‘Satan has come to Rietfontein’: Race in South Africa’s Satanic Panic*

NICKY FALKOF
(Research Centre, Visual Identities in Art and Design, University of Johannesburg)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the apartheid system was falling apart, white South Africa was gripped by a powerful moral panic that played out, often hysterically, in the newspapers and magazines of the time. This Satanism scare revolved around fears of a large-scale conspiracy of evil that mostly involved white youth, and that threatened the spiritual health and even the continued existence of white South Africa. Rape, murder, cannibalism and all manner of atrocities involving virgins, animals and babies were commonly said to be part of Satanist rituals occurring across the country. Satanists, South Africans were told, were everywhere, and were as great a threat to their nation as communists. This article uses contemporary press material to examine three isolated yet related incidents within the scare: the Orso murder trial in 1992, when a teenager and her boyfriend claimed satanic possession as the motivation for the murder of her mother; the case of the ‘Rietfontein slasher’, also in 1992, when a group of white schoolgirls was apparently tormented by a supernatural force; and a single article about the alleged possession of a large number of black students in a school in the Atteridgeville township in 1989. It uses these three episodes to reveal how the Satanism scare was violently racialised, how the possibility of magic was both legally and culturally reserved for whites and how many white South Africans’ literal fear of the devil fed into recurrent discursive narratives about black pathology and white responsibility.

Introduction

Clergymen and teachers must face up to the fact that a ‘large number’ of young South Africans are dabbling in Satanism and drugs, the Minister for National Health and Population Development has said. At a public meeting in Amanzimtoti yesterday, Dr Rina Venter said there was an ‘alarming increase’ in the number of youngsters becoming involved and interested in Satanism. The first step in combating Satanism and drug abuse – which often went hand-in-hand – was for churches to admit that Satanism was ‘a fact’ and that people’s belief in God needed to be strengthened, she said.1

In the late 1980s, during the last years of the apartheid state, white South African culture was gripped by a number of ‘morbid symptoms’.2 Among these were the increasing popularity of millennial and evangelical churches, the rise of the extreme Afrikaner far right and an

*A version of this paper was presented at the Cadbury Fellowship Interdisciplinary Conference at the Centre for West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 18–19 May 2012. I would like to thank Bill Schwarz, Cyril Siorat and the anonymous referees for their comments. I hereby acknowledge the financial assistance of the South African National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research. Opinions expressed are my own and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

1 Pretoria News, 31 October 1990.
2 A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (New York, International Publishers, 1985), p. 276.
apparent epidemic of white family murder. These were the symptoms of a society in shock: what Elleke Boehmer calls ‘this parched place, a society of dead-ends, closures, multiple restrictions on speech and movement, blockages of every kind, spiritual and political’. Another of those symptoms, one that has been largely forgotten by post-hoc narratives of the late apartheid period, is the Satanism scare.

Fear of Satanism was common in the 1980s. Britain and the US experienced similar scares, and the idea was so widespread that it appeared as far afield as Norway and Turkey. But white South Africa’s satanic panic, while iconographically related to these global events, had its own unique character. In this fiercely Calvinist nation, at a period of extreme social upheaval, the apparent epidemic of Satanism did not manifest in terms of satanic ritual abuse (SRA) and was not mediated by the psychiatric establishment. This was a war between biblical good and evil. In the Anglophone West, Satanism was often understood to be about child abuse within cults run by parents, teachers and carers, and about subsequent adult recoveries of the repressed memories of this abuse. As the quote above suggests, however, Satanism in South Africa threatened to bring about the actual appearance of the devil. The scare tapped into many of the existent discourses that characterised the political mythology of late apartheid: colonial narratives of infection and disease; the godless, conspiratorial threat of communism; the opposition of black and white; and the risks to family/nation posed by unruly youth and women.

This article uses contemporary press reports to examine three episodes that occurred during the scare to illustrate the way in which it was aggressively racialised within the larger schema of apartheid. The first case is the Orso murder trial in 1992, when a teenager and her boyfriend claimed satanic possession as the motivation for their murder of her mother. It reveals the different ways in which the possibilities of black and white magic were legally understood by the state. The second is the case of the ‘Rietfontein slasher’, also in 1992, when a group of schoolgirls was apparently tormented by a supernatural force. This is an exemplary tale of whites as victims rather than as perpetrators of the social and psychic evil of Satanism, and shows some of the ways in which (particularly Afrikaans) white female adolescence was understood during apartheid. The third is a single article about the alleged possession of a large number of black students in a school in the Atteridgeville township in 1989. In contrast to the Rietfontein story, it shows how young black people were both pathologised and anonymised by the Satanism scare.

3 N. Falkof, ‘A “Bloody Epidemic”: “White Family Murder in Late Apartheid South Africa’ (seminar paper, Centre for West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 20 November 2011).
4 E. Boehmer, ‘Endings and New Beginnings: South African Fiction in Transition’, in D. Attridge and R. Jolly (eds), Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970–1995 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 52.
5 For a brief history of white South Africa’s late 1980s Satanism scare, see D. Dunbar and S. Swart, “‘No Less a Foe than Satan Himself’: The Devil, Transition and Moral Panic in White South Africa, 1989–1993’, Journal of Southern African Studies, 38, 3 (2012).
6 I am grateful to Ozlem Koksal for this insight.
7 See, for example, Elaine Showalter on ‘hysteria’ epidemics. Showalter explains the role of therapists and child care professionals in creating the ‘hysterical contamination’ that led to widespread belief in SRA in the US and UK. E. Showalter, Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture (New York, Picador, 1997), p. 173.
8 One example is the 1984 McMartin case, when a group of American parents claimed that their children were ritually abused at a day care centre. After six years and $15 million, four of the accused were dismissed and two had a small number of the allegations against them upheld; these were later overturned. R. Reinhold, ‘The Longest Trial – A Post-Mortem’, New York Times (1990), available at query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res = 9C0CE5D913BF9370A966958260, accessed 9 March 2009.
9 One of the foundational texts of the US Satanism scare was Michelle Remembers, a lurid story of satanic abuse written by Michelle Smith, a psychiatric patient, and Lawrence Pazder, the doctor who helped her ‘recover’ her memory. The book was later discredited as a product of Smith’s imagination mixed with the cannibalistic legends that Pazder would have encountered while working in West Africa in the 1960s. M. Smith and L. Pazder, Michelle Remembers (London, Michael Joseph, 1981); D. Allen and J. Midwinter, ‘Michelle Remembers: The Debunking of a Myth’, Mail on Sunday (1990), available at http://www.xeper.org/pub/lib/xp?_lib_wh_DebunkingOfAMyth.htm, accessed 10 March 2009.
In drawing this article’s conclusions I use a variety of material aimed at a diverse (but largely white) audience. The South African press ‘has been a sectional press throughout its history. Race – not language, religion or culture – has proved to be the dominant characteristic of this sectionalism’. For the argument in question, which foregrounds the way in which the white establishment racialised what it called Satanism, white newspapers’ analyses are more relevant (and more abundant) than those in non-white newspapers. This is not to suggest that the white press was monolithic. English and Afrikaans newspapers often took radically different perspectives on cultural and political issues, as did papers aimed at the metropole or the country as a whole when compared to local or regional press. In the case of the Satanism scare, however, the English and Afrikaans press did not noticeably diverge. The paranoia, sensationalism or occasional scepticism with which stories were reported generally had more to do with the class or locality of the audience than with their language group. Satanism was understood to be prevalent in Afrikaans and in English communities. Some of the episodes that occurred, like the Rietfontein case examined in this article, were attached to one particular understanding of working class Afrikaner youth, while others related to a stereotype of wealthy Afrikaans or English suburban adolescence, but in the main Satanism was not allied to either language group and was similarly reported by English and Afrikaans press. As English is my own first language, I have prioritised English-language sources.

Many of the texts I use come from metropolitan newspapers like the Johannesburg Star, Cape Argus and Cape Times that had a wide readership both within and outside their cities (the Cape newspapers in particular appealed to coloured as well as to white consumers). These are media aimed at an educated, middle-income, politically centrist audience, although one that was perhaps not as sophisticated as an equivalent broadsheet market in the West. The Citizen, the only English-language paper to uncritically support the National Party government by the late 1980s, also appears here. Other sources used are local papers like the Pretoria News and Eastern Province Herald. The latter in particular was aimed at a more rural, less centralised readership. Also important for my analysis is the influential genre known as family magazines, particularly You and Personality. These weekly glossy magazines, still enormously popular in South Africa, featured a mixture of celebrities, human interest stories, paranoia, patriotism and current affairs, all in a familial tone that suggested a warm community into which the (white) reader was invited. These magazines often became incensed about social issues and inspired reader involvement; Personality’s ‘crusade’ against Satanism was one of these instances. Despite the differences in their demographics, all these sources seem to have treated the Satanism scare with relative consistency, as a legitimate and real threat to white South Africa.

Satan in Africa

South Africa has a long history of occultism and the supernatural, and of responses to both. From European missionaries’ belief that pre-colonial indigenous religion, with its powerful connection to the world of ancestors, was ‘repugnant to the “civilising mission” of

10 L. Switzer and D. Switzer, The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines 1836–1976 (Boston, G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), p. 7.
11 Newspapers aimed at black readers did report on Satanism but generally from a localised perspective, as in the 14 April 1991 City Press article titled ‘Satanism Hits the Townships!’
12 Ostensibly owned by the Afrikaans millionaire Louis Luyt, The Citizen was in fact an organ of the NP leadership. M. Rees and C. Day, Muldergate: The Story of the Info Scandal (Macmillan, Johannesburg, 1980).
13 The magazine printed a petition that it asked readers to sign and send in to the relevant government department, demanding a dedicated task force to fight the influx of occultism in South Africa (30 July 1990).
colonialism’, to the National Party’s 1957 Suppression of Witchcraft Act and the increase in witchcraft murders after apartheid, the supernatural has always played a role in the country’s imaginary landscape. When I speak of the Satanism scare, though, I refer to a specific moral panic that happened during a particular time and insisted on the whiteness of those involved, the cultic and conspiratorial nature of the threat and its alignment with European rather than with African mythology.

The word ‘Satanist’ is common in many contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, not least in the profusion of narratives that stems from the enormous popularity of Pentecostal churches. The United Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), a Brazilian church that uses its pulpit to demonise rivals and that has been extraordinarily successful in Africa, found its activities temporarily curtailed in Zambia when the government turned the tables and accused it of Satanism. This political use of Satanism to discredit an organisation or opponent is common across Africa but was rare in white South Africa’s satanic panic. Similarly, religious publishing across the continent is filled with tales of Satanists that utilise local mythologies. Ellis and ter Haar give the example of a tract written by a Congolese preacher named Evangelist Mukendi, in which he tells of being weaned by a mermaid and pledged to Satan by his father. Many of the stories he tells involve evil beings living under the water who create ‘diabolic objects’ like cars, television sets and money to lure in the unwary. The appearance of supernatural beings and of consumer goods imbued with evil powers are common to a wide variety of African beliefs and practices to do with witchcraft and the occult, but do not notably appear in European or American tales of Satanism. Mukendi’s narrative also conflates witches and Satanists, using the terms to mean more or less the same thing.

In South Africa itself ‘Satanist’ has attained numerous meanings. Since the mid-1990s, in particular, it has come to be applied within larger African occult schemas and frequently appears in the sensationalist headlines of working class black tabloids like the Daily Sun, where it is used interchangeably with ‘witch’ and with other terms that refer to practitioners of township and rural magic. The type of Satanism that characterised the scare that we are considering here, however, was explicitly related to Christianity and intimately bound up with white ideas about culture and morality. Unlike diverse African ideas about Satanism, it did not involve muti or herbal lore, was understood to be practiced in order to further the aims of a global conspiracy rather than an individual seeking power, and was not interchangeable with other occult practices. Satanism as white South Africans understood it was a cult that was imported from Europe and that used the iconography of European fears and religion.

In 1993 psychologist Gavin Ivey, one of the few contemporary academics to have written on the scare, pointed out the ‘recent claims of . . . a wave of organised Satanic activity, aimed

14 J. Hund, ‘African Witchcraft and Western Law: Psychological and Cultural Issues’, Journal of Contemporary Religion, 19, 1 (2004), p. 68.
15 See, for example, T. Petrus, ‘Defining Witchcraft-Related Crime in the Eastern Cape’, International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 3, 1 (2011), pp. 1–8.
16 P. Freston, ‘The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God: A Brazilian Church Finds Success in Southern Africa’, Journal of Religion in Africa, 35, 1 (2005), p. 46.
17 S. Ellis and G. ter Haar, ‘Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa’, Journal of Modern African Studies, 36, 2 (1998), p. 184. See also L. White, Speaking with Vampires: Rumour and History in Colonial Africa (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000).
18 On 10 April 2012, for example, the Daily Sun’s front page had the headline ‘Cops Raid Theta FM Over Satanism Claims!’, about a ‘community radio station that sparked a violent Satanism controversy’. See also J. Comaroff and J.L. Comaroff, ‘Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony’, American Ethnologist, 26, 2 (1999), pp. 279–303.
19 Satanists and witches generally appear alongside each other in African occult scares, but witches were completely absent from white South Africa’s satanic panic. This may well be a consequence of the fact that witches, in a western cosmology, are understood to be the stuff of fairy tales, whereas Satanists have a capacity for operating within the modern.
at overthrowing traditional Christian values and institutions’.\textsuperscript{20} Afrikaans publications like \textit{Beeld}, \textit{Rapport}, \textit{Hervormer} and \textit{Die Kerkbode}, the official mouthpiece of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk,\textsuperscript{21} carried articles on the satanic menace from the early 1980s, but the incidence of these increased enormously by the mid-80s. Between 1989 and 1992, English newspapers carried around 100 articles on Satanism per year. Reporting on the scare was common across all sectors of the English-language press, from broadsheets to popular dailies and family magazines. Coverage tailed off in 1993 when white focus on Satanism seems to have dimmed in favour of the upheaval of the forthcoming elections.

Much of the fear surrounding Satanism was encoded in worries about foreign films and music, newly permitted in a nation that had, until fairly recently, maintained strict censorship and a prohibitive attitude to American and European cultural products: television, for example, was only broadcast after 1976. By the late 1980s copied cassettes of foreign heavy metal bands spread like wildfire, fostering a growing gothic and heavy metal subculture. Black clothing, long, dank hair, pentagram symbols and other defiant adolescent affectations became common and, read as signifiers for this new threat by anxious parents and teachers, served as a visual reminder that Satanists were ‘out there’.

The Satanist cult was understood to be a vast pan-national conspiracy involved with drugs, murder, pornography, child abuse, sodomy, bestiality and a panoply of weird behaviours ranging from the anti-social to the illegal. Despite a few scattered examples of criminals who claimed satanic possession as a defence, there has been no evidence for these claims. Rebellious adolescents were often classified as Satanists by worried adults and some self-identified as such, but none were ever linked to the criminal behaviour ascribed to the cult. Prosecutions of alleged Satanists were limited to vandalism, drug possession and other deviant behaviour, like the November 1991 arrest of brothers William and Mark Koekemoer for desecrating graves in two Port Elizabeth cemeteries, described by the press as the ‘biggest Satanism haul the city had ever seen’\textsuperscript{22} Police, meanwhile, made wild claims, including allegations of 19 babies ‘specially bred for sacrifice to the devil and ritually murdered by having their throats slit and their hearts cut out and eaten’.\textsuperscript{23} In a magazine interview Reverend David Nel, a pioneering Satan-hunter in the town of Springs, insisted that South Africa was ‘under attack’ from the ‘biggest threat facing the world today’ and estimated that there were more than 200,000 people involved.\textsuperscript{24} This would have made up about 10 per cent of the white population; nonetheless no one fitting these extreme descriptions of the Satanist was ever arrested or prosecuted. The scare was built around a phantom, a fantasy threat so powerful that it kept a fierce grip on the imagination despite its failure to manifest.

South Africa never fell victim to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, recovered memory, Multiple Personality Syndrome or alien abduction, the other ‘modern epidemics’ that Elaine Showalter identifies as the descendants of hysteria, so why Satanism?\textsuperscript{25} According to Jeffrey Victor, Satanic tales ‘arise as a response to widespread socio-economic stresses . . . The Satanic cult legend says, in symbolic form, that our moral values are threatened by evil forces beyond our control, and that we have lost faith in the authorities to deal with the

---

\textsuperscript{20} G. Ivey, ‘The Psychology of Satan Worship’, \textit{The South African Journal of Psychology}, 23, 4 (1993), pp. 180–185.

\textsuperscript{21} Dutch Reformed Church, the main Afrikaner church and official Calvinist religious body of apartheid South Africa.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Eastern Province Herald}, 1 November 1991.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Cape Times}, 19 May 1990. This particular claim was made by a police captain named Leonard Solms who, before he began hunting Satan, was involved a number of raids on gay clubs in Cape Town, claiming to be cracking down on child abuse ‘gangs’. G. Retief, ‘Keeping Sodom out of the Laager: The Policing of Sexual Minorities in South Africa’, in M. Gevisser and E. Cameron (eds), \textit{Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa} (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1994), p. 105.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Personality}, 28 March 1987.

\textsuperscript{25} Showalter, \textit{Hystories}. 
threat'.

26 The Satanism scare was a response to social change, a consequence of the fear of apartheid’s end. And like apartheid it was compulsively, aggressively racialised, meted out differently to black and white. In the three case studies that follow – the court case around a murder and two episodes of apparent possession in high schools – I use contemporary press material to reveal how race was a critical component of the South African manifestation of the satanic panic.

**The ‘Satanist murder’**

By the early 1990s, after half a decade of moral panic, South African police were primed to see Satanists lurking behind every unusual violent crime. On 22 September 1992 Dawn Orso, a white Western Cape housewife, was found brutally murdered in her home, and police were quick to suggest the possibility of Satanist involvement in her death. The killers were soon revealed to be her teenage daughter Angelique and Angelique’s 18-year-old boyfriend Lawrence van Blerk. Possibly reacting to the police statements and press coverage referring to the ‘Satanist murder’, the pair’s defence rested on their demonic possession during the time of the killing. Van Blerk told the court he had been ‘influenced by an unknown force, probably to do with Satanism’, and had felt ‘possessed by the devil inside’. The murder garnered national attention, galvanising the public into something approximating sympathy for a pair of youngsters who seemed as much to be victims as the murdered woman. As the case progressed, however, it became clear that rather than an example of demonic possession, the Satanist murder was a very different tale of a misfit young man led astray by a charismatic and amoral young woman.

After a lengthy trial the pair was found guilty. The possession defence failed because, according to the presiding judge Mr Justice Williamson, their actions were too obviously goal-oriented to be involuntary. Crucially, however, Williamson made a point of stating that ‘the court accepted that people could become possessed by demons’, but that he was not convinced in this particular case. The Orso trial brought a serious prosecution against alleged Satanists who had blamed the devil for their crime, and while it was soon revealed that they had nothing to do with the cult that was threatening the nation, belief in Satanism was strong enough that the judiciary explicitly stated the real possibility of possession.

The Orso trial, when compared to another South African legal case, exemplifies the different weight given by white South African legislators to black and white understandings and practices of witchcraft, Satanism, the supernatural and the occult. The 1933 case *Rex v. Mbombela*, which appears in disguise in Wulf Sach’s *Black Hamlet* and is mentioned too by Isak Niehaus, saw Dhumi Mbombela, a rural Xhosa man of about 20 years old, put on trial for the murder of a child who he had mistaken for a *tokoloshe*, a malicious supernatural being. The prosecution’s case rested on the fact that Mbombela’s strongly held belief in the *tokoloshe* and concurrent genuine fear were not ‘reasonable’. ‘Reason’ was the legal

26 J.S. Victor, ‘The Dynamics of Rumor-Panics about Satanic Cults’ in J.T. Richardson, J. Best and D.G. Bromley (eds), *The Satanism Scare* (New York, Aldine de Gruyter, 1991), p. 221.
27 Satanism was by no means the only moral panic to affect South Africa during a period of acute social and political tension. It followed a trajectory recognisable from the ‘black peril’ panics of late 19th and early 20th century Johannesburg, ‘periodic waves of collective sexual hysteria’ centred around claims of black male rape of white women. C. van Onselen, ‘Witches of Suburbia’, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886–1914, Volume 2: New Nineveh* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1982), p. 45.
28 *Cape Times*, 23 September 1992.
29 *Cape Times*, 26 September 1992.
30 *The Citizen*, 1 March 1994.
31 W. Sachs, *Black Hamlet* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996 [1937]); I. Niehaus, ‘Witchcraft in the New South Africa: From Colonial Superstition to Postcolonial Reality?’, in H.L. Moore and T. Saunders (eds), *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (London & New York, Routledge, 2001), p. 190.
requirement for acquittal; but the colonial administration’s definition of ‘reason’ was inherently flawed.

According to colonial law, majority beliefs were always considered reasonable. But when this basic statute came up against something that the colonial state could not acknowledge as reasonable, numbers became irrelevant and the discourse was shut down. As Adam Sitze illustrates, the state’s defence of its unreasonable valorisation of an inconsistent idea of reason prevented the law from signifying and disregarded anyone whose version of reason did not match its own: ‘Colonial law’s desire to maintain its jurisdiction forced it to violate the very principle of reason that presumably conferred upon it its imperial supremacy and sovereign right.’ The judge in that case, Etienne de Villiers, stated that only ‘one standard of reasonableness’ could exist, and it was not one that could permit belief in African spirits; and, even more notably, that the notion of magic divorced from religion was inconceivable. This has an uncanny pre-echo of Judge Williamson in the Orso case, and it is not unlikely that he would have been aware of the comparison: Rex v. Mbombela has been cited as a precedent at appellate level more than 40 times in South African legal history. Thus even while rejecting the possibility of African supernatural beliefs being anything other than unreasonable superstition, Rex v. Mbombela implicitly created a judicial acknowledgement that European notions of the occult and magic could exist and were somehow ‘reasonable’ within the precepts of the colonial law upon which the modern South African legal system is based.

Similarly, rather than defining all occult and demonological claims as unreasonable Judge Williamson specifically stated that possession was a real threat, although it had not occurred in this case. Satan was real but tokoloshes were not. The witchery of whites, tied as it was to the Bible and the Christian cosmology, was deemed admissible despite what could easily be defined as an irrational basis, while the magic of blacks was dismissed by an apparently pragmatic judiciary as the follies of the uncivilised.

The Orso killers were convicted and their claim of Satanism rejected, but the case nonetheless illustrates the gap between a black and a white occult. Satanism had a legal legitimacy that was denied to its indigenous equivalents. The racial dynamics that characterised the mythology and legislative structure of apartheid – that whites were reasonable, civilised and moral and that blacks were not – were brought into the courtroom by the Satanism scare, as they had been by the Mbombela case, and officially validated.

This divide in experiences of the occult was not, of course, limited to the legal sphere. Two classic British studies on moral panic, Stanley Cohen’s book on the mods and rockers and Hall et al.’s work on mugging in 1970s Britain, illustrate the way in which concurrent fears of youth culture and youth corruption are prevalent in these social epidemics. My next two case studies, both of Satanism in schools, show how popular narratives about the scare repeated apartheid’s racialising ideas about youth, and reveal the gulf between how white and black youth were culturally permitted to inhabit the spaces of Satanism.

**The Rietfontein slasher**

In 1992, five white schoolgirls in the small town of Rietfontein, near Upington in the Kalahari, became victims of ‘the Thing’, also known as the ‘Rietfontein slasher’, a mysterious and
apparently supernatural force that tore their clothes, scratched their legs, pulled out their hair and otherwise abused them physically. The story broke after one of the girls’ parents called the police and Kobus Jonker was sent in. Known as ‘Donker’ (‘Dark’) Jonker, he was the most high profile of South Africa’s ‘cult cops’, a shameless self-publicist and fervent reborn Christian with a taste for exorcisms. Jonker investigated the matter alone, without assistance from psychiatrists or other medical professionals who might have been expected to pronounce on the girls’ mental stability. He soon reported the story to a scandal-hungry press, saying, ‘This is a matter for Jesus Christ. There is nothing else the police can do. We have passed the matter on to local priests and pastors for them to exorcise the school.’ From the very start the coverage emphasised the realities of possession. The episode was neither medicalised nor criminalised but placed firmly within the realm of good and evil.

Not all episodes of Satanism caused this reaction. White teenagers were often characterised as being evil themselves, pre-emptively marked with the possibility of guilt by their age, their social practices and an increase in rebellious tendencies that countered the authoritarian social dynamics of white South Africa. Those who failed to conform to the heavily proscribed normativity of this militarised society, in which compulsory heterosexuality, participation in sport and tanned, healthy bodies were the symbols of social inclusion, were awarded the characteristics of the greatest imaginable evil. In the Rietfontein case, however, the specifics of class and gender led to those involved acquiring a certain idealised victimhood.

The story fired editors’ imaginations and the five girls primarily affected were named and interviewed by national newspapers. Responses to the crisis were varied. A Johannesburg woman named Mel Berman, a ‘psychic astrologer’ who had ‘studied the occult for many years’, agreed with Jonker that exorcism was the girls’ only hope. The school’s principal Neill Oppelt demanded prayer and faith from his students as the only means of combating the supernatural, saying that exorcism equated to fighting evil with evil. Jonker promised to uncover the truth whatever the cost, the girls stuck firmly to their story and their bewildered parents insisted that they were neither lying nor hysterical.

The girls are treated with sympathy throughout the reporting. They are named, and they and their parents are given personal histories. There is no suggestion of mental illness or over-reaction; quite the opposite. When Reverend A. Julies, the local National Party MP and Minister of Health Services and Welfare, visited the afflicted school, he led the children in prayer, promised them a delivery of crucifixes and stated, ‘Yes, Satan has come to Rietfontein. Mass hysteria is not happening here. We can only fight this with prayer and faith.’ The reader is specifically told that there is something real to be afraid of, and that it comes from outside rather than from within the bodies of the affected youngsters.

The Rietfontein story reveals some important truths about the social construction of white, and specifically female and Afrikaans, adolescence in apartheid South Africa. Many...
white South Africans in the 1980s spoke in terms of being ‘drowned’ in a ‘sea of blacks’. Television news reporting on political issues characterised black people as a faceless, nameless and undifferentiated collective. White people, however, were named and individuated. Young white particularly existed under intense scrutiny, subject to rigid expectations around religion, family, gender and social and sexual conformity.

Press treatment of the afflicted girls involved an idealised understanding of upright, morally incorruptible young Afrikaner womanhood. Tentative suggestions that they could be lying or otherwise responsible for their plight (in the absence of hysteria, these were the only possible causes offered for the attacks other than the supernatural) were forestalled immediately. Oppelt is reported as saying, ‘These children deny dabbling in devil worship. I can’t believe this is self-inflicted. They are all well-adjusted and attractive girls who have no reason to draw attention to themselves. They are also from poor families and I genuinely can’t believe they would cut up the little clothing that they do have.’ ‘Good’ Afrikaans girls are those who do not call attention to themselves, those who know their place as women, those who are presentable and respectful of the status quo. Oppelt’s denial insisted that the glare of publicity under which the girls found themselves was not their fault: they were victims of an external power that forced them outside the boundaries of propriety. As with many of the possessed (white) Satanists whose confessional narratives recurred throughout the period of the scare, bad consequences were not the fault of those involved. Touching by evil, they had not invited it.

Descriptions of ‘the Thing’ emphasise its externality. The girls were ‘in the grip of strange phenomena’. Family members could tell when ‘the thing was near’. Not only was the possibility of mass hysteria excised from this account, the reports make a point of emphasising the outside-ness of the forces that affected these girls, who were passive rather than active. The episodes were described as an ‘invasion’, an example of the repetitive narrative of hygiene and parasitism that characterised the Satanism scare. A discourse of infection, pollution, disease and blood purity, this echoes the colonial-era ‘sanitation syndrome’, a response to the threat of plague that led to paranoia about non-whites being unclean and the consequent racial segregation of cities including Cape Town and Dakar. These young women were, it is made clear, infected by external forces rather than being the source of the disturbance themselves. They were placed centrally within the Satan-hunters’ discourse, embodying its most powerful and recurrent metaphors.

As well as avoiding the condemnation of rebellious white adolescence that often characterised responses to alleged Satanism, press treatment of the girls diverges from a common way of understanding Afrikaans femininity. Susanne Klausen, in her article on the 1975 Abortion and Sterilisation Act, explains the moral hysteria around white female promiscuity:  

42 D. Chidester, Shots in the Streets: Violence and Religion in South Africa (Boston, Beacon Press, 1991), p. 91.
43 D. Posel, ‘A Battlefield of Perceptions: State Discourses on Political Violence, 1985–1988’, in J. Cock and L. Nathan (eds), War and Society: the Militarisation of South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989).
44 The Star, 16 August 1992.
45 Oppelt’s statement also reveals another layer of meaning: these girls were identified by class as well as by race, ethnicity and gender. His emphasis on their wholesome, well-adjusted poverty calls to mind the injunctions placed on lower class Afrikaners during the 1930s and 1940s, when ‘poor whites’ was seen to be a danger to the moral health of the nation and D.F. Malan exhorted the masses at the 1938 Great Trek centenary celebrations, ‘South Africa expects of its poor whites that they remain white and live white’. Quoted in H. Giliomee, The Afrikaners, Biography of a People (London, Hurst and Company, 2003), p. 349.
46 See, for example, the story of ‘Charlotte’, a young English-speaking convent girl who accidentally fell into Satanism after playing the occult game glassy-glassy and was then ‘redeemed’ by being born again, published in Personality magazine on 8 August 1988.
47 The Star, 15 August 1992.
48 Sunday Tribune, 16 August 1992.
49 The Star, 16 August 1992.
50 M. Swanson, ‘The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900–1909’, The Journal of African History, 18, 3 (1977), pp. 387–410.
The unmarried Afrikaner daughter represented sexual innocence. As the supposedly unsullied daughters of the Afrikaner nation, their sexuality was under the strict control of their fathers ... By the early 1970s the regime was alarmed about what it perceived as the corruption of white female teenagers ... At a visceral level the visibility of young women’s sexuality provoked patriarchal anxiety about losing control over the white daughter. At an official level it was confirmation of what the regime already suspected: white society’s morals were weakening.\(^5\)

This paranoia about the social meaning of the laxity of Afrikaans girls’ morals led to the drafting of a retrogressive abortion bill that ignored black women entirely and contained shocking clauses like the need to have rape verified by a magistrate.\(^5\) And yet despite this late apartheid sense that the white daughter was sliding out of control, press responses to the Rietfontein girls were entirely desexualised. In their innocence they were metonymic of an idealised Afrikaner girlhood that fed into the icon of the *volksmoeder*, the nurturing and self-sacrificing mother of the nation, the woman who ‘[upholds] the fetish signs of national difference and visibly [embodies] the iconography of race and gender purity’.\(^5\) These girls, unlike many other white teenage Satanists who populated the landscape of the scare, never vocally rebelled or misbehaved; their unruliness was contained within the otherworldly and understood to be external. Thus the whole episode became a morality tale in which evil could not ruin these examples of youthful purity and the national culture for which they stood. All the contradictions, threats, ambiguities and unruliness that youth so often suggested in late apartheid South Africa were disregarded in favour of an idealisation of incorruptible femininity. The sexuality of the Afrikaans daughter was concurrently repudiated; the wild young women that Klausen names as the impetus for the Abortion Bill were reconceptualised as inherently chaste.

The spatiality of a liminal whiteness, a whiteness at risk from forces outside its control, permeates these happenings. Rietfontein is close to the border with Namibia, which had been considered internal to South Africa until the reluctant granting of independence to the former South West Africa in 1990. This incident happened at a space in the imaginary landscape of white South Africa that used to be safe but no longer was. Rietfontein was once just a point on a map, but with the loss of the so-called frontline states to Marxist and nationalist movements it was now dangerously close to the undifferentiated mass of black Africa. Jonker himself stated the unease that permeated this discomforting border town, saying he planned to return for further investigations but would not stay long: ‘That place is very strange. It is too desolate and lonely for me. When that wind blows there, it is no place to be.’\(^5\)

The insecurity of this apparently white space and the idealised, ideologically interpreted character of the principle actors played into the episode’s affective power and the fascination it held for consumers of contemporary media. These things are also true of the third episode in my argument. In this case, however, responses to an apparently supernatural event, this time involving young black people, illustrate the solipsism of a political discourse that categorically refused to treat black and white subjects in the same way.

The Bathokwa ‘possession’

Until its adoption into a larger panoply of black African occult concerns in the mid-1990s, when it became subsumed into a cosmography populated by witches, *tokoloshes* and

\(^5\) S.M. Klausen, ‘Reclaiming the White Daughter’s Purity: Afrikaner Nationalism, Racialised Sexuality and the 1975 Abortion and Sterilization Act in Apartheid South Africa’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 22, 3 (2010), p. 43.
\(^5\) *Ibid.*, p. 50.
\(^5\) A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Imperial Conquest* (London and New York, Routledge, 1995), p. 377.
\(^5\) *Sunday Star*, 16 August 1992.
sangomas, Satanism remained a white concern, the paranoias surrounding it consistently tinged with the hue of global conspiracy that also attended the rhetoric of anti-communism. As Dunbar and Swart point out in a previous issue of this journal, ‘Calls to ban Satanism in South Africa were couched in terms of “destructive freedom” and coincided with the legalisation of both communism and the African National Congress.’ Communism and Satanism were insidious threats imported from decadent Europe. Both threatened the primacy of Christianity and the patriarchal nuclear family. Both preyed on unwitting youth and made women behave in ‘inappropriate’ ways. Both incited children to turn against their families and societies. Communism, like Satanism, tapped into a narrative of disease and sanitation, in which citizens were alerted to the constant possibility of infection by foreign bodies and the concurrent need to maintain social and ideological purity. Nonetheless such was the effect of the scare that, despite its constant narrativisation as a European issue utilising European iconography, it began to appear across the racial borders of apartheid South Africa, never as cleanly drawn as their makers hoped.

On 22 March 1989 the Pretoria News printed the headline, ‘Experts Study Claims of “Bewitched” Pupils’. The story reported that psychiatric experts from Weskoppies Hospital, a mental institution, and officials from the Department of Education and Training (DET) as well as a doctor, faith healer and clergyman had been called in to visit the Bathokwa Community School in Atteridgeville, a township located to the west of Pretoria. The Minister of Education and Development Aid, Dr Gerrit Viljoen, told parliament that ‘allegations of the pupils at the school being possessed by the devil’ were being investigated after an episode earlier that year when two pupils had suffered epileptic fits on the same day and 40 had followed suit the following day.

As the Rietfontein story illustrates, cases of Satanism in schools often received extensive press coverage. The Bathokwa drama, however, seems to have been confined to this single newspaper article. The incident and the minimal narrative surrounding it do more than illustrate the spread of satanic panic beyond the confines of whiteness: they also reveal a vast difference to how satanic episodes relating to white youth were dealt with.

One major difference between the Bathokwa reporting and the way episodes of white ‘possession’ were understood is in the presence of psychiatry, a debased discipline within the discourse of the Satanism scare, usually relegated to second place behind Christian faith. One exemplary episode, related by army psychiatrists during a conference on ‘The Bible, The Church and Demonic Powers’ held by the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 1986, was given extensive coverage in the national press. The speakers admitted to being ‘confounded’ by the case of a conscript who they could not heal. The young man, known only as B, was admitted after an extremely violent reaction to a friend’s homosexual overture. Once in hospital he told intricate tales of his secretive upbringing within a Satanist cult. He was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and eventually released to an unknown fate. Dr M.G.S. Pieridas, on staff at the notorious Military Hospital 1 (a clearing house for homosexuals, pacifists, the mentally ill and other undesirables of the apartheid state), called him ‘the loneliest and most frightened human being in the world’, and said, ‘I wonder whether the beginning should have begun [sic] not with psychiatry but with an exorcist.’ His colleague, Dr A.H. Potgieter, agreed, ‘We had reached the limits of psychotherapy. There

55 Dunbar and Swart, ‘No Less a Foe than Satan Himself’, pp. 601–22.
56 This link was often made explicit. In 1990 the Minister for Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, told a youth group that Satanism, a ‘crime against humankind’, and communism, an ideology that stands ‘totally opposed to religion and the church’, were the major pitfalls facing the nation’s young people. Natal Mercury, 2 July 1990.
57 It is notable, too, that the Bathokwa story was localised, reported in the Pretoria area only, where the Rietfontein case spread across the country from Johannesburg to Cape Town. Only the white ‘possession’ merited national attention as part of the epidemic.
was nothing we could do for him.’58 The beliefs attached to the fear of a satanic conspiracy were so homogenous that, as early as 1986, psychiatry repudiated itself in the face of the satanic menace, stated its own incompetence and turned its back on itself in favour of the healing power of the church.

This perspective was baldly stated by the Personality magazine editor John Gardiner and his wife Helen in their influential and sensationalist paperback Satanism – The Seduction of South Africa’s Youth: ‘Satanism is not a psychological or psychiatric problem; it is a spiritual problem. We have never seen anyone who has been set free from Satanism by psychology or therapy.’59 Later in the book they assert that a clinical diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia is an incontrovertible sign that the subject has been abused by Satanists.60 Priests, exorcists, demonologists, spiritual healers and the like had primary responsibility for dealing with Satanism, while medical practitioners were generally portrayed as ineffectual purveyors of a failed discipline that lost its power when faced with evil.61

In the Bathokwa episode, however, psychiatry and mental health were significantly more present. The article begins by stating that ‘psychiatric experts’ and officials of the DET had been sent to the school. The psychiatric team is also mentioned in the second and fourth paragraphs, receiving far more prominence than the religious experts, who are relegated to a single mention in the fourth paragraph. In this case, unlike in the Rietfontein episode, the assumption was that psychiatry would help rather than hinder resolution. Religious practitioners, although included in the expertise, were treated in the reporting as an afterthought.

The article states, ‘At the request of the Department of Education and Training’s circuit inspector, a doctor had reported to a parents’ meeting, attended by 577 parents, that he could find nothing wrong with the affected pupils.’ The article does not directly quote or interview these parents, referring to them in passing, minor players in a drama starring the white medical, theological and educational hierarchies, unlike the parents in the Rietfontein episode who were named, interviewed and quoted extensively. The black people involved have no voice. We do not know how these parents reacted to the incident or to this meeting. We do not know whether the episode was understood within the township as a case of Satanism or whether that definition came from panicked white authorities seeing the spread of Satanism across racial boundaries. Apartheid South Africa’s townships had their own long-established occult cosmologies; it is not unreasonable to think that black parents, had they been seeking a supernatural explanation for what had was happening to their children, may have been more likely to blame local witches than a satanic conspiracy that was plaguing white areas. But as in the Orso case, the possibility of belief in indigenous magic was absolutely denied by the white voices which hijacked the discourse of the school’s crisis.

It is notable, too, that these parents were addressed by a doctor rather than by a religious practitioner or government spokesperson. Parental concern about what had happened to their children was dealt with by medicalising the episode and treating it as an instance of sickness. The doctor in question could find nothing ‘wrong’ with the children; the suggestion is that he could find no physical ailments, no bodily reason for why these fainting fits should happen, which in turn suggests a further pathology that requires the intervention of psychiatry. As the government sent a doctor rather than a priest to allay parents’ fears, we can infer that those in

58 The Star, 3 July 1986.
59 J. and H. Gardiner, Satanism: The Seduction of South Africa’s Youth (Cape Town, Struikhof, 1990), p. 9.
60 Ibid., p. 125. The American psychiatrist James Hunter had a number of patients who ‘remembered’ histories of SRA in the wake of the publication of Michelle Remembers. All of them had diagnoses of multiple personality disorder. J. Hunter, ‘Interpreting the Satanic Legend’, Journal of Religion and Health, 37, 3 (1998), p. 249.
61 This is in contrast to the British and American Satanism scares, in which a psychiatric specialty with its own jargon, publications, experts and lobbyists developed around SRA. As one of the seminal texts of that movement, see V. Simason (ed.), Treating Survivors of Satanist Abuse (London and New York, Routledge, 1994).
charge did not believe that the cure for the Bathokwa children’s ills was spiritual or religious. Unlike white children in similar situations they were not understood as being the victims of a supernatural evil, and exorcism was not called for.

The failure to consider a supernatural cause for the episode other than Satanism, despite its location in a township that would likely have been suffused with African beliefs and practices to do with magic, witchcraft and the occult, recalls the precedent set by Rex v Mbombela, whereby the only imaginable occult reality was white and attached to a dualistic, Christian idea of good and evil. At the same time, however, the likelihood of Satanism as a cause for the Bathokwa episode was also diminished by the reporting. We can see this in numerous other textual signs that satanic possession, when experienced by black rather than by white students, was different. The first of these is the quotation marks around the word ‘bewitched’ in the article’s headline, suggesting from the outset that the presence of supernatural forces is by no means certain. These are repeated in the first paragraph of the article in reference to the “‘bewitched’ Bathokwa Community School”. This implicates the entire school, and by proxy the community that surrounded it, in the possible ‘illness’ that affected the 40 children involved.

The fifth paragraph states that the pupils were ‘involved in an incident of mass hysteria’. The entire phrase is placed in unattributed quote marks, lending at least some doubt to its validity. In the next paragraph, though, the term ‘mass hysteria’ is repeated without quote marks, now accepted as a legitimate part of the text. Alongside the importance of the psychiatric team, the minimal influence of the religious practitioners and the doctor addressing parents, this claim of hysteria distances the case from the possibility of supernatural involvement and makes it indicative of something wrong with those affected. In direct contrast to the Rietfontein girls, this suggests that the pathology here is internal not external. Additionally, the reader is told that ‘allegations’ of possession have been ‘investigated’ and ‘action [will be] taken’. This criminological terminology serves to further implicate the story’s ostensible victims.

This brief episode, nowhere near as widely reported as the Rietfontein possessions, reveals the extent to which the Satanism scare was racialised and repeated apartheid’s embedded notions of race. White youngsters exhibiting signs of possession were not called hysterical; the possibility of hysteria was explicitly negated. Bathokwa’s black young people, despite exhibiting remarkably similar symptoms, were immediately medicalised by the recourse to mental health professionals, made ill rather than treated as victims of an external force, as white youngsters who suffered ‘possession’ were. The refusal to ascribe external causes to the Bathokwa episode operates as a means of maintaining a sort of purity within the ‘legitimate’ victims of Satanism. Infection as a trope and as a threat remained reserved for white people like the Rietfontein girls, whose blood and bodies were so easily sullied.

This not only retains the affective power of the Satanism scare within the confines of white society, even while denying the possible power of an indigenous township occult; it also serves to pathologise the young people of Atteridgeville. This becomes especially contentious when considered alongside the township’s involvement in the 1984 school boycotts and its reputation as a hotspot for political unrest.62 Within the imaginary of white South Africa the youth of Atteridgeville already possessed certain troublesome, unsettling connotations and the medicalising discourse of mental illness attached to this question of satanic possession reinforces the sense that there was something wrong with them that

62 When NP securocrats enlisted American military theorist John J. McCuen to help manage their ‘total strategy’ in 1985, he named Atteridgeville as one of 34 locations nationwide that would need to be taken by government forces before the country could be subdued. A. Sparks, The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid (London, William Heinemann, 1990), p. 357.
required fixing, very different to the gentle pastoral and religious care offered to white youngsters who experienced almost identical symptoms. In this way the racialised character of the scare became racialising, enforcing an assumption about dangerous black youth that was conveniently coherent with apartheid’s ideologies. The apparent possession that afflicted the youth of Bathokwa became, rather than a shocking example of supernatural evil, another symptom of the dysfunction that was seen by whites to attend upon this community.

The Bathokwa incident illustrates the way in which the possibility of possession had an in-built racial differential. The killers in the Orso case were initially believed when they claimed satanic possession and the judge emphasised the ‘reasonableness’ of a belief in white Satanism, but black youngsters who seemed to be possessed were understood by the white press to be doing so in inverted commas, their victimhood made suspect and subverted to a paternalistic and judgemental discourse of psychiatry, hysteria, mental health and pathology. There were no names mentioned here save that of the headmistress of the school, Mrs Kate Masilela; the children and parents involved did not merit individuation. This was a period in white South Africa’s history in which the satanic menace was taken so seriously that Piet Clase, the Minister for Education and Culture, launched a ‘top-level committee’ to investigate Satanism and Rina Venter, the Minister of National Health and Population Development, claimed that the increasing involvement of the country’s youth in Satanism, the ‘existence of which could not be doubted’, was ‘causing grave concern’ in government circles. Despite this level of unease, though, when it came to the black youth of Bathokwa, mass hysteria was unhesitatingly blamed instead of Satanism. The innocence, victimhood and association with purity that accrued to some white children who experienced satanic ‘problems’ were not available to teenagers in the township, already marked with the troubling signifiers of their race and a recognised history of anti-government activism. The possibility of blaming Satanism for personal and communal ills was only available to those who inhabited the spaces of privilege. Satanism may have spread across boundaries so its myths were recognisable everywhere, but the scare’s discourse refused to ascribe blame to occult forces outside the rarefied spaces of whiteness.

These children were not infected, they were defective. The repetitive metaphors of sanitation and disease that characterised the Satanism scare were not brought to bear in the case of Atteridgeville. As blacks these youngsters were not subject to the same horror of contagion that nationalist mythology held in relation to white blood. Black people could, it is true, be culturally infected, lured away from an imaginary prelapsarian tribal idyll by the corrupting influences of an urban modernity they were not seen to be able to manage. But that fear had already been realised; indeed, it was embodied in the dangerous shifting borders that characterised a place like Atteridgeville, a dark spot on a map of what should, in high apartheid terms, have been entirely a ‘white man’s land’. The link between Satanism and sanitation was not made for the students of this black school because they were already, by virtue of race and urbanisation, beyond the possibilities of cultural hygiene. The references to mass hysteria and to the doctor’s failure to pinpoint anything physically wrong with them suggest that the illness, the dis-ease, that caused this episode came from within the bodies and community of the children themselves. They contained the pollutant rather than being infected by it.

63 Pretoria News, 16 August 1989.
64 The Citizen, 31 October 1990.
65 Giliomee, The Afrikaners, p. 279.
Conclusion

These three episodes in the Satanism scare – the Orso murder, the Rietfontien slasher and the Bathokwa hysteria – illustrate the depth of racialisation within apartheid South Africa, a racialisation that went so far as to pull this phantasmic threat firmly into its orbit. Satanism as it manifested in late apartheid South Africa could not exist without race. Both white and black youth were implicated in the scare but only white youth retained access to its supernatural elements. Where black youngsters were concerned, the possibility of Satanism only opened another channel for state mediation in their lives, while for many young white people, Satanism became another mechanism of enforcing orthodoxy and the political compliance that went with it.

As an expression of the paranoias that dogged white mass culture in the last years of apartheid, as a screen for the repression of the real and radical threats to continued white dominance, the belief in a satanic conspiracy maintained apartheid’s work of racial separation and kept black and white youth in their place, fulfilling the pre-ordained positions given to them by the system’s racial obsessions: whites as conformist bearers of morality, civilisation and reason, blacks as infectious, pathological and preternaturally damaged.

And then, in the mid-1990s, white Satanists vanished, subsumed into a larger framework of African occultism that includes muti, witchcraft and other, older beliefs. The reams of press coverage began to disappear from white and middle class publications; awareness of the possibilities of the supernatural was minimised as white South Africans, so long sequestered by censorship, job protectionism, isolation and fear of modernity, emerged into the post-apartheid landscape. This sudden cessation of the moral panic around Satanists suggests that they had served their purpose, fulfilled their remit in the imaginary life of white people, that their masking and repressive functions were no longer needed in a country that was clearly not heading for the apocalyptic race war that had long been feared.

In the years since then white Satanism has largely passed from cultural memory, visible only in the traces it left in press archives and the furious pamphlets of the Satan-hunters. The performativities of the moral panic, which provided a way for white people to deal with their fears of the future, had become irrelevant. Satanism’s determined racialisation of the population was overcome by newer issues: rising crime rates, incipient class war, a racially violent political discourse, the possibilities of an indigenous occult. The devil had come to South Africa and had been vanquished; not by Christianity nor by the morality of the white South African nation, but by the changing processes of history.

NICKY FALKOF
Research Centre, Visual Identities in Art and Design, FADA Building, University of Johannesburg, Bunting Road Campus, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, South Africa. E-mail: nickyfalkof@gmail.com