

ALIEN-NATION: ZOMBIES, IMMIGRANTS, AND MILLENNIAL

CAPITALISM

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Prolegomenon

What might zombies have to do with the implosion of neoliberal capitalism at the end of the twentieth century? What might they have to do with post-colonial, post-revolutionary nationalism? With labour history? With the "crisis" of the modernist nation-state? Why are these spectral, floating signifiers making an appearance in epic, epidemic proportions in several parts of Africa just now? And why have immigrants—those wanderers in pursuit of work, whose proper place is always elsewhere—become pariah citizens of a global order in which, paradoxically, old borders are said everywhere to be dissolving? What, indeed, do any of these things, which bear the distinct taint of exoticism, tell us about the hard-edged material, cultural, epistemic realities of our times? Indeed, why pose such apparently perverse questions at all when our social world abounds with practical problems of immediate, unremitting gravitas?

So much for the questions. We shall cycle slowly back toward their answers. Let us move, first, from the interrogative to the indicative, from the conundrums with which we shall be concerned to the circumstances whence they arise.

Spectral capital, capitalist speculation: From production to Consumption

Consumption

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was the hallmark illness of the First Coming of Industrial Capitalism. Of the age in which the ecological conditions of production, its consuming passions (Sontag

1978; cf Comaroff 1997), ate up the bodies of producers. Now, at the end of the twentieth, semantically transposed into another key, it has become, in the words of van Binsbergen and Geschiere (n.d.:S), the "hallmark of modernity". Of its wealth, health, and vitality. Too vast a generalization? Maybe. But the claim captures popular imaginings, and their mass-media representation, front across the planet. It also resonates with the growing Eurocultural truism that the (post)modern person is a subject made by means of

objects. Nor is this surprising.

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Consumption, in its ideological guise-as "consumerism"—refers to a material sensibility actively cultivated, ostensibly for the common good, by Western states and commercial interests, particularly since World War II. In social theory, as well, it has become a Prime Mover (lot. tit.), the force that determines definitions of value, the construction of identities, even the shape of the global ecumene.' As such, tellingly, it is the invisible hand that animates the political and material imperatives, and the social forms, of the Second Coming of Capitalism; of capitalism in its neoliberal, global manifestation. Note the image: the invisible hand. It recalls a moving spirit of older vintage, a numinous force that dates back to the Time of Adam. Adam Smith, that is. Gone is *tire deus ex machines*, a figure too mechanistic, too industrial for the post-Fordist era.

As consumption has become the moving spirit of the late twentieth century, so there has been a concomitant eclipse of production; an eclipse,

at least, of its perceived salience for the wealth of nations. With this has come a widespread shift, across the world, in ordinary understandings of the nature of capitalism. The workplace and honest labour, especially work-and-place securely rooted in local community, are no longer prime sites for the creation of value. Per contra, the factory and the workshop, far from secure centres of fabrication and family income, are increasingly experienced by virtue of their closure: either by their removal to somewhere else—where labour is cheaper, less assertive, less taxed, more feminized, less protected by states and unions—or by their replacement by non-human means of manufacture, which, in turn, has left behind, for ever more people, a legacy of part-time piece work, menial make work, relatively insecure, gainless occupation. For many populations, in the upshot, production appears to have been replaced, as the *FONS ET ORIGO* of capital, by the provision of services and the capacity to control space, time, and the flow of money. In short, by the market and by speculation.

Symptomatic, in this respect, are the changing historical fortunes of gambling. Until very recently, living off its proceeds was, normatively speaking, the epitome of immoral accumulation; the wager stood to the wage, the bet to personal betterment, as did sin to virtue. Now it is routinized in a widespread infatuation with, and popular participation in financial "investments" that take the form of vast, high risk dealings in stocks and bonds and funds whose rise and fall appear to be governed purely by chance. It also expresses itself in a fascination with futures and with their downmarket counterpart, the lottery; banal, if symbolically saturated fantasies these of abundance without effort, of beating capitalism on its own terms by dewing a winning number at the behest of

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unseen forces.' Once again that, invisible hand. At a time when taxes are anathema to the majoritarian political centre, gambling has become a favoured means of raising revenues, generating cultural and social assets, in what were once welfare states. Some even talk of the ascendance of "casino capitalism". Argues Susan Strange (1986:1-3; cf. Harvey 1989:332; Tomasic 1991), who likens the entire Western fiscal order to an immense game of luck, undignified even by probability "theory":

something rather radical has happened to the international financial system to make it so much like a gambling hall. What that change has been, and how it has come about, are not clear. What is certain is that it has affected everyone...[It] has made inveterate, and largely involuntary, gamblers of us all.

The gaming room, in other words, has become iconic of the central impetus of capital: its capacity to make its own vitality and increase seem independent of all human labour (Hardt 1995: 39), to seem like the natural yield of exchange and consumption.

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And yet crisis after crisis in the global economy, and growing income disparities on a planetary scale, make it painfully plain that there is no such thing as capitalism *sans production*; that the neoliberal stress on consumption as the source of value is palpably problematic. At once in perception, in theory; in practice. Indeed, if scholars have been slow to reflect on the fact, people all over the world-not least those in places where there have been sudden infusions of commodities, of wealth without work-have not. Many have been quick to give voice, albeit in different registers, to their perplexity at the enigma of this wealth. Of its origin and the capriciousness of its distribution, of the opaque, even occult, relation between means and ends

(Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; van Binsbergen and Geschiere n. d. :3). Our concern in this paper grows, directly out of these perplexities, these imaginings: out of world-wide speculation, in both senses of the term, at the spectres conjured up by real or imagined changes in the conditions of material existence at the end of the twentieth century.

We seek here, in a nutshell, to interrogate the experiential contradiction at the core of neoliberal capitalism is its global manifestation: the fact that it appears to offer up vast, almost instantaneous riches to those who control its technologies-and, simultaneously, to threaten the very livelihood of those who do not. More specifically, our objective is to explore the ways in which this conundrum is resolved, the ways in which the enchantments of capital are addressed, through efforts to plumb the mysterious relation of consumption to production; efforts that take a wide variety of local, culturally-modulated forms; efforts that reveal much about the nature of economy and society, culture and politics in the postcolonial, post-revolutionary present. As anthropologists are wont to do, we ground our excursion in a set of preoccupations and practices both concrete and historically particular: the obsession, in rural post-apartheid South Africa, with a rush of new commodities, currencies, and cash; with things whose acquisition is tantalizingly close, yet always just out of reach to all but those who understand their perverse secrets; with the disquieting figure of the zombie, an embodied, dis-spirited phantasm widely associated, with the production, the possibility and impossibility, of these new forms of wealth. Although they are creatures of the moment, zombies have ghostly forebears who have arisen in periods of social disruption, periods characterized by sharp shifts in control over the fabrication and circulation of value, periods that also serve to illuminate the here-and-now.

We shall argue that the half-life of zombies in South Africa, past and present, is linked to that of compro-

mised workers of another kind: immigrants from elsewhere on the continent, whose demonization is an equally prominent feature of the postcolonial scene. Together, these proletarian pariahs make visible a phantom history, a local chapter in a global story of changing relations of labour to capital, of production to consumption-indeed, of the very pro and con of capitalism-on the cusp of the millennium. Their manifestation here also allows us to ponder a paradox in the scholarly literature: given that the factory model of capitalist manufacture is said now to infuse all forms of social production (e.g. Deleuze 1986), why does labour appear less and less to undergird the social order of the present epoch (Hardt 1995: 39)?

Thus we bring you the case of the Zombie and the (Im)Migrant; this being the sequel to an earlier inquiry into work, labour, and the nature of historical consciousness in South Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 1987). But first a brief excursion into the problematic status of production in the age of global capital.

Labour's host

The emergence of consumption as a privileged site for the fashioning of society and identity, it may be argued, is integrally connected to the changing status of work under contemporary conditions. For some, the economic order of our times represents a completion of the intrinsic "project" of capital: namely, the evolution of a social formation that, as Tronti (1980:32) puts it, "does not lock to labour as its dynamic foundation" (cf. Hardt 1995:39). Others see the present moment in radically different terms. Iqbal and Limy (1987:2321), for instance, declare that we are witnessing not the denouement but the demise of organized capitalism; of a system in which corporate institutions could secure compromises between employers and employees by making appeal to the national interest. The internationalization of market forces

they claim, has not merely dislocated national economies and state sovereignties. It has led to a decline in the importance of domestic production in many once industrialized countries. All of which, along with the worldwide rise of the service sector and the feminization of the workforce in many places, has dramatically eroded the bases of proletarian identity and its politics-dispersing class relations, alliances and antinomies, across the four corners of the earth. The globalization of the division of labour reduces workers everywhere to the lowest common denominator, to a disposable cost, compelling them to compete with sweatshop and family manufacture' It has also put such a distance between sites of production and consumption that their relationship becomes all but unfathomable, save in fantasy.

Not that Fordist fabrication has disappeared. Neither is the mutation of the labour market altogether unprecedented. For one thing, as Marx (1967: 635) observed, the development of capitalism has always conduced to the cumulative replacement of "skilled labourers by less skilled, mature labourers by immature, male by female...". For another, David Harvey (1989:192f) reminds us, the devaluation of labour power has been a traditional response to falling profits and periodic crises of commodity production. What is more, the growth of a global free market in commodities and services has not been accompanied by a correspondingly free flow of workers; most nation-states still regulate their movement to a greater or lesser extent. Yet the likes of Harvey insist, nonetheless, that the current moment is different, that it evinces significant features which set it apart, rupturing the continuing history of capital-a history that "remain[s] the same and yet-[is] constantly changing"^o. Above all else, the explosion of new monetary instruments and markets, aided by ever more sophisticated means of planetary coordination *and space-time* compression, have allowed the financial order to achieve a degree of autonomy from "real production" un-

matched in the annals of modern political economy. Indeed, the ever more virtual qualities of fiscal circulation enable the speculative side of capitalism to seem increasingly independent of manufacture, less constrained either by the exigencies or the moral values of virtuous labour.

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How might any of this be connected to conditions in contemporary South Africa, to the widespread preoccupation there with reserve armies of spectral workers? What might we learn about the historical implications of the global age by eavesdropping on popular anxieties at this cc, ordinate our tire postcolonial map? How do we interpret mounting local fears about the preternatural production of wealth, about its fitful flow and occult accumulation, about the destruction of the labour market by technicians of the arcane?

The end of apartheid might have fired utopian imaginations around the world with a uniquely telegenic vision of rights restored and history redeemed. But South Africa has also been remarkable for the speed with which it has run up against problems common to societies, especially to post-revolutionary societies, abruptly confronted with the prospect of liberation under neoliberal conditions. Not only has the miraculously peaceful passage to democracy been marred by a disconcerting upsurge of violence and crime, both organized and everyday. The exemplary quest for Truth and Reconciliation threatens to dissolve into recrimination and strife, even political chaos. There is widespread evidence of an uneasy fusion of enfranchisement and exclusion, hope and hopelessness; of a radically widening chasm between rich and poor; of the effort to realize modern utopias by decidedly postmodern means. Gone is any official-speak of an egalitarian socialist futu-

re, of work-for-all, of the welfare state envisioned in the Freedom Charter that, famously; mandated the struggle against the ancien regime' Gone, too, are the critiques of the free market and of bourgeois ideology once voiced by the anti-apartheid movements, their idealism re-framed by the perceived reality of global economic forces (cf. Sharp 1998:245f).^o Elsewhere (1999), we have suggested that these conditions, and similar ones in other places, have conduced to a form of 'millennial capitalism'. By this we mean not just capitalism at the millennium, but capitalism invested with salvific force; with intense faith in its capacity, if rightly harnessed, wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered. At its most extreme, this faith is epitomized by forms of money magic, ranging from pyramid schemes to prosperity gospels, that pledge to deliver immense, immediate wealth by largely inscrutable means; in its more mundane manifestation, it accords the market itself an almost mystical capacity to produce arid deliver cash and commodities.

Of course, as we intimated in speaking of consumption and speculation, market redemption is now a world-wide creed. Yet its millennial character is decidedly more prominent in contexts--like South Africa and Central Europe--where there has been an abrupt conversion to laissez-faire capitalism from tightly regulated material and moral economies; where evocative calls for entrepreneurialism confront the realities of marginalization in the planetary distribution of resources; where totalizing ideologies have suddenly given way to a spirit of deregulation, with its taunting mix of desire and disappointment, liberation and limitation. Individual citizens, many of them marooned by a rudderless ship of state, attempt to clamber aboard the good ship Enterprise by whatever they have at their disposal. But, in so doing, they find themselves battling the eccentric currents of the "new" world order, which forge expansive connections between the local and the translocal, short-circuit established ways and means, disarticulate

conventional relations of wealth and power, and render porous received borders, both within and between nation-states. In the vacuum left by retreating national ideologies--or, more accurately, by ideologies increasingly contested in the name of identity politics--people in these societies are washed over by a flood of mass media from across the earth; media depicting a cargo of animated objects and life-styles that affirm the neoliberal message of freedom and self-realization through consumption.

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Under such conditions, where images of desire are as pervasive as they are inaccessible, it is only to be expected that there would be an intensification of efforts to make sense of the hidden logic of supply and demand, to restore some transparency to the relation between production and value, work and wealth. Also to multiply modes of accumulation, both fair and foul. The occult economies of many postcolonial societies (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), and the spectacular rise within them of organized crime, are alike features of millennial capitalism, disturbing caricatures of market enterprise in motion, of the impetus to acquire vast fortunes without ordinary labour costs. Yet, distinctive as they are, the conditions of which we speak here are not unprecedented. In Africa at least, they recall an earlier moment of global expansion, of dramatic articulations of the local and the translocal, of the circulation of new goods and images, of the displacement of indigenous orders of production and power. We refer to the onset of colonialism. It, too, occasioned world-

transforming, millennial aspirations (cf Fields 1985).

With this parallel in mind, we turn to contemporary South Africa.

Alien-Nation

The nightshift: Workers in the alternative economy

There can be no denying the latter-day preoccupation with zombies in rural South Africa." Their existence, far from being the subject of elusive tales from the backwoods, of fantastic fables from the veld, is widely taken for granted: As a simple matter of fact. In recent times, respectable local newspapers have carried banner headlines like "'Zombie' Back From The Dead", illustrating their stories with conventional, high-realist photographs;" similarly, defence lawyers in provincial courts have sought, by forensic means, to have clients acquitted of murder on grounds of having been driven to their deadly deeds by the zombification of their kin;" and illicit zombie workers have become an issue in large scale labour disputes." Public culture is replete with invocations of the living dead, from popular songs and prime-time documentaries to national theatrical productions.' Not even the state has remained aloof. The Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders (Ralushai et al. 1996), appointed in 1995 by the Northern Province administration to, investigate an "epidemic" of occult violence, reported widespread fear of the figure of the zombie. The latter, it notes in a tone of ethnographic neutrality (p.5),"

In a person who is believed to have died, but because of the power of a witch, he is resurrected...[and] works for the person who has turned him in a zombie. To make it impossible for him to communicate with other people, the front part of his tongue is cut off so that he cannot speak. it is believed that he works at night only ...[and] that he can leave his rural area and work in the urban area, often far from his home. Whenever he meets people he knows, he vanishes.

The observations of the Commission are amply confirmed by our own experience in the Northwest Province since the early 1990s; although our informants added that zombies (*dithotsela*; also *diphoko*)" were not merely the dead-brought-back-to-life, that they could be killed first for the purpose. Here, too, reference to them permeates everyday talk on the street, in private backyards, on the pages of the local press, in courts of law. Long-standing notions of witchcraft, *boloi*, have come to embrace zombie-making, the brutal reduction of others-in South Africa, largely unrelated neighbours-to instruments of production: to insensible beings stored, like cools, in sheds, cupboards, or oil drums at the homes of their creators (cf Ralushai et al. 1996: 50). In a world of flexitime employment, it is even said that some people are made into "part-time zombies" (cf Ralushai et al. 1996:224-5), whose exhaustion in the morning speaks of an unwitting nocturnal mission, of involuntary toil on the night shift.

Thus do some build fortunes with the lifeblood of others. And, as they do, they are held to destroy the job market--even more, the very essence of self-possessed labour- in the process. Those typically said to conjure up the living dead tend, unsurprisingly, to be persons of conspicuous wealth; especially new wealth, whose source is neither visible nor readily explicable. Such things, of course, are highly relative: in very poor rural communities, where (almost) all things are relatives, it does not take a great deal to be seen to be affluent. In point of fact, these actually accused of the mystical manufacture of night workers, and assaulted or killed as a result, are not always the same as those suspected: much like peoples

assailed elsewhere as witches and sorcerers, they are often elderly, relict individuals, mostly female. Note: not all, although there is a penchant in much of northerly South Africa to refer to anyone alleged to engage in this kind of magical evil as "old women." Conversely, their primary accusers and attackers, more often than not, are young, unemployed men (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999).

Zombie-makers are sexual perverts whose deformed genitalia and poisonous secretions make them unable to reproduce; they fuse, in a single grotesque, the very essence of negative value: the simultaneous, reciprocal destruction of both production and reproduction.

Zombie-makers, moreover, are semiotically saturated, visually charged figures. In contrast to their victims, who are neutered by being reduced to pure labour power, they are stereotypically described as sexual perverts whose deformed genitalia and poisonous secretions make them unable to reproduce; worse yet, to make them likely to spoil the fertility of others. Also, by extension, of the collectivity at large, be it a clan, a village, a town. *Which* is why they have become iconic of a perceived crisis of household and community in rural South Africa." In this respect, they fuse, in a single grotesque, the very essence of negative value (cf Munn 1986): the simultaneous, reciprocal destruction of both production and reproduction. On one hand, by manufacturing spectral workers, they, annihilate the very possibility of productive employment, imaginatively if not manifestly; on the other, by caking jobs away from young people, they prevent them from securing their wherewithal to establish families and to reproduce-and so make it impossible for any community to ensure its future. No wonder that, in one of the most poignant witch-killings of the 1990s, the old woman set alight by morally outraged youths--determined to save their community by removing all evil-doers--was to hear, in her final agony, the words: 'Die, die you

witch. We can't get work because of you:' (Ralushai 1996:193f; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999).

Discourse in a range of overlapping public spheres, from 'customary' tribunals and provincial courts through local religious and political assemblies to the print and broadcast media, makes it clear that, for many, the threat of a spectral workforce is all too concrete. And urgent. On more than one occasion, large crowds have gathered in towns in the region to watch the epic effort of healers to "liberate" zombies from their captors; in vernacular parlance, to "return them home". Here the spectral becomes spectacle. The fantasy of forcing underground evil into public visibility, of reversing the arcane alienation that creates phantom workers, is a palpable feature of the domestic cultural scene. The media, widely Africanized since the fall of apartheid, have been crucial in all this. They have taken the conventions of investigative reporting far beyond their orthodox rationalist frame in order to plumb the enigma of new social realities (Fordred 1998); harsh realities whose magicality, in the prevailing historical circumstances, does not permit the literary conceit of magical realism, demanding instead a deadly serious engagement with the actuality of enchantment.

Thus a long-running saga in 1993 on the pages of *Mail* -formerly the *Mafikeng Mail*, a small town newspaper, now a Northwest provincial weekly with large circulation in the region--in which a pair of journalists sought to verify the claims of a healer, one Mokalaka Kwinda. Kwinda had claimed that he had revived a man who had been living far four years as the 'slave' of witches in the nearby Swaruggens district; this before the "eyes of his", the zombie's "weeping mother". Likewise a quest that same year to cover the efforts of four diviners to "retrieve" a "zombie woman" from the clutches of a malevolent in the nearby Luhurutshe district." These stories marry the surreal to the banal, the mystical to the mundane: in the former case, the

healer told the reporters that his elusive patient was undergoing 'preliminary' treatment, so that he might be "able to speak and return to normal life". Nor are such events confined to the cutback. In Mabopane, in the eastern part of the Northwest Province, "hundreds of students and workers" reportedly filled the streets one weekday in May 1994, eager to witness a "zombie hunt".

The fear of being reduced to ghost labour, of being abducted to feed the fortunes of a depraved stranger, occurs alongside another kind of spectre: a growing mass, a shadowy alien-nation, of immigrant black workers from elsewhere on the continent. So overt is the xenophobic sentiment that these workers are disrupting local relations of production and reproduction--that they usurp scarce jobs and resources, foster prostitution, and spread AIDS--that they have been openly harassed on South African streets. Like zombies, they are nightmare citizens, their rootlessness threatening to siphon off the remaining, rapidly diminishing prosperity of the indigenous population. Interestingly, like zombies too, they are characterized by their impaired speech: the common term for immigrant, *makwerekwere* a Sesotho word implying limited competence in the vernacular. Suggesting a compromised capacity to engage in intercourse with autochthonous society, this usage explains why migrants live in terror that their accents might be detected in public."

'Die, die you witch. We can't get work because of you!'

Their apprehension is well-founded. In September 1998, for example, a crowd returning by train from a march in Pretoria --held, significantly, to protest mass unemployment--threw three *makwerekwere* to their deaths, purportedly for stealing scarce jobs; two were Senegalese, one from Mozambique." Three months later, in December, there came alarming reports of a band of hoodlums in Johannesburg

who seemed bent on the "systematic elimination" of foreign nationals.' Immigrants from neighbouring canneries, and from further abroad, have worked in industry, on farms, and across the service sector in South Africa for over a century. But, in the 1990s, the tight regulation of these labour flows has given way to less controlled, often subcontracted, sources of supply." Employers are ever more attracted by the potential of this cheap labour; it is said that as many as 80% of them use casual, "non-standard" workers (Horwitz, cited in Adam et al. 1998:209). A recent investigation shows that, while the preponderance of immigrants in the past decade have actually been male entrepreneurs plying their trade in large cities, a great number do find their way into other areas of the economy, often in provincial towns, some, especially those lacking legal documentation (frequently, women and children) land up in the highly exploitable reaches of rural agriculture-in places like the Northwest Province. Wherever they land up in South Africa, immigrants rake their place on a fraught historical terrain. Anxieties about unemployment have reached unprecedented levels: by common agreement, the rate is much higher than the unofficial 38% to which the state admits. According to one estimate, 500, 000 jobs, virtually all of them held by blacks, have evaporated over the last five years. And this is probably a conservative reckoning, based primarily on shrinkage in the formal sector. "No jobs means our youth are destroyed," a resident of Soweto told a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune* in February 1999. "Even that eternal optimist Nelson Mandela, his retirement imminent, recently quipped: "In a few months, I'll be standing by the road with a sign: Please Help. Unemployed with a new wife and a big family".¹⁰

Postcolonial South Africa has seen a raised standard of living for sections of the African middle class ... [but], for the vast majority, millennial hope jostles material impossibility.

In the northerly provinces, which are among the poorest in the country, there has been scant evidence of the prosperity and redistribution that was expected to follow the fall of apartheid. True, the newly deregulated economy has granted some blacks a larger share of the spoils: postcolonial South Africa has seen a raised standard of living for sections of the African middle class, most notably for the 'liberation aristocracy', a few of whom have become instant millionaires and living personifications of the triumph of nonracial, neoliberal capitalism (Adam et al. 1998:203). In spite of all this, or perhaps because of it, the so-called "transition" has, as we noted earlier, kindled a millennial faith in the opportunities of "free" market enterprise, now ostensibly open to all. "I want every black person to feel that he or she has the opportunity to become rich and only has himself to blame if he fails," declared Dan Mkhwanazi, launching the National Economic Trust (Adam et al. 1998: 217).'

But, for the vast majority; millennial hope jostles material impossibility. The much vaunted Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), designed to root out endemic poverty, has thus far had minimal impact. Indeed, its broad reformist objectives, which harked back to the age of the welfare state, soon hardened into GEAR, the government's Growth, Employment And Reconstruction, strategy, which privileges development understood in terms of privatization, wage flexibility, and massive public service cutbacks (Adam et al. 1998:206). Little of the positive effects of these policies, or of recent post-Fordist expansion in domains like tourism, finds its way into the arid rural landscapes of the North or the Northwest Provinces. Here a living has to be eked out from pitifully small-scale subsistence farming and (very) petty commerce; from such things as brewing, sex work, and the refashioning of used commodities, classically the pursuits of women. Such assets as pensions, paltry though they may be, have become the subject of fierce compe-

tion; their beneficiaries, mainly widows and surviving old men, are prime targets of bitter jealousy and allegations of avarice. Meanwhile, the regular migrant labour wages that had long subsidized agrarian endeavours, and had given young men a degree of independence, are noticeably diminishing; this, in turn, 'exasperated their sense of threatened masculinity, and has under-scored the gendered, generational conflicts of the countryside. Which is why the overwhelming proportion of those accused of witchcraft and zombie-making are older and female. And why their accusers are overwhelmingly out-of-work young adult males.

At the same time, provincial towns in these northerly provinces are home to small but bushing black elites, many of them spawned originally by the late "homelands," into which the apartheid regime pumped endless resources over several decades. Well positioned to soak up novel business opportunities and to engage in behind-the-scenes dealings, they have quickly taken charge of a sizeable proportion of retail marketing and the provision of services in the countryside. For them, increasingly, the conspicuous consumption of prized commodities-houses, cars, TVs, cell phones-does more than just signal accomplishment. It also serves to assuage the inequities of the colonial past. But, as it does, it also marks the growing inequities of the postcolonial present. These distinctions, to those who gaze upon them from below, also seem to be a product of enchantment: given that they have appeared with indecent speed and with little visible exertion, their material provenance remains mysterious. So, even more, does the cause of joblessness amidst such obvious prosperity. In the upshot, the two sides of millennial capitalism, post-apartheid style, came together: on one is the ever more distressing awareness of the absence of work, itself measured by the looming presence of the figure of the immigrant; on the other is the constantly reiterated suspicion, embodied in the -zombie, that it is only by magical means, by consuming others, that

people may enrich themselves in these perplexing tithes.

The symbolic apotheosis of this syllogism is to be found in a commercial advertisement run by a "traditional healer" in Mmabatho, capital of the Northwest. It appears in, of all places, the *Mafikeng Business Advertiser*, a local trade weekly. Top among the occult skills on offer is a treatment which promises clients "to get a job early if unemployed". The healer in question, ID's S.M. Banda, should know. He is an immigrant.

Precursors: The ghosts of workers past

On the face of it, much of this is new. When we did research in the Northwest in the late 1960s and mid 1970s-it was then the Tswana ethnic "homeland"-most males were, or had been away as migrants in the industrial centres. There was barely a black middle class to speak of and no manifest anxieties about immigrants. Labourers had long come from elsewhere to seek employment in local towns and on the farms of the neighbouring Western Transvaal; and there were "foreigners" (Zimbabweans, and Xhosa descendants of those who had built the railroad at the turn of the century, for instance) who lived quite amicably with Tswana-speaking populations. There was also no mention of zombies at the time. True, many people spoke of their concern about witchcraft, understood as an unnatural means of garnering wealth by "eating" others and absorbing their capacity to create value. On occasion, moreover, malevolent-, would cause young migrants to lease their moorings, to forsake their kin at home and to eschew the demands of domestic reproduction." But there was nothing like the current preoccupation with the danger of humans being made into toiling automatons; nor with the sense that a spectral economy, founded on the labour of these and other aliens, might be draining the productive or reproductive potential of the community It large.

Yet these late twentieth-century preoccupations are not entirely unprecedented either. In disinterring vernacular conceptions of work, labour, and consciousness during the high years of apartheid (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:169), we noted that Tswana regarded certain modes of migrant toil (mmereko) as alienating; that they spoke of the way in which its disciplined routines reduced humans to draft animals, even to "tinned fish". These tropes implied a contrasting notion of self-possessed work (*tiro*), typically work-at-home, which created social value. By contrast to selfish activity, this form of exertion constructed personhood in a positive key through the simultaneous building up of others. And, concomitantly, of a centred collective world. But the historical record indicates that Tswana ideas of estranged labour are not limited to the experience of proletarianization alone. Accounts from earlier this century tell of a condition linked to tenebral eclipse, typically by witches, of self-possession and, with it, the capacity to accumulate wealth and social power. An individual afflicted in this manner was "alienated from fellowship with his kith and kin," noted 3. Tom Brown (1926: 137-8), a missionary-ethnographer with a well developed grasp of Setswana. He goes on, in the real-time ethnographic present:

...they apply to him a name (*tebibd* or *sehiltr*), which signifies that though the body lives and moves it is only a grave, a place where something has died or been killed. The essential manhood is dead. It is no tuncmonthing to hear a person spoken of as being dead when he stands before you visibly alive. when this takes place it always means that there has been an overshadowing of the true relationships of life ...

Here, patently, we have a precursor of the zombie. But, whereas the latter is conjured from a corpse, either killed for the purpose or already deceased, *sehihi* is a state of eclipse effected by the appropriation of the essential selfhood of a living person, leaving behind a sentient shell as mute witness to the erasure of the social being it once housed. Moreover, where *sehihi* entailed the loss of all human creativity-often

said to have been eaten whole by witches to enhance their own physical, political, and material potency the zombie is transformed purely into alienated labour power, abducted from home or workplace, and made to serve as someone else's privatized means of production."

Evidence from elsewhere in southern Africa fills out this phantasmagoric history of labour, enabling us to track its fitful figurings, its continuities and breaks. Thus Harrie's (1994: 221) study of the world of Mozambican migrants to South Africa between 1860 and 1910 shows that witches (*baloyi*), held to be prevalent on the mines, were said to seize the "life essence" of others, forcing them to toil for days as zombies (*dlukula*) in closed-off subterranean galleries, where they lived on a diet of mud. The poetic particularity of phantom workers-here, as elsewhere-is sensitive register of shifting experiences of labour and its value. The introduction of compensation pay for miner's *phthisis*; for example, quickly led to a notion that zombies returned froth below ground with numbers-potential payouts, blood money-caulked on their backs. Junod (1927:298-9; 513; cf Harries 1994:221), classic ethnographer of early south-eastern Africa, remarked on similar fears in the southern Mozambique countryside around 1910. "Modernized" witches there, anticipating their later-day South African counterparts, were thought capable of reducing their fellows to a nocturnal agrarian workforce, masquerading by day as innocent children." Some could even induce young men to wander off to the Witwatersrand mines, never to return. Once snore we see the zombie as a "walking spectre," err object of collective terror and desire, to use Clery's (1995: 174) description of the "terrorist genre" of haunted Gothic fiction in late eighteenth century England, where industrialization was similarly restructuring the nature of work-and-place. Like these "Horrid Mysteries," zombie tales dramatize the strangeness of what had become real; in this instance, the

problematic relation of work to the production of social being secured at time and place.

Other instances of ghost workers in Africa underline the point. Take Ardener's (1970) piquant narrative of zombie beliefs among the Bakweri of West Cameroon. These beliefs --an intensification, it appears, of older ideas about witchcraft--arose at the time of the Great War, with the relatively sudden penetration of German colonisers into this fertile agricultural region. Their land expropriated for the establishment of plantations manned largely by foreigners, the Bakweri found themselves crowded into inhospitable reserves; as a result, they entered a period of impoverishment and reduced fertility. It was then that the zombie labour force (vekongi) first made itself felt, sheltering in tin houses built by those locals who had somehow managed to profit from the unpromising circumstances." The living dead, many of them children, were said to be victims of the murderous greed of their own close kin; they were sent away to work in distant plantations, where witchmasters had built a town overflowing with modern consumer goods.

Here, as in newly colonized Mozambique, we see the sudden conjuncture of local world-in which production is closely tied to kin groups-with forces that arrogate the capacity to create value and redirect its flow. Above all, these forces fracture the meaning of work and its received relation to place. Under such conditions, zombies become the stuff of "estranged recognition" (Clery 1995:114): recognition not merely of the commodification of labour, or its subjection to deadly competition, but of the invisible predations that seem to congeal beneath the banal surfaces of new forms of wealth.

In their iconography of forced migration and wandering exile, of children abused and relatives violated, the living dead comment on the disruption of an economy in which productive energies were once visibly

invested in the reproduction of a situated order of domestic and communal relations; an order through which the present was, literally, kept in place. And the future was secured.

Ardener (1970: 148) notes the complex continuities and innovations at play in these constructions, which have, as their imaginative precondition, ideas of the occult widely distributed across Africa and, the New World; in particular, the idea that witches, by their very nature, consume the generative force of others. Zombies themselves seem to be born, at least in the first instance, of colonial encounters: of the precipitous engagement of local worlds with imperial economies that seek to exert control over the essential means of producing value, means like land and labour, space and time. It is in this abstract, metaphorical sense that Rene Depestre (1971: 20) declares colonialism to be "a process of man's general zombification". In purely historical terms, the amity between colonization and zombification is less direct: colonialism does not always call forth zombies, and zombies are not always associated with colonialism. What they do tend to be associated with, however, are rapidly changing conditions of work under capitalism in its various guises; conditions which rupture not just established relations of production and reproduction, but also received connections of persons to place, the material to the moral, private to public, the individual to the communal, past to future. In this respect, the living dead join a host of other spectral figures--vampires, monsters, creatures of Gothic "supernaturalism"--who alike have been vectors of an affective engagement with the visceral implications of the factory, the plantation, the market, the mine (cf Ardener 1970: 156; Clery 1995: 9).

As this suggests, however abstract a set of ideas may be embodied in the living dead sari may any particular zombie congeals the predicament of human labour at its most concrete, its most historically specific. How, then, might those we have encountered in rural South Africa be linked,

in more precise terms, to the late twentieth-century transformations with which we began? Or to the impact of millennial capitalism in this postcolony?

Conclusion

These questions have been anticipated, their answers foreshadowed, elsewhere. Thus Harries (1994: 221) has argued that, among early twentieth-century Mozambican miners in the Transvaal, zombie-making magic was a practical response to the unfamiliar: specifically, to the physical depredations of underground work and to the explosion of new forms of wealth amidst abject poverty. Witchcraft, in a virulently mutated strain, he says, became a proxy for capitalist exploitation; witch-hunting, a displacement of class struggle. Niehaus (1995, 1993, n.d.:16), writing of the rural Northern Province at the other end of the century, arrives at a similar conclusion: mystical evil is a "cultural fantasy" manipulated by the dominant to defend their positions of privilege. Explanations of this sort belong to a species of interpretation that brings a critical understanding of ideology to Evans-Pritchard's (1937) classic conception of witchcraft as a "socially relevant" theory of cause (Geschiere n.d.; Ferguson 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). Many would agree that their underlying premise: that witches and zombies are to be read as etiological principles which translate structural contradictions, experiential anomalies, and aporiae--force-fields of greater complexity than is normally implied by "class struggle"--into the argot of human agency, of interpersonal kinship, of morality and passion.

But here lies the rub. How does this very general truism, as valid for early colonial witchcraft as it is for latter-day zombies, relate to the implosive, shifting histories of which we have spoken? If the living dead are merely walking spectres of class struggle, why have they not been a permanent fixture of the modern South African scene? What accounts for their comings and goings and, to return to

1 our opening conundrums, for the dramatic intensification of their appeal in the postcolony? How, furthermore, do we make sense of the particular poetics of these fantasies, whose symbolic excess and expressive exuberance gesture toward an imaginative play infinitely more elaborate than is allowed by a purely pragmatic, functionalist explication.

We have tried, in the course of this narrative, to show that the mounting preoccupation with zombies and immigrants here is owed to a precise, if large-scale set of historical conditions; that these conditions underlie a postcolonial moment experienced, by all but the most affluent, as an unprecedented mix of hope and hopelessness, promise and impossibility, the new and the continuing. They have their source in social and material transformations sparked by the rapid rise of neoliberal capitalism on a global scale, a process that has intensified market competition; translocalized the division of labour; rendered national polities and economies increasingly porous, less sovereign; set many people in motion and disrupted their sense of place; dispersed class relations across international borders; and widened the gulf between flows of fiscal circulation and sites of concrete production, thus permitting speculative capital to appear to determine the fate of post-revolutionary societies. What is more, because industrial capital chases cheap, tractable labour all over the earth, searching out optimally (de)regulated environments, it often erodes the social infrastructure of working communities, adding yet further to the stream of immigrants in pursuit of employment-and to the likelihood that they will be despised, demonized, even done to death.

The backwash of this process, as we have seen, is readily evident in contemporary South Africa, where rapid deregulation, increasingly labile employment arrangements, and the gross shrinkage of the job market have altered the genetic meaning of labour, the specific relationship of production to reproduction, and the

connection of work-to-place. Where, also, labour migration-which had become a rite of passage to social manhood-has all but vanished. In the void left behind, especially in the countryside, there have risen new, unaccountable manifestations of wealth; wealth not derived from any discernible or conventional source. In this void, too, jobs seem available only for "nonstandard" workers: those, like immigrants, who will take anything they can get. Zombies, the ultimate "nonstandard" workers, take shape in the collective imaginary as figurations of these conditions. In their silence they give voice to a sense of dread about the human costs of intensified capitalist production; about the loss of control over the terms in which people alienate their labour power; about the demise of amoral economy in which wage employment, however distant and exploitative, had "always" been there to support both the founding of families and the well-being of communities. This bears its own measure of historical irony, in the colonial epoch, the migrant contract system was regarded as a social, moral, and political travesty, breaking up black households and forcing men to toil under exacting conditions for pitiable earnings; then a frequent object of protest, it is seen, in retrospect, as having been one of the secure foundations of the social landscape. Shades, here, of earlier revolutions, earlier metamorphoses in the articulation of capital and labour.

Here, then, is what is unique about the moment in the South African postcolony; what it is that has called forth an alien-nation of pariah proletarians, dead and alive. It is a historical moment that, in bringing together force-fields at once global and local, has conduced to a seismic mutation in the ontological experience, of work, selfhood, gender-, community, and place. Because the terms of reference for this experience are those of modernist capitalism --indeed, these are the only terms in which the present maybe reduced to semiotic sense-and-sensibility---it is framed in the language of

labour lost, factories foreclosed, communities crumbling. Which is why the concern with zombies in the northerly reaches of the country, while in many ways a novel confection, replays enduring images of alienated production. In Adorno's (1981:96) phrase, "it sounded so old, a.-td yet was so nevi". Much like the story of labour itself which, in an abstract sense, is still subject to the familiar "laws" of capitalism; yet, as concrete reality, has been substantially altered by the reorganization of the world economy as we know it. To reiterate: it all remains the same and yet [is] constantly charging".

One final point. Although we have tried to subdue the fantasy of spectral labour by recourse to historical reason, its key animus still eludes us. What, finally, are we to make of its symbolic excess? What does the intricate discourse about alien workers tell us of the subterranean workings of terror, of the life of standardized nightmares in a world of "daylight reason" (Duncan 1992:113)?" There is little question that this discourse gives motive and moral valence to disturbing events; that, in the classic manner of ideologies everywhere, it links etiology to existing orders of power and value. But zombie-speak seems to do much more: its productive figurations feed a process of fervent speculation, poetic elaboration, forensic quest. The menacing dangers of zombification-the disoriented wanderings, the loss of speech, sense, and will, the perverted practices that erase all ties to kith and kin--serve to conjure with inchoate fears, allowing flee play to anger and anguish and desire. Also to the effort to make some sense of them. Like Gothic horror, the elaboration of these images 'encourage[s] an experience of estranged recognition' (Clery 1995: 114) . And not only at the immiserated edges of polite society. The hardboiled social analyse might insist chat the obsession with the living dead misrecognizes the systemic roots of deprivation and distress. But its eruption onto the fertile planes of post-apartheid public culture-via sober press reports, TV documentaries and agitprop

theatre --has had a tangible impact. It has forced a recognition of ,the crisis in the countryside, of the plight of displaced youth, of an alienation within the postcolony itself. As the very conditions that call forth

zombies erode the basis of a conventional politics of labour and place and public interest, we would do well to keep an open mind about the pragmatic possibilities of these creatures of collective dread; about the

provocative manner in which they, perhaps more than anything or anybody else, are compelling the state to take note. Even to act.

