

## **From Witchcraft to Satanism:**

### **Changing Fantasies and New Experiences in the South African Lowveld**

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During the 1980s Satanism gripped imaginations across the globe. In Canada and the United States, Christians relived their own experiences of sexual abuse as children at the hands of Satanists. Some two-salaried couples also began to fear that Satanists might prey upon children they entrusted to nursery schools. By the late 1980s moral panic had migrated to the United Kingdom, particular to the English midlands. Here the fingers pointed in the opposite direction. Social workers claimed that parents abused their own children in Satanic rituals. The parents allegedly dressed in masks and robes, and perpetrated abortions, cannibalism and human sacrifice. Scotland Yard's inability to produce solid evidence of such crimes was indicative of a powerful conspiracy to silence. In her compelling analysis of these events, La Fontaine (1998) suggests that these beliefs resembled those that informed the early-modern European witch-hunts. By violating innocent children, she argues, latter-day Satanists personified the most diabolical evil. The allegations of Satanism articulated antagonisms: between parents and children, tensions deprived households and welfare agencies, and suspicions by Christians of new pagan religions.

In South Africa, moral panic about Satanism appeared among white citizens during the latter years of Apartheid. Despite certain continuities, these discourses manifested distinctively local concerns. In South Africa anxiety about the vulnerability, but at the same time also dangers, that teenagers present, eclipsed fears of child sexual abuse. Satan reportedly lured white teenagers into a pact. They dined on drug-laced wine and human flesh, desecrated churchyards, wrote diabolical graffiti on walls, held frantic orgies, and sacrificed

infants to Lucifer. The teenagers also prayed for the financial ruin of their families, and for the downfall of South Africa's government. Sites of white hegemony, such as the It is significant that sites of white hegemony, such as elite schools and the military, were most prone to Satan's influence. The South African Police even established an Occult-Related Crimes Unit to protect local youth. [1] Dunbar and Swart (2012) and Falkof (2010, 2015) relate this moral panic to anxiety about the end of white privilege, the renegotiation of political boundaries, and the destructive impact of excessive freedom.

The South African rumours about Satanism were, perhaps unsurprisingly, racially circumscribed, and had hardly any currency among black citizens (Dunbar and Swart 2012: 471). For black persons at the time, particularly for residents of the north-eastern parts of the country, witchcraft, not Satanism, inspired fear. This was apparent in Impalahoek, a village of Bushbuckridge, populated by approximately 24,000 Northern Sotho and Shangaan-speakers, where I have now done multi-temporal fieldwork over more than two decades [2]. Here witches (*baloyi*, singular *moloi*) were adults and elders who represented a source of malevolence completely independent of Satan. Driven by motives of envy and revenge, witches were believed to poison the food of kin and neighbours, lay potions (*sefolane*) on footpaths to cripple their enemies, and send dangerous familiars (*dithuri*) to attack their enemies. At times, witches transformed their victims into diminutive zombies (*ditlotlwane*), whom they deployed as nocturnal servants.

Fears of witchcraft were most acute during the late 1980s, when Bushbuckridge formed part of the Lebowa and Gazankulu homelands . Young political activists called Comrades, conducted successive witch-hunts, burning the homes of accused witches, and expelling dozens of elders from local villages (Niehaus 1998, Niehaus with Mohlala and Shokane 2001). [3] The Comrades sought to cleanse the country of misfortune and expunge those obstructing progresses towards a democratic future. [4]

Two decades after the African National Congress (ANC) had won the elections of 1994, Impalahoek came to be administered by the Bushbuckridge Municipality and Mpumalanga Province. Witchcraft had largely retreated from the public domain. Households now, secretly, used vengeance magic (*lets'wa*) against the witches, they believed, had harmed them (Niehaus 2010). As among white South Africans awaiting the end of Apartheid, public, high school assemblies, dozens of young women confessed that they had been lured into joining satanic covens, and commanded to kill Christian preachers and their own parents, and cause motor vehicle accidents. The girls also confessed at meetings of the Bushbuckridge Residents Association (BRA), who opposed the ANC politically. Pentecostal pastors sprinkled holy water to fortify national roads against Satan's power, and exorcise Satan's spirit from the bodies of the young women.

This article explores reasons for the change from witchcraft to Satanism in Impalahoek. Theoretically, my aim is to analyse witchcraft and Satanism as 'collective fantasies', and assess the experiential dimensions of these beliefs. According to Van Velzen (1995) and Velzen and Van Weltering (1988), collective fantasies play out novel ideas in new situations of life: they probe novel relations between phenomena, clarify existential questions, and express hidden fears and desires (also see Meyer 1995). I also focus on the experiential, or embodied, dimensions of these beliefs, as emphasised by Mitchell's (2001) persuasive suggestion that the eruption of concern about Satan on the island of Malta during the early 1990s, relates to the increased currency of beliefs that are intimately felt by persons. Unlike older beliefs in the evil eye (*ghain*), he argues, Satanism constitutes an 'immediate experiential force'. The Devil's power enters the body and directly changes the subject. This is evident in the view of material and sexual excess, and recreational drug use, as associated with a culture of gratification, as immanent signs of the Devil's presence.

I explore how discourses of Satanism have enabled residents of Impalahoek to engage with, both imaginatively and emotionally, with recent changes in their life worlds, and interrogate the differences in the manner they are felt. Here the growing prominence of Pentecostal-type churches have granted Satan greater cosmological immanence. I contend that the discourses about Satanism enable the ‘fusion of distinct registers of meaning’ (Kapferer 2003:1), These include anxieties about the future, the influx of foreigners, rampant consumerism amidst grave inequalities, erosion of kinship, the rise of a service economy and the possible out-migration of young women. Satanism is also associated with new experiences, such as the ‘introjection’ of qualities from outside the self, and with confessional narratives that would not be possible in the case of witchcraft..

### **Witchcraft and Society in Bushbuckridge, 1930-**

Witchcraft has a long and varied history in the South African lowveld. Accounts of life during the 1930s - when scattered households paid rent to land-holding companies for residential, cultivation and stock-keeping rights in the Bushbuckridge Native Reserve – regularly refer to this phenomenon. Witches were imagined to inherit mystical malevolent power from their mothers, and Northern Sotho women a notorious reputation as users of lethal poisons, such as the crocodile brain. Although accusations were generally made against affines, public-witch hunts did occur during periods of drought. On these occasions, diviners pointed out witches who has laid potions made from human flesh (*šibeka*) at secret locations in the forest, to drive away the rain-bearing clouds. Chiefs punished accused persons (usually male), by tying him to a tree stump and kindling a fire nearby to make him feel the heat he caused others to endure.

Witchcraft became a more pronounced, following the restructuring of rural life under Apartheid. In 1948, the South African Bantu Trust purchased all farms in the Bushbuckridge. Henceforth the area became a reception site for hundreds of households, who had been displaced from the surrounding white-owned farms, by the mechanisation of production operations (Harries 1989:91). To facilitate the steady influx of additional households, the Trust, implemented comprehensive 'agricultural betterment' scheme. In 1960, officials demarcated clearly defined arable fields and grazing lands, and relocated all households onto residential stands in eight village sections. The village sections were now diverse collections of unrelated households, who came to rely almost exclusively on the remittances of young men employed in South African centres of industry as oscillating labour migrants.

Confinement in concentrated village sections brought new tensions between neighbours that were articulated in witchcraft accusations. Villagers imagined that working men brought ever more dangerous witch-familiars, such as the snake-like *mamlambo*, and the ape-like *tokolotši* into Bushbuckridge. The *mamlambo* (mother of river in Xhosa) came in the form of a root, but metamorphosed into a snake with awesome fangs, and the shape of a white lover with silver, shiny hair. The familiar brought its owner wealth, but would demand regular sacrifices of human blood in return. The *tokolotši* had pronounced sexual features, such as an enormous penis or huge breasts and would be sent out to molest men and women sexually. These familiars focused attention on the possible impact of the selfish pursuit of money, and unrepressed sexuality (Niehaus, with Mohlala and Shokane 2001).

At times villagers took justice into their own hands, and violently attacked persons whom they believed had bewitched them. Zionist and Apostolic churches, which had experienced phenomenal growth since the 1960s, also came to provide a new space for engaging with witchcraft. Unlike the earlier mission churches, which discouraged witchcraft beliefs, Zionist prophets actively confronted witches. They healed the afflicted, and used

prescriptions from the Holy Spirit to fortify their homes against witchcraft. Within these churches, Satan never attained prominence as God's evil counterpart (Kiernan 1977). Satan existed independently of witches, as a source of moral rather than natural evil (Parkin 1985). Ministers represented Satan as an impersonal force or the snake of Eden that misleads people, or simply as a metaphor for the inclination to perform immoral deeds.

The most concerted anti-witchcraft campaigns occurred after the formation of national liberation movements in Bushbuckridge during 1986. Young male activists called Comrades, campaigned for the transformation of local schools, organised work stoppages and instigated rent and consumer boycotts. They also dedicated themselves to the complete eradication of evil, and formed disciplinary squads to confront suspected witches. Between April and May 1986, Comrades burn hundreds of homes and killed at least 36 villagers (Ritchken 1995). In Impalahoek they stoned to death an elderly woman, whom they accused of bewitching neighbour's child, and then driving cattle through the neighbour's yard, which desecrated her child's grave. These activities articulated a distinctive 'generational consciousness': the Comrades challenged the state, whose laws protected witches, and usurped the authority of chiefs and elders.

Since the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, its national executive body strictly forbade political activists from confronting witches. But this did not bring an immediate end to witch-hunting. During a single week in July 1990, there were nine inexplicable deaths in Impalahoek, followed by four suicides by teenagers. In response the Comrades, now acting as members of the ANC Youth League, took 90 suspects to a witch-diviner close to the South Africa-Swaziland border. The diviner identified 39 of the suspects as witches. He roughly shaved their hair, cut holes in their clothes, and painted their bodies with black oil. At home the Comrades entrusted the accused to the police for safe-keeping. The accused witches were men and women of insecure economic status, some of whom had transgressed general moral

precepts. They included drunkards, idle gossips, adulterers, drinking house-operators, and stock thieves (Niehaus with Mohlala and Shokane 2001).

South Africa's new ANC-led government, pursued a modernist agenda, which opposed all violence against suspected witches. Provincial politicians repeatedly called for the arrest of anyone who publically accuses others of witchcraft. This policy brought an end to public witch-hunts, but did not eliminate the underlying beliefs. During the devastating HIV pandemic, villagers attributed the symptoms that biomedical doctors diagnosed as AIDS-related, to witchcraft (Niehaus 2012) [5]. Kin secretly asked diviners to place potions called (*lets'wa*) on the corpses, to make witchcraft rebound, and causing the killer to die in a similar manner as his or her victim. As such, mystical forms of revenge came to be used to combat mystical malevolence.

### **Satan Arrives in Bushbuckridge, 2003-**

Satan gained greater immanence as Pentecostal-type churches secured greater visibility in the religious landscape of Bushbuckridge. Villagers now had the opportunity to listen to American-styled pastors from Johannesburg and from further afield preaching in large multi-coloured tents during religious crusades. There was also a succession of new congregations, supporting names such as 'Living Purpose Ministry'; 'Hope Fellowship'; 'Word of Life'; and the 'Regeneration Christian Bible Church.' Pastors of these churches introduced new technologies to cure sickness and ensure prosperity. They regularly called sick people to the front of the congregation and blessed them. They also promised worshippers that they could secure well-being and wealth by touching the garments worn by senior pastors. In Pentecostal dogma, it was not witches nor demons, but Satan himself, who obstructed progress in life. At

crusades one could hear a constant refrain, ‘Shout the Hallelujah for Satan’s kingdom to hear!!!’

As in North American and Britain, confessional narratives were central to the creation of moral panic. Young women, when called to the front of their congregations, occasionally displayed exaggerated emotional responses, during which they admitted working for Satan. Grace Kutoane, a research participant in her forties, told me that during 2003 she accompanied her daughter, Mary, attended a crusade of the Emanuel Church in Venda. During an all-night prayer, a fifteen-year old girl acted as if she was outside herself, and screamed: ‘I’m burning. I’m burning!!! I work for Satan!!! He sent me to kill the pastor!!! But the pastor has a fire!!! I can’t destroy him. I’m burning!!!’ Observers were uncertain as to what, precisely was happening, and could not determine whether Satan, or the pastor himself, has been responsible for her distress. They nonetheless congregated around the girl, and prayed for her deliverance. This was the first time any of my acquaintances in Impalahoek mentioned satanic possession.

During 2005, Grace Kutoane’s own daughter, Mary, absconded from home. When Grace eventually located Mary, she resided with friends near her school, and seemed to be disorientated. Mary told Grace that her friends had recruited her to join a satanic coven. Grace did not know whether Mary was truthful, but was relieved to have her daughter back at home. A few evenings later, Mary awoke, grasped her own throat, and screamed: ‘Someone calls me! I see two coffins and corpses’. Grace called the local Emanuel pastor to pray for Mary. In a strange voice, Mary shouted, ‘I want to take her to hell! I want to burn you with fire and send you to a bottomless pit?’ Seven times the pastor shouted, ‘Fire’. Mary then opened her eyes, but looked startled and had complete amnesia of the event. She was gradually re-integrated into her mother’s household.



Further episodes of satanic possession followed. In the same year, four girls between the ages of 14 and 18 years, confessed at the Nazarene Revival Crusade to being ‘brides of Satan’s ‘spirit’ (*moya wa Satan*). They claimed that Satan had commanded them to kill members of their own families, and also the pastor of the church. The pastor did not feel confident to deal with the situation, and sent the girls to the headquarters of his church in Impalahoek. Here, the girls lived there for several weeks, whilst people prayed for them, and cleansed their bodies. Two girls escaped and reportedly broke the burglar proofs at their windows with their bare hands.

At the United Christian Fellowship, an eighteen-year-old girl called upon the pastor to stop praying. Her mother later discovered animal hide and Vaseline in her handbag. At a crusade of the Living Purpose Ministry, young women, when called to the front stage, started walking like models on a fashion parade, and then slithered on the floor like snakes. Two women reportedly stood up from the floor, laughed and shouted that because they were from Mozambique, they did not fear any minister or politician. They claimed to own snakes that wore expensive beads and had slept with everyone in the neighbourhood. The next week there was a vicious storm, and pastors were forced to take down the tent. Subsequently a fifteen-year-old girl confessed at a church sermon of the Nazarene Church that she had used satanic power to force one of their peers to commit suicide by jumping from a bridge.

Concern about Satanism spread beyond the Pentecostal churches. In 2008 a most horrible road accident occurred at a curb on the national road: two trucks transporting workers collided, killing twenty-five people. [5] The driver of one vehicle, who survived the accident, claimed that a mysterious cloud had obstructed his vision. In the wake of this tragedy the Bushbuckridge Municipality launched a road safety campaign at the Impalahoek Community Hall. Several churches attended, and Job Mashile, a bishop of the Hope Church, led hundreds of church members to pray by the roadside, whilst he sprinkled holy water on

the tarmac. Mashile blamed Satanists for the tragedy. The mayor of Bushbuckridge joined the proceedings and called on church members to ‘stop Satanism through prayer’.

In the aftermath of the road safety campaign, the locus of satanic possession shifted to high schools. During 2012, the principal of the Caswell Mokoena High School, asked a Nigerian pastor to lead the learners in hymns and prayer during the school assembly. He wished to ‘uplift the learners spiritually’ before their final examinations, and maintain Caswell Mokoena’s status as one of the best schools in the region. But the pastor’s short, energetic, service had unforeseen consequences. An exceptionally large number of learners stepped forward to receive God’s blessings, and after the pastor touched their foreheads, many girls began to display exaggerated emotional reactions. Amidst a cacophony of screams, girls fainted, fell and rolled on the floor. Some girls claimed to have seen fire and shouted ‘Leave me!!!Leave me!!!’ There were also allegations that learners saw a *tokolotši* in one of the classrooms, and that a girl tried to poison food pots at the school feeding scheme. The principal closed down the entire school and asked Christian healers and diviners to cleanse the schoolyard and to restore calm.

This event was followed by further possession experiences at different schools, each time linked to allegations of Satan’s presence. At Moripa High School, a young woman acted hysterically during assembly, and confessed that she had caused motor vehicle accidents. At Mabetha Primary School, a young schoolgirl provoked suspicion by carrying four lunchboxes to school each day, but never eating any of the food herself. During assembly at the Milton Mashile High School, a young woman screamed that she had seen a large snake.

During 2013, moral panic erupted at the Ngungunyane High School. Two teachers died in successive years. A male teacher died in a motor vehicle accident. The following day a strong wind blew through the schoolyard, and a dark cloud hung over the entire village. The next year a popular woman teacher passed away unexpectedly, after she had complained of

migraine. When the principal announced her untimely death during the school assembly, a young girl fainted. The learners sitting next to her screamed in the mistaken belief that she, too, had died. This provoked learners to flee from the over-crowded assembly hall. Some claimed to have seen the woman teacher's figure on the stage, others that they saw her writing on the chalk board. These accounts suggested that she was not really dead, but that Satanists were transforming her into a zombie. Rumours suggested that the school principal worked for Satan and killed devout Christian teachers at the school.

A political formation called the Bushbuckridge Residents Association (BRA) soon attempted to arrest the spread of Satanism. Delta Mokoena, a charismatic local political activist, broke away from the ANC to form BRA in 2009. The Association campaigned against corruption and poor service delivery. During the municipal elections of May 2011, BRA fielded candidates in eleven of the 37 wards in Bushbuckridge. Mokoena was elected municipal councillor for Ward 15, where he gained 85% of all valid votes. In the absence of effective policing, BRA formed anti-crime squads to track down and punish thieves and rapists. When apprehending suspected criminals, the crime fighters ironically usually used the ZXC greeting, 'Peace!!! Peace!!! Hey (*Kgotso! Kgotso! Haai!* ). They then blindfolded the suspects, transported them to a secluded place in the forest, and beat the soles of their feet with baton-like sticks to extract confessions. The crime fighters also used other forms of torture. They drove nails into the feet of thieves, and placed rapists in hessian maize bags before submerging them in dams. Only once the suspects had confessed, revealed the location of stolen goods, and pointed out their accomplices, would BRA hand them over to the police.

The Association's anti-crime squads have, on occasion, expelled a headman (*induna*), whom they accused of witchcraft, and two women, who allegedly poisoned drinks at a party to celebrate the return of boys from a circumcision lodge (*moropela*), from Impalahoek. BRA also helped cleanse Caswell Mokoena High School from satanic influences. Representative of

the association met with teachers and with parents of five girls, who confessed to being servants of Satan. When questioned by BRA, the girls claimed that an elderly woman had bestowed the spirit of Satan upon them, and commanded them to cause motor vehicle accidents. An anti-crime squad punished the old woman for abusing schoolchildren.

In 2013, BRA accommodated the four girls at their headquarters and asked them to tell onlookers at meetings throughout Bushbuckridge how they became Satanists, caused motor vehicle accidents, and drank the victim's blood. At the Impalahoek sportsground, located next to a high accident zone, political activists broke down a wall, containing satanic slogans. Closer inspection revealed that graffiti of black and white Chinese letters had been spray-painted on the wall. Each evening BRA called on pastors to exorcise Satan's spirit from their bodies.

In a similar manner as earlier confrontations occurred between Comrades and the Apartheid government over the issue of witchcraft, interventions in the field of Satanism pitted BRA against the official judicial system and the ANC government. Through their actions BRA challenged the legitimacy of the police, whom they claimed were protecting Satanists. The ANC, in turn, encouraged those apprehended by anti-crime squads to lay charges of kidnapping and assault against BRA.

### **On the Specificities of Satanism**

We can argue that fantasies about Satanism momentarily attained greater salience than witchcraft, due to their capacity to signal or advertise changes in the broader social landscape. This shift parallels the changes from discourses about witches to those about 'vampire men' (*banyama*) in central Africa during colonial times. White (2000) suggests that fantasies about vampire men, enabled Africans to reflect on features of colonial rule that threatened to

disrupt existing routines. Vampire men foregrounded otherness, the extraction of precious substances from African bodies, bureaucratic uniforms, technology, mechanical mobility, professional work and supervisory relations. Through telling these stories, she argues, central Africans, debated the advantages of technological innovations and new social relations.

There is clearly some overlap between narratives of witchcraft and those of Satanism. A young Christian woman told me: ‘Witches and those who kill with guns and knives are part of Satan, but they are not Satanists’. The narratives that I collected also refer to similarities in the mode of conduct of these malevolent agents. For example, they also portray Satanists as working with well-known witch-familiars as transforming their victims into nocturnal servants. The framing of witches and Satanists in common conceptual space facilitates comparisons of their formulaic elements.

The discourses, that came to the fore during different historical junctures, were linked to contrasting ‘tempo-politics’, that is, attempts to manage time and envision alternative futures (Weiss 2004, 1-20, Smith 2008). This is evident in the generational locus of evil. Whereas witches were imagined to be adults and elders, usually older than fifty years of age; Satanists were teenagers from the ages of fourteen to twenty. The most concerted actions against witchcraft, occurred towards the end of Apartheid, when the Comrades movement embraced a project of revolutionary social transformation. Their activism was informed by ideologies of progress, and aimed to build a more prosperous future. In this context, discourses about witchcraft portrayed tradition ambiguously, and highlighted its obstructive potential. The accused witches were of an increasingly marginalised generation that could stand as a reactionary, negative, counterpoint to the revolutionary project. They included diviners and Christian ministers, whose moral authority that underwrote the old, thoroughly discredited, social order.

The moral panic about Satanism occurred two decades later, when ideologies of liberation, no longer inspired great conviction. Despite notable improvements in social welfare, residents of out of the way places such as Bushbuckridge struggled to cope with the debilitating effects of deindustrialisation, increased unemployment, the AIDS pandemic, and high crime rates. Many villagers, much like white South Africans awaiting the end of white minority rule, had become apprehensive of the future. Discourses about Satanism warn of the possibility of moral regress, of disobedient youngsters who behaved anti-socially, sought to destroy their families and churches, and violated the sanctity of life. In their dystopic form, the discourses refer to the 'end of days', when Satan recruited followers in anticipation of a final confrontation with Christ.

'In Revelations God revealed everything that is happening now. We are living in the last days before God takes his place and we do not have much time anymore. That is why the Satanists are targeting the youngsters. They are trying to win souls. They are controlling the politicians, who make evil decisions in government.'

'The Bible says that at the end of days there will be deaths all over and there will be many bad things. We see girls getting children, young women who disrespect their mothers-in-law, and we see murders.'

A second difference lies in the gender of the presumed practitioners of witchcraft and Satanism. Whereas both male and female adults practiced witchcraft, Satan's the foot soldiers were largely young women. Research participants accounted for the preponderance of young women Satanists in terms of their openness, respectability to outside influences, and inability to withstand temptation. Like Eve in the primordial Garden of Eden, girls were more likely to succumb to the lies of the snake. However, the narratives that I collected also portrays the openness of girls as a source of power. Young Satanists frequented the underground, where male migrants once worked, attended company meetings, conducted the business of killing, and assumed control of highways leading to places of greater and power and prosperity. This shift in the gendered locus of power foretells an age of assertiveness of young women,

resonating with the shift from an industrial to a service economy that has accorded greater economic opportunities to them. Young women, who generally attain better grades than boys in school, have increasingly favourable access to positions in the public sector, and have benefitted, more than men, from affirmative action, and from the provision of social grants.

Third, Satanists are imagined to operate on a larger scale and to construct broader social networks than witches. Although witches met at the edge of the village at night, and shared the flesh of their victims in a cannibalistic meal, they acted primarily as individuals. Witches tended to operate largely within intimate social settings of the home, village and work group (Geschiere 2012). The Northern Sotho proverb, ‘a witch does not cross a river’ (*moloi ga a na tsele noka*) alludes to the social and geographic, circumscription of witchcraft. (Rivers commonly denote boundaries.)

By contrast, Satanists are recruited to join large corporations, administered along bureaucratic lines. Young women were not born as Satanists, but were recruited to join satanic covens. Satanists met in secret locations, far removed from local villages. A young woman confessed that she was given a ‘key to success’, and told to place the key underneath her pillow. She woke up in early morning hours, and a door opened in the wall of her room. Within five minutes she was in Johannesburg. Alternatively, Satanists meet in locations beneath river-beds, dams, the Indian Ocean; or even in America. This subterranean world was described to me as a well organised town, with homes, well-paved roads and shopping complexes. To become a fully-fledged member of the Satanic society, and attain promotion to the rank of ‘queen’, new recruits had to complete successive tasks assigned to them by their seniors. Well respected adults headed local covens, and according to local gossip, were led by Eddy Ncgube, a successful school headmaster from Zimbabwe. Ncgube drove a black Mercedes Bence and a Nexus, and lived in an exclusive suburb of Hoedspruit. My research participants speculated that Satanists had infiltrated the South African government, and that

the late Nelson Mandela, current United States president, Barack Obama, and his wife Michelle, were both prominent Satanists. The number of Mandela's former prison cell, 46664, they said, was the sign of the Beast, encased by two 4's. When Michelle Obama accompanied her husband to attend a memorial service for Mandela in Johannesburg, she allegedly made a satanic sign: with her fingers of her right hand, she made a six and three 1's.

A fifth difference lay in the flow and symbolic topography of evil. Whilst male witches did import technologies of malevolence from cosmopolitan markets and urban workplaces, their operations remained rooted in local social relations. Also, it was believed that one always encountered the most potent forms of witchcraft in rural areas that were repositories of tradition (Jensen and Zenker 2015). Indeed, I heard of urban-based football teams, such as Orlando Pirates and Maroka Swallows, consulting herbalists in Bushbuckridge to 'doctor' their players, before the advent of the new season (Niehaus 2015).

In Satanism, the flow of evil from metropolitan places was more profound. A research participant who regularly migrated between homes in Ebony Park, Johannesburg, and Impalahoek, told me that Satanism had a far greater hold on urban life. She mentioned incidence of teenagers who performed rituals on the site of an abandoned hospital, stabbed others with knives, consumed human flesh, and vomited snakes in church. 'There [in Johannesburg] we see it with our own eyes. Here [in Impalahoek] we only hear about one or two cases in a year.'

Many research participants suspected that immigrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Somalia, Senegal and Nigeria might be agents for the transmission of Satanism. This perception resonates with xenophobic attitudes towards foreign workers and traders, seen to undercut local wages and prices (Reddy 2012). They also reflect disease about the *modus operandi* and crass materialism of West African Pentecostal pastors. A circular logic posits that the very same persons who propagate fears of Satanism, might, themselves, be



Satanists. This is evident in the following statements, ‘We don’t know what the Nigerians are planning’; ‘They come here without wives, sleep with local girls, and then quickly disappear’; ‘They are after money’; ‘I’m sure the they are involved. I think they are really pastors of Satan.’ A locally born apostolic preacher argued: ‘Some priests acquire foreign spirit and bring these spirits into the church. They are the ones who make our children disrespectful.’ He doubted whether it was really the Holy Spirit that made hundreds of girls faint in the schools. Another conservative Christian criticised Pentecostal pastors for selling anointment oil and holy water at high cost, and feeding church members live snakes. [6] These suspicions were inflamed when two local women travelled to Lagos to attend a crusade of the Synagogue Church of All Nations, led by the world-renowned prophet, T.B. Joshua. The church building collapsed, and they, together with 114 other attendants, died in the avalanche of rubble. [6] ‘The owner of that church knew why it collapsed’, I was told. Maybe there is a hidden agenda.’

A sixth difference was the greater prominence of consumerism in discourses about Satanism. The pursuit of money was certainly apparent in witchcraft. This is evident in beliefs about the *mamlambo* which brings the witch money, but feeds on the blood of his or her kin. A desire for consumer goods led people to Satan. Young women were allegedly easy to recruit because they are addicted to fashions. Satanists reportedly lured them by offering them items of food (lollipops, red sweets dough cakes, or cold drinks); jewellery (rings, earrings, bangles, or necklaces’); items of clothing (such as expensive T-shirts); and cosmetics (such as nail polish). Through using these the recruits absorbed Satan’s spirit. Products such as artificial hair, *Monster* energy drinks, and *Lacoste* clothing (which uses a crocodile as symbol); and new musical styles (such as ‘House’ and ‘Hip Hop’) rendered youngsters susceptible to Satan. A research participant told me of the lyrics of a particular song, ‘I am the daughter of Satan. God got away from me.’ Satanists issued each recruit with a secret

code – resembling an identity number and PIN code for auto-teller banking machines. The code indicates their rank within the corporation and can be used to attain wealth.

Satan's subterranean town was described as a materialist paradise. Here complaint recruits were rewarded with loads of money, large homes, and expensive, cars. 'It is much better than this world. There are malls with shops. People run companies, they are with husbands and boyfriends, and they have land and businesses so they can become rich'. It was also likened to a goldmine, where male migrants formerly produced wealth. 'There is gold and the leader has a stone of gold'. But much like government's promises of prosperity, the wealth of the satanic world is illusionary. Material wealth comes at great social cost, and cannot be transferred to the real world.

These discourses capture the perceptions of the materialism of youth. 'Young people', I was told during an interview, 'don't want to work hard. They want things to come to them for free.' These discourses occurred in conjunction with moral panic about young men's involvement in crime, and about moral condemnation of the wastefulness of young men, called *skhothane*. Thieves stole items that articulate cosmopolitan tastes: television sets, DVD and CD players, cellular telephones, personal computers, fashionable clothes and Carvela shoes (Niehaus 2012:142). *Skhothane*, who were the sons of wealthy parents, sought to shame their peers through conspicuous displays of wealth. They drove luxurious cars, dressed in the most fashionable clothes (some wore expensive shoes of different bands), and frequented popular taverns. Here *skhothane* purchased large quantities of liquor, pouring beer and custard onto the ground, and even burnt notes (up to R400) in front of poorer customers.

Discourses of Satanism more clearly counter-posed the quest for wealth with the destruction of kinship. This is evident in the notion that children left their families for Satanic covens and appropriated blood, which is metonymic of genealogical connectedness (White 2000). These images capture anxieties about physical and social reproduction. In the

aftermath of the AIDS pandemic large numbers of children lived outside their natal households. [7] During 2004 only a third of adults in 89 households were married, and half of all children did not reside in the same household of their fathers (Niehaus 2006). In 2009, an official estimate placed the numbers of orphans in the Mpumalanga Province at 18.7% (Weckesser 2011:127). At least some stories articulate concern about the fate of children without parents. For example, activists accused a woman who had adopted six children of compelling them to engage in diabolical activities at night. Another profound fear is that young women, who increasingly bear the burden of care at home, might be seduced to pursue careers in the urban areas, turning their back on their kin.

### **Satanism as Introjection of Evil?**

Witchcraft and Satanism amounted to more than fantasies. Mitchell (2001) postulates that in discourses pertaining to the evil eye and in Satanism on the island of Malta, power is differently conceptualised and felt. The evil eye, he suggests, mainly serve as a post-facto explanation of misfortune. Although such power is located within the body, subjects accused of harbouring it are unconscious of their capacities. In Satanism, by contrast, power is a located outside the body, but is intimately felt and experienced as it enters the subject's body through possession. Whereas the evil eye 'explains misfortune', he writes, Satan 'is misfortune' (p.83).

Drawing on relationship theory in psychoanalysis, Lambek (2002) formulates this difference between witchcraft and spirit possession slightly differently. In the case of witchcraft, he argues, the subject refuses to recognise certain feelings, qualities and wishes; expels these from the self; and locates them in another person or thing, in this case, the witch. Fantasies about witchcraft are thus vehicles for the 'projection' of disavowed impulses,

especially those pertaining to aggression and sexuality. In spirit possession, by contrast, the subject ‘introjects’ inherent qualities from the outside to the inside of the self’, and assimilates diverse experiences.

Unlike as in Malta, an emphasis on the currency of experience per se does not explain the shift from discourses about witchcraft to Satanism in the public domain in Bushbuckridge. Here there is no real difference in the ‘this worldly’ emphasis of the older Zionist and Apostolic churches and the more recent Pentecostal ones. Zionist and Apostolic churches, too, focused on the pragmatic harnessing of the divine power of Holy Spirit (*moya*), to address the condition of the body and its immediate life worlds. This is evident in the importance of baptism, the wearing of uniforms, dietary prescriptions and divine healing (Comaroff 1985). This resonated with the manner in which Pentecostal churches aim to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit over the person.

Rather, these discourses enable different kinds of experiences and feelings. To conceptualise these, it is essential to distinguish the perspectives of the accusers from those of the accused. For the accuser, witchcraft certainly does involve a post doc explanation of misfortune, and it is also possible to discern the operation of ‘projection’, in a similar manner Kluckhohn (1942) does in his famous study of the Navaho. Collective fantasies of witchcraft contain extensive reference to aggression, envy, and to the desires to level of social inequalities, acquire money and power, and practice unbridled sexuality. These impulses are seldom acknowledged as appropriate. But for the accuser witchcraft is felt in the form of persistent misfortune (Niehaus 2012). Misfortune is often concretised as an almost tangible force surrounding the body, called *bati*. Witchcraft can be felt as abjection, as evident in the belief that witches are gradually taking hold of different parts of one’s body and aura (*seriti*), whilst trying to transform the subject into a nocturnal servant. Alternatively, witchcraft is experienced as the projection of some object or substance into the body. This mainly occurs

when subjects feel that they injected slow poison (*sejeso*) that transforms into small reptiles inside the body, that gradually consumes one's flesh and internal organs. But witchcraft is not felt by accused persons, who are, in the vast majority of cases, 'absented third persons' (Rio 2002). For the most part they vigorously deny involvement in the causation of misfortune. In cases where the accused do confess under the threat of violence, they profess a complete lack of intention.

Satanism possibly explains less than witchcraft, if only because the identification of possessing agent precedes the recollection of its deeds. Misfortunes attributed to Satanism, such as motor vehicle accidents on the national roads, frequently seems remote from the self. But for accusers, processes of 'projection' might be as, if not more, pronounced as in witchcraft. Collective fantasies about Satanism, too, refer to aggressive and destructive impulses towards the family and church. The desires that discourses about Satanism articulate resonate with contemporary desires for employment in the corporations, the forging of transnational connections, accumulation of wealth, and consumption of fashionable commodities. They also capture the impulse to escape from overwhelming domestic burdens within struggling households. The immediacy of these desires makes discourses about Satanism compelling to engage with.

The prime difference lies in the experience of the accused. In Satanism, unlike witchcraft, young women actively participate in these discourses through voluntary confession. Their deeds are informed by well-established notions of spirit possession. In Buchbuckridge, women became diviners after they had experienced a bout of sickness, which they and their healers interpreted as due to possession by foreign spirits. Once the spirits had been appeased, and converted from a hostile to a malevolent force, the spirits bestowed the power of healing and foresight. The Malopo, who were Sotho spirits, specialised in treating

venereal diseases; the Ngoni, who were Shangaan or Swazi, in children's diseases, and the fierce Ndzau, who came from central Mozambique, in the detection of witchcraft.

Spirit possession does enable women to introject alternative, otherwise, inaccessible, experiences (Boddy 1989), and express strong oppositional sentiments (Fry 1976, Ong 1987). For example, in 1967, a girl began to display exaggerated emotional reactions in class. She shouted, cried, laughed, rolled on the floor, and began taking off items of her school uniform. Only after teachers took her to the shade of the tree, and fed her bananas, did she regain consciousness. During the 1980s, another girl called out the names of her ancestors in the school assembly, whenever learners sang Christian hymns. Subsequent investigations by teachers revealed that both girls experienced intense distress: the former had been sexually abused, the latter regularly moved between the homes of her parents and grandparents and felt that she had no permanent place to live.

Pentecostal gatherings and preaching during school assemblies, provided a novel space for confessions about involvement in Satanism, and for the articulation of emotions that would have been disallowed in other contexts. Csordas (1989) suggests that in a Charismatic Catholic Church in the United States, performative speech acts by ministers produce inner states within listeners. Once ministers identified an evil agent, a range of experiences confirmed their presence in worshippers. By identifying spirits linguistically, ministers brought them into existence (p.13-14). In Bushbuckridge, witnessing other persons being possessed also had a demonstration effect, providing visual encouragement for worshippers to experience the presence of Satan within their bodies. The range of feelings that confirmed possession included listlessness and depression, urges towards self-harm, sudden outbursts hostility, anger towards kin, a wish to escape from present obligations, couples with feelings of being out of control. This is most apparent when the possessed speak in a different voice, or even slither on the floor in imitation of snakes.

These experiences allude to a build-up of unarticulated tensions, in addition to the well-established ordeals of puberty and sexual maturity. In the 2000s, young women in Bushbuckridge were subject to novel sets of demands, young women were obliged to care for new sets of relatives, including sick persons and orphaned relatives and cope emotionally with the loss of loved ones (Weckesser 2011). It is telling that young women who displayed symptoms of hysteria in nineteenth century Europe – such as in the well-known case of Anna O – were compelled to care for sick and dying relatives at home (Freud and Breuer 1895). With the growth of a service economy, younger women also envisioned becoming active participants in the workforce, and of leaving home to work in tourist lodgers in the region, or in positions in the public sector or in commercial enterprises in the cities of Mpumalanga and Gauteng.

Narratives about girls allegedly involved in satanic activities provide a glimpse of these disguised tensions, associated with the premature loss of youth (Durham 2004). A young women research participant told me of one of her peers, called Lerato Monareng, who refused to pray at school. She had a large wound on her arm, like that of a person who had repeatedly engaged in self-harm. Lerato said that she had joined a satanic coven, and that a snake had bitten her on her arm in the subterranean world, because she refused to kill her own mother. Other Satanists were described to me as exceptionally quiet, or obstinate. One of the young women who claimed responsibility for causing motor vehicle accidents had recently given birth and found it hard to assume the role of motherhood. Another, was unwilling to perform household tasks, such as cooking and washing dishes. Girls who confessed to Satanism were in trouble for stealing money at home, or for swearing, bullying other girls, and more importantly for failing examinations at school.

Confessions of Satanism, unlike those of witchcraft and crime, seldom provoked severe punishment. At worst alleged Satanists were confined to quarters of church buildings

or at the headquarters of the BRA, and forced to address public meetings. At best, they received sympathy, were prayed for, and treated with prescriptions from the Holy Spirit. We can also see the absence of punishment as due to fundamental ambiguity as to the locus of behaviour, and to the perception that an outside agent might be responsible. This was coupled to a general perception that it was inappropriate to punish young women in public.

## **Conclusions**

rather than simple expressions of emerging tensions within social relations, as evident in the above-mentioned analysis.

Kapferer (2003) suggests that discourses on witchcraft capture the imagination precisely because they resist falsification and stand outside of everyday systems of reason. The force of these discourses, he argues, 'derive not so much of what it is representative of external to itself, but in the potentialities, generative forces, linkages and renditions that it opens up within itself' (p.22). They fuse different registers of meaning, and throw insight upon social and political processes. Englund (2007) demonstrates that discourses of witchcraft in Malawi enable subjects to imagine sociality on an indeterminate scale, and can potentially exceed the impact of the mass media.

Vagueness of period.

## **Notes**

1. Moral action by these associations ranged from the condemnation of black clothing, Dungeons and Dragons, and Stephen King novels, to the burning of 'demonic' Ninja turtle toys, and the destruction of 'peace poles', said to contain the spirit of the anti-Christ (Dundar and Swart 2012).



2. To protect the anonymity of my informants, I use pseudonyms for the place of fieldwork and all personal names. Unless otherwise specified, all vernacular terms are in the Sepulana dialect of Northern Sotho.
3. The South African witch-hunts of the 1980s and 1990s are fairly well documented and theorised. See Ralushai et. al. (1995), Delius (2006), Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), Mavhungu (2000), and Ashforth (2005).
4. The Ralushai commission estimates that between 1985 and 1995, no fewer than 389 alleged witches were killed in areas currently comprising Limpopo Province of South Africa (Ralushai et al 1995). These figures are likely to be an underestimate.
5. See Buks Viljoen. 2008. 'Road full of dead bodies' News24Archives, news24.com/South Africa/News/Road-full-of-dead-bodies-20081113 (11 November).

## 5. Life expectancies. AIDS

The theme of immobilising enemies seems to be fairly widespread in Africa. Taylor (1999) describes how during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Hutu executioners targeted the feet, Achilles' tendons and legs of their victims. Similarly, Heald (2006) shows that vigilantes among the Kuria in Tanzania broke the ankles of young men accused of cattle theft.

5. Riches (1986) argues that the performance of violence require little specialized knowledge and equipment. Yet violence can be used effectively to intimidate opponents and communicate key social ideas.
6. which replicated techniques that security forces of the apartheid state had deployed against political activists (cf. Feldman 2002).
7. The AIDS pandemic
8. The doctoring of football teams in Bushbuckridge.
9. Pretoria's snake handling Christians
10. TB Joshua's building that collapsed. <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-11-16-nigeria-church-collapse-victims-remains-handed-over-to-families>
11. This journey towards the subterranean world resonates with that of the first diviners, who were purportedly trained by the serpent, Nzozzo, underneath the water, and symbolises transformation or rebirth (Hirst 1993, Niehaus and Sikhauli 2007).

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