

Coloureds - Ctil Betwixt and Between?

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The ways of thinking about race and purity that the apartheid system developed in South Africa has far from dismantled with the official dismantlement of apartheid rule in 1994. Through fieldwork among a group of young men and women in the coloured township Manenberg, over a 5-year period, I gained insight into what the apartheid classification “coloured” means for their perceptions of themselves today. The new hybrid constructions of identity in South Africa post-apartheid, which challenge the former fixity of identities and undermine the cultural hierarchy and imposed ethnicities, are intertwined with class and consumption in a myriad of ways. In Manenberg, outside of Cape Town in the Western Cape, the young men and women are at the intersection of class and (former) classification. The implementation of apartheid legislation over 46 years profoundly influenced South Africans’ definition of communities and of persons, especially in local township contexts. (Adhikari 2005, Norval 1996, Salo 2003, Wasserman and Jacobs 2003, Zegeye 2001). The external categorizations became self-identifications for the individuals belonging to the different groups. Stereotypes became internalized and passed on to the next generation in complex ways. Black Africans and coloureds, physically separated in townships during the 60’s and 70’s, remain there today, save a small minority who have had the resources to move out and up the socio-economic ladder. Even though the young generation in Manenberg have not experienced this period, they too share daily life and experiences primarily with people who look like themselves: 97 percent of the approximately 80.000 people living in Manenberg are coloured. This generation grew up listening to their parents complain about the political situation in the country, post-apartheid: “*Before we weren’t white enough, today we’re not even black enough*”. The young people do not call themselves “so-called coloureds” in defiance of the imposed racial categorization during apartheid rule, they do not vote or take political action in a rainbow nation where, as they put it: “*there is no brown in that rainbow, anyway*”. In this paper, I wish to present my findings and discuss the implications of the estrangement from the “so-called” multiracial democracy of this group of young people.