NATIONS WITH/OUT BORDERS:
neoliberalism and the problem of belonging in Africa, and beyond

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Anthropologists are fond of stories and riddles. The stranger, the more puzzling they are, the better. So let us first pose a riddle, then tell a story.

The riddle: What might the Nuer, a remote tribe in the Southern Sudan, have to do with Carl Schmitt, the noted German philosopher, a notorious apologist for Nazism, and, of late, one of the most quoted social theorists in the English-speaking world? For their part, the Nuer are famous among anthropologists, not least because, in the 1940s, they were held to pose an epistemic challenge to received Western political theory (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940:4). This was largely owed to the fact that they had a political system without government. According to Evans-Pritchard (1940a, 1940b), their storied ethnographer, they lived in "ordered anarchy": a state-of-being without a state to rule over them. In this respect, they were the archetype of so-called "acephalous" African political systems, systems that were later to be evoked, by Michael Barkun (1968) and others, in efforts to account for the segmentary oppositions on which the fragile coherence of the cold-war world system sustained itself. *Contra* Hobbes, order here did not congeal in offices or institutions, in courts or constabularies, in finite territories or fixed geogra-

phical borders. It inhered, rather, in *virtual* grammars of action encoded in the idiom of kinship: in an immanent socio-logic of fission and fusion, of relative social distance, that brought people together or forced them apart in situations of conflict. Thus, if a homicide occurred within the "tribe," it was dealt with by established means of self-help and retribution; if they occurred beyond its margins, what followed was warfare between polities.

Practically-speaking, though, those boundaries between inside and out were renegotiated, dialectically – they were objectified and made real – in the process of dealing with the very transgressions that breached them. The Nuer polity, then, was a field of potential action, conjured by the need to distinguish between allies and antagonists, law and war.

Which is where Carl Schmitt comes in. In the *Concept of the Political* (1996), Schmitt portrays politics, Nuer-like, as a pragmatic matter of the will to make life-or-death distinctions between friend and enemy. In other words, as a matter of making order by drawing lines. Of inscribing the political in collective identities, at once physical and metaphysical, carved as much out of the logic of who we are *not* as who we are; indeed, of entailing the one in the other, and both in the affective, sublime act of arriving at unequivocal oppositions when they count. Like those, for example, between theologico-civilizations caught up in an apocalyptic clash

between the good and the bad in the ugly days after 9/11; days in which the planet was terrified by uncertainty because it was so uncertain about terror, specifically, by its capacity to ambiguate formerly clear axes of global geopolitics; days in which US came to spell not just the United States but "us." As Evans-Pritchard might have said of the Nuer, in an orderly world, in a world of absolutes, everything is relative since all things are relatives. Except those who are not, who fall beyond the law, beyond the ethical margin, and who, therefore, are to be excised, outlawed, or, *in extremis*, unsacrificially disposed of (cf. Agamben 1998). Order, in short, is wrought from disorder, political existence from anarchy, by virtue of drawing the line. It is at that line that the riddle is resolved: that line where the Nuer and Schmitt meet, there to agree on the inscription of the normative in a grammar of difference, made manifest by enacting boundaries at once existential, ethical, and legal – and-, as we shall see, immanently violent.

THE FIRE, LAST TIME

So much for the riddle, to which we shall return. Now for the story. It is about a fire, about aliens, about a nation-in-the-making, and about its borders, both internal and external. At is also about a world in which borders in general are becoming ever more enigmatic and troublesome. It is a tale we have told before, but one

we felt compelled to revisit in light of recent events, which reveal how it was, in fact, haunted by its own future. The story raises a host of questions: What might disasters – natural and otherwise – tell us about the architecture of twenty-first century nation-states? How might the sudden flash of catastrophe illuminate the meaning of borders and the politics of belonging? And to what extent are those two things, borders and belonging, morphing – along with the substance of citizenship, sovereignty, and national integrity – in this, the neoliberal age, one often associated with states of emergency? These questions have a number of deeper historical implications hidden in them. But we are running ahead of ourselves. Let us title our tale...

Apocalypse, African Style

The millennium passed in South Africa without incident; this despite public fears, before the event, of murderous violence and mass destruction. Then, two weeks later, Cape Town caught fire. On a hot, dry Saturday, the veld flared up in a number of places across the greater metropolitan area. High winds carried walls of flame up its mountain spine, threatening historic homes and squatter settlements alike. As the bush continued to burn, helicopters dumped ton after ton of water on it. Round-the-clock reports told horrific tales of beasts grilled alive, of churches incinerated, of vineyards razed-

. The city sweltered beneath a blanket of smoke as ash rained down on its boulevards and beaches.

In total, 9,000 hectares burned. The mountains smouldered sullenly for weeks. So did the tempers of the populace. Blame flew in many directions, none of them politically random. Fire is endemic to the region. But, being of calamitous proportions, this one raised fears about the very survival of the natural kingdom at the Cape. Its livid scars evoked elemental anxieties, saturating public discourse as it called forth an almost obsessive desire to construe it as an apocalyptic omen, an indictment, a call to arms. The divinations that ensued – in the streets, the media, the halls of government – laid bear the complex *social* ecology whence the conflagration itself had sprung, casting a sharp light on the state of a nation then barely six years old.

Apocalypse, we noted at the time, eventually dissolves into history. Therein, to borrow Mike Davis's (1995) phrase, lies the "dialectic of ordinary disaster." Thus, while early discussion of the fire was wild and contested, it reduced, in time, to a dominant interpretation, one that, while not universal, drew enough consensus to authorize strong state action and broad civic collaboration. Here, clearly, was an "ideology-in-the-making." As such, it played upon an implicit landscape of affect and anxiety, inclusion and intrusion, prosperity and loss. Via a clutch of charged references, it linked

the fire to other public concerns, concerns about citizenship and identity, about organic society and common humanity, about boundaries and their violation, at the heart of contemporary nationhood. But its efficacy in this respect rested, first, on producing a plausible explanation for the extent of the blaze.

Initially, carelessness or arson were suspected – the latter pointing to a campaign of urban terror attributed to Muslim fundamentalism that had gripped the Cape long before 9/11.[1] Then the discourse abruptly changed direction, alighting on an etiology that took hold with unusual force: whatever sparked it, the catastrophic scale of the fire was blamed on alien plants, plants that burn more readily and fiercely than does native vegetation. Outrage against those plants grew quickly. Landowners who had allowed them to spread were denounced for putting the population, and its "natural heritage," at risk.[2]

Note: "natural heritage." Heritage has become a construct to conjure with as global markets and mass migration erode the distinctive wealth of nations, forcing them to redefine their sense of patrimony. And its material worth. A past mayor of Cape Town, for example, was wont to describe Table Mountain as a “national asset” whose value is "measured by every visitor it attracts."[3] Not coincidentally, South Africa was then engaged in a bid to have the Cape Peninsula declared a World Heritage Site in recognition of its

unparalleled biodiversity. This heritage is embodied, above all, in *fynbos* (Afrikaans, "fine bush").[4] These small-leaved evergreens that cover the mountainous uplands and coastal forelands of the region have come to epitomize its organic integrity and its fragile, wealth-producing beauties. And, as it has, local people have voiced ever more anxiety that its riches are endangered by alien vegetation, whose colonizing effect is to reduce it to "impenetrable monotony" (Hall 1979:134).

The blaze brought this to a head. Efforts by botanists to cool the hysteria – to insist that fire in *fynbos* is not abnormal – had no effect. A cartoonist, casting his ironic eye on the mood of millennial anxiety, drew a flying saucer above Cape Town. Peering down on the city as it sank into a globally-warmed sea, its mountain covered by foreign flora, a little space traveler exclaimed "Glork plik zoot urgle." Translation: "They seem to have a problem with aliens."[5]

The satirist touched a raw nerve: the obsession with alien plants gestured toward a scarcely submerged sense of civic terror and incendiary panic. But what exactly was at stake in this mass-mediated chain of consciousness, this litany of alien-nature? What does it tell us about perceived threats to the nation and its patrimony, about destabilized identities and insecure entitlements? Observers elsewhere have noted that an impassioned sense of autoch-

thony, of birthright – to which alienness is the negative counterpoint – has edged aside other images of belonging at the end of the twentieth century; also, that a fetishism of origins seems to be growing up the world over in opposition to the effects of neoliberal *laissez-faire.*[6] But why? Why, at this juncture in the history of the modernist polity have boundaries and their transgression become such an urgent issue? Could it be that the public anxiety here over invasive plant species speaks to an existential conundrum presently making itself felt at the very heart of nationhood everywhere: In what *does* national integrity consist, what might polity and society *mean*, what moral and material entitlements might it entail, at a time when global capitalism appears almost everywhere to be breaching sovereign borders, almost everywhere to be displacing politics-as-usual?

In order to address these questions – in order to make sense both of our narrative of catastrophe and of the more general matter of why it is that aliens of all kinds have become such a burning preoccupation – we must take a brief detour. It takes us into the interiors of "the" late modernist nation-state.

THE NATION-STATE IN PERSPECTIVE, RETROSPECTIVELY

Euro-nations a la Anderson (1983) were founded on the fiction

often violently effected, of cultural homogeneity: although to be sure, Euro-nationhood was always more diverse than its historiography allows, always a work-in-progress. But since the late twentieth century, polities everywhere have had increasingly to come to terms with difference. Historical circumstance has pushed them toward an ever more heterodox nationhood. Hence the growing concern-, scholarly and lay alike, with citizenship, sovereignty, multi-culturalism, minority rights, and the limits of liberalism. Hence, too, the xenophobia that haunts heterodoxy almost everywhere. Of which more later.

The move toward heterodoxy is itself part of a more embracing world-historical process, one in which 1989 figures centrally. That year, symbolically if not substantively, heralded the *political* co-ming of age, across the planet, of neoliberal capitalism. While its economic roots lie much deeper, this, in retrospect, is typically taken to have been the juncture at which the old international or-der gave way to a more fluid, market-driven, electronically-articu-lated universe: a universe in which *supra*national institutions bur-geon; in which space and time are recalibrated; in which geography is rewritten in four dimensions; in which a new global jurisprudence displaces its internationalist predecessor, overlaying the sovereignty of national legal systems; in which transnational iden-tities, diasporic connections, and the mobility of human populations

transgress old frontiers; in which “society” is declared dead, to be replaced by "the network" and “the community” as dominant metaphors of social connectedness; in which governance is reduced to a promiscuous combination of service delivery, security provision, and fiduciary oversight; in which liberty is distilled to its postmodern essence, the right to choose identities, subjectivities, commodities, sexualities, localities, and almost everything else. A universe, also, in which older institutional and instrumental forms of power – refigured, now, primarily as biopower disperse themselves everywhere and anywhere and nowhere tangible at all: into transnational corporations and NGOs, into shadowy, privatized parastatal cabals, into syndicated crime and organized religion, and into unholy fusions of all of these things.

In the upshot, "the" state is held to be in constant crisis in many parts of the world: its legitimacy is tested by fiscal mismanagement, debt, poverty, corruption; its executive control is perpetually pushed to the limit; and, most of all, its hyphen-nation – the articulation, that is, of state to nation, nation to state – is widely under challenge. This is especially so in postcolonial nation-states, whose ruling regimes often rely on theatrical means to produce state power, to conjure national unity, and to persuade citizens of the reality of both (Mbembe 1992; Worby 1998). They are not alone in this, of course. Resort to mass-mediated ritual excess

– not least ritual orchestrated in the name of security and national integrity – features prominently right now in the politics of state in many places.

This broad historical transformation has any number of corollaries. For present purposes, we raise just three.

The *first* is the refiguration of the modernist subject-citizen. One corollary of the changing face of nationhood, of its growing heterodoxy, has been an explosion of identity politics. Not just of ethnic and cultural politics. Also of the politics of, among other things, gender, sexuality, age, race, religiosity, and style. While most human beings still live as citizens *in* nation-states, they tend only to be conditionally citizens *of* nation-states. Which, in turn, puts ever more stress on their hyphen-nation. The more diverse nation-states become, the higher the level of abstraction at which "*the* nation-state" exists, the more dire appears threats against it. And the more imperative it becomes to divine and negate whatever endangers it. States, notes Harvey (1990:108), have always had to sustain a definition of the *common*weal over and above sectarian concerns. One solution that has presented itself in the face of ever more assertive claims made against it in the name of identity is an appeal to the primacy of national autochthony: to the ineffable loyalties, the interests and affect, that flow from rootedness in *a place of birth*. Nor is this just a tactic, one that appeals to those

in the business of government. It resonates with deeply felt populist fears – and with the proclivity of citizens of all stripes to deflect shared anxieties onto outsiders.

Autochthony is implicit in many forms of identity, of course; it also attaches to places within places, parts within wholes. But, as a *national* claim against aliens, its mobilization appears to be growing in direct proportion to the sundered hyphenation of the sovereign polity, to its popularly perceived porousness and impotence in the face of exogenous forces. Citizens *in* many contemporary states, whether or not they are primarily citizens *of* those states, seem able to re-imagine nationhood in such a way as to embrace the ineluctability of internal difference: "multiculturalism," "rainbow nation," and terms like them provide a ready argot of accommodation, even amid political conflict. However, when it comes to the limits of that difference, autochthony constitutes an ultimate line, the *fons et origo* of fealty, affect, attachment. Whatever other identities the citizen-subject of the twenty-first century may bear, s/he is unavoidably either an autochthon or an alien. Nor only s/he. It too. Nonhumans, also, may be autochthons or aliens.

The *second* transformation of the modernist polity concerns the regulation of borders – and, hence, the limits of sovereignty. Much of the debate over the "sovereignty" of the nation-state hinges upon the contention that governments can no longer control the mobility-

of currencies and commercial instruments, of labor and commodities, of flora and fauna, of information, illegal substances, and unwanted aliens. Nor can they always control enclaved zones, the frontiers *within* their realms, those under the sway of organized crime, religious movements, corporations, and the like; all of which has led many contemporary nation-states to resemble patchworks of sovereignties, laterally arranged in space, with tenuous corridors between them, all surrounded by terrains of ungovernablility (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006). National frontiers have always been more-or-less porous, of course. But technologies of space-time compression *do* appear to have effected a sea-change in patterns and rates of global flow – of the concrete and the virtual, of humans, objects, signs, currencies, communications. Which is why so many states, most maybe, act as if they were constantly subject both to invasion from the outside and to the seeping away of what – like of-shore capital and scarce employment – ought properly to remain within. South Africa, for instance, laments the pull of overseas market on its human resource[7] – while anguishing, xenophobically, over the inflow of migrants (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). And Western Europe, despite its so-called "demographic winter," agonizes over the specter of a future Muslim Europe and, more immediately, over the ubiquitous presence of racially marked, criminally-inflected others of various provenance.

Our object, though, is not just to remark the heightened concern with borders and their transgression. It is also to observe that this concern is the product of a paradox. Under current global conditions, given the logic of the neoliberal capitalist economy, states find themselves in a double bind. In order to garner the value spun off by that economy, they require at once to open up their frontiers *and* to secure them: on one hand, to deregulate the movement of currencies, goods, people, and services, thus to facilitate the inflow of wealth; on the other, to establish enclaved zones of competitive advantage so as to attract transnational manufacture and media, investment, information technology, and the "right" kind of migrants – tourists, corporate personnel, NGOs, specific sorts of laborers who will work cheaply and tractably, without the entitlements of citizenship. In this way, the nation-state is made, in aspiration if not always in reality, into a metamanagement enterprise, a business both in itself and in the business of attracting business; in sum, part franchise, part licencing authority. This in the interest of its "stakeholders" who desire simultaneously to be *global citizens* and also *corporate national subjects* with all the benefits that accrue to membership of a sovereign nation. The corollary is plain. The border is a double bind because the commonweal appears to demand, but is threatened by, *both* openness and closure. No wonder the *angst*, the avid public debate in so many places, ab-

out what should or should be allowed entry, what is or is not in the collective interest. And who ought to share it. Hence the arguments, also, between those who would globalize capital by erasing all barriers and patriots protective of the national interest.

The *third* salient feature of the predicament of the nation-state is the decentering of politics into other domains: into the law, technology, ritual, the media, and, above all, the market. The conventional argument goes like this: neoliberal capitalism, in its triumphal, global phase, appears to offer no alternative to *laissez-faire;* no other political-economic system seemed plausible; even outposts of socialism like China and Cuba were actually living in collusion with the market. The primary question left to public policy, then, is purely technical: how to succeed in the "new" world order. Or at least, that *was* the argument, until the recent global financial crisis began to make itself felt. In its wake, amidst frantic government interventions and a rash of garguantuan bailouts, there have been mounting calls everywhere for tighter oversight of finance markets and corporate practice. The radical rise in joblessness and homelessness across the world offers brutal evidence of the fragility of wealth generated by what Stiglitz (2008:36-7) termed "ever more complex and precarious financial products that no one....fully understands," or can regulate. Will this foster an awareness that individual self-interest is not coterminous with the

"interests of society as a whole," as he suggests? Ora realization that the late modern world does not yield limitless new frontiers for colonizing capital? That, *contra* the mantra of brave neo-liberal age, there *is* such a thing as "society?"

To be sure, the tenor of public rhetoric, at least in Euro-America, has been read as evidence of a significant shift: if not of a turn to the model of the "developmental state," then to some semblance if a neoclassic , managed economy. It has also been offered, playfully, as evidence that, yet again, "socialism saves capitalism." In fact, it is too soon to say whether current crisis is (or is not) a harbinger of post-neoliberalism; whether it will yield anything more than tighter regulation of the riskiest reaches of the existing finance markets and the most egregious excesses of corporate profiteering. It is too soon to know wether if this moment might resurrect a meaingful politics of redistribution. Or indeed, politics, *sui generis.* Prior to this moment of meltdown, recall, it had become commonplace in certain circles to speak of "the end of politics, and the "retreat of the social" (Kapferer 2005); of a world in which inter-personal relations had dissolved into the natural, the biological, the contractual; a world, too, in which "the community," was both the site and the product of the purposive enterprise of empowered moral subjects; a world in which public life had been reduced to struggles, often fought by means of lawfare, over

"special" interests and issues: issues like the environment, abortion, health care, child welfare, domestic abuse, human rights, crime, and capital punishment. Under these conditions, urgent questions of the moment, typically addressed with reference to technical imperatives, become the stuff of collective action, cutting across older lines of ideological and social commitment. Each takes the limelight as it flares into public awareness and then burns down, its embers consigned to the recesses of collective consciousness – only to flame up again if kindled by contingent conditions or vocal coalitions. Or both.

Our evocation of the imagery of fire returns us to South Africa – but to a South Africa now situated, if all too summarily, in a history of the present that involves altered forms of citizenship, an obsession with boundaries, aliens and autochthony, and various displacements of the terms of modernist politics as we have come to

NATURING THE NATION

A Lesson from Fynbos

The full impact of the fire in January 2000 flowed from the capacity of the burning bush, of the flowers and flames, to signify. To signify charged political anxieties, many of them unameable in everyday discourse. To signify the aspiration that, from the ashes, might arise a distinctly local, new South African sense of community,

nationality, inclusion. The question, patently, is how: How *did* those flowers and flames come to mean so much? And what inchoate future terrors did they portend?

First, the flora. Flowers have long served as national emblems. The Giant Protea, which typifies *fynbos*, has been South Africa's for many years. It stands in a totemic relationship to the nation; a relationship, that is, of people to nature, place to species, in which latter enriches the former – so long as it is venerated and not wantonly consumed. But it is also a fetish, a natural displacement of emotively-charged identities rooted in acts of ethnos-national assertion.

It was not always so. The use of *fynbos* for the indigenous plants of the southern Cape is recent: it was only at the end of the 1960s that the term, and the category to which it now refers, became established in either popular or botanical parlance[8]. This was precisely the time when international demand for local flora took off, and a national association was formed to market it; *fynbos* export is now a huge industry. It was also the point at which statesmen began to dub these flora a "natural asset" – and at which botanists first asserted that they were a fragile species worthy of conservation as a "unique biome type" (Kruger 1977). Not long before then, in 1953, an authority on the subject actually described *fynbos* as an *invader* that threatened the local grassveld (Acocks 1953:14,17). What is now

said of aliens was being said, a half-century ago, of this "South Africa treasure," this passionately protected icon of national, natural rootedness.

But it is not just as fragile natural heritage that fynbos has captured the imagination of the South African public. It is also as a protagonist locked in mortal struggle with invasive aliens that threaten to take over its habitat and choke off its means of survival. A parenthetic note here: similar anxieties about plant invaders have manifest themselves in other Western nations as well: nations, tellingly, where human in-migration is a mass concern – in the USA for example, and in Australia, where, ironically, South African flora are demonized (Wace 1988; Carr et al 1988); also Britain, where huge expanses of alien Rhododendrons, once very popular, are to be removed at great cost from National Trust properties.

Time was when there was great enthusiasm for nonindigenous vegetation. In the high colonial age, British colonial rulers encouraged the import of exotics for what seemed, at the time, to be good, "modern" ecological reasons (Hall 1979). It took a long while for desirable imports to become "invasive aliens," "pests," "colonizers," even "green cancers."[9] And it was only in the 1990s that aliens came to be held largely accountable for the fragility of Cape Flora. This is abundantly clear from the way in which attitudes to fire in the fynbos has shifted over the past decade, culminating in

the catastrophe of January 2000

As we have said, fires are endemic to the Cape. Expert opinion acknowledges that the conservation of biodiversity actually depends on natural conflagration. What is more, in the past, foreign plants- were only one of many factors held to produce fires of distinct kinds; in fact, an authoritative report on the topic published as late as 1979 (Kruger 1979) does not even list them as a concern. Neither, remember, did public blame in 2000 alight immediately upon them – although when, it did, they became a burning preoccupation. Literally. Fire, after all, is one of the most elemental embodiments of energy, heat, light, destruction, purification; it smoulders in the colonial memory as brutal force of the last resort, as to the powerless as the powerful.

And what does it have to do with aliens? Until the fall of apartheid, the term "alien" had archaic connotations in South Africa, being enshrined in laws aimed at barring Jewish entry in the 1930s. These laws remained in place until amended in the mid-1990s,[10] when immigrants became a fraught issue in a society seething with a surplus of the unemployed and unruly. It was at the same time that foreign plants became both the subject of ecological emergency and an object of national renewal (Hall 1979:138). The most striking symptom of this was the *Working for Water Programme*, launched in 1995. Part of

the post-apartheid Reconstruction and Development Plan, the scheme, a flagship project to create jobs and combat poverty, centered on routing out alien vegetation. Unemployed women and youth, ex-offenders, even the homeless would be rehabilitated by joining eradication teams. Alien-nature, in other words, was to be the raw material of communal rebirth.

The blaze in Cape Town gave yet further impetus to this. As popular feeling focused on the foreign "scourge," the state seemed intent on coaxing "a spirit of community" from the ashes.[11] Ever more overt official connections were made between the war against those aliens and the prosperity of the nation. But the most portentous words were those of then President Mbeki: Alien plants, he said, "stand in the way of the African renaissance."[12]

FOREIGN OBJECTS: THE POLITICS OF ESTRANGEMENT IN THE POSTCOLONY

And so invading plants became embroiled in the state of the nation. But this does not yet answer our key question: to what precise anxieties, interests, and historical conditions does the allegory of alien-nature speak? An answer is to be found in a cluster of implicit associations and organic figurations in the public discourse that give insight into the infrastructure of popular consciousness-under-construction; into the way in which processes of naturalization made it possible to voice the unspeakable, to broach-

the challenge of conceiving a nation amidst liberalization. Conditions, that is, that involve precisely the transformations of which spoke earlier: the changing meaning of citizenship and belonging, borders at once open and closed, people unavoidably on the move, irreducible social and cultural hetereodoxy, the displacement of politics, a shrinking commonweal.

Take this satirical comment by a well-known South African journalist:[13]

> Doubtless there are gardening writers who would not think twice about sounding off in blissful praise of something as innocent...as the jacaranda tree...But...you may be nothing more than...a racist. Subliminally that is[14]...Behind its blossoms and its splendid boughs, the jacaranda is nothing but a water-hogging...weed-spreading alien

Once, the jacaranda had been described as "almost South Africa's national tree."[15] Now, in a bizarre drama in which flora signify what politics struggles to name, it has become an object of estrangement, even racialization. Some even spoke of the "ethnic cleansing" of the countryside;[16] this in a land obsessed with who is or is not a citizen, with constitutional rights and wrongs, with routing out all vestiges of racism. But it was a wry letter from a West African scholar to the *Mail & Guardian* that made the political subtext most brutally plain.[17]

> It is alien-bashing time again. As an alien...I am particularly prickly about criticisms of aliens even if they are plants ...But before the Department of Home Affairs is dragooned into investigating the residence permits of these plants I, as a concerned fellow alien, wish to remind one and all that plants such as maize...soybean, sunflower...originated outside of the continent of Africa. In any case, did the fire-and-flood-causing alien plants cross the borders and establish plantations ...by themselves?

For this human alien, ecology had become the site of a distressingly

familiar crusade: the demonization of migrants by the state and its citizenry alike How long, we wondered – as we witnesses the rising temperature of this rhetoric – before a metaphorical spark (Coetzee 2008:23) would leap the species barrier, and alight on the human objects toward whom it had long been reaching?

It has been noted that the migrant is the "specter" on whose wretched fate the triumphal neoliberal politics of the "new" Europe has been founded.[18] In South Africa too, a phobia about foreigners – above all foreigners from elsewhere in Africa – has been the offspring of the fledgling democracy, waxing, paradoxically, alongside appeals to *ubuntu*, a common African humanity. In the 1990's, that phobia congealed into an active antipathy to what is perceived as a shadowy alien-nation of "*illegal* immigrants"; the qualifier, "illegal," has become inseparable from the sign, just as, in the plant world, *invasive* has become locked, adjectivally, to alien. Popularly held to be "economic vultures"[19] who usurp jobs and resources, and who bring crime and disease, these anticitizens are accused – in uncanny analogy with non-indigenous flora – of spreading uncontrollably. And of siphoning off the wealth of the nation.[20]

Aliens, then, are a distinctive species in the popular imagination. In a parodic perversion of the past, they are "profiled" by color and culture, thence to be excluded from the moral community. Once singled out, "illegals" are seldom differentiated from *bona fide*

immigrants.[21] All are dubbed *makwerekwere*, a disparaging term for incompetent speech. Not surprisingly, they live in terror that their accents will be detected.

The fear is well-founded. With the relaxation of controls over immigrant labor, South Africa – Africa's "America" – has become the destination of choice for many people from the north; estimates run as high as eight million.[22] This influx has occurred amidst transformations in the domestic economy that have altered relations of labor to capital, leading to a radically downsized job market in which over 80% of employers opt for "non-standard" labor (Adam et al 1998:209), much of it done by lowly paid, non-unionized "illegals," whom farmers and industrialists claim are essential to their survival in competitive global markets.[23] Small wonder, then, that routing *the* alien – who has come to embody the threat to local work and welfare – began to emerge as a persuasive mode of confronting economic dispossession and regaining a sense of organic community.

And so the stage was set. In 2008, amidst sharply increasing unemployment, rising food prices, and growing discontent about the lack of housing and services, violent attacks were unleashed against foreigners, first around Johannesburg and then across the land. "Troops called in as SA Burns,"[24] screamed the local press, while media across the world bore graphic images of property torched, and bodies set aflame. Fire and aliens again. In a manner that replayed the neck

lacing and witch-burnings of the 1990's – but also the macho populism that surrounds ANC leader Jacob Zuma -- young men armed with pangas and sticks took to the streets to purge their neighborhoods of foreigners.[25] These strangers were dragged from their homes amidst frenzied accusations that had stolen jobs, undercut the minimum wage, usurped scarce housing, fostered crime, spread AIDS. The ethnic profile of the victims showed some predictability: Zimbabweans, who have fled their troubled homeland in large numbers, were the most likely victims nationwide. But the identity of scapegoats also varied with local sociology: in some parts of the Cape, Somali shopkeepers were targeted. On the East Rand it was Tonga-speaking "Shangaans" (Vachangana) from Mozambique, long preponderant in a mining industry now rapidly shedding its workforce, who most embodied the protean scourge of "otherness.". In each case, the designated alien served as foil for a desperate struggle to forge a sense of citzenship from the ashes, a sense of citizenship long promised, still denied.

Through all this, the state has remained an ambiguous actor. On one hand, it has joined outraged voices at home and abroad in condemning the attacks, and insisting on respect for universal human rights. On the other, it was initially slow to respond to the ethno-nationalist violence. Furthermore, while it engaged in pious condemnation of savage xenophobes, allegedly abetted by criminal gangs or an insurgent "third force,"[26]again, echoes of apartheid speak

– it was conspicuously silent on the desperate social conditions and sense of neglect that set the scene for this brutal drama. The regime has also contributed to the logic of xenophobia by permitting its enforcement agencies, their effectiveness ever more in question, to wage visible war on the foreign specter with high-profle raids on immigrant neighborhoods. Such tactics have been accompanied by official announcements of "US-style bid[s] to rid SA of illegal aliens."[27] At the country's main, privately-owned deportation center foreign nationals have been harshly beaten, their human rights seriously violated, their property looted.[28] The state made little effort to regulate the situation.

Reference here to the "US style" of alien management is telling. In the USA, too, shows of decisive action in the face of the "immigrant problem" exist alongside an almost farcical legal paralysis on the issue at a national level. Here too, a history of official double-speak that makes plain how acutely "the problem" focuses the paradox of porous borders; how it highlights the contradiction between sovereignty and deregulation, neoconservatism and neoliberalism, national protectionism and a globalized division of labor. In the US, too, spectacles of enforcement serve as futile attempts to redress the anomaly of strangers who have become essential to domestic reproduction; who mix intimate local knowledge and foreign loyalties (real or imagined) raising specters of

crime and terror; who are simultaneously indispensable and disposable, visible and invisible, human and degraded; who reside ambiguously inside, yet beyond the law. In June, 2007, for example, "dozens of armed immigration agents, supported by local police in riot gear" stormed a meat-packing factory in Greeley in Colorado, one of five simultaneous, well-publicized raids on similar facilities across the nation.[29] Termed "Operation Wagon Train," these raids were hailed by US Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement – ICE by name and nature – as a "major blow" in its "war against illegal immigration." Many of these deported workers were back within a week. Their labor, like that of an estimated 12 million other undocumented workers, is indispensable to American industry, agriculture, and the service sector; this being evidence of just the kind of late modern boundary-making impasse we witnessed in South Africa – although, in the US, it is exacerbated by the conflict between transnational agreements like Nafta, which liberate capital, and local politicians, who seek to criminalize foreign labor and keep it imprisoned within the "developing world."[30] Here, observes Gary Younge, the political border is no longer coterminous with the physical borders of the nation-state. The former, the *de facto* border, is now more a matter of "economic expediency and political opportunism than either law or order." And it crisscrosses the country, mobilizing ethnic profiles and securing the homeland by dividing

nationals from aliens wherever they might be.

Shades, here, of the kind of contingency we identified, at the outset, as characteristic of the Nuer polity and Schmittian philosophy. In Nuer politics, recall, in the absence of fixed geographical borders, the objectification of boundaries between inside and out "occurred in the process of dealing with the very transgressions that breached them." For Schmitt, the essential political gesture lay in drawing the line, indeed making life-and-death distinctions, between friend and enemy. Which is exactly what happens when aliens in South Africa are either flushed out by the police, with little attention to their legal rights – or worse yet, killed by vigilante mobs of unemployed locals. Also what happens in the USA, where would-be illegal migrants may be apprehended not only at points of entry into the country, but anywhere that their difference from nationals comes to light, anywhere that lines may be crossed, anywhere that they may be espied and reported by citizens. Note, in this regard, that "Operation Wagon Train" is no arbitrary turn of phrase. Its cavalier reference to the conquest of the Wild West frontier – a process, incidentally, that made America's first autochthons into aliens – reveals a deeper truth. It returns the US to a language of state-making as a species of colonial heroics, in which, as one anti-immigrant group put it, "citizen control" is to be re-established.[31] Seen in this light, armed

raids on migrant enclaves might not seal the border, but they *do* create an "impression of effectiveness" on the part of the state in a political context in which illusion has become, perforce, "as important as reality."[32] Here, in short, is an instance of the kind of symbolic activity of which we spoke earlier: the mass-mediated ritual excess, directed at producing state power and hyphen-nation, that features so prominently in efforts to secure sovereignty in a neoliberal age.

ENDS AND MEANINGS

Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000) have noted the growing stress, in Africa, on the exclusion of the stranger, not least in reaction to the kinds of social and economic uncertainties, and the destabilization of borders, set in motion by "global flows." This is certainly true of post-apartheid South Africa, where outrage against aliens has provided a versatile call to arms, forcing a new line of separation that unifies a home-grown population otherwise divided by class, color, culture, and much else; not fully or finally, of course, but nonetheless visibly and volubly. Nor, as we have intimated, is South Africa alone in this. Similar processes are evident more or less everywhere that the nation-state is perceived to be plagued by conditions that threaten to dissolve it borders, opening them up to unwanted aliens of all sorts, undermining the

coordinates of moral and material community – and making them seem more like contested colonial frontiers than the secure boundaries of the modernist polity.

The ambiguation of those boundaries, as we have noted, arises from the absorption of contemporary nationhood into a global economy whose neoliberal ways and means have altered modernist patterns of production and consumption, the articulation of labor to capital, the movement of persons and commodities, the nature of sovereignty and civic identity, geographies of space and time, order and security, and much else besides. Because of their particular histories, postcolonies like South Africa manifest these things in especially acute form. But in many respects they are merely condensed, hyper-extended prefigurations of what is becoming increasingly visible elsewhere. As Western states resort more audibly to the language of "wagon trains" and frontiers, as journalists talk of an "apartheid planet,"[33] as the post-Cold War seems ever more to be giving way to a state of "ordered anarchy," we may be forgiven for thinking that colonial societies of the global south were less historical inversions of the metropole than foreshadowings of what, in a post-modern world, the global north might become.

This speculation is not idle: it is arguable that European colonial regimes managed the political and economic contradictions inherent in early liberal capitalist modernity by means of a politics

of spatial separation. The segregation of metropole and colony not only obscured their material and cultural interdependence; it also served to keep well apart the humanitarian, modernizing, rule-governed, freedom-seeking impetus of liberal democracy from the exclusionary, divisive, violently-secured forms of subjection and extraction that were its underside. Colonial societies were zones of occupation, sites in which the civilizing mission was countered by the immediate dictates of control and profit – and by the need to secure the contested frontiers held to separate order from chaos. Defending those boundaries in the name of "progress" often warranted the suspension of enlightened ways and means, even in the face of resistance and humanitarian outrage.

The long process of decolonization that set the stage for a new Age of Empire has disrupted this spatial logic. The Cold War era might have marked time between the two imperial epochs, but it came undone when economies were deregulated and capital moved offshore, escaping state regulation, globalizing the division of labor, deterritorializing sovereignty and jurisdiction, and scrambling received relations between politics and production. As neoliberalized enterprise relocated its polluting factories to distant sites of cheap labor, new forms of enclaved colonial extraction were invented, extraction with minimal costs, *sans* state-apparatuses, safety restrictions, civilizing missions, and the like. At the same time,

workers who could move from devastated postcolonies sought access in ever greater numbers to the underclass reaches of cleaner, post-Fordist, Western economies. In the process, the structural and spatial separations of metropole and colony have begun to erode. And as they do, camps for illegal aliens, inner city wastelands, zones of occupation, and burning *banliues* project colonial conditions and modes of governance into the heart of first-world polities – there to draw the line, once again, between friend and enemy, law and war. Reciprocally, states in the South and East take on many of the features of the West, from the growing preoccupation with democracy and the law, to an inventive engagement with modern urbanism, electronic communications, global finance, and so on.

In the face of all this, received models of society and politics have undergone drastic revision in the West – for scholars and statesmen alike. The image is fading of an organic society, *a la* Comte and Durkheim, in which divisions of class and culture were contained – ideally, at least – within national boundaries; in which, also, the rude, pathological, criminal classes were believed, through welfare and reform, to be recoverable "citizens-in-waiting." On the rise is a rather different archetype: that of the state as citadel; of national territory as embattled homeland; of prisons as sites not of recuperation, but of the warehousing of those deemed disposable; of borders as elusive lines to be drawn and redrawn within the

nation-state and beyond against the endless onslaught of enemies who threaten its moral and corporeal integrity, from without and within – enemies who take the form of aliens, migrants, terrorists, home-grown saboteurs, felons, criminals, the indigent poor. This, once more, is the world of Carl Schmitt, in which politics is less about national participation and redistribution than about securing the frontier between autochthon and intruder, good and evil, citizenship and subjection. It is also the world of the Nuer, with their constantly shifting lines between inside and out, law and war. Is it to be wondered, then, that conditions that nurture phobias of alien nature and campaigns of ethnic cleansing should also have generated a new, more plain-spoken industry, the so-called 'homeland security sector,' rapidly gaining ground on a global scale; an industry whose key products are "high-tech fences, unmanned drones, biometric ID's, video and audio surveillance gear, air passenger profiling and prisoner interrogation systems," many of them originating in Israel, recently described as "a living example of how to enjoy relative safety amid constant war" ?[34] All this may seem a world away from allegories of alien plants and natural autochthony. But the link between them is patent: both speak to efforts to bring to order the anarchy of our late modern age. Or, to be more precise, to make sense of, and act upon, some of the contradictions and contingencies, the uncertainties and insecurities, the ambiguities

and ambivalence, that come with a global disjuncture: the disjuncture, that is, between the modernists world as we knew it and the neoliberal world now rapidly taking shape.

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NOTES

Acknowledgments. As we note in the text, this essay revisits another. Entitled "Naturing the Nation," its earliest version (parts of which are reprised here) came out in *Hagar: International Social Sciences Review*, 1,1 (2000), pp.7-40; it was republished, in very similar form in *Social Identities* (2001) and in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* (2001), the latter in a special issue dedicated to Shula Marks, in whose honor it was originally written. We should like to acknowledge, again, the debt owed to our son, Joshua Comaroff, an architect and geographer whose specialist knowledge of landscape has drawn us into many discussions on the topic; he was with us in Cape Town during the events described here and participated in the formulation of our analysis of them. The present version revisits those events with longer hindsight, placing them in a rather different conceptual frame, one moe in tune with broad concerns in the contemporary social sciences.

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1. See e.g. B.Jordan, "Ash City: Why the Fires Were So Bad," *Sunday Times*, 23 January 2000, p.7.

2. See J. Yeld, "Force Landowners to Clear Invading Alien Plants," *Sunday Argus*, 22-23 January 2000, p.7; also L. de Villiers, Chair of Peninsula Mountain Forum, "Take Decisive Steps to Avoid Future Fire Disaster," letter to the *Cape Times*, 28 January 2000, p.11.

3. See "*Ukuvuka* the Biggest Ever," editorial, *Cape Times*, 7 February 2000, p.10.

4. For early technical accounts of *fynbos* and its ecology, see e.g. Kruger (1978) and Day, *et al* (1979).

5. Chip, "They Seem to Have a Problem With Aliens," *Cape Argus*, 27 January 2000, p.23.

6. For a thoughtful, Africa-centric reflection on this tendency, see Geschiere and F. Nyamnjoh (2000).

7. See e.g. "Official Figures for Brain Drain Released," *The Star*, 14 March 2000, p.2.

8. This was confirmed by botanists working on the Fynbos Biome, although "fynbos" seems first to have appeared in a publication in 1916 (Dave Richardson, personal communication). Regular academic usage begins in the

early 1970s. The term appears on a list of Summer School lectures at the University of Cape Town in 1972, for example, and in F. Kruger, 'Ecology and Management of Cape Fynbos: Towards Conservation of a Unique Biome Type', paper read at the South African Wild Life Management Association's Second International Symposium (Pretoria,1977).We certainly do not recall it being in circulation while we were growing up in the Cape.

9. See Anonymous, *The Green Cancers in South Africa* (no publisher given, 1959).

10. It was replaced by the Aliens Control Act 96 of 1991 and subsequent amendments.

11. L. de Villiers, Chair of Peninsula Mountain Forum, 'Take Decisive Steps to Avoid Future Fire Disaster', letter to the *Cape Times*, 28 January 2000, p.11.

12. Message from President Mbeki, read by Valli Moosa, Minister for Environmental Affairs and Tourism, at the International Symposium on Best Management Practices for Preventing and Controlling Invasive Alien Species, Kirstenbosch, 22-24 February 2000; see also K. Bliksem, 'Only the Truly Patriotic can be Trusted to Smell the Roses, and Weed Them Out', *Sunday Independent*, 22 February 2000, p.8.

13. K. Bliksem, 'Only the Truly Patriotic can be Trusted to Smell the Roses, and Weed Them Out', *Sunday Independent*, 22 February 2000, p.8.

14. A controversial investigation of racism in the mainstream press, both overt and "subliminal", was being conducted by the Human Rights Commission at the time; see e.g. E. Rapiti, 'Journalists Must Do Their Jobs Without Interference', letter to the *Mail & Guardian,* 10-16 March 2000, p.28.

15. Moll and Moll (1994:49).

16. C. Lazar, 'Forget Alien Plants, What About Guns?', *The Star*, 7 March 2000, p.8.

17. M. Aken'Ova, 'Loving the Alien', *Mail & Guardian*, 18-24 February 2000, p.29.

18. J. Seabrook, 'Racists and Hypocrites', *Mail & Guardian*, 18-24 February 2000, p.22.

19. Radebe, 'Time We Became a Bit More Neighbourly', p.13.

20. M. Sinclair, 'Unwilling Aliens: Forced Migrants in the New South Africa', *Indicator*, 13, 3 (1996), pp.14 – 18; Reitzes, 'Alien Issues'.

21. L. Madywabe, 'My Four Hours as an Illegal Immigrant', *Mail & Guardian*, 3-9 March 2000, p.16.

22. See the findings of the South African Migration Project, summarized in C. Carter and F. Haffajee, 'Immigrants are Creating Work – Not Taking Your Jobs', *Mail & Guardian*, 11-17 September 1998, p.3; also J. Matisonn, 'Aliens Have Many Years' Respite in SA', *The Sunday Independent*, 19 March 2000, p.3.

23. M. Reitzes, 'Alien Issues,', *Indicator*, 12,1 (1994), p.7

24. "Troops called in as SA burns," Sapa, 21 May, 2008, *IOL (*/www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=79&art_id=nw20080521184209735C690777&newslett=1&em=177481a1a20080522ah*)* accessed 6 April, 2009.

25. "The Populist Vice-Grip." Steven Robins, 12 August, 2008, *Mail & Guardian online* (www.mg.co.za/article/2008-08-13-in-a-populist-vice-grip) accessed 6 April, 2009.

26. "The Populist Vice-Grip." Steven Robins, 12 August, 2008, *Mail & Guardian online* (www.mg.co.za/article/2008-08-13-in-a-populist-vice-grip) accessed 6 April, 2009.

27. R. Brand, 'US-Style Bid to Rid SA of Illegal Aliens', *The Star*, 14 February 2000, p.1.

28. Reports of violence at the center, owned by a consortium that includes members of the "struggle elite", are not new. In this case, the Cameroonian embassy lodged a formal protest to the South African government; C. Banda and G. Clifford, 'Cameroon to Lodge Protest Over Repatriation Center Beating', *The Star*, 17 March 2000, p.1. See also Tsedu, 'Illegals Deserve Better Than This', p.12.

29. Gary Younge, "The US Is Clamping Down On Illegal Migrants, But It Relies On Their Labor," Gary Younge, *The Guradian,* 11 June 2007, p. 29.

30. "The US Is Clamping Down On Illegal Migrants, ..."

31. "The US Is Clamping Down On Illegal Migrants,..."

32. S. Friedman, "Action With Too Little Discussion," *Mail & Guardian*, 24-30 March 2000.

33. Naomi Klein, "How war was turned into a brand," *The Guardian*, 16 June, 2007, p.34.

34. Naomi Klein, "How war was turned into a brand," *The Guardian*, 16 June, 2007, p.34.