deployed on the colonial frontier against people of colour towards the interests of colonial expansion. Therefore, the way in which Christians and Muslims of colour interpreted their ethnic differences was strongly influenced by European

classificatory vocabularies that aimed to classify different people as they related to Europeans. The calculated structuring of religious, racial, and cultural differences between people of colour and Europeans, however, produced the supreme oppositions servicing European notions of racial superiority, since these processes of “Othering” people of non-European descent as strange, exotic and foreign served to denigrate them as sub-human and therefore insignificant.

### **Islam and ‘Malay’ Culture**

Locally, Muslims have long been associated with an ethnic identity largely as a result of Islam having been introduced into the region by political convicts from South East Asia. The foreignness of local Muslim religion was pointed out in the colloquial adjective “Malay” that was used to describe local Muslims. The religious subjectivity “Malay” therefore imposed the association between Islam and South East Asian ethnicity upon local adherents of Islam. In this way, “the Muslims of the Cape were given roots that were not local at all”, and which made them “wholly foreign” (Jeppie, 2001: 81).

Indeed, the foreignness of Cape Muslims has been advanced as the primary evidence of their unique ethnic and cultural heritage, since from the arrival of the first Muslim Sheiks, local Muslims had apparently preserved their Malay heritage through a system of hereditary transmission of religious authority. As Shell (1997: 269/70) has pointed out, the “early imams, who formed the core of the Cape’s *ulema*, or Muslim clergy, became a hereditary class. Several of these nineteenth-century imams were also ancestors of the twentieth-century Muslim clergy”. The history of Cape Town’s first mosque, the Auwal mosque near the city centre, affirms this assertion. Since its erection in the early nineteenth century, the religious authorities of that mosque all stemmed from the family that first sanctified it with formal Islamic worship (Bradlow and Cairns, 1978). The hereditary transmission of religious authority implied that authentic Islam would remain in the hands of those who were more foreign than local and therefore more authentically Muslim. Cape Malays have also advanced other cultural artefacts, like cuisine and music, in support of these claims to cultural authenticity. These claims have long been accepted as true, having been recognised by state apparatuses from 1925 and having been

embraced by South Asian states seeking out the displaced peoples from those nationalities. Authoritative acknowledgement of this calibre confirmed the Cape Malays' foreign heritage, and their local cultural uniqueness as preserved intact, after two centuries of bondage, through the observance of Islam.

Despite compelling evidence in its favour, the authenticity of Cape Malay identity has been viewed with some suspicion. Jeppie (1989; 2001) has undermined the apparent self-evidence of Cape Malay identity by pointing out its constructed character as shaped by the apartheid ideologue I.D Du Plessis. A folklorist, Du Plessis became fascinated with the Cape Muslims during his stay in the city, eventually writing his doctoral thesis on their contribution to Afrikaner folk music. This was his first foray into reinventing local Muslims as Malays. Reinvention implied casting local Muslims into an imaginary mould of the original Malays, in the sense of the geographical location, and the first Malays to have arrived at the Cape. This project was brought to life through his advocacy of knowledge about the Cape Malays through texts and his espousal of expertise when it came to institutions which attended to Cape Malay needs and interests. He pioneered this plan arduously, writing a text on the Cape Malays in 1942; formalised Muslim folk music by establishing the Cape Malay Choir Board in 1939; endeavoured to establish an Institute of Malay Studies at the University of Cape Town during the 1940s; and worked towards the preservation of the deteriorating Malay quarter at the foot of Signal Hill. Du Plessis' work therefore represented a local form of Orientalism, since he was the self-appointed authority on the Cape Malays. His paternalist efforts at preserving the lost heritage of the Cape Malays, significantly, played a key role in the construction of Afrikaner identity during this period. The apparent self-evidence of the Malayness of local Muslims was therefore revealed to have a constructed character that was certainly local in origins and nationalist in scope. Islam, to a large extent, has endured as an ethnic religion at the Cape, with many Muslims drawing upon their religious identities as a primary source of meaning (Bekker and Leilde, 2004).

### **Recovery and Denial**

Religion and religious identity has also been advanced as a tool for recovering a “lost” Khoisan heritage. In his 1990 Masters thesis, *An Investigation Into the Supposed Loss of KhoiKhoi Traditional Heritage*, Chris Nissen tested the claim that Khoikhoi culture and religious beliefs had been totally annihilated amongst the coloured people, whom are assumed to be their direct descendants. At the outset, Nissen felt that “there [were] many remnants of Khoisan culture, religion and tradition in the Coloured community, especially those in the rural areas” and claimed that these emerged in popular “folktales, ceremonies and rituals”. “It [could] therefore be said,” Nissen concluded, “that the Khoi Khoi culture...remained in a latent form” culturally within the coloured population, especially amongst the working class (Nissen, 1990: 5-7).

It has generally been accepted that the Khoisan indigenous to the Western Cape have all but been obliterated culturally, religiously and ethnically. There have been disputes, however, over the cause of this cultural demise. Richard Elphick (1985) has argued that these indigenous peoples met their annihilation as a result of endemic sociological factors which ill prepared them for the onslaught of colonialism. Others have posited that the Khoikhoi had greater agency over their disappearance, arguing that they met their demise because culturally they had the ability to easily adapt and change to different socio-political climates; in essence that they adapted themselves away (Nissen, 1990; Marks, 1972). In the wake of these arguments, some have clutched at apparent Khoikhoi cultural remnants to advance claims that coloured identity was ethnically situated. Nissen, however, identified but sparse remnants of Khoikhoi religious beliefs extant in coloured society. At funerals, for example, Nissen claimed, one was obliged to wash one’s hands “at the gate of the deceased’s’ house”, a ritual that was significant because it “signifie[d] the cleansing of those who were at the burial” because “water...was seen as an element of purification” (76). Mourners were also obliged to “put a stone or a handful of soil on to the grave to greet the deceased person” (76). In the latter example, Nissen suggested that contemporary coloureds invoked the Khoisan practise of piling carrion stones on the graves of deceased Khoisan, but also out of devotion and respect to the heroic Khoisan deity Heitsi-Eibib whom it was believed had died many times and came back to life in

many forms. Nissen went on to argue that by drawing on an academic discipline like African theology, coloured people could reclaim and reassert their authentic Khoisan heritage in the same way in which black Africans had done with their traditional religious beliefs, culture and practises.

When the issue of cultural identity became a national priority in South Africa during the second half of the 1990s, Nissen's revivalist sentiments were picked up and advanced by cultural and linguistic minorities in their motions for official recognition as indigenous first nations. Within this broad category, a proportion of the coloured population also advocated claims for Indigenous First Nation status. Coloured, this group argued, was a term used to oppress local indigenous people, and snare them into a form of hegemony which had culturally and psychologically enslaved them into the false beliefs about their historical roots. They considered themselves to be direct descendants of the Khoikhoi, or Khoekhoe, and came to be known as revivalist Khoekhoe. Through such claim-making the group became "politically active as [a] cultural organisation" (De Wet, 2006: 61). In line with Constitutional stipulations regarding the protection of the rights of cultural and linguistic minorities, the state established a commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. Known as the CRL, the commission played the role of mediating in inter-group differences but also in promoting their desires for acknowledgement through public cultural exhibitions. At this time, it was recognised that these groups had suffered significant cultural loss so that in the case of the Khoekhoe especially, only a few cultural remnants survived. The CRL therefore had to play a role in developing these remnants so as to consolidate these minority groups' ethnic identities. This was a developmental process that also entailed establishing the authenticity of their claims. In this situation, the criteria for authenticating their legitimacy was contested and had to be negotiated under circumstances in which conventional criteria set out in international and national instruments proved insufficient. For example,

During the white paper discussion process regarding the Bill on Traditional Leaders and Governance...the Khoe and San indigenous leaders tried to be

accommodated in this Bill. This was an extremely contentious issue as many Khoe and San Leaders started to be identified or simply identified themselves as Traditional leaders. It was later argued that due to the void in history regarding San, but especially the Khoekhoe peoples, tracing back bloodline heritage was problematic and arguments regarding authenticity arose. (de Wet, 2006: 26)

In the context of the historical void, the Khoekhoe developed new ways of establishing their cultural legitimacy. They drew on the ancient Khoekhoe !Nau traditional ritual to authenticate their cultural authenticity and institutional authority, when they were sworn in as chiefs of the Khoe Cultural Heritage Developmental Council, a group composed of “leaders of affiliated organizations (or so called ‘tribes’), at ceremonies “under the auspices of the National Council of Khoikhoi Chiefs of South Africa”. The latter organization’s legitimacy was also self-determined, premised solely on the claims by members within the revivalist Khoe community. In dealing with these groups, the CRL remained sensitive about their beliefs and practises, demonstrating their acknowledgment of their significance by practising mediation strategies which drew on their power. Mediation included circle sittings as well as healing rituals. In the case of the Khoekhoe and other minority groups, the observance of religious practises therefore represented an important means of redeveloping and reasserting their ethnic identities.

The majority of the coloured population, however, distanced themselves from such motions. De Wet suggests that in the case of revivalist Khoekhoe, coloureds were sceptical about their claims because they believed they masked the pursuit of material interests in the form of land claims. All the minority groups considered their connection to the land as sacred and saw their reconnection to sacred spaces from which they had been historically displaced as an important element in the revival of their identities. On the other hand, de Wet suggested that Khoisan revivalism was unappealing because this style of advocacy was premised on associations too closely linked to black African identity. Members of the Khoisan revivalist movement interpreted the widespread aversion to their mission statement as a form of denial on the part of the coloured

population and one manifestation of the racism within the coloured population. Significantly, they ascribed this negative self-perception to be the result of hegemonic white racism operating on in the popular coloured psyche (de Wet, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to understand the relationship between religion, culture and coloured subjectivity. Culture may be described as the ensemble of beliefs, values and practises a group used to understand itself, its place in the world and to perpetuate itself over time. As this definition suggests, and as Clifford Geertz (1966; 2005) has persuasively argued, culture and religion are intimately related. By looking at the examples of cultural identity and expression discussed in this chapter, it is apparent that this relationship had an important role to play in shaping the multiple and changing forms of coloured subjectivity.

It has been shown that cultural expression frequently manifests in a socio-political context characterised by political and ideological dominance so that, gangsterism, ethnic Islam and Khoisan revivalism, for example, appeared to be cultural practises of resistance. At the same time, as we have also seen, the process of cultural reproduction was in itself a political endeavour since it entailed engaging in a contest for cultural legitimacy. Within the coloured community, these forms of cultural expression contested cultural dominance against those cultural forms considered hegemonic. In the struggle for cultural legitimacy, cultural groups drew on religious resources to strengthen their claims of social homogeneity. This was most apparent in the examples of the Minstrel Carnival and the Khoisan revivalist movement. It was the Minstrel Carnival's religious qualities that radically amplified its socially unifying cultural significance; while Khoisan revivalists argued that when coloured individuals participated in particular religious rituals they re-established their authentic indigenous identity by reuniting with their collective cultural heritage. When it appeared at the juncture of cultural contestation, negotiation and legitimation, religion frequently amplified the significance of claims to cultural legitimacy into the realm of the incontestable.

At the same time, such claims have also resulted in assertions of cultural difference and diversity within the coloured community, so that religion became a force influencing heterogeneity. Here, it is important to keep in mind that claims to cultural uniqueness were always situated in particular socio-political contexts, and that they were regularly generated using cultural resources drawn from surrounding groups with whom uniqueness was being contested. In this way, if we return to the example of ethnic and religious identities in colonial Cape Town, it becomes apparent that cultural assertions of difference often resulted in the production and reproduction of local notions of religion, religions and the religious. This was also evident in the case of converted gangsters who embarked on projects of youth diversion work in their communities, since their testimony and example helped reinforce the notion of religion as psychologically transformative, and the Christian tradition as focussed on the concerns of the community. Overall, by expanding the horizon of cultural expression, religion was deeply entangled in processes of negotiating legitimate practises and performances of colouredness.

## Chapter 4

### Sensational Subjects, Scandalous Religion:

#### Religion and the Practise of Mediation in the *Daily Voice*

##### Introduction

When asked to draw a picture “of his community and what he sees around his home”, a seven-year-old Manenberg learner responded eagerly, scratching and colouring away at his piece of fullscap paper to produce an image that would stand out among his peers and make his educator proud. The top left hand corner of his drawing was dominated by the yellow disk of the sun sealed with a thin rim of black crayon, and radiating thin black rays down onto the world, which featured a large red tree in the top centre. The tree seemed to be bearing a number of circular fruit, since a few of the red globes hanging on its branches were depicted as dropping down onto what is unmistakably two dead bodies splashed with the same deep red of the tree. On the left hand side of the bodies are four erect armed figures firing their weapons at another two figures directly opposite them. Across the middle of the page, just above the figures, appear the words “Americans Gangsters”. The learner could not have imagined the impact his drawing would have and the kind of attention it would draw. Having moved the educator, the drawing was passed on to other educators within the school as well as “a social crime prevention worker” and “a child psychologist”, with the drawing and the tale behind its production eventually being publicized all over the Cape Flats in a widely distributed local community newspaper, *The People’s Post*. Prompted to provide a graphic description of their living circumstances, the learner responded with a visual depiction that they felt most accurately summarised their experience of home-life, one communicating armed violence, death and the dominant role of gangsters in the community (*Peoples Post*, 28 March, 2007).

In her attempt to understand the evocativeness of the image, the journalist reporting the story for *The People’s Post* sought the expertise of a child psychologist and a local social crime prevention officer. In the first instance, the psychologist observed that the image “focus[ed] on the divisions within [the child’s] community, and the child’s fear at being

“exposed” to the “daily threat of gangs”. He further asserted that the ripe falling fruit “could indicate how the child experiences a degrading (corruption) of good values and what should make [the learner] feel secure”. Emotionally, the child’s community was characterized by “much anxiety, tension and hostility” all of which “contributes to aggression in his life”. Overall, “the child is feeling ill-equipped to deal with these threats in his community. It is overwhelming and he experiences uncertainty in his relationships with those around him”. The shining sun however, was a more positive sign, as it referred to the child’s sense of “hope for the future”. The psychologist’s exploration of the image thus rendered another image, one depicting the child’s psychological and emotional vulnerability in a social environment characterized by the threat of gangs, tension and hostility, and the degradation of social values.

In his interpretation of the drawing, the social crime-prevention officer focused on signs pointing to gangs and violence. Children growing up in the child’s community, he said, were so accustomed to violence that they were no longer shocked by it. More significantly, these days, rather than run away from the sound of gun shots, “children run towards the sound of the shots” because “socially, it has become correct to them”. Gangs played such a dominant role in these communities, he went on to say, that children aspired to emulate them as adults. Children were so fascinated by gang culture that some of them actually “want to go to Pollsmoor to see what the ‘numbers’ gangs look like and they then aspire to become ‘the number’”. The appeal of gangs, he said, stemmed from their ability to provide young people with a sense of belonging, something which young people in such communities missed because there were few forums for them to engage in constructive group activities like sports.

More than just a random image, the child’s drawing was a layered symbolic code describing the torment and strife of children on the Cape Flats. Having transformed their living experience into “an object of contemplation”, the child’s drawing became a tool that shaped the beliefs and sentiments of its viewers, since it drew their attention to the plight of children on the Cape Flats, and asked questions about their role in those children’s living environment and lives. From this perspective, the drawing is comparable

to religious images. In the medieval Christian tradition, for example, religious images, or icons, played a significant role in the faith. At one time or another, icons were publicly important as religio-political currency in inter and intra-religious conflict, while at the same time, privately, they were an integral part of the laity's intimate contact with the divine as windows of intercession. Simply, icons were powerful religious images which depicted important biblical events and figures. As holy representations, they were therefore "objectification[s] of belief", designed for the contemplation of "self-transcendence" (Goethals, 1981: 33). In this capacity, icons were also pedagogical tools designed and employed by religious authorities to shape the beliefs and sentiments of the largely illiterate masses. Icons taught important religious lessons. They drew the laity into meditation about the ultimate reality that underwrote them, and invited them to dwell upon the limits of their embodied humanness in the vast expanse of the visually perfect cosmic order. As a mediated image, the drawing of violent murder and death on the Cape Flats operated like these supreme religious texts, since it was a symbolic representation that created important social meanings, in the same way as icons, by guiding and educating its viewers' outlook about themselves and the world.

Whatever its religious, social or psychological underpinnings, as a mediated image the drawing raised questions about the media, mediation and the problem of representation in the public domain. Significantly, these issues were of serious concern in South Africa during the early part of the twenty-first century. In the wake of a wave of sustained critical media coverage of the state by independent media houses during the early twenty first century, government officials responded by levelling serious accusations against the commercial media industry. Amongst other things, they claimed that the privately owned media industry was wholly dominated by white supremacist interests, which therefore meant that the independent media reflected this group's biased point of view, all of which formed part of their ideological attack on the state. Privately owned media houses' rapacious motives, critics claimed, was another central element in this ideological attack, since it was the primary stimulus behind their brand of "gutter" journalism. Such claims, therefore, highlighted media critics' concerns about the role of the media in South Africa's fledgling democracy.

During 2007, the opposition between the state and the South African media industry came to a head. Following sustained controversial press coverage of the Minister of Health by *The Sunday Times*—a privately owned weekly publication—the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) withdrew its membership from the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) as a result of the body’s endorsement of the paper’s coverage as being in the public interest. Motivating its withdrawal, Dali Mpfu, the SABC’s Editor-In-Chief, said in an open letter to the head of SANEF that

It [was] clear that SANEF ha[d] reached some consensus around a particular conservative, self-serving ideological position on the issue of the role of the media in *our* society. It is a consensus which is diametrically opposed to *our* stance which is based on a contextual interpretation of *our* Constitution and the values underlying our Bill of Rights which form the foundations of *our* freedom and hard-won democracy.

Mpfu, furthermore, pointed out the main distinctions between the news values of the public broadcaster and the privately owned media industry, saying that

Commercial media is primarily driven by the fundamentally wrong notion that the right to human dignity, especially in the South African context, is less important than *their* own right to make money – which is usually and narrowly clothed under the disguise of “freedom of expression” and the media.

As a defender of the rights and values of the nation, Mpfu went on to clarify the SABC’s stance, saying that it could not “remain quiet while our mothers and our democratically chosen leaders are stripped naked for the sole reason of selling newspapers”. By advancing the SABC’s stance in this dispute, Mpfu therefore also articulated a broader state perception of the apparent “epidemic deterioration of

journalistic ethics” and disrespect for “the people”, that were blatantly evident qualities of commercial media output. To corroborate his sentiments Mpfu quoted newspaper headlines relating to the dispute between the Health Minister and *The Sunday Times* which had appeared in other national and regional newspapers around that time. This observation was in line with the more general consensus of media critics who had identified the print media as the most corrupt media channel (Mpfu, 31 August, 2007).

Apart from the high-end sector of the print media, the introduction and flourishing of tabloid newspapers during this time, have, in their own way, played a significant role in the local debate about media and society. For example, in 2003 the state proposed amendments to the Film and Publications Bill of 1996, which in effect meant that all news publications were to be screened by certifiers who were to police media output for instances of hate speech and child pornography. Media commentators recognised that this intended action was, in the first instance, directed at tabloids which are renowned for publishing material of a licentious nature, but more broadly, noted its impact on media freedom in general, since the definition of hate speech proposed in the amendment was open to broad interpretation. The flourishing of democracy, it has regularly been noted, depends on healthy media debate and discussion beyond the influence of the state. Tabloids were at the forefront of this ongoing process of national self-discovery since they continuously tested the limits of legitimate public expression.

In contrast to the kind of analysis employed by the experts mentioned in the early parts of this chapter, both media critics and commentators became preoccupied with the ideological qualities of the media. The tone and character of this debate, however, implied that the issue of concern was not where the media was to be situated as a fundamental democratic institution *in* the nation, but rather, about the extent of its influence *over* the people as an autonomous capitalist enterprise. This fear was cloaked in a hubbub of vocal, polemical apprehension, expressed by both quarters, about the quality of news, and the circumstances surrounding its production. For example, in response to the seriousness of the matter, in 2007, not long after its spat with SANEF, the SABC initiated a weekly, hour-long special television program to address important media

issues. Airing on Sunday mornings on the station's predominantly English-language channel, SABC 3, the programme took the form of a round table discussion featuring members of various quarters of the South African media industry. The programme, by default, highlighted the state's ideological scepticism of the commercial media, while its title, *In the Public Interest*, epitomised media critics' concept of proper news values.

*The People's Post* article discussed in the very beginning of this chapter, while flying under the radar of this broader debate, was significant because it introduced the topic of the role of the contemporary commercial print-media in Cape Town and Cape Flats society. One telling development in this area, since the turn of the century, has been the introduction and flourishing of tabloid newspapers. From about 2002 Cape Town saw an exponential increase in the number of tabloids available on the media market, to the extent that five years later Cape Townians had access to at least four different tabloids, published in both English and Afrikaans. Of these, arguably, the *Daily Voice* has been one of the more popular, and certainly more sensational, papers to hit news stands. The *Voice*, as it was commonly referred to, was significant not merely because of its availability or popularity, but because of its bold and novel branding as being a paper for the people of the Cape Flats. It is for these and other reasons, soon to be made clear, that the *Voice* will be the primary subject of this chapter, with the more specific intention of exploring how the terms religion, media and identity relate to each other within its pages. Drawing on both symbolic and ideological analytical tools, this chapter seeks, firstly, to look at how the practise of mediation, or the production of news, shapes and constructs particular local identities. Secondly, it will look at the religious qualities of the practise of mediation in terms of what religious worldviews are portrayed and constructed. Finally, it will reflect on what the practice of local news production can reveal about religion's more general relationship with media.

#### **"A Paper You Can Call Your Own!"**

The *Daily Voice* was launched in Cape Town on 16 March, 2005 as a sensational surprise to the public and the local media fraternity. As a tabloid, it was brought to life under a veil of secrecy so as to effectively penetrate an as yet untapped market. It was deployed

on an audience exposed to two mainstream, daily broadsheets with long-standing histories of reporting in the city, *The Cape Times* and *The Cape Argus*, as well as a number of other freely distributed community newspapers (see Shaw, 1999). Independent Newspapers, the *Voice*'s parent company, however, recognized that its main competitor at the time would be the weekly *Kaapse Son* (later changed to the daily *Cape Sun*), an Afrikaans tabloid widely distributed throughout Cape Town and the Western Cape. As a stand-alone challenger in this competitive market, the *Daily Voice* was conceived to be an "in your face" newspaper which would be tinged with a spirit of entertainment and fun. In other words, the paper was envisioned to elicit "escapism" among its readers, yet at the same time have voyeuristic "shock value". Tony Howard, Chief Executive of Independent Newspapers, said he hoped the paper would cheer up readers since it would focus on 'toning down doom and gloom'. The editorial in the first edition confirmed these sentiments when it stated that the *Voice* would take its readers "on a bit of a fantasy trip...an escape from the daily grind of life. That's the *Daily Voice*". The paper's slogan of 'Sex, Scandal, Skinner (gossip), and Sport' therefore represented the distilled vision of its creators (BizCommunity, 2005).

The formal definition of a tabloid was that it referred to the number of folds on a newspaper—broadsheets having two, tabloids only one. From this perspective, the term encompassed one of South Africa's more astute and engaging weekly newspapers, *The Mail and Guardian*. As far as the term referred to mass market, sensational publications, tabloids were, however, not new to South Africa or Cape Town. Yet since their contemporary re-launch into the market, they became the subject of critical debate in South African media circles. Both tabloids and tabloid journalists have been marginalized by the orthodox media fraternity because of an overriding perception that tabloids were spurious publications filled with distasteful, sometimes fallacious content. One of the flaws of this kind of stereotyping, it has been noted, is that media critics have "essentialized and othered" tabloids into one category, as if there were not key differences between British and American and South African tabloids" (Glenn and Knaggs, 2006: 2). The local perception of tabloids mirrored the one held by members of the broadsheet media fraternity in other parts of the world. The widely held negative

stereotype about tabloids, arguably, masked uneasiness about the serious questions they raised about the legitimacy, efficacy and authenticity which apparently underwrote respectable broadsheets. Specifically, they raised questions about the public role of the media as an institution meant to educate the masses as citizens; they cast doubt on news values shaping that which is in the public interest; they have questioned the credibility of the news media's ability to accurately relay information; they have highlighted the significance of the news media's entertaining qualities; and they have challenged conventional notions of public interest through radically outstripping broadsheets in sales.

As a commercial enterprise, Independent Newspapers had calculated exactly the *Daily Voice's* expansive target market. It was to be aimed at the middle and working class coloured population, who, as research indicated, had largely shied away from the city's two wordy broadsheets. According to their research, conducted roughly a year after the first publication, their readership resided on the Cape Flats, spoke both English and Afrikaans, with equal numbers of men and women reading the paper (Glenn and Knaggs, 2007). With this knowledge, and a keen awareness of the marketing dynamics employed by the (Cape) *Kaapse Son*, the *Daily Voice* was editorially tailored to most effectively penetrate its niche. In terms of format, "stories [would] be deliberately short...and pages [would] be busy, with a high story count". Visually, the tabloid would be a spectacle, as pictures were to be "big and bold". By relying on this layout style, the paper was merely conforming to standard tabloid conventions which had been developed over a period of more than fifty years and successfully implemented in other parts of the world (Bird, 1992). In terms of the *Voice*, these conventions served to indulge its audience voyeuristic appetite for visual content, but also nourished their pre-existing, virtually universal, desire for stories of an erotic nature, celebrity gossip, a TV guide, and dedicated sports and health and advice columns.

The style and content of tabloids like the *Voice* were distressing to media purists. In light of their commercial success globally, critics raised a number of concerns about their potential effect on media standards. Media purists, for one, argued that tabloids would

negatively influence conventional journalistic ethics, since tabloid style news coverage set an unsettling precedent of placing entertainment before factual reporting. Others have questioned the plausibility of this “tabloidisation” thesis, arguing that such a juxtaposition of tabloids against orthodox media is done in a fashion which misconstrues the “fabulous reportage” discourse evident in tabloid news reporting, and conventional “news discourse”. As two different “orders of discourse”, they are “quite different in communicative purposes” (Connel, 1998: 12). While purists were lamenting the transformation of news values in general, across all media channels, the printed publication remained a special case in this broader debate to the extent that some critics have argued that “they can no longer be regarded as “newspapers”” and that a new classification be developed to describe these popular, textual forms of ‘info-tainment’ (Rooney, 1998: 106).

The *Voice* went beyond the parameters of standard tabloid format and was unique because its pages were predominantly charged with evocative local material. In terms of content, its publishers went to great lengths to capture the essence of Cape Flats life by placing the needs and interests of its target market at the forefront. Veering away from standard media conventions, the publishers employed novel adaptations to its reporting priorities and style, by, for example, concertedly drawing on colloquial street language, by covering stories about workaday people and community issues, and by placing emphasis on blood, death and gore, all of which were considered to be common, everyday elements of Cape Flats life. These careful adaptations therefore represented the paper’s commitment to its original promise, outlined in the editorial of the first edition, that it would be “A paper that you can call your own!” (BizCommunity, 2005).

Human interest stories—or stories that focussed on personal individual experiences—and community issues generally overlooked by the broadsheets, were, the *Voice*’s main news features. For example, soon after its first publication, the *Voice* ran a story about a field on the Cape Flats suburb of Blue Downs where a number of murders, rapes and child abductions had occurred. The paper dubbed the field “The Bush of Evil” and continuously ran stories on it, in the hope of grabbing the attention of authorities so as to

have it cleared. As the editor of that time put it, “we have hammered the mayor for months about that bush and now finally . . . it started getting chopped down. Its good, our readers wanted it”. Disconcertingly, however, the editor went on to remark that they “were accused of just doing it for sales” (cited in Glenn and Knaggs, 2006: 3). If, as this accusation would suggest the *Voice* was simply cultivating an economic relationship with its audience, it remained significant, since, in these terms, the readership could be perceived as either a collective of consumers or a commodified collective. In the first sense, “news is a product—a product that must be made attractive or appealing to a market of consumers (Richardson, 2007: 77). By implication, this suggests that the audience can also be conceived as a commodity; as a collective developed by media houses through calculated marketing. Claiming the ability to reach specific audiences is essential for the maintenance of economic relations between media houses and advertisers. The editor of the *Voice*, however, wholly rejected this appraisal of the paper as an unsympathetic reduction to capitalist exploitation. He argued that, “what people don’t recognise is that there is no dichotomy between doing something for sales and doing something that is good. Because if your readers want it and they agree with you and *identify* with you, they will buy your newspaper” (in Glenn and Knaggs, 2007: emphasis added).

If sales figures could be equated with news quality, as the editor suggested, then, in the case of the *Voice*, quality referred to the authenticity of its news content. Authenticity was a novel, utilitarian kind of news value that convoluted the central premises underwriting conventional news values because it implied that the accuracy of news content, otherwise related to the notion of objectivity, stemmed from its currency or popularity. The *Voice* could be seen to be strongly informed by this news value, since authenticity served as an adjective for, and affirmation of, its unashamedly judgemental, crude and callous reporting style. Nowhere was this more evident than in news items about religion, death and children.

### *Scandalous Religion*

On the 20 March, 2007, under the headline 'Cluck Off', the *Voice* reported on the case of "a chicken suspected of being an agent of evil" causing a commotion in the Cape Flats suburb of Khayelitsha. The community suspected foul play when they noticed that the chicken had a "bottle" and blade tied "round its neck", and a "ladies purse" tucked under its wing. After observing the chicken for some time, "a mob of superstitious residents" chased it in the hopes of killing it. "The bird fled on a wing and a prayer and was", apparently, "peri-peri lucky to get away" when the police captured and later released it. Two days later, the *Voice* reported a story of a woman identified only as Nokubonga who claimed that "a chicken dressed in traditional Xhosa clothes was left on her *stoep* (front porch) by someone with fowl play on their minds". Suspecting the bird was an agent of evil, she and her husband decided to throw "Jeyes Fluid (detergent) over the chicken, thinking it would cleanse it of evil" (*Daily Voice*, 22 March 2007). The bird later died in the care of a *sangoma* (traditional healer), who later observed that the bird "could have killed someone". Nokubonga claimed that the "incident [was] all part of a campaign by a jealous neighbour" (*Daily Voice*, 22 March 2007).

While these reports had overtones of sensationalism, they related to the real phenomenon of accusations of evil in African traditional religion (see Hammond-Tooke, 1970). In traditional rural societies, since witchcraft was a resource available to all members of traditional African polities, it afforded subordinate groups the opportunity to subvert the balance of power that, otherwise, they were subject to bear. In the urban environment, however, members of the black African community identified sudden changes in personal fortune, physical illness or harm as signs of the use of witchcraft deployed frequently by known foes within the community. Victims cited jealousy, lust, greed and animosity as the motivating factors behind their personal afflictions. Just as in the rural context, witchcraft was a resource available, and frequently used, by subordinate community members as a means of asserting their position within society. Women, therefore, frequently bore the brunt of such accusations. Similar stories of the deployment of evil appeared at infrequent intervals in the *Voice*. For example, in 2005 a family reported that

their home was under attack by demonic forces, which they claimed manifest in such strange phenomena as “a drumming noise”, the appearance of “black worms” in their beds, as well as “strong odours and the appearance of black circles” in different parts of their home (*Daily Voice*, 20 July 2005). The source of the spiritual offensive, the family claimed, was their jealous neighbours. To combat the evil spirits, the family resorted to trying a variety of religious formula including, writing the words ‘God is love’ at the entrance of their home, placing crucifixes and Christian religious motifs throughout the house, and out of sheer desperation went to “the length of sprinkling “blessed” cooking oil around the house” (*Daily Voice*, 20 July 2005). Whatever the eventual outcome of this family’s efforts, the story was indicative of how a particularly African religious phenomenon could be drawn upon as a captivating framework for news content. Significantly, however, other sensationalised African religious phenomena like muti-killings—where corpses were mutilated, and then harvested of their organs for use in the practise of witchcraft—were rarely covered in the *Voice*.

Animosity and conflict appeared to be important criteria for validating the newsworthiness of news-items dealing with religion. The *Voice*’s reporting of religiously motivated social upheaval was typically idiosyncratic when juxtaposed against the portrayals presented in other local print media. For example, in September 2005, the *Voice* and the conservative Cape Town morning broadsheet, the *Cape Times*, both reported the story of a violent skirmish between members of two rival churches in Gugulethu, Cape Town. Under the headline, ‘Police called to stop fighting between church congregations’, the article appeared on page 6 of the Wednesday the fourteenth’s edition of the *Cape Times*. The journalist, Babalo Ndenze, reported (here abbreviated) that

The Old Testament saying of an “eye for an eye” was substituted for a rock for a rock when men from two congregations engaged in a bloody battle of stone throwing outside a Gugulethu church at the weekend.

Fighting erupted when a group from the St Joseph Apostolic church from Site C in Khayelitsha allegedly disrupted a church service at the

Apostolic church in NY 82 in Gugulethu, headed by Bishop Caldwell Sinke.

The two groups pelted each other with stones and laid into each other with sticks outside the church while the service continued inside.

There were even gunshots as the battle went on before police were called in to stop the fight. (*Cape Times*, 14 September 2005)

Commenting on the background and motivation behind the attack, Ndenze reported that “the two groups were once part of the same church” before Sinke “broke away to start his own congregation”. Sinke claimed the group came to his church “with the intention of causing trouble”, since, as he stated, under the directorship of “their bishop”, “they just want[ed] [his] church to come to an end”. “Its just jealousy basically”, he said. Despite this deep seated animosity, Sinke remained humble and open when asked about the possibility of more future attacks, stating that “there will be a lot of danger if they come again because they can come, it’s a church and everyone is welcome”. On the previous day, the *Voice* had run the same story with the front page headline ‘Bible Brawl’, adding the by line ‘Blood flows as a church turns into a mal (mad) fight club’. The article read

Blood flowed at a Cape Flats church when two congregations *moered* (beat) each other *dik* (up). Suit-clad men *packed* each other *aan* (ganged up on each other) with sticks and stones during the two hour running battle.

People swapped Bibles for stones and began pelting each other in front of the church. Others took up sticks like Moses but instead of parting the Red Sea they tried parting each others skulls.

One congregant even pulled a gun in the church. The man fired into the ground and hit a woman in the foot. Fortunately she only suffered a broken shoe after the bullet narrowly missed her toes.

Many of the church goers claim they “saw the light”. But they were probably just seeing stars after being whacked in the head.

“Apparently”, the article went on to say, “the fight broke out when a former member of the Free Reformed Apostolic Church in Gugulethu’s NY 82 rocked up at the Sunday service with a bus load of supporters”. Bishop Sinke claimed that when “a minister asked” the disruptive leader of the St Joseph congregation, Welcome Bam, “to leave, all hell broke loose” (*Daily Voice*, 13 September 2005).

The rhetorical differences between the two articles is striking, yet the factual similarity, as far as the story was related by Bishop Sinke, seem as distinct. Factually, both articles converged in their reflection on ethics and injustice, since they both drew on Bishop’s Sinke’s explanation of the motivations behind the incident. The rhetorical differences, however, suggest the two portrayals diverged in their representation of religion. The sensational snippet opening the *Cape Times* article was telling in that it framed participants’ actions in a humanist-Christocentric discourse which highlighted the folly of the human condition in comparison to authoritative Christian teaching. As sinners, they were to be forgiven, and therefore, were in need of the redemptive power of Christ. The *Voice*’s portrayal was framed in a kind of ‘exotic other’ discourse typical of nineteenth century metropolitan theorists’ vignettes of the beliefs and practises of adherents of primitive religion. In developing their human evolutionary schemes of religion, metropolitan theorists drew on the beliefs and practises of indigenous cultures as live evidence of primitive European man’s first forays into scientific thinking. Primal groups, it was therefore argued, practised pseudo-scientific magic rather than religion. In discrediting their religious beliefs, metropolitan theorists frequently drew on vivid descriptive accounts to emphasize primal groups’ apparent religious absurdities (Chidester, 1996). Since it was an invisible abstraction, separate from the materiality of everyday life, the *Voice* implied Christianity was a meaningless form of superstition. The parodied allusions to Christian holy texts, myths and religious experiences further

suggested the conflict revolved around religious values. Those involved in the conflict were therefore apparently all absurd since they were fighting over superstition.

These articles were some of the few stories that dealt with religion in the *Voice*. Jesus and the Virgin Mary occasionally featured when they made miraculous appearances on bodies or in the urban space, for example. Clearly, the *Voice* steered away from content that related to religion and the occult, especially when stories related to the metaphysical or supernatural, choosing, instead, to pay attention to more hard news stories. The articles on the chickens as agents of evil represented a marked divergence from the normal trend in its reporting style, since, in the cases where religion was reported, it was the hard facts rather than the metaphysical detail of the story that was emphasised. Headlines like “The Chapel of Death” (*Daily Voice*, 2 July 2007) seemed to epitomise the *Voice*’s approach to these matters. For example, in September 2007 the paper ran two stories on Christian religion. In the first case, it reported the case of the apparent satanic ritual murder of a Church elder in Paarl on Halloween night the previous year. That issue was headlined ‘Church of Satan’, and the story itself – which was dominated by a number of graphic images of a mutilated corpse, and the word ‘satun’ scrawled in blood on a wall – was entitled ‘The Devils Butchery’. Beyond the graphic details of the murder itself, and a series of carefully planted hints, the article paid little attention to the alleged religious motivations behind the killing. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2007, in an article headlined “Happy Crappy Kerkie” the *Voice* reported the story of a church operating out of a derelict primary school’s toilet. Here, emphasis was placed upon the valiant efforts of the priest as community worker, embarking on positive evangelical work despite the most dire and repulsive odds. Through his efforts this space, where dereliction, pollution and contamination had once reigned, “a pulpit and lectern now take pride of place” (*Daily Voice*, 11 September 2007). As portrayed in these latter examples, religion was revealed to be a functionalist moral institution that could be used as a form of legitimacy, whether one’s actions were socially sanctioned or not.

*Bad Bad News*

In terms of content, the *Voice* failed to deliver on its promise of ‘toning down the doom and gloom’ since its pages were filled with stories of pain and suffering. Its human-interest stories were more often than not focussed on crime and dominated by tales of rape, robbery, child abduction and murder. These stories were always focussed on specific victims, yet at times they were framed in a narrative format that was social or communal in orientation, suggesting that the source of these problems stemmed from flaws in the Cape Flats social fabric. In these instances, the community was held accountable for the plight of suffering victims. Human-interest stories were therefore invariably construed in terms of a “victim-perpetrator” binary, since the transitive action process, or narrative relationship between subjects in a text, of news items connected subjects of news to responsible actors. As subjects, victims were frequently portrayed as passive and innocent while perpetrators were portrayed as active, calculating and inherently base. The *Voice* sometimes invoked the word evil as an adjective for perpetrators of particularly heinous crimes. Children were perceived to be the quintessential victims, and in the pages of the *Voice*, their rapists, murderers and kidnappers were the quintessential evil perpetrators. The *Voice*’s portrayal of crimes involving children therefore presents itself as one fruitful area for exploring the mediation practises that went into forging a relationship with its readership.

As a result of a spate of violent acts against Cape Flats infants and children during 2006, the *Daily Voice* started the ‘Save Our Children’ campaign. As Aldridge (2002) has pointed out, newspaper campaigns provide a unique “opportunity to create readership loyalty and identification by positioning the paper as an effective change agent” (cited in Richardson, 2007: 117). This campaign was a drive to draw attention to issues of child safety, and operated around stories of child abductions, rapes and murders. Therefore, in most instances of stories relating to child and infant victims of crime, whether the victim or perpetrator was the main subject of the article, news items were tagged with a special red stripe containing the yellow letters of the ‘Save Our Children’ slogan. Perpetrators were explicitly labelled according to the nature of the crime, with paedophiles earning the tag *vuilgatte*, literally meaning dirty bastards, with murderers often earning the label evil. While a wide variety of infants and children fell under the headline, the paper tended to

pay more concerted attention to more heinous examples. The contract killing of 6 month old baby Jordan-Leigh Norton in 2005 and the brutal rape and murder of 4 year old Celine Cowley in 2006 became emotive focal points for the campaign, receiving extensive coverage over many months.

Despite its noble intentions, the 'Save Our Children' campaign, in actuality, appeared to be superficial when compared to trends identified in similar campaigns in overseas newspapers. Richardson (2007) has pointed out that the newspaper campaign was a significant "economic practise of journalism", since in these instances "newspapers use populist, sensationalist but politically timid subjects to market themselves" (Richardson, 2007: 115). In his analysis of similar newspaper campaigns in the United Kingdom, he found that these sustained subjects of coverage tended to be responsive rather than proactive, were sensationalist in tone, played on the audience sentiments by presenting issues in emotive terms, and, finally, paid attention to the symptoms rather than causes of social issues. In light of such research, it appears that newspapers like the *Daily Voice* tried to create the impression that they were pursuing positive social change when they embarked on such media projects, but more often than not, they had little if any real material influence.

Images of corpses and victims of brutal violent crime were another staple feature. The *Voice* placed emphasis on reporting violent crime, and brutal death, which crime statistics indicated were rife on the Cape Flats. As Bird (1992) has shown, the use of particular content themes was vital in shaping a tabloid's image and specific readerships. For example, during the 1960s, in America, the *National Enquirer* pursued the theme of death and gore. At the time, the paper preferred to focus on "bizarre violence" so that "[w]herever possible, stories of the period featured photos of dead and mutilated bodies. Under the guise of public interest, the paper published graphic photographs of accident victims, such as a two-page spread featuring a man whose face had been ripped off, his dead wife, and the charred bodies of their children" (Bird, 1992: 26). The *Voice* seemed to have adopted the same stylistic strategy with its virtually unrestrained publishing of graphic and disturbing images of victims of brutal violence and murder. The gory aspects

of these news items were, however, toned down through the use of trivializing headlines that usually had a humorous twist. So, for example, the headline 'Smoked' was used to refer to the death of a young man who was gunned down near his home in the suburb of Hanover Park while he was on his way to a shop to purchase a cigarette. This lexical strategy was deployed in sometimes sarcastic ways. For example, from 2005 until 2007 rival taxi organizations in Cape Town were locked in battle over access to key commuter routes around black townships. The competition for these routes was so fierce that taxi operators started engaging each other in gun battle over them, resulting in a number of fatalities during this time. The *Voice* kept an official casualty count of these victims in the form of 'The Taxi War Deathometer'.

Whether or not the *Voice* was merely portraying reality on the ground, the increasing appearance, and graphic quality, of death in the media globally can be related to a voracious public appetite for voyeuristic media content, and the blurring of the lines separating reality and entertainment. Media portrayals of death could therefore also be construed as pornography. Sexually explicit material, while still holding primary purchase over the term pornography, gains its erotic allure, as Gorer (1980) argues, from the fact that it is socially taboo and distanced from ordinary life. As the human experience of death, especially natural death, has become more and more socially distant, and almost unmentionable in modern Western society, the more fascinated modern audiences have become with the phenomenon. "While natural death became more and more smothered in prudery", Gorer claims, "violent death has played an ever growing part in the fantasies offered to mass audiences" (Gorer, 1980: 50). The facts of life, that being, birth, sex and death, therefore require social media for being engaged and understood. On the other hand, through the graphic reporting of death, the media may also be seen to be offering alternative religious like ways of understanding mortality and the afterlife. Seaton (2005) has argued that contemporary media portrayals of death provide the forum and logic for understanding death as a fact of life, since "the fundamental idea communicated in the rituals of journalism is that news attention may reveal the meaning of a death". "Contemporary journalism", Seaton claims, "expresses a set of beliefs about the proper transition from life to death of an individual essence which

earlier generations were more confident calling ‘the soul’”. The telling of stories about death, especially unjust death, secures the rite of passage from life to death for the victim, and serves to consolidate social meaning around the loss. “Thus for journalism the life after death exists in the telling of the story of a particular death as part of the argument of a wider news narrative”. In this way, “the rites of journalism are about establishing for the audience the meaning of particular deaths in the narratives of news” (Seaton, 2005: 191, 196). In the case of bad death, the media have therefore become the new ceremonials for ensuring the smooth transition of the dead into the afterlife and the restoration of society after death.

### **A Paper of the People**

As far as authenticity described the accurate simulation of reality, it also referred to the actual process by which the *Voice* identified with its readership, and lured its readership into identifying with it. According to references in its content, the *Voice*’s audience was identified, simply, as residents of “the Cape Flats”. Typically, this reference would be made in the first few sentences of news items, and, remained the only spatial referent describing the location of a news event. Counter-intuitively, “the Cape Flats” was deployed as an all encompassing adjective that referred to all the marginalized, middle-class and working-class communities of colour in Cape Town, and was not exclusively reserved for coloureds. In this way, the phrase “the Cape Flats” was not so much a geographical place, but rather, a common sense, taken for granted location in the hearts and minds of those who could relate to the experience of social and economic marginalization.

Stylistically, this use of the phrase was amplified through a spatial configuration of the globe that had the “Cape Flats” in the very centre. For example, news content relating to national or international affairs, when not omitted, was treated as peripheral. This was partly because the *Voice* employed a contingent of journalists who generated a regular stream of organic stories which came from face-to-face engagement. News items stemming from other parts of the country, or the world, were almost always of a trivial or bizarre nature, and slipped onto pages as miniscule squares. With some of its more

sensational stories, the *Voice* also actively touted itself as breaking international news when it claimed its content was “World Exclusive”, a referent which suggested that events on “The Cape Flats” were of momentous importance in relation to the minor events taking place in other parts of the world. This spatial configuration was significant because it communicated a sense of pride for the region on the one hand, while on the other, it hinted at the narrow confines of its audience’s worldview.

The South African media made a significant contribution towards this constructed concept of “the Cape Flats”, helping to shape the powerful moods and motivations the term evoked. This was made evident in the work of Sean Jacobs (2002), who analysed how the Cape Flats township of Manenberg and its residents were represented in the South African media. Specifically, Jacobs looked at media articles about the suburb immediately after a natural disaster had razed a number of homes in the area in the early 2000’s, and then compared these to news items about the tragedy a year later. Both at the time of disaster, and a year later, news items were wholly negative as they perpetuated a stereotypical perception of the suburb as a slum haven to criminals and social degenerates, and portrayed its residents as deserving victims, suffering at the expense of their own irresponsibility. Manenberg had a legacy of such negative media coverage, with national and international newscasters having regularly turned their attention to the suburb throughout the 1990s as if it was an extreme case of social degradation. In the case of the natural disaster, therefore, news content tended to pay little attention to the freak nature of the incident, the socio-political history which made residents of the suburb vulnerable, or the lack of long term, meaningful intervention by the state to ameliorate residents’ problems. This depiction of the suburb, Jacobs argued, had less to do with the real place, people and events than with complex political struggles playing out in the national and provincial arena at the time. In this way, the signification of the suburb of Manenberg had a bearing upon the perception of the city itself, as well as popular beliefs and sentiments about the Cape Flats in general. By labeling the subjects of its news items residents of the Cape Flats, the *Voice* tapped into this latent history and contributed towards shaping new meanings of the common-sense understanding of the place.

Two other stylistic conventions employed in the reporting of news items played an equally important role in simulating authenticity. Firstly, colloquial language was filtered into the *Voice's* general reporting register in a way that imbued news items with the feel of the intimacy of the exchange of gossip. This unique local *patois*, developed on the ground, in the streets, consisted of a blend of English, Afrikaans, Malay and indigenous African terms and phrases, and was characterised by dexterous code-switching (see McCormick, 1995, 2004; and Stone, 1972, 1995). Secondly, news items were almost always framed in a narrative trajectory of a moral drama that more often than not drew impetus from the beliefs and values of working class coloureds. For example, an article headlined 'The Arsonhole' read

A Cape Flats woman says her tikmonster son burnt her house down yesterday. Thozama Patricia Xhosa, 39, claims her boy started the fire that destroyed everything she owned. She says her 18 year old son threatened to kill her after she confronted him about stealing her clothes. (*Daily Voice*, 20 March 2007)

Tikmonster was a colloquial coloured adjective for a crystal methamphetamine addict, tik being the adjective for crystal methamphetamine, which was a serious social problem in the coloured population in Cape Town. The news item was cast in the morally dramatic discourse of the erosion of traditional values surrounding the make up of the family as a result of the macabre transformative power of drugs. Colloquial language therefore played a fundamental role in framing news stories because they were loaded with the values and beliefs of the people who spoke it.

Speaking in the peoples' voice was an important element in making the *Voice's* content meaningful. Colloquial language was also used to shape the format of the paper. Columns and sections bore titles that were distinctly local and made to appear distinctively organic. For example, the *Voice's* daily "self-help and how to" double page spread was entitled 'Jou Ma Se Voice' (Your Mothers Voice), while the column dedicated to readers SMS comments was titled 'Rek Jou Bek' (Have Your Say). In adopting this use of language,

the *Voice* drew on a tabloid tradition that was almost a century old, hailing from the marketing strategies of media moguls in America. In the American edition of the *Daily Mirror*'s inaugural editorial in the mid 1920s, William Randolph Hearst had boldly echoed the sentiments of his competitors when he stated that, "when the tabloid speaks, its language is not dead with the stylism of conventional newspaper wordage but alive with phrases that were spoken. Here is the history of a time as it would have been written by its people" (cited in Bird, 1992: 19). The tabloid was, therefore, the peoples' history, which implied their ownership of the text. Benedict Anderson (1991) has argued that vernaculars appearing in print media form played a crucial role in the formation of nationalism(s) during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the printed form, they concretized otherwise trivial audible linguistic differences between language groups and related them to specific geographies. At the same time, they transformed readers into consumers since the texts operated within emerging capitalist markets. In print, vernaculars were therefore ideologically charged forms of language since they were spaces where situated language groups came together and imagined their distinct homogeneity. By default, they were also commodities which could be exploited for their economic potential.

It should be mentioned that the coloured community was not unaccustomed to such media attention, nor were they oblivious to the ways of the media. For example, in the early 1990s the British Broadcasting Corporation commissioned the production of a documentary called "Cape of Fear" as part of a six-part series on the plight of working-class communities from different parts of the globe. The documentary looked at social circumstances in Manenberg through the tale of a year in the life of the Hard Livings, the most powerful gang in the area. In this way, the director sought to reflect on the "political and economic origins of the crime economy and how the residents, cope with or struggle against this reality". Despite these intentions, ultimately, the film helped propel Cape Flats gangs into the media limelight. The first 'bootleg copies of the film that reached South Africa gained cult status among gang members', and, its subsequent screening on South African public television not long afterwards seemed to have "spawned a whole genre of gang documentaries by SABC news analysis programs" (Jacobs, 2002: 9).

In 2006 another large British media conglomerate commissioned a documentary on local gangsters. In trying to establish the link between the street gangs and the prison number gangs, the host, Ross Kemp, ventured to the Cape Flats to speak to the gangsters themselves. Kemp was fortunate enough to gain an informal interview with a contingent of high ranking American gangsters while they engaged in a drug session at their criminal headquarters, known as the White House. At one point, Kemp posed the question, "Am I right in assuming that the Americans are the biggest [gang in Cape Town]?" To which one senior member replied, saying, "I'd go so far as the media...the media announce it you know. By me saying that we are the biggest gang . . . it could be a lie you know, it could be true too. But according to the media . . . the media stated, the most *notorious* gang in the Western Cape, the Americans". This insightful comment indicated that, having enjoyed the attention of the national and international media fraternity since the early 1990s already, the coloured community was skilled in reading into practises of mediation, and, therefore, was not comprised of passive media consumers.

Nevertheless, as a text, it remained plausible to say that the *Voice* could be perceived as congregating an imagined community, since it brought to life an otherwise frowned upon widely understood language, used it to narrate the living experience of a particular social group, and linked them both to a geographical location. While the *Voice* spoke to and about all the marginalized people of colour within the city, it was the coloured population with whom its media practises resonated most strongly. The *Voice* came onto the market at a time when the Cape coloured population was experiencing of socio-political anxiety and uncertainty. As Adhikari (2005) and others have pointed out, socio-political changes in the demography of the city have significantly impacted on the coloured community's experience of democracy, so that their endemic perception of being social outcasts seemed to be perpetuating itself in the new democratic dispensation. Against this background, the *Voice* tapped into the coloured masses' long-held desire for authenticity, and quenched their thirst for social recognition and cultural validation.

### **Mediation as a Practise of Religion**

As the brief discussion of icons in the beginning of the chapter indicated, religion has always had a special relationship with media. Arguably, the practice of religion is inseparable from the signs, symbols, images and texts religious traditions draw upon for communicating the divine. In this sense, the significance of media in religion goes beyond simple utilitarian reductionism, which characterises religious media as empty, independent artefacts only relevant to the extent of their use value as communicative tools. For, in the first instance, the divine communiqué broadcast by religious media are subject to, and influenced by, the qualities and limitations of the media transmitting the message. The quality of this relationship between divine communiqué and the medium through which it is disseminated has led some to argue that “religion . . . cannot be analyzed outside the forms and practises of mediation that define it”. In that sense, “it is most fruitful, as a starting point, to view religion as a practise of mediation” (Meyer and Moors, 2005: 7).

The quality of the relationship between religion and media has implications not only for conventional concepts of religion, but also for the media in general. Under the cloak of a religious aura, the potential of media channels were expanded and transformed in a way that suggested they had the power to convey virtually limitless meaning. In the case of icons, for example, Chidester (2000b: 206) has argued that “[a]lthough icons were often characterised as if they were visual scripture, the Bible of the illiterate, their pedagogical role was superseded by their status as sacred objects effectively conveying the spiritual power of holy persons”. This means that, even though emphasis was placed on the accuracy or authenticity of an icon, “an icon was more than a mere likeness; it was a presence. Through ritual acts of veneration—bowing, kneeling and kissing the image—devotees could gain access to the spiritual power of the holy person represented by the icon” (206). The ritual labour of veneration, therefore, expanded the power of icons as purely visual media. If the practise of mediation is considered to be the production of meaning through the use of a communicative medium, then, as the case of these icons suggest, mediation itself could be considered to have religious qualities. As we have seen in the case of news stories about death, for example, their contemporary portrayal in the

media have somehow substituted for religion in mediating the public and personal transition of human beings into the afterlife. The news conventions and values underwriting journalism seemed to invest the media with existential powers. Objectivity in the search for truth was one of those values. In conducting their work, journalists operate from the premise that “there are right answers to problems”, and, therefore, behave as if “an objective truth exists, but that it has to be searched for” (Seaton, 2005: 200). The application of news values suggests that media content is not merely a commercial artefact, but rather also imbued with deeper meaning and significance that stem from the pursuit of abstract ideals.

Against this background, the *Voice* can be seen to be significant for three reasons. Firstly, it shaped and tailored its news as fresh, and unique, so that information appeared to be a supernatural, other world to which it claimed exclusive access. The transcendent aura in which the *Voice*'s news content was cloaked could be traced to its branding style which aimed to evoke the experience of escapism in its readers, but also to the more prevalent notion of information as a prized form of social currency in the contemporary ‘information age’. The modern media industry has contributed significantly to the transformation of the notion of information in the public psyche. For example, by default, the increase in the rate of news information amplified the desire for information. Granted, the marketing of news as being “exclusive” was central to the commercial survival of all news channels, in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, information seemed to mean more than just revealed news content. One of the new meanings of information emerges at the point of intersection between news and religious imagery, since both shared a special relationship to the truth, in the sense that they do not “merely represent reality: they also claim to be guarantors of the veracity of the events they depict”(Seaton, 2005: 92).

Secondly, the *Voice*'s claims to information were consolidated by its unique ability to congregate a special kind of imagined community. As we have seen, the *Voice* premised itself on a branding that was about the people, for the people, and developed this relationship through calculated marketing strategies. As the *Voice* told its distinctive

stories, the tabloid created a space for the congregation of a linguistic or geographical community. But it also transformed news into a text that related the dramatic unfolding of a complex mythical narrative about the people on the Cape Flats.

Finally, more than claiming access to another world, or relating a real story unfolding at the moment, the *Voice* also situated its audience in space, and shaped their perspective of the world. A stylistic focus on the real, manifest in, amongst other things, an emphasis on entertainment, education, dead bodies and areligious judgements served to guide readers' experience of reality. The *Voice* turned readers' attention towards the cold reality of the material world, shaping their worldview through careful contrasts with other apparently false perceptions of the world influenced by politics or religion.

### **Conclusion**

Over the course of this chapter I have tried to demonstrate the dynamic interplay between the terms religion, media and identity taking place in the *Daily Voice*. In so doing I have tried to pay attention to the ideological and symbolic qualities of the media as a real social force and a product of human hands. By focussing its marketing campaign on the simulation of authenticity, the *Voice* inverted the conventional media's privileging of middle and upper middle-class beliefs, values and sentiments as taken for granted norms. In this way, through the use of the spatial metaphor "Cape Flats", the publication capitalised on the working-class's experience of social marginalization. By drawing on colloquial language and tapping into the beliefs and values of the coloured population, the paper seemed to be more concerned with this subjectivity, tapping into its audience's need for social and cultural recognition. The infrequent appearance of news items relating to religion suggested that it was not taken very seriously as a social phenomenon. When it did manifest in news content, religion was thought about in functionalist terms, considered to be meaningful only in so far as it shed light on the hard facts of news items. Finally, the *Voice*'s mediation practises contributed to the burgeoning exploration of the religious qualities of the media, through its emphasis on information, through its congregation of a special imagined community, and through its shaping of a worldview focussed on the real.

## Conclusion

This thesis sought to explore how a group of people made meaning in the world, in terms of where they were situated, and how they chose to be recognized. In the first phase of this journey it was shown how academic and pseudo-academic theories of coloured identity were closely linked to how coloured folk came to understand themselves. One of the reasons for this was because a large proportion of literature on the subject was tinged with essentialist notions of race and identity, resulting in the perpetuation of the notion that coloured identity was politically, racially and socially problematic, and, by extension, that the coloured population was somehow racially afflicted. When looking at how former residents of District Six made meaning of their experience of forced removal in the second chapter, we caught a glimpse of how the coloured community perceived themselves spatially and historically, as urban dwellers and owners of the city of Cape Town. In the third chapter, where the relationship between religion, culture and subjectivity was investigated, it appeared that the cultural foundations of coloured identity were shown to have been indelibly influenced by a history of negotiation, contestation and debate about religion, religions and the religious. And finally, the subject of religion and mediation in the *Daily Voice* was examined. There, the social significance of the link between consumerism and signifying practices surrounding the reporting of news about people on the Cape Flats in the post-apartheid era was revealed, as well as, how similar contemporary news reporting was to religious practices of signification.

When pulled together in this way, a better synopsis of the relationship between the terms religion and coloured identity can be formulated. One way of condensing this research was to say that religion, in both formal and abstract guises, has interfaced with coloured identity, as a social identity, in four important spheres of meaning—namely, space, culture, capitalism and the media—so that the interplay between religion and identity, sometimes in opposition, sometimes in symmetry, revealed how the production of new

meanings of religion and the religious supplemented the situated negotiation of legitimate options for practicing coloured identity.

Firstly, through the lens of religion, coloured identity could be seen as spatially situated in three interrelated realms. Coloured identity was located in the broad realm of the nation and the South African nation state. As we saw in the first chapter, the term coloured was adopted as a social signifier partly as a political response to increasing threats to the community's civil and social status intimated by white political authorities around the period of the formation of the South African state. Since the coloured community identified itself as being different from black Africans, and related to whites, and with the state's increasing preoccupation with race as the primary criteria of civil status over the course of the twentieth century, coloureds came to occupy the civil space between blacks and whites. Securing this position in the South African political and racial hierarchy, significantly, depended on the coloured community's display of having adopted the civilized culture of whites, which included things like the mastery of English, the adoption of the Christian faith, and values like temperance, chastity, and aspirations for upward social mobility. While these values were rooted in Christian teachings, Muslims were equally able to adopt these values and contribute to the broader drive for special social status.

Secondly, coloured identity was situated in Cape Town. As we saw, the coloured population drew on religious resources to formulate a kind of folk religion that transformed their circumstances of urban marginalization and racial oppression regarding their forced removal from District Six into a multivalent material location in history that mediated the notion of coloured identity as situated in the history of the city.

Thirdly, coloured identity was situated in bodies. Ultimately, colouredness came down to visible physical features like hair texture and skin colour, which in effect meant that bodies came to define the limits of what it meant to be a human and a citizen. Since religious institutions on the Cape Flats predominantly paid attention to the immediate needs of the community, they indirectly reinforced these prevailing concepts of race by

promoting racially defined social networks, while at the same time their religious teachings were founded upon abstract, egalitarian concepts of humanness that went beyond the limits of the visible human body.

Culturally, religion helped to cloak certain cultural practices in an aura of authenticity, in the case of the Minstrel Carnival, for example, and, therefore, played a role in advancing notions of coloured homogeneity. On the other hand, religious observances in many cases sharpened cultural distinctions that existed within the coloured community, and, therefore, helped maintain the broad spectrum of cultural heterogeneity. In this way, coloured identity could not be reduced to the standard stock of cultural artifacts commonly associated with it, such as language, dental-modification practices, or music. Instead it turned attention to the context and labour that went into making those artifacts meaningful.

When it came to employment, during apartheid, Cape Town's coloured community enjoyed the protection of the state through the Coloured Labour Preference Policy. In effect, the policy stifled competition by preventing blacks from entering the labour market. But as was the case with all people of colour, coloureds were largely prevented from rising to the higher ranks in the job market purely on the grounds of race. The obvious result was that a large working-class population emerged. In the context of widespread capitalist exploitation, the coloured community established religiously inspired alternative economies of exchange that sought to undermine and subvert the power relations of the prevailing capitalist order. Cape Flats gangsters, for example, subverted the established capitalist order by formulating alternative claims to the secret mysteries of money as a source of wealth and power, in that way justifying the criminal exploitation. Otherwise, as we saw was the case in District Six, the coloured community survived on an economy based on the value of fair or reciprocal exchange. At local stores, consumers could purchase goods on interest-free, or short- and medium-term lines of credit, while commodities like food clothing and so on were donated, traded or sold in the spirit of goodwill. The significance of this economy could be seen in the uproar surrounding new competition entering the market. For example, since the 1990s foreign

nationals started moving into coloured communities, and established barber shops and general stores. In an attempt to secure a share of the market, rather than observe the economic norm of fair trade, the new traders slashed the prices of their goods and services, selling them at a much cheaper rate than their long-established competitors. To coloured communities, this represented a serious violation of communal values, and, at times, resulted in vigilante action against foreign traders. The above examples suggest that, by negotiating alternative economies of exchange, the coloured community sought to establish different value orientations to the material world. The capitalist economy was inescapable, yet its underlying values could be adapted to address different sets of needs.

Finally, turning to the subject of the media, in our discussion of the *Daily Voice* we looked at the notion of mediation as a signifying practice. Religious communities in Cape Town, however, certainly did not give the *Voice* this margin of plausibility, in many cases writing the tabloid off as degrading and immoral rubbish. Its content represented wide scale rapidly descending quality of social values, and therefore, was one of many media channels that faced negative criticism from religious groups and authorities. The flighting of soft-porn films during the early hours of the morning over weekends by the independent TV channel, E.TV, was a related example, since the channel was heavily pressurized by religious groups to suspend airing the films.

For conservative religious groups, new media formats were also viewed as controversial. In Cape Town during 2007, public outcry arose around the cellphone chat program Mxit which had become very popular amongst teenagers and young people. Specifically, parents and other interested parties voiced concern over the extent to which teens were using the program, raising fears of addiction and anti-social behaviour, as well as the possibility of sexual predators targeting young people under the guise of a false online identity. The free reign young people had over their cellular phones, and the amount of unsupervised time they had on their hands, led to the cellphone pornography scandal later in that same year. According to media reports, teenagers would gather in large groups at shopping malls, having arranged the gathering through Mxit, and telling their parents they were going to attend the movies. Once congregated, a mixture of peer pressure,

cunning and coercion was employed by certain group members to lure young girls into having sexual intercourse in the public bathrooms, all the while their peers filmed them using camera phones, so as to distribute the video clips afterwards. There can be no doubt that the cellphone has radically transformed the media industry. With a flick of a button, ordinary citizens had the ability to become journalists, empowered with technology that could accurately capture audio and video images live, on the spot, at the most opportune occasions and situations. Yet the Mxit case and the cellphone porn scandal served only to fuel a negative perception of new media, technology and creative innovation.

At about the same time, longstanding religious institutions, especially Christian churches, started experiencing a decline in attendance, particularly amongst the youth, as the number of evangelical and charismatic churches increased. Well established churches were largely community-based organizations, having built up a following in a particular area over a number of years, so that each church had a small but reliable catchment area. Charismatic churches, however, operated like businesses, establishing churches at sites that were logistically and financially convenient, such as warehouses in industrial areas. Followers were drawn to the church through advertising and marketing that centred around the church founders and their religious power, and aggressive research-like proselytizing strategies that included the capturing of visitors' personal details and telephonic follow-ups. Not only were charismatic churches using new media to market themselves, they also incorporated a range of lively audio-visual media into the devotional liturgy, and promoted the consumption of gospel music and seminars and sermons of well known charismatic leaders from other parts of the globe.

The concerns raised by the conservative community churches about the media therefore revolved around a crisis of signification, as contemporary society and even the Christian faith increasingly expanded its range of primary communicative modalities. And, as charismatic churches showed, these new modalities were not inherently sinful, but could be used for a variety of purposes. Teenagers therefore used chat to express their individuality while simultaneously engaging in a wider process of emerging youth social identity by speaking in the quirky and constantly evolving Mxit language of abbreviated

words, characters and symbols. While on the internet, one could visit the website [bruinou.com](http://bruinou.com) and chat in *gamtaal* about issues pertinent to coloured folk. The coloured community has a rich textual history where poets, playwrights, authors and everyday people have contributed to the coloured story by telling their particular part. In the post-apartheid era, the interplay between coloured identity and religion has resulted in a virtual multiplication of new possibilities for religious devotion and cultural expression that explored the potential limits of new signifying practises and modes of signification, and tapped into and translated new, foreign cultural resources.

Viewed through the lens of religion, coloured identity was a dynamic and fluid concept, changing over time in relation to new social and cultural norms, the economic climate and the socio-political environment. And, as we have seen over the course of this thesis, it was constantly being made and remade as the coloured population invoked religion to, for example, make claims to the city, establish indigenous authenticity, or assert cultural distinctiveness.

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