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HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE POTENTIALS OF BOUNDARIES
STEPS TOWARD A THEORY OF THE SOCIAL EDGE

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AFRICANA

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The Potentials of Boundaries
Steps Toward a Theory of the Social Edge[1]

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I. Cultural boundaries in South Africa

In this paper, I am making a number of claims about the potentials of boundaries. The argument can be stated in the following several sentences.

Boundaries are created and maintained by cultural conventions, and boundaries constitute a kind of social and cultural 'edge', or set of edges. South Africa can be characterised as a country full of boundaries or social edges. As a polity, it is perplexed by overlapping and shifting identities that have been created by multiple historical processes. These have left a complex pattern of social and cultural edges. One kind of boundary that is especially important in understanding South Africa is the boundaries of the country. South Africa is a country, not a nation, and it is composed of three city states and their hinterlands. Being a citizen of a country, rather than a member of a nation or subject of a king (Zulu or English), has implications for a number of other identities. In particular, the sense of belonging to a country arises from an identification with its *landscape*, but possibly also with the land, the soil or the earth, since countries, but not nations or states, are understood to be parts of the earth's surface, or of the land and landscape. This rasises the possibility of a struggle over autochthony and autochthnous origins. Authochthony is the idea of an origin from the earth or of an identity based on images of emergence from the soil. The South African historical struggle for a South African identity is largely focussed on a struggle for autochthonous rights and identities. This has created a country of political actors who are much more aware of the nature and the limits of the polity, or of multiple polities in the larger political arena of the country. The peculiar character of southern African politics is due to the fact that it is largely a *meta-politics*, that is, it is a form of politics that focusses attention on the nature of politics itself and the on the limits of political identity and participation.

II. Boundaries and culture

In a 1988 essay on 'culture', I wrote about how cultures define boundaries.[2] My claim then was that one of the chief functions of culture was to invent, to maintain and

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[1] A version of this paper was first presented at the Second Inter-University Colloquium of the Standing Committee on University Studies of Africa (UK) and the Netherlands African Studies Association entitled "African Research Futures: Post-colonialism and Identity." for the panel entitled 'Post-colonial South Africa in the making', convened 13-16 May, 1994, at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Research in Manchester, UK.

sometimes to impose boundaries. At that time, the essay was partly intended as a critique of the theories of culture that seemed to underwrite the policy of Apartheid. That essay has since found a wide and appreciative audience in South Africa, but a boundary has been crossed into a New South Africa and the terms of the debate have changed. My goal in the essay was to move towards a definition of culture that transcended ethnic and partisan boundaries. I saw boundaries as being central to the function of *political* culture in particular, but pointed to the paradox that this formulation presented. If cultures helped people to define their identities, and thus to create boundaries, then there must be 'culture' on both sides of any boundary. In other words that which divided people also united them in a strange way. This idea seemed to be especially valuable for South Africa, and I attempted to define culture as a sort of 'community resource' or set of resources available in principle to all people in South Africa. I argued then, against the Apartheid view of separate and incommensurable cultures, that South African culture had some regional coherence, but often very little logical coherence.[3] By attempting to define boundaries as cultural products, I intended to historicise them as human creations that, like any other powerful fiction or myth, had an historical beginning and could have an end.

I would make the surprising claim, based on this reasoning, that South Africa is particularly suseptible to democratic forms of political activity, but that the limits and scope of participation in the polity of the country will always remain problematic. It is susceptible to democracy because democracy is not actually a form of government at all, but rather a method for choosing powerful political agents who will act on behalf of others. These actors, and their constituents can, of course, choose to be ruled by tyrants, and sometimes do. Democracy, therefore, unlike many other forms of government, is unable to guarantee its own future. The overlapping identities and the plethora of social edges in southern Africa, however, will tend to maintain a meta-politics — a politics about politics — and democracy is always likely to emerge and re-emerge out of this. I believe that the history of South Africa supports this claim, but in this paper I examine and elaborate on the claims that I have made about southern Africa's special political character.

A. A theory of the social edge

It is now clear to me that what is needed now is an integrated theory of historical and cultural 'edges', points of transition between identities, categories, regions and historical periods. This image of the edge evokes for me an idea of a transition point between planes, flat surfaces that can symbolize, like a map, relatively coherent cultural

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[2] "Culture: A Contemporary Definition." In ***South African Keywords: The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts.*** (Edited by Emile Boonzaier and John Sharp, Cape Town: David Philip 1988.) pp 17-28.

[3]. In defining culture in this way, I was attempting to blend a Boasian view that cultures have regional distributions, in the manner of his 'age-area' hypothesis. Boas saw little logical coherence, where European theories of culture emphasized the logical coherence or structure and function of culture. The problem that I saw what how to integrate a regional view of culture (after Boas) with a holistic theory of culture that saw separate cultures as internally consistent but regionally incommensurable (after Malinowski and Durkheim).

discourses or spatial regions or both. The edge is a point of transition and intersection that is shared by two planes. An edge is part of both planes, but it is seen as part of neither. I believe that South Africa has long been a region full of cultural, historical and regional edges, like a finely cut diamond, perhaps. It has also had an acute vision of its own historical edges, and of the edges of its many 'parts'. Moreover, this constant vision of the edges of social, cultural, regional and historical categories has driven South African history in its own characteristic way. For instance, the 'edge' of the urban environment, and the edge of the rural have been eroding each other for most of this century. The rural-urban edge is now more like a continuous curve, but people continue to insist on the maintenance of this edge. The maintenance of this boundary, and the use of it to symbolize many other sorts of transitions and boundaries, is integral to African Independent churches, for instance, which seek to mediate between images of urban evil and rural peace. The migrant who attempts to maintain a family in the rural areas while he works in the urban mines and industry, both transcends these edges while maintaining, even insisting upon, the distinction between urban work and subjugation counterpoised against rural rest and dignity. The White Afrikaner who longs of the *plaas* ['farm' or 'rural area'], or the *volkstaat* [literally 'folk state'] does the same. For black South Africans, the boundaries between youth and age are constantly transgressed, especially since the Soweto Uprising and Sharpeville when youth took charge of the 'revolution', but also constantly maintained through periodic renaissance of initiation rituals and circumcision.

These social and historical edges distinguish and characterize South African society and history. It is possible to see the history of migrancy, for instance, as an ongoing discourse about the edges of the rural and the urban, the male and the female, between alienating labour and fulfilling work, between black and white, between money, markets and commodities on the one hand and gifts, family and the wholesomeness of the land on the other. These potentials of cultural and regional boundaries have yet to be thoroughly explored, but they do have genuine historical force.

Throughout Africa, contemporary discussion of a potential transition from colonial and post-colonial authoritarian states to new multi-party democratic orders tends to assume that the fundamental cultural concepts and practices of African polities will support such a change. Some recent sociology, social history and ethnographic work on European revolutions and transition to the Modern, however, points strongly towards the importance of cultural notions which African societies and cultures appear to lack. For instance, notions of privacy and institutions which support the practices and the architecture of privacy, the control (but not absence) of violence and coercive intrusion, an apparently distinctive European concept of the person and of individualism and individuality, and so on, while deeply embedded in European cultures are often less apparent or absent in African. On the other hand, small-scale democracies of the African village-chief's public court has no obvious equivalent in contemporary Europe. It is essential now to examine how these ideas of boundaries defining privacy, the public, the battlefield, etc. — boundaries of persons, boundaries of kin-group, in-group, out-group, of friend and enemy, of the familiar and the stranger — are understood, negotiated and redefined in Africa. This is equally a problem for studies of real (i.e. empirical) polities and action, as it is for the 'imagined communities' of nationalism and race. While boundaries are often seen as the locus of

political conflict, it is also clear that boundaries are essential for there to be any politics at all. What is less clear is how the idea of personal, political, cultural, regional and other boundaries either contribute towards or militates against a particular political order. The recent history of southern African politics needs to be understood in the context of broader theoretical discussions from anthropology and social history of the boundaries that define the person, the domains of 'public' and 'private', and the polity (as the arena of conflict and negotiations, and as the space of political power). In doing so, we must examine in particular how different cultural constructions of boundaries of person and polity have been deployed in southern African politics from the late nineteenth century to the present.

By 1988, however, it looked to many of us in South Africa that the end of Apartheid, and perhaps more besides, was at hand. But the vision of the end of South Africa and the end Apartheid was perennial: everyone knew it must happen, but no one was ever really ready for it. For decades, even centuries, South Africans have lived as if on the edge of a political Apocalypse, believed to be the edge of history and of civilization, both fearing it and desiring it as one kind of liberation or another. Shortly before I wrote the essay on culture, the State President, Mr. P. W. Botha had had a vision of that historical edge. In a speech to the public, he called it 'the Rubicon' with obvious reference to small stream that Julius Caesar crossed in AD 49. Although 'crossing the Rubicon' has come to mean irrevocable commitment to a course of action, Botha proved unable to cross the historical edge, but P. W. Botha did set in motion, almost unwittingly, a process that led to the collapse of his government, and ultimately to the release of Nelson Mandela and the first democratic elections in 1994. Now, a few months after the first universal-franchise democratic elections in South Africa, the country is poised on a new edge. This time it is the edge of the future. The ambient political rhetoric now presents South Africa and its President, Nelson Mandela, as the best shot at secular salvation we've got. A history of oppression and separateness has suddenly given way to what looks like a future of opportunity under a government of National unity. An edge has been crossed. New edges have been created and a whole new map of South Africa has been drawn that cross-cuts most of the old provinces that were based on the boundaries of older states and colonies. New ethnicities and political identities are emerging while old ones change and adapt to the new political geometry.

B. Boundaries as edges of difference

Boundaries are lines of distinction or difference between the different parts of the polity. Boundaries exist in many different forms, but they have in common some symbolic means of marking difference and inclusion or exclusion from some category. Simple difference itself — difference of language, religion, believes, practices, colour, and so on —is never to sufficient to make a social or cultural difference. There must also be a concept of a category that some difference — any difference — can be made to mark. Not all socially relevant differences are marked by cultural or social differences. The magical appeal of Calvinism, for instance, was that the real and most essential difference between people was *not* marked in any perceptible way. Whether one was saved or not was only known to god, but the boundaries that the distinction created were believed to be both absolute and final. Being saved or damned, of course, consisted purely and simply of a difference that only God could know and comprehend. This in turn created two categories of people which was based on what

we might call pure difference: pure because it could not be confused with any human judgment. This was because no mortal could perceive the such a fundamental difference. Outside the circle of believers in this pure form of difference, however, there literally was no difference. The moral of this story — although there are others, notably the one Max Weber drew out of it — is that the *signs* of difference are never either a necessary or a sufficient condition for the existence of socially relevant difference. In broadly anthropological terms, then, social difference is ultimately a matter of categories which signs such as colour, practices, or whatever, may symbolize.[4] The symbols and markers of difference then must be cultural just as the capacity to form concepts must be a universal human trait. Together, categories and concepts make it possible to communicate. One of the things we humans most urgently communicate about, it seems, is difference.

In this sense, then, I said at the very end of the essay, that

> Societies, political groups, nations and so on have boundaries. Their edges are often very easy to perceive and to define. This is what culture does. But the boundaries that are created . . . are at the centre of culture, not its edges.[5]

I meant by this that the means for cultural communication in the many forms that it takes — from popular culture to official culture, high culture, business culture, political culture or whatever — tend to make the edges of social groupings as clear as possible through all of the symbolic and communicative means at its disposal. The edges of social groups come into being when cultures recognize common symbols of difference. This includes ritual, religion, rites of passage, a literature, secular and sacred law, monuments, political oratory and recruitment, etc. Elaborating on this recognition has been at the centre of major theoretical efforts of, for instance, Pierre Bourdieu or Jurgen Habermas.

In 1988, South Africa was still struggling with Apartheid. It seemed to me then, as it seems to me now, that Apartheid was an attempt to make hard edges where there were only ragged imbrications of fragmented societies. Formulated by intellectuals, albeit twisted ones, Apartheid was as much an *intellectual* exercise of making order out of what was widely perceived to be chaos, as it was a political plan, or the consequence of grand economic structures of determination. It was a desperate attempt to create and to maintain boundaries that were clear and sharp in a country

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[4]. Of course, there may be categories without any means to symbolize them. Classes of smells that have no name or visual sign for them are examples of such categories that exist cognitively, but which can not be either talked about or symbolized in other ways.

[5] This appeared in an essay 'Culture: a contemporary definition' in a collection of essays produced by the Social Anthropology department of the University of Cape as it was in 1988, together with the cooperation of several anthropologists at the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit (RAU) who had recently 'come out' in favour of Social anthropology and against the 'volkekunde' model for research and education that exited at most of the Afrikaans-medium universities. The book that resulted. **South African Keywords: The uses and abuses of Political concepts** (edited by Emile Boonzaier ad John Sharp. David Philip, Cape Town 1988:) has had wide usage and currency in South Africa since its publication in 1988

where there were none, or where those that did exist overlapped and confused any attempt to grasp it all. Apartheid's vision was to create an order that could be grasped, a whole that could be taken in at a glance, a machine that would glint and shine as the light of history reflected off its clear sharp edges. There was a clear aesthetic judgment of the kind of social life that would be deemed wholesome. That vision — the Vision of the Apartheid visionaries, was of a social mass with edges, crystalline rather than liquid. In reading the documents that these visionaries produced, one has the feeling that they longed for the imagined political *feel* of glazed tiles and porcelain, rather than the slippery mud of rain washed soil or blowing dust. It was in its essence a modern feel that they wanted, enamel on metal, one that would endure, and be made pure. Instead, the southern part of Africa had long felt like it was always at the end of its own history, always about to combust from the friction of its peoples. For the architects of Apartheid, edges meant order. The plan was quite simply to create edges where they had not existed before, and to sharpen up the definition of those that existed. This process of differentiation is familiar enough to anyone familiar with South African history. I merely wish to point to the *aesthetic vision* that was implicit in it, and its family resemblance to other projects of modernism, from Betty Crocker and the all-electric kitchen to Hitler's crematoriums. The symbols of difference served intellectual and cultural programs that created boundaries and appreciated, above all, the aesthetics of the hard edge.

This is, in a sense, natural. The symbolic modes of human imagination, expression and memory tend to create categories whose edges are hard and certain rather than soft and fuzzy. Indeed the idea of fuzzy categories and soft concepts (such as those of the social sciences and humanities) have been consistently devalued by the academy and by the public. Nevertheless, it is now asserted from within schools of so-called post-modernism and 'chaos theory', that fuzzy and soft is what its all about. Life, for the most part, is really quite fuzzy, except where it is hard, and it is the hall-mark of reason, and the key to the growth of science to find the hard edges of fact and invariable regularity that lurk in the fuzzy experience of everyday life and the chaos of nature. Chaos, according to one new kind of mathematics, may be determined by relatively simple forces and causes that can be represented by relatively simple mathematical formulae. Most forms of chaos are not fully or even partially random, but are in fact fully determined. They are determined, however, in a way that does not permit these systems to be predicted with any reasonable degree of success, but, more importantly, does not allow us to go backwards in time from the present to guess about what previous states of the system may have been like. What makes the investigations of these chaotic systems most interesting to the human scientist is that time can only go one way in these complex systems. There is no way back; there is only many ways forward. If history and society are chaotic in the sense that these models suggest, then there is in fact no necessary pattern to history. Knowing history, then, will not in the least prevent us from making the same mistakes; but, more encouragingly, it will also not limit us to the same conditions in which mistakes can ever be the 'same' mistakes.

Under these conditions, then, of fuzzy categories, soft concepts and chaos, it is the work of culture to make sense — to give reality some edges. A great deal of this making of sense is the making of political order, and making political order is making distinctions. Thus, social groups and social categories are distinguished by boundaries

that the symbolic order of society creates to do just this job. The mechanism of boundary-making itself are central to the system, and can not be at its 'edges'. This is because it is precisely these edges — or boundaries — that it creates. Political boundaries, cultural boundaries and social boundaries exist because there is a means for 'making' them in the minds of people who live by and in terms of them, and because we must impose an order, however fictional it may be, in order to live with, through and for each other.

We now live at a juncture of time in which the familiar edges that the whole twentieth century worked so hard to make, have begun to erode like limestone cathedrals in acid rain. As the old edges lose their definition, we see new patterns emerging out of the softer forms of the weathered rock. To extend the metaphor, one of these appears to be democracy. I think there are a good reasons for this that are not directly related to the politics of democracy or to any other system for apportioning and regulating power. Democracy is different from systems of power that rule through fear or patronage, or systems that rule through hierarchical orders sanctioned by religion. These are political orders that Ernest Gellner, in a sweeping account of human political history from hunters and gatherers to the post-modern condition, calls 'Agraria' and 'Industria'. Democracy can only exist in societies where fear, hierarchy and patronage have become optional, or have been limited to such a degree that they cannot destroy democracy. It is clear, however, that democracy is not itself a means of government. It is only a means for selecting a type of government, and for making those with power responsible to those whom they rule. The critics of democracy have always pointed out that 'the people' can be wrong. Plato rejected democracy for precisely this reason: ordinary people can not be expected to know what is good for them. They might, either in fear or in naive trust, elect tyrants to rule them. People, especially "The People", needed philosopher kings to rule them because they could not be trusted with democracy. The democratic processes after the French and Russian revolutions proved Plato correct in this one respect: the people could not always be trusted to elect just or good rulers, and democracy itself did not necessarily provide a just means of government. Democracy, it turned out, is simply a means for summing up and giving form to something that could be called the collective will, or just the 'majority'. In fact, modern democracies are just 'numbers games' that create complex fictions of political will. These fictions of political will can be exercised by bureaucracies or by tyrants, by oligarchs or patriarchs, . . . and even buffoons. It is undeniable that the present years in South Africa constitute a new departure, and that democracy is 'the way to go.' But democracy is not the 'end of history,' as Francis Fukuyama has called it after the fall of the Berlin Wall. If the philosopher Georg Hegel had been right about the inevitable realization of the Sprit of World History as the unfolding of human freedom, then Fukuyama would be right in seeing democracy as the end of history. But Hegel was wrong, because history does not work like that, and so is Fukuyama. Democracy in fact, can not be a system of political power. Instead it is a method for deciding in an inevitably chaotic and temporal world who shall be deemed to have power, and over whom and with what limits. In other words, democracy is a *method and a discourse, not a political system of government*; alternatively, we can say that it is a political system but only inasmuch as it defines the terms of discourse about power. Power exists outside of democracy which can only choose, under certain conditions, what form it will take.

It is natural, then, that democracy could emerge in times of flux and uncertainty about what power is, and who wields it over whom. South Africa, curiously, has reached a democratic moment because the certainties that Apartheid attempted to create have failed. It has emerged into a field of discourse where everything seems open and fresh, new for discovery as the New South Africa.

III. Boundaries: resources and discourses

During South Africa's first democratic elections from 26 to 29 April, 1994, I traveled with my family to observe the process in the eastern Transvaal (now the Northern Transvaal province) in the area around Hoedspruit and Timbavati. Hoedspruit is a tiny farming town that also services the air force base located nearby. It is the centre of a strong White right-wing contingent of the Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging. As we entered the town, we could see the prominent posters for Constand Viljoen, the leader of the Volks Front party. Even more prominent was the sign at the outskirts that said '*Welkom in ons Volksstaat*' (Welcome to our Folk-state). Signs like this one have appeared all over the Transvaal, and signal the unofficial and unilateral 'declaration of independence' by some small 'White' towns in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. My daughter was puzzled, and asked what it meant. Her mother explained that some people in the town wanted an old Apartheid-style Whites only town, and that the sign was an attempt to show that they meant business. She was then even more puzzled since there were no White people in sight, and she exclaimed, 'But there are only Black people here!' My son interjected, 'Well, that's the story of South Africa.'

On the surface the sign looked like the 'Welcome to our Town' signs that civic-minded Rotarians or Chambers of Commerce erect at the edges of their towns in the interests of 'good business' On the outskirts of Hoedspruit the sign both proclaimed and disguised a complex political fantasy, its apparent innocence as camouflage for desperation. Later on, members of the Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging did assemble in a 'show of strength' to attempt to keep Black voters from the polling stations that had been set up in the town. They were dressed in their Khaki uniforms with black and red Nazi-like insignia — uniforms that are an odd blend of the Colonial British bush-attire for rural administrators, with school-boy shortpants, and badges indirectly reminiscent of German National-socialist insignia. The insignia are composed around the Biblical, apocalyptic symbolism of the number 7, but they look like dyslexic swastikas or strange modernist re-arrangements of one of the most disturbing symbols of twentieth century nationalism. They evoke images of genocide without directly referring to it, and denote for their followers a yearning for the end of the world which, somehow, must also be their own re-beginning in a promised land. By combining the biblical symbolism of the Apocalypse — three sevens — with the colours and sprung format of German National Socialism from the middle of this century, these end-of-the-century activists seemed to placed themselves at the 'end of history'. Ironically, they did so on the eve of the birth of the New South Africa. This is a precarious place from which to launch a new 'Volksstaat'. When the end of the vote-count showed that the ANC had won by an astonishing majority, the precariousness and ambiguity of their position seemed extreme. But the AWB members of Hoedspruit have a great deal to tell us about the nature of power, and the way that these communities attempt to explain

power to themselves, now that its exercise seems so fraught with complexity and uncertainty.

Their uniforms assemble elements of past conflicts and past armies that had been, ambiguously, both friends and enemies to the Afrikaner people. Photographs show Boer commandos of the last century, and those who fought during the South African War of 1899-1902, wearing corduroy trousers and woolen jackets, velskoene (home-made hide shoes), and banded felt hats. Though they imagine that they are the contemporary embodiment of the old Boer armed levies, the uniforms of today's AWB 'Wencommandos' show little trace of an historical knowledge or a conscious attempt to recreate the past. The elaborate reconstruction of the 'Great Trek' in 1938 by those Afrikaners who did deliberately use the images of the past in order to recruit a loyal and dedicated following, show that such historical reconstruction of clothing is a possible option for the Afrikaner politician. This, however, is not what is happening today. The AWB uniforms appear to draw more inspiration from the military aesthetic of security firms and the plethora of commando movies. They are a stagy pastiche of the colonial and the anti-colonial. Above all, they exemplify the aesthetics of violence, the act of bloodletting and dressing up for the kill. The costume of the killer — Schwarzeneger (the actor) in armour or Schwartzkopf (the US General) in camouflage, the jumped up flight-lieutenant as president-for-life or the home-made 'freedom fighter' — is today both entertainment and the emblem of high political seriousness, and thus they display a sense of the tragic and the comic, the African bush and the Hollywood soundstage together. Above all, they display the boundary — the boundary of political identity, the boundary of an era, the boundary of a certain African style and disposition. Both playfulness and seriousness are evoked at the edges of time, custom and place that are farthest from the mundane. Behind the men of the AWB was the sign-boards at the edge of a kind of madness saying— to us, outside observers as they do to themselves — here, and no further: 'Welcome to the Volkstaat'.

In 1932, Jan Smuts, the ex-Boer General, international diplomat and philosopher of holism, remarked that Africans were 'not ready for politics'. This may still be true today, but it is equally true that the Afrikaners of the AWB have forgotten what politics they might once have known. Can groups of people, some who have yet to discover politics, and others who have forgotten it, re-create a polity? Unfortunately, many lack the resources to do so. The AWB lack the resource of their own histories, as do many of the Black Africans that surround them. Education had long since lapsed into indoctrination or had, for Blacks, ceased to exist as a viable institution. Lacking the resources for a genuine recourse to history, they must all return to a common point of mythical origin in this land, from this land, within this land. In other words, they have resorted to different versions of the myth of autochthony. All over the lowveld towns before the election, the posters of Constand Viljoen, leader of the Volks Front Party were pasted side by side with those of Zulu Chief Minister Gatsha Buthelezi who demanded a Kingdom for his king, as emblem of the genuine Africa. These were different versions of a similar story that each could at least understand as the other told it.

Elsewhere such competing claims to the earth and to traditions could only end in bloodshed. In the lowveld, this time, and in this South Africa, everything went

smoothly. The AWB men at Hoedspruit had been moved from their roadblocks by the police, quickly and without incident. Nevertheless, the anomalies and anxieties that underlie the declaration of a White 'folk state' are built on cobbled-together political myths of domination and 'the land', enacted in uniforms that might just as well have been a post-modern artists 'statement' had they not invented them for themselves, on borders that they wished were enforceable and carried out in a roughneck, 'boorish' style. The AWB men of the lowveld were aggressive, but it seemed to arise from disappointment, yearning, rage and confusion rather than any purity of will, clarity of purpose, or folkish solidarity, though these sentiments may also be part of the complex mix.

A few tens of kilometers away from the town of Hoedspruit, a colleague, Isak Niehaus has been conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the regions straddled by the 'homelands' of Gazankulu and Lebowa, one for the Tsonga (or Shangaan) people; the other for the 'North Sotho' (people who have recently and somewhat mysteriously become the 'Pedi'). The indecision about their 'tribal' name is chronic, long-standing and symptomatic of the interchanges and ambiguities of identity in the whole region. It was one of the grand aims within the smallness of Apartheid thinking, of course, that such ambiguities could, and should, be cleared up. People, it was thought, should at least know who they are. So a boundary was drawn between the Sotho (or Pedi) people, on the one hand, and the Shangaan (or Tsonga) people on the other. Since, unlike the Zulu, they had no names for themselves, they were given names for their newly created foundling-states, Lebowa and Gazankulu, each vaguely reminiscent of past kingdoms, Golden Ages and the glories of bloodshed, but again, slightly skewed. The reference to the Gaza kingdom, in the name Gazankulu, 'Great Gaza', for instance, refers to a conquest state in southern Mozambique, not Transvaal, and not within the memory or historical knowledge of any of the ostensible 'tribes' who could not, in any case, agree on a name for themselves. In any case the boundaries were drawn. Just outside of the little town of Acornhoek, the railway line runs along this border. One day while my anthropological colleague, Sakkie Niehaus, and a young Shangaan friend were walking along it, the boy declared proudly that he and his friends stood on this railway line that had become the boundary between the new 'States', in order to throw stones at the boys in Lebowa. Sakkie asked him, 'But why do you throw stones at them?' 'No, Sakkie,' the boy replied, 'I didn't have a gun.' Lacking resources of history as well as violence, the boy's acts were reduced to play along the fenceline.

In each of these cases — what we might call symptoms rather than cases — fantasies of 'power' occur on the boundaries. But what are these boundaries? The railway line today is now just a railway line, and there is no Volkstaat, notwithstanding the sign that welcomed us to it. Lebowa and Gazankulu have apparently disappeared. They still exist on maps, and in government gazettes, and indeed will persist far longer in the formal and informal practices of bureaucrats, farmers, traders and travelers. The Volkstaat of the AWB has never existed, but its power to recruit followers seems to emerge out of the future as a trace in the present, just as the many boundaries of the past still continue to recruit shadowy allegiances to them. The imagination of the polity in the lowveld has shifted. New provinces have been created. Old ones are unceremoniously discarded. Those who were once enemies have become . . . if not friends, at least common citizens of a country wracked by the ghosts of boundaries.

A. Towards an aesthetics and metaphysics of power

The boundaries of South Africa, whether signaled by khaki uniforms or bureaucratic knowledges and practices are strangely evanescent and yet enduring. They have a presence that makes them stand for themselves. While there is a vast literature on nations, nation-states, The State, ethnicity, and identity, most African countries today are **countries**, not nations, states or ethnic groups. By 'countries' I mean named areas of land demarcated by international boundaries, but not necessarily possessing comprehensive state apparatuses, full administrative or fiscal coverage of the area so named, or even a coherent self-identity as such. Seen as such, most of Africa is countries, not nations or nation-states. Countries seem to exist as a form of nominalism: they are named therefore they are. They are named because they have boundaries. This is as true for the poorest of them as it is for the most powerful. At some point in the histories of these bits of earth, they acquired boundaries. South Africa, for instance carries a purely geographic name denoting the southern portion of a continent. Its shape is the result of a history of bureaucratic decisions that might have been otherwise: Lesotho (Basotholand) Botswana (Bechuanaland) and Swaziland might all have been part of it, while Zululand or Transkei (Kaffraria) was not, or some might have and others not. Other combinations and exclusions were possible. In the end, it is simply as it is: a country within its borders. Actual borders are often determined by factors that have little to do with any real *political* process: the course of rivers, how far a horse can be ridden, the location of pass, how far a surveyor can see, magnetic variations, illegible or imaginative treaties implemented by guess-work, where one frightened army happened to catch up with another, and so on. These are the events in the histories of *countries*. It is otherwise for nations. Countries are distinguished from nations, tribes and ethnic groups by the kinds of narratives that define them, and by the rhetoric which evoke them.

All post-colonial countries in Africa have recognized, and stated in the OAU charter that their borders, would be maintained even though they are consequences of geographic happenstance and rarely reflect real ethnic, social or linguistic boundaries on the ground. (It is an open question whether this is a good or a bad thing.) A few have changed their names, but none have willingly changed their borders. They can not be justified functionally, socially or politically. In order that they be taken seriously, governments must refer, again anomalously, to a 'tradition' which everyone knows is recent, not of African origin, and often in conflict with the 'nationalist' policies of the governments that are associated with them.

South Africa's borders, similarly, are arbitrary, but to the historical arbitrariness of its external borders is added the many internal borders within South Africa between provinces (the four old ones and the ten new ones), administrative districts (so-called development regions), the recent nominally-independent homelands (e.g. Venda, Bophuthatswana) and the dependent but self-governing homelands (e.g. KwaZulu), less recently, the 'group areas' of Grand Apartheid, the townships, farms, urban areas, suburbs and central business districts, national parks, state lands (some mandated by Queen Victoria!), military preserves, communal tribal lands, Black-owned free-hold tenure lands, and many other types of areas and lands. Now, there are the phantom boundaries of recently 'absorbed' previously independent or self-governing 'homelands' that are cross-cut the new, not yet implemented boundaries of the ten newly declared provinces whose borders have, again, been decided arbitrarily by

committees in Pretoria. All of these boundaries raise questions about who is 'inside' (and inside what) and who is 'outside', who is an enemy and who is a friend, who is a citizen, a 'home-boy', a permanent resident or a refugee, a native, a settler, an African, a South African, and so on. Like the OAU charter that specifies the inviolability of Africa's largely arbitrary boundaries, South Africa today is faced with a problem of boundaries that are both widely recognized as arbitrary and without function, but also considered 'sacred'. Virtually all of them cross-cut others, and divide the country into many different kinds of units without either hierarchical order, such as the Napoleonic rationalization of the French country-side into departments and prefects, or a consistent and regular 'tiling' of the terrain with 'counties' as in England. Nor are they consistent with the demarcation of Europe's landmass into 'countries', or the precise jigsaw puzzle of US state boundaries.

There is almost no boundary in South Africa that is not haunted by the ghosts of borders-past. A good example is the broad contested region between the Sundays River and the Kei River, still called The Border region in English, with bars, rugby teams, and hotels so named. The region was complex from the very beginnings of recorded history. White settlement began at the Sundays River in the late 1760s and proceeded with frequent redefinition of the border to the Fish River in 1778 (Bergh and Visagie 1985). Within this Eastern Cape Frontier zone boundaries shifted continually between Dutch speaking, German and English speaking settlers and transhumant cattle farmers among the Whites, and the Gcaleka, Ngqika, Ndlambe, Gwali, Dange, Ntinde, Gqunukhwebe and others, including the Mfengu, composed largely of factions from the Hlubi, Bhele and Zizi who had been driven into the Xhosa region of the Cape frontier zone in the aftermath of Shaka's consolidation of the Zulu kingdom. Boundaries continued to shift and incorporate more and more of the frontier in the Cape colony until, in 1856, the remainder of the region was swallowed up by the Colony as a 'humanitarian' measure by the governor Sir George Grey after the collapse of Xhosa independence in the wake of the failed prophesy of Nongqawuse. Nongqawuse a young girl who saw visions of beautiful cattle and the ancestors of the Xhosa people rising again from the river, ultimately convinced the Xhosa paramount, Sarhili, that his people must burn their crops and kill their cattle in preparation for a great rebirth in which the Whites would be driven from the land. Instead, the Xhosa, as a consequence of this appealing fantasy of power, starved to death in great numbers, and thus weakened, were incorporated easily into the Cape. The frontier shifted by degrees, through failed prophecies, informal agreements and abrogated treaties, but each step left an historical trace of boundaries that can still be perceived today, not so much on the ground, but in the beliefs and practices of people who live there. The Cape Frontier is the beginning of the Great Trek and the African National Congress. It is a powerful generator of discourse on boundaries.

The South African boundaries are complex, but more than this they are not mere edges: they are themselves the focus of attention and identity. Today, these aesthetics and metaphysics of boundaries are under pressure in the changing South Africa. Boundaries are being manipulated 'rationally' by governing committees of well-intentioned people, but traditional values, practicalities, practices and habits all attach to the previous and long-standing multiple boundaries and borders. Current political and constitutional debates focus on boundaries–how they are to be created, or destroyed, and how they may attract or repel allegiances–in the New South Africa.

Boundaries themselves have a salience that surpasses the merely practical. They are both political problem and political solution. They are entailed by the exercise of power, but undermine power and make possible the escape from it. The politics of boundaries, and the boundaries of the political, and of the political community, all combine in South Africa to create a discourse that goes well beyond the political to the meta-political.

IV. Identities: consequences or prime movers?

I want to explore then, whether the relationship between boundaries and identities that we frequently take for granted can not be inverted: it is often boundaries that create identities rather than the other way round.

The literature on identities — national, nationalist, racial and racist, ethnic, and so on — assume the naturalness of identity, that it is constructed, or primordial, but always there. It is identities that create boundaries around the nations, ethnicities or tribes that are somehow already there. It is usually taken for granted that it is the concept of the nation, the ethnicity, the tribe that we must explain, not the boundaries which are usually understood as the practical consequence of their mere being or coming into being, like the epidermis of the political organism, the hide of the Leviathan.

It may be, then, that in countries like South Africa, or in regions like southern Africa, or even most of the rest of Africa, boundaries create identities.

A. Identities and boundaries

Boundaries are created and maintained by what amounts to ritual or gaming: passports, mileposts, yellow lines painted across the road, electric fences like the one between South Africa and Mozambique, are all more or less elaborate charades meant to convince the person on the spot of the transcendent and enforceable 'truth' of maps. Very few, if any boundaries are actually negotiated on the ground by people who might be concerned. Boundaries of the modern sort are arbitrary, not boundaries of conquest or treaty. As such boundaries are like death: they are sudden ruptures in social space, as death is a rupture in social time, and they must be made sense of. The formation of 'identities' is one way to do this.

Like the so-called 'Holy Land', now Israel/Palestine, it is as if the conflict was not so much about who got what, as about how and why. These struggles of the Border lands are struggles over who gets to be the 'nation of Israel', and who 'the Pharaoh', who is 'chosen by god' and who not. But more than this struggle over whose narrative will prevail is the struggle over whose map will prevail. The truism that 'a map of country is not the country' applies, but the country, unlike the nation, religious or ethnic group can not exist without a map. Nations, religious groups and ethnic groups are held together by their texts, their master narratives of origin, common descent and/or transcendence through suffering. Countries are held together by maps. Unlike verbal texts, the referential truth of maps can be enforced and permanently enacted. Texts represent evanescent speech; maps represent enduring landscapes. The aesthetics of the map is visual and direct, that of text, aural and imagined. The

mapped boundaries of countries, 'homelands', regions or townships can quickly become symbols and metaphors of all other kinds of boundaries and forms of difference. It is precisely this that was the dark and powerful logic of Apartheid.

Without geographical consistency or historical stability, the problem of boundaries is not merely a geographic practice of surveying, marking, patrolling, establishing customs posts, and so on, but there is also a constant and often anxious discussion of boundaries, what we shall call, in addition to a *practice* of boundaries — that is, the surveying and recording, the planting of markers and border posts, that makes them what they are — there is also a intense *discourse* of boundaries that dwells upon their very *nature*. Any exercise of power must depend on the successful demarcation of boundaries of a political community or a national territory, and on their representation in text, wood, stone and steel. Of course, the aesthetics of these portrayals is important: the colour of the border-guards jackets, the powerful almost magical aesthetics of the rubber stamp on the crested page by which the world has sometimes been ruled, the extraordinary claim to truth that each coloured map makes. The way in which people respond to them in historical and ethnographic contexts suggest that there is a significant aesthetic component to boundaries and their various representations that goes well beyond what coercion and custom can account for. Maps mark boundaries, but more than that they are pictures of imaginary shapes and patterns that seem to reveal the natural shape of the country. Countries are these boundaries, these shapes, and their very shapes compel consent and allegiance. This is surely an aesthetic judgment.

Unlike Europe's countries, for instance, Africa's countries exist because of their boundaries and not vice versa! The same is true of many divisions in South Africa today. Boundaries, however, both make possible certain kinds of transactions and prohibit others. Theft, chicane, corruption, refugees and refugee 'problems', 'external' guerrilla bases and 'internal' political opposition movements are all made possible by boundaries, however arbitrary. Around these develop considerable economic and political interests that seek to maintain them. In time, deeply held emotional attachments and identities may also arise (and of course have done so). On the other hand, boundaries also limit access to trade, to education and other social and material resources; they make available to political recruiters (to whatever cause or party) the valuable resource of the external threat of the 'enemy' outside, and make possible an imagined community of 'friends' within.

B. Cross-cutting identities and the integrity of polity

South African identities cross-cut each other in multiple ways and in multiple contexts. There is no fundamental identity that any South African clings to in common with all, or even most other South Africans. South Africans have multiple identities in multiple contexts, depending on factors of expedience, recruitment and mobilization, and the company one keeps. In many similar multi-cultural countries or 'hetero-nationalist' states, the same condition applies. In South Africa, however, South Africans have multiple identities in common contexts, and common identities in multiple contexts. A person might be a Zulu, or an Afrikaner, or a Jew in a context of a common political party — perhaps the National Party, the Inkatha Freedom party or the ANC. All of the major parties, for instance, are now multi-racial (or 'non-racial'), and see this as a powerful source of political strength. A Muslim, or a Coloured, may

span many religious, political, social and cultural contexts and thus link them together into a social universe. These identities, then, can be said to be multiply cross-cutting, in that, each overlaps a range of contexts, or a common context or institution may contain many identities within it. On the other hand, these differences are also seen as the principle source of conflict in South Africa. The motivation for Apartheid was to prevent — in the mechanical metaphors of the time — 'friction' between the races and nations, since racial difference caused 'friction' between 'race groups', and this caused 'heat', that is, violence. Political commentators and the public today blame political violence on 'tribal', 'cultural' and 'racial' differences.

It is one of the fundamental ironies of South Africa that the endemic conflict that characterized South African history, and that continues today, is the source of both stability and disintegration. This is the compelling insight of Max Gluckman, one of a number of anthropologists like Monica (Hunter) and Godfrey Wilson, Isaac Schapera, and Meyer Fortes whose anthropological vision was largely shaped by the South African experience. Indeed, the 'South African experience' has been written directly into the history of anthropology itself. Malinowskian anthropology looked for the order in the whole, the function of each part in making society 'run so smoothly' (Malinowski 1926). In contrast to Malinowski, indeed in direct and conscious critique of the Malinowskian vision, Gluckman believed that conflict was itself a mode of integration. South Africa has puzzled all observers, including both Max Gluckman and Malinowski, by its apparent surfeit of boundaries across which conflict could erupt. It has always seemed that South Africa was on the brink of political and cultural collapse. For the people of South Africa, the sense that somehow it could never work, yet somehow must work, has been pervasive, a constant sense of suspense. The extremes of this manifest in Apocalyptic visions of bloodbaths believed by the political fringe and retailed worldwide by the press. For the anthropologist, like Gluckman it presented a fundamental challenge to the theoretical basis of his discipline, but he argued that it was through conflict itself that societies maintained their coherence, and the rituals of inversions, or courts of law channeled and directed conflict in ways that led to the maintenance of social stability overall. In his essay on the 'social situation in modern Zululand', Gluckman described boundaries as being at the centre of the 'situation', defining interactions between missionaries, Zulu commoners, chiefs and kings, and the various agents of the Colonial state. He understood the management of conflict rather than maintenance of order to be the centre of the political process; ritual played a central role by inverting, masking and mystifying conflict.

> Persons are intricately involved with the same sets of fellows in varied systems of purposive activity. Cross-cutting allegiances and processes of internal development within sets of relation establish ambivalence and conflict within each group. Ritual cloaks the fundamental disharmonies of social structure by affirming major loyalties to be beyond question. (Gluckman 1965: 265).

Thus, Gluckman believed that conflict was itself a form of integration. Certainly, his experience of South Africa must have seemed to confirm this for him, and he generalized it as a principle of political order and stability. But applied to many of the world's conflicts, Gluckman's formulation rings false or naive. In most instances of serious conflict, violence, coercion and other consequences of conflicting aims and

claims destroys the polity. Indeed, what seems to have made South Africa unusual is precisely its resilience in the face of long-term endemic conflict. Parties to these conflicts have somehow failed consistently to achieve their ends while southern African society has apparently evolved towards greater and greater political and economic integration while maintaining consistently high levels of violence. Why?

The answer lies in the pervasive 'cross-cutting allegiances' which are both persuasive and permeable, and the ambivalence and ambiguity that they give rise to. Gluckman speaks of the success or failure of conflict itself. The answer to his perplexity, however, lies in the domain of complexities and contradictions of *cultural identities* more than it does in the success or failure of *political processes*. South African identities have never polarized sufficiently to permit devastating conflict. They are either too fragmented, or too solid to permit the sort of bi-polar conflict that would destroy it. With the exception of the Boer War, in which an external Imperial power was directed against the independent Boer states, internal conflict has always stabilized not as a balance of power, but rather as an impotent confusion. This is not a model of conflict as integration, but rather integration through the consistent failure of any single conflict to mobilize two, and only two, sides. It is the very complexity of all possible allegiances, together with the fact that maintaining multiple identities and cross-cutting allegiances has remained possible that helps to make South African uniquely stable and violent at the same time. The factions of Zululand, the gangs of the East Rand, or APLA cadres respond violently to conflicts inherent in the South Africa social structure, but they never recruit a sufficient following to effect genuine change. This has been true as much for Mkhonto we Sizwe and Apla (armed wings of the ANC and PAC) as it is true of the South African Defense force, and the mysteriously-sponsored so-called 'third force' of *agent provacateurs* and violent spoilers.

V. Countries: Failed nationalisms?

On May 9, 1994, Nelson Mandela addressed the people of South Africa on the occasion of the opening of the new Parliament. He did not speak of 'The People' or the 'nation'. As he stood on the balcony of the Cape Town City Hall with the majestic Table Mountain as his backdrop, he pointed to the landscape on which the 'beginning of the fateful convergence' of Black and White had begun. If nations are, as Benedict Anderson has argued, 'imagined communities,' then countries are imagined geometries of landscape. South Africa, the country, is a geometry for conflict and accommodation, but above all it is a landscape. Looking out over the Bay to Robben Island on the horizon, he spoke of his own imprisonment and subsequent freedom. With a few gestures to the landscape, he thus summed up over 350 years of history as one might sum up the shape of jelly by pointing to its container.

In the modern theory of nation states, it is the existence of nations that justifies the existence of states. This was claimed by Hegel, who wished to justify the right of Prussia to conquer the other German speaking states, and to create a unified master state. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hegel's theory has become home truth, and is not less strong today. Nevertheless, countries — especially South Africa, and those like it — can not be justified by the nations they purportedly contain since they do not contain nations but heteroglot and heteroethnic congeries of peoples. The

appeal to nationalism made by the National Party on the basis of an Afrikaner, a Boer or White nation, has failed. The claim to nationalism made by the African National Party is likely to fail as well in so far, and if, it continued to pursue a 'nationalist' agenda. Countries require other grounds —and Nelson Mandela seems to have grasped this implicitly.

If politics is the art of the possible, then possibilities for legitimacy include the appeal to the earth itself, to the aesthetics of landscape, the native (in the sense 'one born in'), and to autochthony.

Failing nations, then, the land is sacred. But land in South Africa is an ambiguous resource, regarded with ambivalence. There is, in fact, very little independent and economically successful agriculture in South Africa, and most of what there is restricted to a tiny fraction of the country. There is virtually no commercial agriculture in any of the demarcated homelands. The so-called White farms produce the overwhelming bulk of the agricultural product, but most of them are fully mortgaged and could not continue to exist without massive government subsidization. In the face of this, however, it is the land to which appeal is made on all sides. Both White and Black people who call themselves Africans identify with the land, and claim it as their inalienable right. Both appeal to the blood that has been spilt on it, the dead that have been buried in it, the food that can be coaxed from it, and again and again, the beauty of it. The aesthetic beauty of the landscape is thus a political resource. The migrant dreams of it while he is in the mine, and waits to return to his land in the country-side somewhere. In the case of the South African land, aesthetic *is* power.

A. Names and models

South Africans constantly refer to the beauty of their land, and it is this more than any other single feature that seems to define what is common among the diversity. South Africa is a country that does not have a name for itself, but simply calls itself after the part of the continent that it sits on, the south end of Africa.

For years, discussion of South Africa has focused on the conflict between 'White' and 'Blacks', and on the domination of one by the other. The terms of this conflict are direct and simple, too simple. Perhaps the more powerful, and most powerfully problematic conflict in South Africa is the perplexing logic of identity that lies behind this. It is a country in which two nations both call themselves by the same name, Africans/Afrikaans, yet see each other alternatively as mortal enemies and sons of the same soil. They compete not just for land, but for autochthony, the transcendent moral right to be of the land, not merely on the land. The politics of this cultural struggle transcends mere politics. '*Afrikaner*', of course, simply means 'African', 'a person of Africa' in Afrikaans, a language whose name for itself means simply 'the African language' (*die Afrikaanse taal*). This language is spoken by two groups, one 'White'-- people who call themselves *Afrikaners*, 'Africans', *Boere*, 'farmers' or *Blankes*, 'white-skins'-- and another brown or so-called Coloureds, or *Kleurlinge* group of people who identity more or less fully with Africa and with the Afrikaans culture.

On the other hand, the so-called 'Blacks' span a similarly large range of colours, but are distinguished by broadly similar languages of the Bantu family and broadly similar cultural beliefs and practices. Prior to their integration into South Africa, a *process* of

incorporation and accommodation that went on for three hundred years from 1652 (on the Cape Peninsula) to the early 1950s (in the far eastern Transvaal). Independently of what Nelson Mandela called the 'fateful convergence,' African social relations led with few exceptions to fission and separation, not consolidation and integration. In order to form a nation, and have access to its goods, Black South Africans have had to adopt and accommodate to political concepts and practices that were originally European, while Whites have had to develop cultural concepts of allegiance to the land the landscape and to a permanent identity in Africa. This presents both with opposite sides of the same problem: how to be 'European' in an African landscape, and how to be African in a Europeanized polity. These are not problems that can be solved by any amount of violence — for all human communities violence inevitably intensifies a commitment to locale and to the earth in which the dead are buried. They are not problems that can be solved by the exercise of 'power' short of extermination. They are, in a sense, pure cultural problems. For both people who call themselves Africans, the cultural solution has been sought through their appeal to the ground, the country itself, not as the territory of a nation, but as the terrain mapped out by arbitrary boundaries. These boundaries, and the landscapes they contain become themselves the emblems of identity and the focus of allegiance.

B. City-states and their hinterlands

South Africa is a country stretched as thin as a sheet over three points of power and wealth. These points, sprawling African conglomerations of villages, towns, malls, superhighways and dirt tracks, business districts, industrial parks, townships, hostels, squatter settlement, suburbs, small-holdings, farms, gardens, parks, public arenas and no-go areas, amount to city-states, not just cities. They are Johannesburg in the central northern inland region, Durban on the east coast and Cape Town on the west coast. There are 3 or four lesser centres, but for the most part the three main cities are all that matter. They mark the space around them and dominate their own hinterlands which look to them with desire and anticipation, and loathing and disdain. They are metropolises with bright lights and sources of darkest sin, they are cities and saviours, hell-holes and minepits, harbours and havens or killing-grounds and places of no return. South African rural sprawl that covers large parts of the hinterlands of these cities is scarcely distinguishable from them on many formal grounds of sociological measurement since it's poor have no hope of scraping a living out of the soil that is often as hard as parking lots, and yet as beloved as the graves of ones ancestors, the promised lands. The violence of the villages far from the vast city states respond as little to the grand ideas of republic. There is no farm in the hinterlands that is independent of the capital and administrative control of the city-states that command them, and none that can claim to inspire the idyll of authentic subsistence from the earth and sun, yet there is none that can claim to be entirely immune to the hope that the earth will support its children. The city, not by contrast, but in sympathy, nurses its own spasms of violence and hopelessness. The city-state of Johannesburg, is in its turn, like a rural place. Only one train track passes through it, there are no busses that completely connect it, and people hurry through it going to other places within it and beyond it. Johannesburg and its hinterlands have names, many names, but no maps. The maps can not keep up with the change. These are places where local knowledge is the best and only guide. Maps show the main roads named for dead architects of Apartheid: Malan, Verwoerd, Strydom, and statesmen like Jan Smuts and Louis Botha,

but the real geography of Johannesburg lies in the routes to schools, the secluded prayer spots in the rough bush all over the city, the Portuguese cafés, the sellers of used furniture, fruit and mielie meal. It is like a forest in which only the denizens of the many eco-zones know its mysterious resources.

The city states of South Africa each have their own identities and allegiances. This fact has been implicitly recognized by creating one province out of the area around Johannesburg. No one has come up yet with a proper name since it is not recognized as the city-state that it is, but it is referred to by the geometry of several of its main landmarks, Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Vereeneging, or just 'The PWV'. There is no inherent logic or native land, no nation whose supposed territory this is. It is defined by the density and focus of its population, and by their commitment to it as a geographical focus. Johannesburg is a young city and one that can claim autochthonous origin. It sits atop the countless deep galleries of the mines that brought it into being, like the crown of a giant African termite mound. Underground, the rock is still dug and pulverized to extract the gold and other minerals that it contains. The city exists here for no other reason. It is rooted in the hollow chambers created by a century of mining. This in itself is a kind of autochthony.

To think of South Africa as a constellation of city states avoids the long-ingrained habit of trying to imagine it as a centralized nation on the European model of the 'nation state' led from Paris, London, Rome or Berlin. The Niccolò Machiavelli of ***The Discourses*** is more appropriate as an analyst of South Africa than the Karl Marx of ***Capital.*** The princes and peasants, the palaces and countryside of Macchiavelli are far more similar to the intricacies of the real South African country, than the banks and steam-engines of Karl Marx's London when compared with city-state and hinterland structure of the South Africa landscape. Above all, the countryside is important.

C. Autochthony

Inseparable from the countryside, however, is the politics of chiefs and kings. This dimension of South African politics is probably least understood of all — in part because of the inappropriateness of the models that have been applied. It is well-known, of course that the Chief Minister of the Kingdom of the Zulu, and President of the Inkatha Freedom Party, Chief Gatsha Mangosotho Buthelezi, is directly descended from Shaka, the founder of the Zulu state. His insistence that room be made for permanent recognition of the Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelethini, nearly wrecked the elections. Nelson Mandela, however, is also of chiefly lineage. He renounced the chiefship long ago when he chose the path of the ANC, and it is difficult to say how important this may once have been in securing his original power base among the Xhosa and the educated elites who founded the ANC and who were then its members. It is of little significance now, except that it links him, perhaps ambiguously, to one of the most powerful sources of legitimization in South Africa.

The chiefs and the so-called traditional authorities in South Africa are ambiguous. Indeed, the 'traditional law' of chiefs and kings has been defined by both the formal state bureaucracy and by the followers of the chiefs, as somehow *outside of politics.* Indeed, the power of traditional authorities, and the power of politics seem incommensurable. For many, especially rural South Africans, the authority of the city-states, and the authority of the chiefs are parallel and different. They may function,

relative to each other, as points of external reference, as alternative or ultimate courts of appeal. In any case, they offer the individual an escape or alternative recourse: the chief may defend one from the state bureaucracy, while the apparatuses of the bureaucratic state may also act as an escape from 'tradition' and the chief where this is necessary — for instance in cases of witchcraft accusation, or where Christians may wish to avoid circumcision. The bureaucratic institutions of the city-states and the chiefs are as similar and as dissimilar as the games of draughts (American 'checkers') and chess. Despite the apparent similarity of the games, draughts can not be played with chess men, nor can chess be played with draughts pieces. In the first case, draughts pieces are not sufficiently differentiated to carry the semantic distinction of chess; on the other hand, the shapes of chessmen make it mechanically impossible to play draughts because they can not be stacked. The two games are not merely incompatible, but are incommensurable; it is not just a difference of rules, but a difference of fundamental properties. Similarly, chiefs can not be integrated into the politics of parliament because of the different grounds on which their authority rests. Chiefs still control access to land and control the initiation schools and 'tradition'. Thus any appeal to an African tradition, and to autochthony depends on the existence of chiefs. Any real practice of power in the modern sphere of parliamentary politics, however, must contradict and undermine the power of chiefs. They stand at the intersection of practical logic of administration, and the meaningfulness and legitimacy of the African identity and origin.

Chief Minister Buthelezi's attempt to negotiate a place for King Goodwill Zwelethini in the domain of politics was disruptive and potentially fatal. It was a kind of resistance-politics brinkmanship of holding out to the last possible moment. But more than this, it was a brinkmanship game on the boundary between autochthony and bureaucracy. The king could not be part of parliamentary politics without undermining the nature and basis of his authority, but could not remain entirely outside of it without disrupting the legitimacy of the entire system, especially for the large number of Zulu royalists. The compromise that was reached, however, leave room for many more 'kings' and traditional chiefs to emerge and play an increasingly larger, perhaps parallel role, withing the broader field of social power in South Africa.

'Politics' is still not seen as a universal contest in which all possible forms of power are disposed. Rather, 'politics' is a restricted domain of the exercise of particular forms of power for most South Africans. Witches, chiefs, kings, ancestors, God, prophets and doctors all are held to exercise other, different powers. To carry the weight of 'politics', and to bring the legitimacy of the genuine African-ness of its exercise, the chiefs have remained outside of politics. Recognizing this, Smuts' remark that Africans were not ready for politics rather missed the nature of this dual politics, or rather the differentiation of the polity into the modern and traditional.

From the view of the Afrikaners, especially those represented by the secessionist AWB and Volksfront, the land is theirs by another logic, the logic of production and utility. It is nonetheless a claim to the land, not just as resource but as mythical origin and primordial right. In this light, it is easy to understand that surprising alliance between the 'traditional' politics of both the 'White' right-wing and the Zulu chief minister. Both necessarily resorted to the identity giving power of the land, and the landscape, and appealed in their different ways to a pure African-ness.

VI. Politics and Meta-Politics:

The key to South African politics then is that it is not just politics at all. All politics, they say, is local politics. This is true where politics concerns itself with the legitimate exercise of power and with control over the distribution of scarce resources, or over the behaviour of the members of the polity. This is what we usually mean by normal politics As such, all normal politics is, from the outside, essentially boring. By contrast, South African politics is not boring. This is because it is not merely local. In fact it is a politics *about* politics, a meta-politics.

South African politics has constantly attempted to explicate and examine the grounds of its very being. This is a politics which has not been able to take for granted the nature or number of its primary actors. It is a politics that seeks not merely to distribute power, or to acquire or maintain power, but to define the nature of power itself. Many different political visions contend with one another in the political arena; even the limits and nature of the arena itself are questioned and tested. A universal politics in which all persons are the primary units has only just been achieved, this late in the twentieth century.

A. The transition to 'Transition' from Apocalypse

When Captain James Cook came to South Africa on his way to his fatal impact with the Hawaiians, he noted the constant tension that seemed to exist between the 'races', the English and Boers, the White and the Hottentots. He gave the Colony just 20 years before, he thought, it would end in bloody violence. At the end of the1980s it seemed that Captain Cook had been off by a precise factor or ten, that is, it had taken 200 years to dissolve into a bloodbath, not the 20 that he had then thought. Now, it seems he must have been just plain wrong.

For most of its history the sense of the end of history, the coming of bloody and final conflict, has characterized South Africa's view of its own history. It is still the central element of the political vision of the many in the White right wing, and of the some Black ultra-nationalists of the PAC and its allies. It is a vision of a 'rolling apocalypse' in which the predicted end is only just put off by another war, another proclamation, another bomb, by segregation, by Apartheid, by the end of Apartheid, by 'one settler, one bullet', and now by elections. Everyone now feels that South Africa is 'in transition.' But South Africa is not simply in 'transition' to a final state, or to some other 'end of history'. To be successful, it must remain in a sort of permanent transition. Like Trotsky's idea of a permanent revolution', South Africa seems likely to remain in permanent transition, just as it once seemed to exist perpetually just ahead of Apocalypse. It is important to maintain this sense of transition since there can be no end to history in South Africa that is not also apocalyptic. That much is correct about the baleful visions of the racists of all colours and persuasions. But history does not end. This is a post-modern condition, and the ability and willingness to recognize it is a sign of a new kind of political maturity.

VII. References cited

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