

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Passionate Attachment, the Rigid Designator and Ideological Fantasy

This chapter rounds off the argument, that Mbeki has a passionate attachment to race, based in ideological fantasy.

In trying to reach conclusions to what is the role of race in Mbeki's discourse, I have found the theories of Butler, Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe, Althusser and Pecheux the most useful in providing the clearest theoretical framework in which to place Mbeki's discourse. Through an application of their theories of subjection and the concepts of "passionate attachment", "rigid designator" and "the other", a greater clarity on Mbeki's discourse has emerged. Each of these theorists' concepts have touched on issues that lie at the heart of Mbeki's discourse.

This chapter looks at the argument that race functions as a rigid designator in his discourse, using the theories of Butler and Žižek, respectively. Using Mouffe's arguments, it draws conclusions on the importance of making a distinction between adversaries and antagonists, which has a positive impact on tolerance in a democratic society.

Within the social democratic discourse liberty has come to mean, Laclau and Mouffe³⁶³ argue, the "capacity" to make certain choices and to keep open a series of real alternatives. It is thus that poverty, lack of education, and great disparities in the conditions of life are today considered offences against liberty, they say.

³⁶³ Laclau and Mouffe (1985:172)

Tutu's protest against the elitist nature of BEE and his concern over the lack of debate about HIV/Aids and Zimbabwe, I argue, was a debate necessary to deepen the democratic and transformation project in the country. But his protests were interpellated³⁶⁴ by Mbeki as "elitist", and "ignorant" of what goes on "even in an ANC branch".³⁶⁵ Mbeki did not make a distinction between adversaries and antagonists.

Likewise, Vavi's challenge of government policies, and particularly Mbeki's role³⁶⁶, on the HIV/Aids crisis can be viewed in the same light.³⁶⁷ The government discourse in response to Vavi was not a response that viewed him as a legitimate adversary but rather as an antagonist. In this example, by calling Vavi "irresponsible" the space for civil society to articulate its views, intrinsic to the deepening of the democratic project, was shut down. The question raised here is why does Mbeki draw the space of opposition so narrowly? What is responsible for his repetitive and compulsive exclusion of 'adversaries' into the camp of antagonists? It is, of course, his attachment to rigidly categorised identities and to rigidly antagonising society into "us and them".

Applying this argument to the race question, Norval³⁶⁸ suggests that non-racialism is premised on a discourse of equality and creates a "symbolic space" in which "democracy may be deepened and the struggle for difference may be extended". Nevertheless, while it is "symbolic", she asserts two more points that are pertinent to a consideration of the role of race in Mbeki's discourse. In South Africa today, Norval³⁶⁹ states, "We have, more than ever, to assume responsibility for our actions and interventions, whatever form they may take". She adds that non-racialism, while

³⁶⁴ Althusser (1994:130) explains: "All Ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects." Butler (1997:5) explains Althusser's theory to say the subordination of the subject takes place through language.

³⁶⁵ Chapter 3 discusses the debate between Tutu and Mbeki in detail.

³⁶⁶ Vavi's challenge to Mbeki on HIV/Aids is dealt with in detail in Chapter 5: Thabo Mbeki and the issues of HIV/Aids and Race.

³⁶⁷ According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985:178), "The multiplication of political spaces and the preventing of the concentration of power in one point are, then, preconditions of every truly democratic transformation of society."

³⁶⁸ Norval (1996:305)

³⁶⁹ *ibid*

premised on the equality discourse and drawn from a socialist perspective, could provide a horizon that conceives of democracy as a never-ending process of extending the demands for equality.

Within his discourse, Mbeki has viewed disparate subjects, such as Tutu, Vavi and whites, as the “others” in society. In his interjections he has made no distinction between legitimate adversaries and antagonists, as I argued (in Chapter 3: The key issues of Mbeki’s Presidency), using Mouffe’s theory. Mbeki’s responses to criticism of the way in which transformation takes place is an attempt to bring his subjects back into line with the prevailing ideology. And, while I acknowledge that Mandela’s emancipatory project, characterised by the metaphor of the “rainbow nation”, did not engage in any real sense with the issue of transformation, it is my contention that although Mbeki engages with transformation this is done so via an obsession with race. This is shown, for example, in the discourse on his Two Nations Theory, where he ignores the unpatriotic bourgeoisie by racialising class. What happens here, as indicated, is that having projected *his* structure of antagonism – black equals People verses whites equals Other – on South African society, the emergence of an unpatriotic yet black class of property owners cannot be acknowledged because it threatens to dislocate the structure of this fantasy.

Butler³⁷⁰, in discussing subjection theories using Althusser’s interpellation theory, writes that in the ideological state apparatuses the subordination of the subject takes place through language. In the Althusser example of the passer-by being hailed by a policeman, Butler asks why this person responds to the authoritative voice of the law. She notes that Althusser does not answer the question. Butler argues that the subject is passionately attached to his or her own subordination through a reflexive, sometimes a violent or melancholic, turn.

³⁷⁰ Butler (1997:4)

However, Butler adds a qualification – the final responsibility for that subordination does not reside within the subject, instead attachment to subjection is produced through the workings of power. The subject is forced by a will that turns back on itself, meaning the subject is the effect of power *in recoil*, she asserts.³⁷¹ In explaining this reflexivity, Butler argues that in turning towards the voice of the policeman the passer-by is turning against him or herself while simultaneously turning to the law – hence the term ‘passionate attachment’, a turning back to conditions of one’s past oppression. In this thesis the term has been used to show how Mbeki turns back on himself, using various examples where he harks back to the wretched days of slavery and colonialism.

I. Passionate Attachment

Resignifications are needed in South Africa for a deepening of democracy. Butler refers to Foucault’s thesis that “a sign can be taken up, used for purposes counter to those for which it was designed, that even the most noxious terms could be owned, that the most injurious interpellations could also be the site of radical reoccupation and resignification”.³⁷² Norms are not fixed, in her theory, and through its repetitions there can be slippages and reappropriations. Therefore race and repetition is also performative, meaning race can be “performed” in different ways, showing new possibilities, hence resignifications.

In this country, with regard to race, these resignifications can occur through the course of debate for example, where norms can be reiterated in unpredictable ways. If race is rigidly designated and if passion is invested in race to the exclusion and regression of other signifiers, thereby rendering it the master signifier, such a project

³⁷¹ *ibid* pp6

³⁷² Butler (1997:104)

of the deepening of democracy can only be hindered. According to Butler³⁷³, passion can tear us from ourselves, it can bind us to others, it can transport us, it can undo us, it can implicate us in lives that are not our own. It is, she continues, “sometimes fatally, irreversible”.³⁷⁴

She argues³⁷⁵ that subjects emerge with a passionate attachment, which can oppress and subjugate. The idea is that subjects become attached to the conditions of their own subjectivity even if these are the very conditions that oppress it. She uses Hegel’s Unhappy Consciousness³⁷⁶ to develop her argument. Hegel argues that the pursuit of wretchedness, the attachment to wretchedness, is both the condition of and the potential to undo subjection. But Butler argues, resignification can rework and unsettle the passionate attachment to subjection without which subject formation – and reformation – cannot succeed.³⁷⁷ It can be argued that Butler does not recognise enough the material base of oppression, in other words the real experience of racism, especially when one considers her argument that it is *only through* a reflexive turn that a subject emerges. To counter this, there is contingency in her theory, and the repetition from her of the unpredictable ways that norms can be repeated, through new signs, signalling new hope and new possibilities.

For Mbeki, this psychic investment in race, exceeds all expectations, as seen in his discourse on the African Renaissance, Nepad, “Letters from the President” and on HIV/Aids, shows a close identification with his own oppression. This, however, is complex. As Butler³⁷⁸ indicates, “It is always tricky territory to suggest that one might actually identify with the position of the figure that one opposes because the fear, justifiably, is that the person who seeks to understand the psychic investment in one’s own oppression will conclude that oppression is generated in the minds of the

³⁷³ Butler (1997:6)

³⁷⁴ Butler (2004:20)

³⁷⁵ Butler (1997:9)

³⁷⁶ *ibid* pp61

³⁷⁷ Butler (1997:105)

³⁷⁸ Butler (2000:149)

oppressed, or that the psyche trumps all other conditions as the cause of one's own oppression. Indeed, sometimes the fear of these last two consequences keeps us from even posing the question of what the attachment might be to oppressive social conditions and, more particularly, oppressive definitions of the subject."

I argue, however, that Mbeki embraces the terms that injure him to *such an extent* that the excess and surplus shows the passionate attachment to the signifier, rigidly designating the signifier. Race, I argue, is not a floating signifier in his discourse but a master signifier.

Mbeki embraces terms that injure³⁷⁹ him and rigid identity politics form part of this embrace. Butler's thesis is that through the embrace of these injurious terms and through the reiteration of such norms there are possibilities for resignification. This would, I argue, involve a detaching from the signifier, race as a master signifier to embracing it rather as a 'floating signifier'. In other words, in South Africa today, it is not *a priori* a central principle of *all* social experience. It is rather, as itself, a contingent series of phenomena to be accounted for. Such detachment could undo and unsettle the passionate attachment to subjection. However, throughout Mbeki's discourse under investigation I have not been able to identify any significant signs of resignification. But Mbeki's discourse is a social one, and a social discourse is historical – it is a discourse at a particular point in time in South Africa's history (of transformation politics) who is to say that his discourse will always remain without new resignifications, that it might not take an unpredictable turn?

For now his discourse has explicated a highly predictable pattern of passionate attachment to the master signifier. Mbeki's concern over the intellectual, moral, economic and political paradigms of white people and, more particularly, how they

³⁷⁹ See Butler (1997: 96), "I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially."

view black people, shows a deep level of investment in the issue. This is clear in his discourse on HIV/Aids, for instance, where he contends that whites view blacks as animalistic and unable to control their passions.

II. Ideological fantasy

Explaining Zizek's elucidation of ideology, developed from Althusser³⁸⁰, Torfing writes, "Ideology also involves a certain form of mis or non-recognition on the parts of subjects."³⁸¹ The point is not that people possess a distorted representation of reality, since in our post-ideological society many people no longer trust ideological truths and no longer take ideological propositions seriously. The point is, rather, that even when we keep an ironical distance from totalising ideological representations, we still act according to these representations. That is to say, the illusion is not on the side of *knowledge*, but rather on the side of what people are *doing*."

As Zizek indicates³⁸² "... what they overlook, what they mis-recognise, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but they still are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion, which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion may be called the *ideological fantasy*".

Butler³⁸³ also explains "fantasy" in a similar way. "The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy – through censorship, degradation, or other means – is one strategy for providing the social

³⁸⁰ Althusser (1994:123) says, "Ideology is a representation of the imaginary relations of individuals to their real conditions of existence." He adds (1994:129) that "man is an ideological animal by nature...."

³⁸¹ Torfing (1999:116) quotes Zizek (1989:28-33)

³⁸² Torfing (1999:116)

³⁸³ Butler (2004:29)

death of persons. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting as its constitutive outside.”

Many of Žižek’s examples of “ideological fantasy” can be applied to Mbeki’s discourse. For example, Žižek argues that we know men and women are born equal, yet we continue to live in accordance with the fundamental values of patriarchy. In Mbeki’s mind, he knows there are possibilities for resignification but in his discourse, as I have shown, race identities are fixed and the social, in this way, is totalised. There are no spaces for anomalies or signs in his discourse that blacks may identify with different discourses (as may whites). But ideological fantasy is the safety net of ideology, providing the ultimate support of reality.³⁸⁴

For Žižek³⁸⁵ there is a certain enjoyment attached to ideological fantasy, in a term he refers to as “surplus-enjoyment”. What he means is that it is not a surplus that simply attaches itself to some normal fundamental enjoyment. *Enjoyment as such emerges only in this surplus* because it is constitutively an “excess”.³⁸⁶ And, if you subtract the surplus, you lose the enjoyment itself, Žižek argues. As shown in Mbeki’s “Letters from the President”, he seems to have an inability to let go of an issue but also seems to enjoy the confrontation - hence his seeking out a survey from 1940 on white attitudes towards black people, to make his point about endemic racism today.

Žižek³⁸⁷ uses examples of “the Jew”, “the black”, and the “communist conspiracy”. These separately, in different contexts and to different extents, are held responsible for the corruption of the social. In Mbeki’s case it is “the whites”, “the rich” or “the elite” and “those among us”. This is seen clearly in his response to Tutu’s criticism

³⁸⁴ Torfing (1999:117)

³⁸⁵ Žižek (1989:52)

³⁸⁶ *ibid*

³⁸⁷ Žižek (1999:117)

(as discussed in Chapter 3: The key issues of Mbeki's Presidency) where Tutu quickly becomes "the other".

Torfinn³⁸⁸ explaining Žižek's theory of ideology, points out that, "The critique of ideology as totalising and essentially reductive will fail to convince the racist, precisely because he or she enjoys being a racist. Confronted with the fact that the Jewish neighbour of a racist is in fact a poor, law abiding fellow worker, the racist might answer that this proves how good Jews are at deceiving us." The racist might not believe this answer, but it permits him or her to retain the fascinating object of enjoyment: the Jew. It follows, therefore, that in order to undermine the grip of ideology we need to account for how "ideology implies, manipulates and produces a pre-ideological enjoyment structured in fantasy". In other words, we must show the excessive properties attributed to the Jew to be nothing but a response to the constitutive impossibility of the social, which produces in advance the ultimate failure of ideology. Mbeki must show the excessive properties attached to whites, that they, for instance view blacks as animalistic unable to control their urges.

Hudson³⁸⁹ also uses Žižek's notions of fantasy and the unconscious in an analysis of applying psychoanalytical approaches to the social sciences. Using Žižek's example of anti-Semitism, Hudson applied it to aspects of South African politics. Žižek, Hudson argues, uses an example someone "who is consciously well-disposed towards Jews, but who, it is believed, nonetheless harbours profound anti-Semitic prejudices he is not consciously aware of. Are we claiming, in this case, asks Žižek, that he is not aware of how Jews really seem to him?"

³⁸⁸ Torfinn (1999:117)

³⁸⁹ Hudson presentation at a symposium at the University of the Witwatersrand: Rethinking the Social: Psychoanalytical Approaches in August 2005.

“Why do we say this of the individual? Because in this case, this individual, in his social life, via his actual social intercourse with Jews and non-Jews, ‘bears witness’, to the fact that Jews really do appear to him as ‘dangerous and unreliable’”. Here, then, is a distinction between how things “really” appear to someone as opposed to how they immediately appear in his (self) conscious experience.

Hudson argues that this is where “phantasy” fits in. “Phantasy subverts the standard objective/subjective distinction. Of course, phantasy is not ‘objective’ in the naïve sense of existing independently of the subject’s perceptions. However, it is also not ‘subjective’ in the sense of being reducible to the subject’s conscious experience. Phantasy thus belongs to the bizarre category of the ‘objective subjective’, i.e. the way things actually, objectively, seem to you even if they don’t seem that way to you. This, in other words, involves ‘a knowledge that doesn’t know itself’, an ‘unknown known’ i.e. disavowed beliefs and suppositions we are not even aware of adhering to ourselves but which are a (transcendental) condition of possibility of our conduct, in this case our ‘objective’ anti-Semitism. The phantasy is the (set of) beliefs and suppositions which have to be assumed in order for it to be possible for the subject to behave in the way it does.”

This, applied to Mbeki then, would be the “objective” fact of white racism. The fantasy is the set of beliefs and suppositions that have to be assumed for him to make his claims and assertions. Using Žižek’s theory I would argue that Mbeki’s discourse shows clearly the operation of social fantasy.

While Mbeki does not see himself as a racist – it is whites that are racists for seeing blacks in the way they do – by reiterating past norms there are no signs of resignifications in his discourse. Mbeki’s *bete noir*, the issue of stereotypes, is at the kernel of the discourse, showing the passionate attachment. Stereotypes are

dangerous, offensive and reductive, being based on generalisations and assumptions. Identities, however, are multiple and open. Assumptions about what an individual identifies with, or chooses to identify with, are just that, assumptions.

While Mbeki finds stereotyping offensive, he has, nonetheless, fallen deeply into the trap of making racial generalisations. In so doing, Mbeki embraces closed and fixed social identities. He reiterates the norms of race and perpetuates patterns of race as though they are fixed and essential. He repeats again and again the projection onto South Africa of a necessarily racialised antagonism.

Zizek³⁹⁰ argues that the stereotyping of Jews has helped to keep them a 'race apart'. In Mbeki's world, stereotyping all whites as racists, and all whites as having these excessive views of blacks, will perpetuate the norms that keep the races apart. This ties in with the notion of the "enemies of the nation", the mythical and empty characterisation of the nation and the people as one. If you step outside of this you are an enemy as pointed out in this construction by Zizek, "...the nation can only be obtained in and through the discursive construction of enemies of the nation, which are simultaneously inside and outside the nation...."³⁹¹

In Mbeki's world there are "enemies", not adversaries. This has been shown in the numerous examples discussed throughout the dissertation. His discourse does not show any distinction between adversaries and antagonists, using Mouffe's critique of Schmitt. It is Mbeki's desperate need for political unity, which drives this blurring of a crucial democratic distinction.

³⁹⁰ Zizek (1989:96)

³⁹¹ Torfing (1999:193)

Mouffe argues that, "Once we accept the necessity of the political and the impossibility of a world without antagonism, what needs to be envisioned is how it is possible *under those conditions* to create or maintain a pluralistic democratic order. Such an order is based on the distinction between 'enemy' and 'adversary'. It requires that, within the context of the political community, the opponents should be considered not as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated. We will fight against his ideas but we will not question his right to defend them."³⁹²

Mbeki makes no distinction between enemies and legitimate adversaries or critics, as indicated in his treatment of Vavi and Tutu. Those who have articulated different opinions from the ANC on the project of transformation, for example, are viewed *a priori* as a threat. When Tutu said³⁹³, "If we believe in something, then surely we will be ready to defend it rationally, hoping to persuade those opposed, to change their point of view ...We should not too quickly want to pull rank and to demand an uncritical, sycophantic, obsequious conformity", Mbeki's responded, "The Archbishop has never been a member of the ANC, and would have very little knowledge of what happens in an ANC branch..."³⁹⁴. He added that Tutu should demonstrate a "decent respect for the truth" rather than to resort to "empty rhetoric".

While social antagonism is intrinsic to the social, the way in which different views are tolerated, or not tolerated, becomes significant when characterising democracy. In a clear example of the "othering" Tutu's concerns are just defined as illegitimate, and he is then berated by Mbeki and interpellated as belonging to the "elite".³⁹⁵ In other words, you become an enemy by not following his definition of the rules of the game.

³⁹² Torfing (1999:121)

³⁹³ See Chapter 1: Introduction, the Nelson Mandela Memorial lecture in Johannesburg, 23 November 2004.

³⁹⁴ *Sunday Independent* 28 November 2004 Let's start with the facts, archbishop

³⁹⁵ The Sociology of the Public Discourse in Democratic South Africa: Shut up Mr President! ANC Today Vol.5 No.4 28 January-3 February 2005.

This illustrates the circular logic at work in the rigid definition of the People, “in the Stalinist universe; here ‘supporting the rule of the Party, is ‘rigidly’ designated’ by the term ‘People’ – it is, in the last analysis, the only feature which in all possible worlds defines People. That is why the real member of the People is only he who supports the rule of the Party; those who work against its rule are automatically excluded from the People; they become ‘enemies of the People’”.³⁹⁶ This circularity leaves no room for the recognition of problems and dislocations or their reflective analysis. Any real difference automatically becomes a threat to be repressed – not an occasion for self reflection. This “rigidity” or “circularity” thus binds Mbeki very closely to himself, to the trauma (of colonialism and apartheid) that has constituted who he is. He is bound to this “kernel of enjoyment” and must, (ie is compelled by it to) maintain and repeat the fantasmic screen projections on which it depends.

In the debate with Tutu, how could Mbeki have responded differently? Instead of attacking the archbishop, Mbeki could have shown some tolerance for differing opinions. How could Tutu have better served the democratic process? By continuing the debate, of course. Those who express different views are legitimate adversaries, necessary for expanding the democratic frontiers, not threats to the very existence of the Transformation project.

III. The Rigid Designator: is being critical unpatriotic?

Mbeki’s use of race is a circular one and as we have seen functions as a rigid designator. “... South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographical dispersion ...The

³⁹⁶ Zizek (1989:147)

second larger nation of South Africa is black and poor....”³⁹⁷ Class, in this way, is rigidly designated by race.

Mbeki, on the issue of Two Nations, creates an identification and dis-identification through the construction of two distinct and separate social identities, by racialising class and ignoring the unpatriotic black bourgeoisie. As Raymond Suttner writes, the use of binary opposites is a common barrier to understanding, setting up dichotomies that can be viewed as “prison houses”.³⁹⁸ Besides the academic literature where these prison houses are prevalent, they can also be found in “government discourse, for example, the talk of ‘two economies’, when they are in fact inextricably bound to one another, and, in using this particular dichotomy is one not taking us back to a paradigm that belongs to a less transformative discourse than we need or purport to have as our nation vision?” asks Suttner.

Cronin critiques the Two Nations Theory from the point of view of how class gets racialised in that theory, and how the parasitic bourgeoisie is neglected. He uses the terms “representative vanguardism” and “righteous vanguardism” in making his argument.³⁹⁹

Mbeki’s Two Nations Theory is the reiteration of norms, of old social and political identities, and economic dichotomies, showing none of the signs of resignifications that have now emerged. The Two Nations Theory harks back to the old dualism of development theory in which no interdependence is recognised.

Mbeki’s theory is inadequate as a description of the economic climate of South Africa. He maintains the illusion that there continues to be a strict divide between black and white on the basis of wealth, locked in his fantasy and ignoring the

³⁹⁷ Mbeki (1998:68)

³⁹⁸ Suttner (2005) Harold Wolpe Memorial Lecture presented in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town: Talking to the Ancestors: National Heritage, the Freedom Charter and nation-building in South Africa in 2005

³⁹⁹ Cronin (2005) Paper: The People shall govern – class struggles and the post-1994 state in SA

emerging black middle class⁴⁰⁰ as well as the new black millionaire class. The end result is the same: Mbeki constructs, or reconstructs, two nations on the basis of race rather than bringing to the fore the actual and real nuanced complexities of poverty and unemployment⁴⁰¹ where race intersects with class.

Mbeki's discourse in the "Letters from the President" is also an antagonistic one which shows the excessive passion invested in race. In many of these letters, there is a reconstruction of political identities on the basis of race as well as the ascribing of racism to a particular group. For instance, he invokes enemies of the nation. "As we would expect, there are some in our society who are opposed to these changes. These have fought all along the way and on all fronts to defeat the transformation agenda, in an effort to preserve as much as they can of the racially and gender based privileges of the past."⁴⁰² Here is a presupposition of enemies, as Mbeki sees it, opposing transformation. "There are some in our society" is a very typical way for Mbeki to express himself, showing how he does not tolerate other views easily.

In another example, Mbeki writes about "the fishers of corrupt men"⁴⁰³. "We should not and will not abandon the offensive to defeat the insulting campaigns further to entrench a stereotype that has, for centuries, sought to portray Africans as a people that is corrupt, given to lies, prone to theft and self-enrichment by immoral means, a people that is otherwise contemptible in the eyes of the 'civilised'. We must expect that, as usual, our opponents will accuse us of playing the race card, to stop us confronting the challenge of racism. The fishers of corrupt men are determined to prove everything in the anti-African stereotype." The surplus/excess in this statement

⁴⁰⁰ Southall (2005:189) discusses the changing power elite in SA, "Nine black men were rated by the *Financial Mail* as amongst the 20 most influential people in South African business at the end of 2003 ... In contrast, no blacks had made it into the top 20 when a comparable list was produced in 1993."

⁴⁰¹ Buhlungu and Webster (2005:249) in a chapter on Work restructuring and the future of labour in South Africa noted that South Africa's unemployment rate has steadily increased from 1 912 471 in 1990 (unemployment rate of 15.91%) to 4 789 582 in 2002 (unemployment rate of 30.51%).

⁴⁰² Letter from the President ANC Today Vol.1 No.23 29 June – 5 July 2001

⁴⁰³ Letter from the President ANC Today Vol. 3 No.21 30 May – 5 June 2003

shows Mbeki's enjoyment in portraying that whites perceive blacks in this horrendous way. It is a violent and reflexive turn to norms of the past.

Mbeki burns the midnight oil firing off these missives. The Letters contain a careful harnessing of the facts and a constant harking back to the days of oppression. Many political writers and social commentators, both black and white, have noticed this too. While some critics have backed down from challenging Mbeki, others have not, demonstrating a commitment to deepen democracy and the role of civil society.⁴⁰⁴

Examples of such challenges, which show the possibilities for resignification, emanate from wide range of sources, including Drew Forrest, Rhoda Kadalie, Thandwa Mthembu, Devan Pillay, Barney Mthombothi, Zakes Mda and Mark Gevisser. Each articulates a different criticism of the Mbeki transformation project, but in my view they all reach a similar conclusion – Mbeki's style of political leadership fits neatly into the concept of the rigid designator.

Forrest⁴⁰⁵, deputy-editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, wrote, "The late newspaper editor Ken Owen once described President Thabo Mbeki's political skills as 'pathetic'. He could not have been more wrong. Mbeki has outstanding gifts for instilling sheep-like obeisance in his party and neutralizing and cutting down to size perceived or real opponents. As a political street fighter, whose business is winning, holding and building power, he is formidable. In Parliament this week he showed why his sway over the African National Congress remains unchallenged despite the many mistakes he has made in his four years at the top. One could have heard an order paper drop during his quiet, disdainful, slightly unctuous reply to the State of the Nation debate,

⁴⁰⁴ Laclau and Mouffe (1985:181) make convincing arguments about the importance of the "plurality of subjects" and the proliferation of radically new and different political spaces. Zizek (2004: 103) says, "...psychoanalysis advocates an independent civil society, political pluralism, a social life in which dissent and a sceptical attitude towards official ideas are tolerated ..."

⁴⁰⁵ *Mail & Guardian* 21 February 2003 [Mbeki goes for the jugular](#)

delivered in the manner of a headmaster at a school assembly ... Mbeki is a fearsome debater, expert at harnessing selected facts to his case, brushing aside opponents without engaging them and reversing moral onus on to his accusers. He also has an instinct for the jugular.” The universal complaint that Mbeki’s State of the Nation address had all but eluded the pressing national issues of HIV/Aids and Zimbabwe was ‘puzzling’, Forrest said. The only possible solution to this mystery was that some had not read the speech. The “beating of the drums”, Forrest suspected, stemmed from differences with the policies of the government “rather than an economy of words on our part”. One might have thought half of his speech had been devoted to these two pressing national issues instead of the lone paragraph devoted to each. And, lest anyone mistake his terseness on Aids for contrition about past error, Mbeki slipped in a defiant line about “the entire spectrum of diseases of poverty and under-development included those associated with immune deficiency”, wrote Forrest.

Here Forrest captures the essence of Mbeki’s political style and how he relates to criticism. He also shows that Mbeki is adept at “harnessing selected facts to his case...” ie into the frame of his fantasy.

According to sociologist Devan Pillay⁴⁰⁶, “A narrow focus on race obscures a more meaningful approach to dealing with the challenges facing South Africa.”

He tells his story, “Recently a student came into my office and strongly objected to the use of racial categories in class discussions. ‘I do not see race’, she insisted and therefore refused to look at people in racial terms’. Is it now the case that black people are reasserting race because they stand to benefit, while whites seek a denial of race because it has become more expedient? The latter charge can certainly stick

⁴⁰⁶ *Sunday Times* 26 June 2005 Class at the heart of the national question.

to the seasoned politicians of the DA and their older supporters. Their objections to affirmative action and black economic empowerment, based on free market solutions that in effect lock in current privilege, ring hollow. However, we should be extremely cautious about laying the same charge at the door of young whites. There seems to be an increasing number of young people, eager to embrace the 'rainbow nation', who wish to do away with race classification altogether. How do we reconcile such attitudes, which resonate profoundly with the non-racial principles of our struggle for liberation, with the need to address the persistence of inequality in most spheres of social life? If affirmative action and economic empowerment were primarily class based as opposed to race-based, then meaningful inroads into the 'two South Africa's' will be made. The vast majority of the poor are black. By focusing redress mechanisms on the poor (for example skills development, or university admission, among others), we can minimize the 're-racialisation' of our public discourse and still reach black people primarily."

The questions Pillay poses and the issues he raises are at the core of the question of the transformation in South Africa. For him, while racial and ethnic sensibilities are real, the "fundamental issue remains poverty and class inequality..." Pillay makes two salient points that could be directed to Mbeki. The first point is to exercise caution in generalising about "whites" and not insist that a group, by virtue of the colour of its skin, will be given to homogenous views. The second is that there could be a focus on delivery to the poor, instead of employing racial terms, which could have the effect of "re-racialisation".

Human rights activist and political commentator Rhoda Kadalie⁴⁰⁷ agrees. "When powerful, highly trained black men blame racism for their failures they are no different

⁴⁰⁷ *Business Day* 20 May 2005 The point is delivery, not the race of the deliverer

to Robert Mugabe, who after 20 years of misrule still blames colonialism for his dictatorship and political failures.

“To deny racism is like denying that the sky is blue ...the time has come for us to take responsibility for our own destiny – or are we forever going to inhabit the citadel of ‘victimhood’ and give substance to the saying that democracy gives everyone the right to be his or her own oppressor?” Kadalie’s perception and use of the term “victimhood”, has the resonances of Butler’s love of the shackles, and this applies to Mbeki too. Mbeki constantly makes reflexive turns to conditions of oppression of the past. He constantly reiterates norms, and constantly embraces the terms that injure him.

Is being critical being unpatriotic? Editor of the *Financial Mail*, Barney Mthombothi, in an editorial, is critical of the prevailing culture of silence among black intellectuals. He writes that “black intellectuals have been co-opted”⁴⁰⁸ and their silence is due to the tendency, he writes, quoting author Zakes Mda, to “deify post colonial leaders and turn a blind eye to their wrong doings because they had suffered ... on our behalf, they deserve some reward for their trouble”. Mthombothi argues that black intellectuals are also silent because they are wary of being too critical of the government lest they be labelled unpatriotic, or worse, be sidelined when it comes to “lapping in the black empowerment trough”.

By and large, Mthombothi is correct that there is silence from black intellectuals, however, there are also many intellectuals who do challenge the *status quo*, as I have shown already.

⁴⁰⁸ *Financial Mail* 4 February 2005 Editorial

A further example of this is the viewpoint of the vice-principal of the University of the Witwatersrand, Thandwa Mthembu⁴⁰⁹, who highlights the complex nature of South Africa's transformation. Using an Nguni expression, *Inyoni yakhela ngamaqubu enye*⁴¹⁰, he makes a convincing argument about transformation and universities. He asserts that transformation has become a more complex process since the 1990s, when it was mainly quantitative.

What has become clear for him is that equitable representation alone does not ensure meaningful and sustainable transformation at a university – there is the need for improved management of resources, the quality of academic and research offerings, the establishment of an international identity and so forth. “South Africa wants to be a successful nation in the global village ... Rising to this challenge will require quality, efficiency and delivery. Indigenous knowledge and human capital have to be mixed with whatever global knowledge and human capital is available.”

The same issues of transformation at universities are confronted in the transformation project of the country. Mthembu's argument shows possibilities for resignification, it shows that he thinks that new conditions require new ways of looking at issues. But as shown in Mbeki's discourse throughout this dissertation, too much energy is expended on pursuing wretchedness.

The intellectuals and commentators, mainly black, have been quoted here to indicate that it is wrong to suppose that there is a homogeneous “black view” of race, racism or transformation in the country. They also illustrate the challenges, especially among blacks, to the *status quo* and to the ideological way in which Mbeki uses race. And

⁴⁰⁹ *Sunday Times* 21 August 2005 Transformation cannot be the exclusive preserve of black people.

⁴¹⁰ “A bird builds its nest using other birds' feathers.”

they all assert the point that to reduce the problems in South Africa to race is both dangerous and disingenuous.

Journalist Mark Gevisser⁴¹¹, in an unpublished biography on Mbeki, writes that Mbeki has a fervour to do good in Africa, not just because he despises the idea of a hopeless black continent, but because his “extreme prickliness about racism makes him long to ‘redeem’ Africa in the world’s eyes”. This again shows the passionate attachment to race at work.

IV. Ideology and the Gaze

Zizek⁴¹², in a chapter entitled *Che Vuoi?*, explains “ideological quilting”. Using the Lacanian *point de caption*, Zizek argues that within different political contexts there will be different “floating signifiers” that form a quilt of ideology, and the fixed meanings emerging from the nodal points. In other words, there will be one signifier that effects identity and within that particular context, unifies a given field, giving it meaning, and constituting identity.⁴¹³

Race, evinced from this dissertation, unifies the field of social discourse for Mbeki, and is the master signifier in his discourse. Race is used to fix meaning. In other words, if you are white, you will think of blacks as sexual beasts. If you do not support fully the views of the ANC, or Mbeki’s views, you are anti-transformation. And, as we have seen, this opposition takes on a racial tinge. Zizek’s rigid designator aims at that “impossible kernel, at what is ‘in an object more than the object’, at this surplus produced by the signifying operation ... and the crucial point to grasp is the connection between the radical contingency of naming and the logic of emergence of

⁴¹¹ Gevisser quoted in *The Economist* January 22 2005 [A man of two faces.](#)

⁴¹² Zizek (1989)

⁴¹³ Zizek (1989:95).

the 'rigid designator' through which a given object achieves its identity".⁴¹⁴ The surplus/excess has been shown in numerous examples in Mbeki's discourse, from Two Nations theory, where race is rigidly designated, to HIV/AIDS where race is the master signifier.

A brief note on "unconscious" is necessary before I continue. In a paper⁴¹⁵, Hudson explains, the unconscious as "objectively subjective", which, he writes, "shatters distinctions in the social sciences which seem always to being pulled in two contradictory, even antagonistic, directions: either towards the social as 'objective' i.e. external to the dimension of subjective autonomy, or as 'subjective' i.e. as reducible – in a more or less transparent and mediated way – to the *sui generis* initiatives of just such a subject. In addition, this conception of the unconscious is ontologically light: it is, that is to say whittled down to how things must (for reasons of transcendental logic) seem (objectively) to the subject even if they don't appear that way to the (same) subject. This conception (of the unconscious) is thus minimally freighted with ontological assumptions and is at the antipodes of any substantialisation or hypostatisation."

Zizek argues that the effect of "quilting" occurs only when a certain inversion takes place, producing a surplus.⁴¹⁶ Thus although Mbeki denies he projects essentialised racial antagonism on South Africa, it must be assumed he does, in order to be able to account for his discourse. To explain quilting, Zizek uses the example of anti-Semitism. "Jew" appears as a signifier connoting a cluster of supposedly effective properties – sly, greedy for gain and so forth. "But this is not yet anti-Semitism proper. To achieve that we must invert the relation and say they are like that *because*

⁴¹⁴ Zizek (1989:96)

⁴¹⁵ Hudson: Introductory comments in Rethinking the Social: Psychoanalytical Approaches August 2005.

⁴¹⁶ Zizek (1989:96)

they are Jews."⁴¹⁷ The appearance of tautology is false, Žizek explains, because "Jew" in 'because they are Jews' does not connote a series of effective properties, it refers to ... what is 'in Jew more than Jew'. In other words, what is the surplus or the excess? The rigid designator aims then at finding that "impossible-real kernel" at what is in an object more than the object,⁴¹⁸ and is therefore constitutively protected against empirical challenge.

"The crucial step in the analysis of an ideological edifice is thus to detect, behind the sizzling splendour of the element which holds it together this self-referential, tautological, performative operation. A 'Jew', for example, is in the last resort one who is stigmatised with the signifier 'Jew'; all the phantasmic richness of the traits supposed to characterize Jews (avidity, the spirit of intrigue, and so on) is here to conceal not the fact that 'Jews are not really like that', not the empirical reality of Jews, but the fact that in the anti-Semitic construction of a 'Jew', we are concerned with a purely structural function. The properly ideological dimension is there the effect of a certain 'error of perspective'."⁴¹⁹

Mbeki despises stereotyping people yet constantly turns back to the old stereotypes of black people as constructed by white people a century ago, to argue that whites are racists. There are rigid designators in Mbeki's discourse. First, he uses the same sort of inversion process of "logic" in the way he argues about how whites view blacks. Whites view them as "depraved, animalistic" ...*because they are black.*⁴²⁰ In turn, Mbeki views whites as having those particular views about blacks *because they are white*. Here is the surplus/excess in his discourse. This is clear in the "Letters from the President" and in the debate over HIV/Aids. Just as there was a paranoid

⁴¹⁷ ibid pp96

⁴¹⁸ ibid pp97

⁴¹⁹ Žizek (1989:99)

⁴²⁰ See the discussion on HIV/Aids in Chapter 5.

racist construction in Nazism of the Jew, in South Africa today, Mbeki constructs the notion of the white (as one which despises blacks).

According to Dennis Goldberg, in racial discourse, “what is circulated and exchanged is not simply truth but truth-claims or representations”.⁴²¹ He discusses racial discourse, asking how it differs from other discursive fields, such as gender, nation or class. Goldberg⁴²² argues that the unity of racialised discourse is not given in any purportedly ahistorical durability of race or racism; instead “the discourse of race transforms – arises and alters, and perhaps will eventually disintegrate – both with actual society conditions and with conceptual reformulations, with implicative redirection. The overall coherence of racialised expression and the racist project rather turns on the pre-conceptual elements structuring dispositions and the drawing of implications. These elements include classification⁴²³, order, value, and hierarchy, differentiation and identity, discrimination and identification; exclusion, domination, subjection, and subjugation; as well as entitlement and restriction”.

Like Butler, Žižek and Mouffe, Goldberg argues that identities can change because they depend on discourse. Thus identity is contingent. Discourse is social and does not have to be fixed because it is not ahistorical. It is through the recognition of contingency and through the unpredictable ways in which norms can be repeated that possibilities lie for resignifications. I have argued that these have been far and few between in Mbeki's discourse, thus far.

⁴²¹ In an essay Truth, Reference and the Pragmatics of (racial) Meaning (1999:232)

⁴²² Goldberg (1999: 234)

⁴²³ The impulse to classify goes back to at least Aristotle times but it was only during the Enlightenment that it was established as a fundament of scientific methodology. With its catalogues, indices, and inventories, classification establishes an ordering of data ...but it also claims to reflect the natural order of things, writes Goldberg (1999:234).

V. The Gaze

"I will not keep quiet while others whose minds have been corrupted by the disease of racism accuse us, the black people of South Africa, Africa and the world, as being, by virtue of our Africanness and skin colour, lazy, liars, foul smelling, diseased, corrupt, violent, amoral, sexually depraved, animalistic, savage and rapists ... Whites regard blacks as sexual beasts, unable to control our urges, unable to keep our legs crossed, unable to keep it in our pants," said Mbeki⁴²⁴ in October 2004 during a parliamentary debate on HIV/Aids.

Mbeki makes a violent turn (against whites by conferring on them such views, and on blacks, by repeating these norms) in the above excerpt in asserting that whites view blacks as savage and depraved sexual beasts. What kind of a gaze is this?

As Zizek's ⁴²⁵ points out, "...the fact that imaginary identification is always identification *on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other*".⁴²⁶ To explain what he means by this, he uses three examples⁴²⁷: Charlie Chaplin, Charles Dickens and Stalin. He cites how Eisenstein noted that in Chaplin's films there was nothing of the usual sweetness in how children are treated. Instead there is a vicious, humiliating attitude to children. They are teased, taunted and mocked for their failures.⁴²⁸ The argument he makes is this: from which point of view must we look at children so they appear to us as objects of teasing and mocking, not as gentle creatures in need of protection? The answer to Zizek is obvious: from the gaze of children themselves. "Only children

⁴²⁴ See Chapter on HIV/AIDS for the full reference

⁴²⁵ Using the Lacanian explanation (as opposed to the Derridean one) of what "the gaze" is, Zizek (1992:125) writes, "I can never see the picture at the point from which it is gazing at me, i.e. the eye and the gaze are constitutively asymmetrical. The gaze as object is a stain preventing me from looking at the picture from a safe, 'objective' distance, from enframing it as something that is at my grasping view's disposal. The gaze is, so to speak, a point at which the very frame (of my view) is already inscribed in the 'content' of the picture viewed."

⁴²⁶ Zizek (1989:106)

⁴²⁷ *ibid* pp107

⁴²⁸ *ibid*, p107

themselves treat their fellows this way; sadistic distance towards children thus implies the symbolic identification with the gaze of children themselves.”⁴²⁹

Using the Chaplin illustration: how and from where is Mbeki looking at blacks? He can only do it from the gaze of white people. It seems as though he cannot break free from this ideological trap. Even in his letter on “Be Positive Day”⁴³⁰, he has to invoke white racism when he talks of how whites have left the country. Mbeki’s excessive statements make them ideologically fantasmic and shows “enjoyment” in excess.

Later Žizek⁴³¹ asks, “what if ...evil resides in the very gaze that perceives that evil?” In light of this, how do we read Mbeki’s statement, “...as being, by virtue of our Africanness and skin colour, lazy, liars, foul smelling, diseased, corrupt, violent, amoral, sexually depraved, animalistic, savage and rapist ... Whites regard blacks as sexual beasts, unable to control our urges ...”⁴³²

The Dickens example Žizek uses also illustrates ideological fantasy. At the opposite extreme [to the Chaplin example], he writes, “we find the Dickensian admiration of the ‘good common people’, the imaginary identification with their poor but happy, close, unspoiled world, free of the cruel struggle for power and money. But, (and therein lies the falsity of Dickens) from where is the Dickensian gaze peering at the ‘good common people’ so that they appear likeable; from where if not from the point of view of the corrupted world of power and money?”⁴³³

In Žizek’s third example; Stalin’s elevation of the dignity of the working people is an idealised image staged for the gaze of the ruling party, which served to legitimate

⁴²⁹ *ibid*, p107

⁴³⁰ Letter from the President: South Africans have reason to be positive ANC Today, Vol.1 No.42 2-8 November 2001

⁴³¹ Žizek (1994:180)

⁴³² See chapter on HIV/Aids.

⁴³³ Žizek (1989:107).

their rule. An example of “the Gaze” in Mbeki’s discourse is exemplified in the following example, from Hogarth’s column in the *Sunday Times*, Mbeki conducts an aerial survey⁴³⁴, which also shows Zizek’s notion of impossibility⁴³⁵, “Remember how President Thabo Mbeki exposed unemployment statistics by not seeing queues of unemployed people from his car window?⁴³⁶ Well, he’s done it again. This time, the President discovered that South Africa was divided between rich and poor by taking a chopper ride to Groblersdal on Tuesday. The *Sowetan* quoted the President thus: ‘I had the opportunity to see the country from the air. I saw where the rich white people live and next to it where the poor black people live.’ Mbeki did not reveal how he knew the race of the occupants of the houses.” Zizek would argue that there is an “impossibility” in this gaze because the subject is already present in his conception, rendering it subjective.

In the same month, August 2005, Mbeki criticised rich white property “golfing estate” developments in the “gated communities” of Dainfern, north of Sandton. The *Mail & Guardian*,⁴³⁷ published a picture of ANC secretary-general Kgalema Motlanthe’s house⁴³⁸ in a similar community, saying Motlanthe must have been “sweating” after Mbeki fired his broadside about the boomed areas.

⁴³⁴ *Sunday Times* 14 August 2005 Mbeki conducts an aerial survey.

⁴³⁵ The gaze, for Zizek (1997:16), is “impossible” and not objective. “The gaze, by means of which, the subject is already present at the act of his/her conception.”

⁴³⁶ Hogarth (*Sunday Times* 14 August 2005 Mbeki conducts an aerial survey) refers to Mbeki questioning Statistics South Africa data on unemployment statistics in May 2005. (<http://www.finance24.com>) Mbeki said it was “difficult to get an accurate picture of the job situation in the country... This is not to question the fact that we have a high unemployment rate. Precisely because of this, it is necessary that our collective response should be correctly focused, based on the real situation rather than perceptions.”

South Africa’s labour market statistics collected and published by Stats SA, which uses the International Labour Organisation’s definition of unemployment, and according to Stats SA there were 4.4-million unemployed in SA in March 2004. Mbeki said that this “is such a large number of people that nobody could possibly have missed the millions that would be in the streets and village paths ‘actively looking for work’.” He added: “It therefore seems quite unlikely that the Stats SA figure is correct ...”

⁴³⁷ *Mail & Guardian* 19-25 August 2005 Streets paved with gold.

⁴³⁸ The cost of the Blue Valley estate (Motlanthe’s “gated community”) is described as “a location under the African sky second to none in the Gauteng area” – prices range from R1.9-million to R2.9-million, while “green fees” for the Gary Player designed golf course are R2 800 annually. Motlanthe said in response to the Mbeki criticism of gated areas: “I think the President was just making a general point.” <http://SouthAfrica.blogspirit.com/archive/2005/08>.

Mbeki spoke of the urgent challenge of “bringing to a stop the pro-rich housing development strategies that ensure that all the best facilities are always available to the rich; a situation where the best land is allocated especially to create gated communities and golf estates, where the poor can only access dusty semi-development land far away from modern infrastructure”.⁴³⁹ In his over-arching, sweeping gaze about rich whites in this community, Mbeki missed the significant number of Motlanthes’ in South Africa.

Mbeki questions the high unemployment rate in the country, but what is such questioning based on? Mbeki’s “gaze” does not see queues of unemployed people standing in the streets, yet he asserts that our response to unemployment “should be correctly focused, based on the real situation rather than perceptions”.⁴⁴⁰

From a close examination of Mbeki’s discourse over time and from a wide range of topics, such as African Renaissance, Nepad, BEE, Two Nations Theory, HIV/Aids, among others, several conclusions emerge.

There is an excessive emphasis on race in his discourse, showing a passionate attachment to this signifier. This has been established from the patterns that have emerged, of a determinate sort, in the way the signifier “race” is deployed in his discourse – in the meanings he gives to it and how these are distributed, in its rigidity or circularity. Race, then also functions as a rigid designator in his discourse. It is the master signifier, in which all other meanings are fixed to race, or the way in which a series of signifiers is totalised.

⁴³⁹ <http://SouthAfrica.blogspot.com/archive/2005/08>.

⁴⁴⁰ <http://www.finance24.com>.

Many of his pronouncements on race are also based on the need for political unity, where whites, and those with other views on transformation, are viewed with suspicion, and are antagonists rather than tolerated as legitimate adversaries. No distinction is made between enemies and adversaries, thus showing that race is rigidly designated. This, I have argued, has negative implications for democracy.

The emergent pattern is that of constant reflexive turns to conditions of oppression, for instance, poverty in his discourse on HIV/Aids, as well as to the days of slavery and colonialism in his discussions on Nepad and the African Renaissance. For instance, in the letter written on “Be Positive Day”⁴⁴¹, Mbeki makes a mockery of “being positive” by making a violent and melancholic turn to contemptuously deriding whites who have emigrated. His pursuit of wretchedness, and his constant fall into the Hegelian Unhappy Consciousness, using Butlerian terminology, is unerring.

The last conclusion is a two-fold one. Mbeki is passionately concerned about what whites think about blacks, and this is a stumbling block for possibilities of resignification. This blockage prevents the reiteration of norms by the subject in unpredictable ways, creating new possibilities for the future. The subject’s passionate attachment to the signifier, race is at the root of his obsession about whites’ perceptions of blacks. Finally, then, why should what whites think about blacks matter so much?

While the findings of this research compel the conclusion that there are no signs of resignification in Mbeki’s discourse, nevertheless, as Butler *et al* say, resignification is possible. In this subject’s case, it would require, for instance, detaching from the master signifier, race. But what is that moment of possibility that triggers change? It could be a dramatic event or some “objective truth” for example, where a scientist

⁴⁴¹ Letter from the President: South Africans have reason to be positive ANC Today, Vol.1 No.42 2-8 November 2001

wedded to a particular theory, suddenly abandons it, in light of new concrete evidence. It could be a dramatic event, the loss of a loved one or a *positive* spiritual experience or social ritual. Notwithstanding the above forlorn conclusions, signs have emerged at the very end of this period of research that Mbeki may be going through a process of resignification. In his State of the Nation address 3 February 2006⁴⁴², he made no reference to race, emphasizing instead growth of the economy, reducing unemployment through infrastructural development, governance and administration issues that would propel delivery of local government, skills development, among other priorities, such as, land and justice issues. He also referred to a recent Markinor survey⁴⁴³, which showed that South Africa has three times more optimists than pessimists and ranked 8th in the world on the optimism index, that 65% of the people believed that the country was moving in the right direction and that 84% think that the country holds a happy future for all racial groups. By not ignoring such a survey, Mbeki is showing some detachment from the signifier, race. Similarly, in an interview with the SABC⁴⁴⁴ soon after his State of the Nation address, he indicated that if skills development meant bringing back retired white Afrikaners back into the public service to mentor, then this is what should happen. It is, perhaps not insignificant that in this interview when asked about the possibility of a third term of office, he responded, "By the end of 2009 I would have been in a senior position in government for 15 years, and I think that's too long."

For the first time Mbeki was unequivocal about this issue and reconciled to this fact. The loss of power which the end of his term necessarily entails, and the fact that South Africans seem very much less concerned about the signifier, race, than he might have supposed, might be the reason for his process of resignification. The

⁴⁴² State of the Nation address: Source: <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06020310531001.htm>; accessed 12 February 2006

⁴⁴³ <http://www.Markinor.co.za> accessed 12 February 2006

⁴⁴⁴ <http://www.dfc.gov.za/docs/speeches/2006/Mbek0205.htm>; accessed 12 February 2006. "These are names and CVs supplied, for instance, by the Freedom Front and other people who say that here are people, many of them retired, not pushed out of a job, but who are ready to work and they are ready to come back."

efflux ion of time alone will reveal whether such a process is indeed underway. That, however, is necessarily beyond the scope of this dissertation and could be the subject of further fruitful research. As Zizek *et al* have said democracy is constantly evolving and political theory and practice should never entirely abandon utopianism.⁴⁴⁵ For Mbeki, as the “Prince” in the drama of South African politics, the moment of possibility seems imminent, and if indeed this is the case, it might well bring about a more engaging and liberating passionate attachment.

⁴⁴⁵ Zizek (2004: 179) quoting Martin Luther re “ ‘recognizing the rose of the sublime in the cross of everyday vulgarity’, is not to mystify the existing reality, to paint it with false colours, but quite the contrary: to summon up the strength to translate the sublime (utopian) vision into everyday practice – in short, to *practice* utopia”.