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occult economies and the violence of abstraction:
notes from the South African postcolony

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New situations demand new magic. . . .

—E. E. Evans-Pritchard¹

Human beliefs, like all other natural growths, elude the barrier of system.

—George Eliot

I.

Consider the following four fragments, four notes from postcolonial South Africa. Each is drawn from the archaeology of the fantastic in this new global age, this Age of Futilitarianism wherein postmodern pessimism runs up against the promises of late capitalism.

Postcolonial South Africa, like other postrevolutionary societies, appears to have witnessed a dramatic rise in occult economies: in the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends. These embrace a wide range of phenomena, from “ritual murder,” the sale of body parts, and the putative production of zombies to pyramid schemes and other financial scams. And they have led, in many places, to violent reactions against people accused of illicit accumulation. In the struggles that have ensued, the major lines of opposition have been not race or class but generation—mediated by gender. Why is all this occurring with such intensity, right now? An answer to the question, and to the more general problem of making sense of the enchantments of modernity, is sought in the encounter of rural South Africa with the contradictory effects of millennial capitalism and the culture of neoliberalism. This encounter, goes the argument, brings “the global” and “the local”—treated here as analytic constructs rather than explanatory terms or empirical realities—into a dialectical interplay. It also has implications for the practice of anthropology, challenging us to do ethnography on an “awkward” scale, on planes that transect the here and now, then and there. [postcoloniality, modernity, millennial capitalism, occult economy, witchcraft, South Africa]

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the first In March 1996,² in a far northeastern village,³ a baboon, taken to be a witch in disguise, was killed by “necklacing,” the infamous way in which collaborators were dealt with during the late apartheid years. Baboons have long been thought of as potential witch familiars;⁴ indeed, a state commission recently referred to them as “professor(s) of witchcraft” (Ralushai et al. 1996:22; see below). The animal in question “was huge . . . and was carrying a plastic [shopping] bag”—this last object was suspect since it signaled an all-too-human capacity to transact and transport ill-gotten goods. Said the woman who set off the alarm, “There was definitely witchcraft here. Just look at how long [the beast] took to catch alight and at how small its body is now that we have . . . killed it.”

the second “Is It a Duck? No, It’s the Howick Monster,” wrote Ellis Mnyandu on June 10 of the same year.⁵ Curious crowds are visiting the Howick Falls, in KwaZulu-Natal, to glimpse a mysterious 25-foot creature. Absalom Dlamini has not actually caught sight of it yet. But, he says, there is “a fearsome spirit here which makes you feel like you are being dragged [in. It] proves there is a monster down there.” Bob Teeney, a white businessman—aficionados of the fantastic, in this New Age, form a rainbow coalition—claims to have seen it. He also claims to have photographs (taken by a tourist) of mom, pop, and baby monsters. He argues that they belong to “an aquatic, snake-like dinosaur family known as Plesiosaur.” These beasts, say scientists, have been extinct for six million years, give or take a million, and they never lived in fresh water to begin with. A local anthropologist, also disappointingly matter-of-fact, has opined that there is nothing there at all, that the story recuperates an old Zulu myth about a water serpent.⁶ Science (and ethnographic authority) aside, people have flocked to the place. If nothing else, this has promoted local commerce, including the sale of likenesses. One sculptor, a crippled craftsman from Zaire, has become a convert. “First I believe in God and then the monsters,” he says. “I am making more money than I used to. I call it monster-money.”

the third Since 1994, notes Lumkile Mondli,⁷ there has been an explosion of pyramid saving schemes in the countryside—some of them founded by old antiapartheid activists, now “development entrepreneurs,” to deal with the destitution of rural blacks. These schemes undertake to pay three times the initial stake, depending for their viability on ever more people signing on. But many investors were not taking their money at maturity, waiting rather to cash in huge sums later on.⁸ Mondli says that the management of one scheme found itself with R 46m (\$9.2 million), more than it could handle. So it asked a team of authorities—including Mondli himself—to intervene under the Bank Act. Mondli goes on to say that he had been manning a toll-free line to answer investors’ questions; also to investigate the “fetishism [of] money and problems of accumulation in rural households.” The callers had disconcerted him: he was accused of selling out to “the Boers” by abetting government efforts to subvert local economic initiatives, even threatened with necklacing. Apartheid, they told him, had made them desperately poor. And the postcolonial state had not helped. In the upshot, “God brought the scheme to them and changed their lives.”⁹ Similar schemes are also rampant in white South Africa at present, despite the regulatory efforts of the Business Practices Board and Internal Revenue.¹⁰ One, unsubtly entitled “Rainbow,” demands a R 10,000 stake and is run in great secrecy by an anonymous cabal with a Liverpool address. It is said to “conduct [meetings] with an almost religious fervour” and to threaten anyone who divulges the nature of its practices.

the fourth Johannesburg, April 29, 1996. A 38-year-old man is arrested in a shopping mall after “trying to sell a pair of blue eyes.”¹¹ This incident, wrote the *Star*, the city’s largest circulation paper, “might be linked to the murder of street children for . . . traditional medicines.” Body parts, it added, were regularly used in potions for fertility, for success in business, and for luck in love. Those of white children fetched the best prices. This tale of an occultist in

the economy of the occult is not unusual. The local press has been full of such cases, and courts have been kept fairly busy trying those accused of disemboweling their victims, often babies and youths, and either retailing organs in the market in viscera or using them for their own nefarious ends.¹² Not only body parts are used; so, too, are whole persons. Witches are said to bring the dead back to life so that they might work for their necromantic masters. Thus, in KwaZulu-Natal, some two years ago, the kin of 11 children killed in a bus crash, allegedly caused by magical intervention, refused to allow them to be buried because “witches [had] abducted them after bringing them back to life.”¹³ The bodies in the mortuary, which they had identified earlier, were no longer those of the people they knew. Soon after, an old woman, suspected of the evil, was dragged from her home and killed by schoolmates of the deceased, who, in turn, were jailed.

These fragments may appear lurid, even salacious, from the cool distance of *Academia Americana*. In their own context, they are not that at all. Each of them, moreover, has parallels elsewhere: those parts of Europe and the United States beyond the ivory tower, the parts in which ordinary people live, produce their own fair share of the fantastic (Comaroff 1994; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; cf. Geschiere in press). The Howick Monster evokes not only its Loch Ness prequel, which it is said to resemble. It also resonates with celluloid cosmologies of the Jurassic kind, making a mammoth montage of the Spielberg mindscape, the Scottish landscape, and Zulu mythology—all the while tapping into an increasing obsession with the return of extinct creatures of sub- yet superhuman potency; note here Mitchell’s (1998) interesting thesis that the dinosaur is the new American totem. The Leviathan of Natal belongs to a planetary species whose existence conflates the virtual with the veritable, the cinematic with the scientific, gods with godzillas, the prophetic with the profitable.

Likewise, the pyramid schemes, schemes that put a con in *economics*. These recall the ten or so whose crash sparked the Albanian revolution early in 1997.¹⁴ They also bring to mind other scams and stratagems, different yet similar, that flow from a promiscuous mix of scarcity and deregulation.¹⁵ Such schemes—a few legal, many illegal, some alegal—are springing up all over the place, especially in postrevolutionary societies. Often registered at addresses halfway across the earth from the site of their local operation, they escape control by insinuating themselves into the slipstream of the global economy.¹⁶ These schemes cover a wide gamut, from familiar forms of chain letter, through national lotteries and offshore (or on reservation) gambling, to aggressively speculative investment in the stock markets of the world, now heavily into global funds, which has led to an upsurge of “pump and dump” swindles (Eaton 1997).¹⁷ All of these things have a single common denominator, “the magical allure of making money from nothing” (Andrews 1997).¹⁸ Like efforts to weave gold from straw, an alchemy associated with an earlier transition in the economic history of Europe (Schneider 1989), they promise to deliver almost preternatural profits, to yield wealth *sans* perceptible production, value *sans* visible effort. In its all-conquering, millennial moment, it appears, capitalism has an effervescent new spirit—a magical, neo-Protestant *zeitgeist*—welling up close to its core.¹⁹ Take, for example, the Foundation for New Era Philanthropy, an American pyramid scheme created “to change the world for the glory of God,” which persuaded 500 nonprofit organizations, Christian colleges, and Ivy League universities to invest \$354 million; this on the promise of doubling their money in six months (*Chicago Tribune* 1997).²⁰ So much for rational economics. And for the disenchantment of modernity.

Neither are the narratives of witchcraft, body parts, zombies, and the brutalization of children—in which generational antagonisms and curious creatures like the baboon-witch are recurrent motifs—uniquely South African. Everywhere the boundaries of postenlightenment humanity are called more and more into question; hence the fascination with cyborgs, the fear of invasion by aliens clothed in humdrum bodily form, the dangerous promise of cloning and

genetic mutation. And from everywhere come stories of not-quite-human transactions in the corporeal. Postcolonial Africa is replete with accounts of the way in which the rich and powerful use monstrous means and freakish familiars to appropriate the life force of their lesser compatriots in order to strengthen themselves or to satisfy consuming passions.²¹ Similarly, Latin America has, throughout the 1990s, witnessed mass panics about the theft and sale, by unscrupulous gringos, of the organs of infants and youths (see, e.g., Scheper-Hughes 1996).²² There, and in other parts of the world, this traffic—like the international commerce in adoption and mail-order matrimony—is seen as a new form of imperialism, the affluent West siphoning off the essence, even appropriating the offspring, of impoverished Others for ends both occult and ordinary (see below). All of which gives ample evidence, to those at the nether end of the planetary distribution of wealth, of the workings of insidious forces, of potent magical technologies and mysterious modes of accumulation, of sorcery of one or another sort. That evidence reaches into the heart of Europe itself: note the recent scares there about the satanic abuse of children (La Fontaine 1997);²³ note also reports in British broadsheets of a transnational trade in people, again particularly young people.²⁴ In 1997, for example, *The Guardian* carried a report about the self-styled Sado Hangman and the Leather Witch arraigned in Berlin for offering Czech girls, on the net, to be used in torture, sexual slavery, or whatever—pick-up and disposal of bodies inclusive—at DM 15,000 each (Staunton 1997). This case is neither fanciful nor singular.²⁵ It reached the Bavarian courts, one of a number of such incidents, many of them implicating the worldwide web, that are leaving the pages of the yellow press and entering into the arena of serious social concern.

Precisely because they are at once profoundly parochial and so obviously translocal, these fragments, and innumerable others like them, raise the same conundrums, all of them distilling down to one order of question. Why *now*? Why now does there appear to be a dramatic intensification—none of these things is new, of course²⁶—of appeals to enchantment, to the use of the bodies of some for the empowerment of others (cf. Geschiere in press)? Why now the acute moral panics? What, if anything, has any of this to do with processes of globalization and the forms of capitalism associated with it? With postcoloniality? Or with the sociology of postrevolutionary social worlds? We pose the problem both as a general matter of anthropological concern and, more specifically, of contemporary South Africa. Is it not extraordinary, for example, that the thoroughly modernist African National Congress (ANC) saw it necessary, among its first gestures in government, to appoint a commission of inquiry into witchcraft and ritual murder in one of the new provinces (Ralushai et al. 1996)? That it found itself presiding over an epidemic of mystical evil? That this epidemic, far from abating with the end of apartheid, is on the *increase*?²⁷ That, according to the head of the Occult-Related Crimes Unit of the South African Police Services—itself a curious creature—the devil actually seems to be making a “revolutionary re-appearance” here?²⁸

Finally, what might these things have to do with the memory of Max Gluckman? Or with the present and future of the discipline of anthropology, about which he had such strong ideas? As we shall see, they challenge us with the problem of doing ethnography on an awkward scale, neither unambiguously “local” nor obviously “global”—but on a scale in between that, somehow, captures their mutual determinations. And their indeterminacies.

II.

Let us take the last question first. Our memories of Max Gluckman go back to the early 1970s, toward the start of our professional careers, toward the end of his. We came to Manchester, to the famous Department of Anthropology founded by him in 1949, having read a great deal of his work—and not a few critiques (see, e.g., Tambiah 1966).²⁹ None of this, however, prepared us for our encounter with charisma, Mancunian-style. Or with conflict structural-functionalism

as propounded, in the flesh, by Gluckman himself, a formidable interlocutor if there ever was one. Maxism, it is true, was not Marxism; very much a creature of their day, and much less influential, many of the founding principles of the “Manchester School” are now dated (for an overview, see Werbner 1984). But they were essayed with vigor, certitude, and a bold sense of possibility. Anthropology, for Gluckman, was both a mission and an invitation to an argument; though, in point of fact, he was always easier to argue with when not actually present. His combative, creative spirit lives on, in our consciousness, for two things above all else. It is these that provide our mandate here.

One was his—emphatically prepostmodern—insistence on discerning design in, on abstracting order from, an “illogical assortment” of disparate details, minutiae, even trivia (Gluckman 1963:1); his introduction to *Order and Rebellion* (1963) notes, with approval, how a coherent anthropology grew out of “the study of oddments by eccentrics.”³⁰ Gluckman, of course, was not lacking in oddness or eccentricity himself. And coherence is not valued all that much anymore. But so be it. The serious, if simple, corollary is that our skills and sensibilities ought to be put to the effort of detecting emergent social processes and patterns from diverse, discordant acts and facts; that the sacred charter of the discipline is to explain the existence of such partly obscured, barely audible, often nascent phenomena in the world. Sometimes these phenomena, like the unruly events so memorably described in Gluckman’s *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand* (1940), bring into sharp focus, and serve to bridge, cultural and material forces of dramatically different magnitude or scale; as they do, they compel us to address the evanescent, ever-present connections between local concerns and world-historical movements. Herein, in this challenge, lies the essential distillate of the Gluckman heritage.

The second thing is more specific. Max Gluckman is justifiably famed for his work in legal anthropology, for his studies of political and social processes, and the like. Amidst his lesser-quoted essays, however, is one that warrants special attention today. Entitled “The Magic of Despair” (see n. 1), it tries to make sense of the ritual practices of Mau Mau. Not only that. Those practices are run up against Central African witchcraft movements (Richards 1935), millennial cults of the middle ages (Cohn 1957), Melanesian cargo cults (Worsley 1957), Zionist prophets in South Africa (Sundkler 1961), and various forms of social banditry (Hobsbawm 1959). What is the point? To explain why Africans should seek recourse to the occult in situations of rapid social transformation, under historical conditions that yield an ambiguous mix of possibility and powerlessness, of desire and despair, of mass joblessness and hunger amidst the accumulation, by some, of great amounts of new wealth (1963:3–4). These circumstances, added Gluckman (1959:145) presciently, do not elicit a “reversion to pagan ritual.” Just the opposite. “New situations,” he says, citing Evans-Pritchard (1937:513), “demand new magic”; hence the epigraph at the head of this essay.

Put these various pieces together—Gluckman’s concern to decipher patterns-in-the-making from oddments and fragments, his insistence on seeing connections among phenomena of widely different scale, his interest in creative responses to contradictory historical situations—and the argument of this essay begins to take shape. So, too, do our answers to the Big Questions.

The essence of our narrative, if we may sketch it out in a few bold lines, goes like this. The Howick monster and the pyramid schemes, the epidemic of witchcraft and the killing of those suspected of magical evil, moral panics about the piracy of body parts; all are, alike, symptoms of an occult economy waxing behind the civil surfaces of the “new” South Africa.³¹ Drawing on cultural elements with long indigenous histories, this economy is itself an integral feature of millennial capitalism—that odd fusion of the modern and the postmodern, of hope and hopelessness, of utility and futility, of promise and its perversions. Its roots, we have already hinted, do not lie simply in poverty or material deprivation, however cruel and unrelenting it may be. They are to be found, rather, in a doubling, the very doubling spoken of by Gluckman in “The Magic of Despair.” On the one hand is a perception, authenticated by glimpses of the

vast wealth that passes through most postcolonial societies and into the hands of a few of their citizens: that the mysterious mechanisms of the market hold the key to hitherto unimaginable riches; to capital amassed by the ever more rapid, often immaterial flow of value across time and space, and into the intersecting sites where the local meets the global. On the other hand is the dawning sense of chill desperation attendant on being left out of the promise of prosperity, of the telos of liberation. In South Africa, after all, the end of apartheid held out the prospect that *everyone* would be set free to speculate and accumulate, to consume, and to indulge repressed desires. But, for many, the millennial moment has passed without palpable payback.

The implication? That these not-quite-fathomable mechanisms—precisely because they are inscrutable, occult—have become the object of jealousy and envy and evil dealings; that arcane forces are intervening in the production of value, diverting its flow for selfish purposes. This, in turn, underlies the essential paradox of occult economies, the fact that they operate on two inimical fronts at once. The first is the constant pursuit of new, magical means for otherwise unattainable ends. The second is the effort to eradicate people held to enrich themselves by those very means; through the illegitimate appropriation, that is, not just of the bodies and things of others, but also of the forces of production and reproduction themselves.

Partly because of the nature of the struggle to end apartheid, partly because of the legacy of apartheid itself, partly because of the dawning of a new epoch in the history of production, most of those who experience postcoloniality here as privation, and who engage the commerce in enchantment, are young. It is they—the progeny of an electronic age—who held out the greatest expectations for “the revolution.” They are the repressed for whom the promise of postcolonial return is most obviously blocked by the hardening materialities of life at this coordinate on the map of global capital. As a result, rather than the more familiar axes of social division—class, race, gender, ethnicity—the dominant line of cleavage here has become generation. Post-apartheid South Africa, to put it bluntly, is trying to construct a modernist nation-state under postmodern conditions, a historical endeavor fraught with contradictions. Black underclass youths embody those contradictions most tangibly. It is the males among them, more than anyone else, who have to face the apparent impossibility of the contemporary situation—and to confront the difficulties of social reproduction in an age that once held out fervent hopes of rebirth. But it is not only they. Entry into the occult economy ultimately transects color, culture, age, and sex.

Like Gluckman, we hold that that the practice of mystical arts in postcolonial Africa, witchcraft among them, does not imply an iteration of, a retreat into, “tradition” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993).³² On the contrary, it is often a mode of producing *new* forms of consciousness; of expressing discontent with modernity and dealing with its deformities. In short, of retooling culturally familiar technologies as new means for new ends (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993:xv–xvi). It is new magic for new situations. On a global scale, enchantment abounds; yet, in some scholarly circles, there is a reluctance to acknowledge that the Africa of the 1990s is still home to such arcane ideas. The fact is, as Geschiere (1997, in press) has said, there *is* a lot of witchcraft about just now. And “natives” *do* speak about it; for many, it is an ontological given in this age of rapidly shifting realities (cf. Ashforth 1997:2). It is also a pressing practical problem that must be dealt with. For our own part, we do not see it as an isolated, even as an African, phenomenon. In a surging, implosive economy, it is just one element popping up in comparable contexts all over the planet, albeit in a wide variety of local guises. As it does, it posits fresh (or refashioned) ways of producing immense wealth and power—against all odds, at supernatural speed, and with striking ingenuity.

We have claimed that the things of which we speak have to do with global processes or, more precisely, with specific intersections, in the here and now, between the global and the local. And we have hinted that there is a lesson in them for the practice of anthropology. Before we can give either claim any credence, however, it is necessary to focus on a particular

ethnographic setting, one in which realities appear more than usually fragile, fluid, fragmentary, and contested. We turn to the northerly provinces of the “new” South Africa, just before and after the close of the epoch of apartheid.

III.

The Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders in the Northern Province was established by the new provincial government in March 1995 in response to a mounting sense of emergency in the countryside. Official commissions were the stock-in-trade of colonial rule (Ashforth 1990). But these are postcolonial times, times in which politics often masquerade as culture. This inquiry was an unprecedented hybrid of government and ethnography:³³ an effort at once to regain control over a runaway world and to grasp persistent cultural realities, its terms of reference drew both from the tropes of scientific universalism and from the language of difference. Chaired by Professor N. V. Ralushai, a retired professor of social anthropology and ethnomusicology, it comprised nine members, all but one of them Africans.³⁴ Their *Report* is a rich, if barely analyzed, amalgam of informant accounts, case records, first-hand observation, and recommendations. These recommendations reveal a tension between two impulses: (i) civic rationalism, expressed in a call for liberation through education and for a more rigorous response to witch-related violence,³⁵ including a possible reinstatement of the death penalty; and (ii) frank, even assertive cultural relativism. Consistent with the latter, the *Report* declares that most Africans regard magical attacks as “normal events of everyday life” (Ralushai et al. 1996:61), a reality incompatible with the legacy of European law, which criminalizes witch finding. It also notes that the majority of black police believe in witchcraft, making them reluctant to intervene when suspects are attacked (Ralushai et al. 1996:63). The conclusion is that there is no clear-cut solution to the legal problem—other than to advocate various strategies to stem the brute force with which accused witches are hunted down. The actuality of witchcraft itself, however, is not called into doubt.

On the contrary, the urgent tone of the commission, the sense of existential and constitutional crisis to which it speaks, is underscored by a rising demography of violence: between 1985 and 1995 there occurred over 300 cases of witch-related killings in the province (Ralushai et al. 1996:31); in the first half of 1996 there were 676,³⁶ a 45-fold increase.³⁷ (In the Northwest Province, the rate was lower, but also increased over the decade.) Little wonder that many people, here as in other parts of Africa, fear that witchcraft is “running wild” (Ralushai et al. 1996). The mood of alarm is well captured in the opening remarks of the *Report*: “As the Province continued to burn,” as “witchcraft violence and ritual murder” were becoming endemic, “something had to be done, and very fast” (Ralushai et al. 1996:i).

The countryside was burning alright. But there were many ironies in the fire. For one, this was a moment, much heralded and celebrated, of exodus from colonial bondage. And yet, as our parallel research in the Northwest Province indicates, rural populations were convinced that their neighborhoods harbored trenchant human evil; that their familiar landscapes were alive with phantasmic forces of unprecedented power and danger; that the state, both past and present, had failed to shield ordinary citizens from malignity, leaving them little recourse but to protect themselves. For another, it was young men, not people in authority, who felt most moved to execute “instant justice” and to cleanse the country. They greeted Nelson Mandela’s release from prison, viewed by the world as a sign that right and reason had prevailed at last, with a furious spate of witch burnings—often to the august chanting of freedom songs (Ralushai et al. 1996:62, 244). All this was accompanied by a burgeoning fear, in the rural north, that some people, usually old people, were turning others into zombies; into a vast virtual army of ghost workers, whose lifeblood fueled a vibrant, immoral economy pulsing beneath the sluggish rhythm of country life. The margin between the human and the inhuman had become ever more

permeable, transgressed by the living dead and their depraved owners. Along with a grisly national market in human body parts, these zombies bore testimony to a mounting confusion of people with things.

Once again, none of this is entirely new. It is now clear that, in much of Africa, the colonial encounter played on preexisting enchantments and that, at times, it magnified the sorts of frictions that ignite witch hunts (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Fisiy and Geschiere 1991). Witchcraft has proven to be every bit as expansive and protean as modernity itself—thriving on its contradictions and its silences, usurping its media, puncturing its pretensions (Comaroff 1994). Yet, as Geschiere (in press) suggests, longevity does not imply continuity. Whatever their putative powers, witches cannot escape history. Neither is their flexibility infinite or random. Shifts in their cultural conception often register the impact of large-scale transformations on local worlds.³⁸ Indeed, their very durability stems from a genius for making the language of intimate, interpersonal affect speak of more abstract social forces. It is this articulation, in both senses of the term, that has underlain the sudden intensification of witch finding in South Africa—and, despite its very local nuances, throughout the continent at large (Geschiere 1997, in press). The parochialism of witches, it seems, is an increasingly global phenomenon.

Because witches distill complex material and social processes into comprehensible human motives, then, they tend to figure in narratives that tie translocal processes to local events, that map translocal scenes onto local landscapes, that translate translocal discourses into local vocabularies of cause and effect. In rural South Africa, the recent rise in witch finding and exorcisms has coincided with an efflorescence of other magical technologies that link the occult and the ordinary by thoroughly modern, even postmodern, means—means that evoke, often parody, and sometimes contort the mechanisms of the “free” market.

Thus ritual murder is said to have become “big business” across northern South Africa. In 1995, for example, stories spread widely about the discovery of dismembered corpses in the freezer of a casino in Mmabatho, in the Northwest Province. The casino was built for tourists during the apartheid years, when betting and interracial sex were illegal in South Africa but not in the ethnic “homelands”; here, over the border, in the gray interstices of the transnational, white South Africans came to purchase sexual services and to gamble. In the “new” South Africa, black bodies were again for sale, but in different form; the gruesome trade now nested comfortably within the orbit of everyday commerce, circulating human organs to whomever had the liquid cash to invest in them—they are, after all, a materialized form of cultural capital—in order to abet their undertakings. Much the same thing was apparent, too, in all the talk about the “fact” that some local entrepreneurs were turning their fellows into working zombies, a practice that conjures with one of the foundational laws of capitalism: namely, that rates of profit are inversely related to labor costs. But the most fabulous narratives were about Satanism, held in the Northwest, where it became a popular fixation in the mid-1990s, to be the most robust, most global of all occult enterprises. Less a matter of awesome ritual than of mundane human greed, dabbling in the diabolical was said to be especially captivating to the young. In 1996, when the Setswana network, Mmabatho TV, broadcast two programs on the subject, the “reformed” ex-Satanists featured, along with their “spiritual councillor,” were juveniles—of both sexes. As they took calls from the public, they told (in flat, prosaic terms) of the translocal power of the black arts—among them, an ability to travel great distances at miraculous speed to garner great riches at will.

We shall return to the substance of these things—to ritual murder and zombies and Satanism—in due course. Here we note merely that what is at issue is an expanded array of enchanted, often unnervingly visceral, modes of producing value—visceral, yet also strangely banal. In colonial times, divination involved a discrete, clandestine consultation with an expert. Now anxieties about witchcraft, money magic, ritual murder, and unnatural death are ventilated in churches and comic strips, on the radio, on television, and the Internet; almost every day

newspapers and magazines advertise “dial-in-diviners.” The public, multimediated quality of this communication is neatly captured in innovative ritual technologies (see n. 63). One is divining by “mirror” or “television,” recently developed in the Northern Province (Ralushai et al. 1996:6, 148, 177). An electronic update of such long-standing practices as reading oracular designs in a water bowl (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:97–98), this procedure requires that clients visit a “screenroom,” in which they imbibe a fermented drink and watch a white cloth mounted on a wall.³⁹ Figures of miscreants, both human and bestial, take shape on the screen; their transmission and appearance mimic the manner in which satellite dishes, broadcast networks, and long-distance magic condense images, objects, and sounds from afar.⁴⁰ While the adept might assist in unscrambling the ethereal pictures, these are received directly by his customers, who sit in the archetypal posture of family viewing and listening.

Who are the protagonists in these theaters of the banal, these mundane magical dramas? Who are the witches? And who takes responsibility for killing them? According to the witchcraft commission, “In general the community is responsible . . . but the youth who are called ‘*comrades*’ are in the forefront. Note: ages of the accused ranges [*sic*] between 14–38 years” (Ralushai et al. 1996:15, emphasis in original).⁴¹ Not only were young men the most identifiable perpetrators of witch-related violence, but they seem often to have forced neighbors and ritual experts to do their bidding. The purported malevolents, on the other hand, were the usual suspects of African witchcraft—men and women of conspicuous, unshared wealth (Ralushai et al. 1996:219, 253)—although those who were physically attacked were overwhelmingly old and, often, socially isolated and defenseless.

Let us take a closer look at the most extended case recorded by the witchcraft commission, the Ha-Madura Witch-Hunt (Ralushai et al. 1996:193–198).⁴² The defendants, who ranged from 14 to 35, were charged with having murdered an elderly woman, one Nyamavholisa Madura, by necklacing. They were also accused of attacking two others, both of advanced age. Witnesses recounted that, late in the afternoon of March 21, 1990, “the majority of the youths” of Madura—most of them male, most of them lacking regular work, most of them with time on their hands—gathered under a tree near the primary school. After a couple of speakers had urged them to exterminate the witches in their midst (Ralushai et al. 1996:202), they went off along the road in search of suspects, the accused at the head. Neither of their first two intended victims was home, so they torched their property and assaulted a man suspected of raising the alarm. They then moved on to the yard of the deceased. When they found her, they doused her with petrol and set her alight. She fled across her maize field and crawled through a fence, where the crowd, wielding sticks and stones, caught up with her. “Why are you killing me, my grandchildren?” she wailed. Her assailants responded, “Die, die you witch. We can’t get work because of you!” (Ralushai et al. 1996:206, 212). Garlanding her with a rubber tire, they applied more petrol and ignited her one final time.

There could hardly be a more bald statement of intergenerational antagonism. For these rural youth, “mass action” might have delivered the vote. But it brought them no nearer to the wealth and empowerment that the overthrow of apartheid was supposed to yield. Instead, it brought quite the reverse. Trade sanctions had increased unemployment sharply, especially in the countryside. The bitter irony of South Africa is that, as one of the world’s last colonies, it won its right to secular modern nationhood just as global processes were compromising the sovereignty and material integrity of the nation-state, *sui generis*. Multinational capital is capricious, its patronage shifting: once apartheid had ended, it found cheaper, more tractable labor, and less violence, elsewhere. As a result, many corporations did not return and money flowed in other directions. What is more, alterations in the world economy during the 1990s—the dramatic rise of tourism and post-Fordist production, of the entertainment industry, the electronic market place, and new-age commerce—have made few inroads into the “backveld.” They engage uneasily, or not at all, with rural enterprise and are experienced

primarily as stories from the city or as traces on television screens. The new era, it is true, has raised the living standards for sections of the African middle class (cf. Adam et al. 1998). Very visibly. But, overall, work is harder to come by and poverty is still dire.

It is no coincidence that the most spirited witch finding occurs where conditions are most straitened⁴³ and, also, where raw inequality has become most blatant. The North is, aggregately, the poorest province in the country (see Davidson 1994), and the remote regions of the Northwest come not far behind; the much heralded Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), far from being a postcolonial panacea for poverty, has had little impact here (cf. Adam et al. 1998). Agriculture, much of it on a pitifully modest scale, continues to be practiced, largely by women and, to a lesser extent, by older men. Petty business—beer-brewing, sex work, woodcutting, leather craft, thatching, carpentry, refashioning the detritus of used-up commodities for resale—supplements many household budgets. On the other hand, the migrant wages that had long subsidized faltering agrarian endeavors, and had granted young males a modicum of autonomy, are now diminishing. Concomitantly, cash assets vested in the elderly, like pensions, have risen in relative value; as disposable income, they are the object of fierce jealousy and mystical activity (cf. Ritchken 1994:357, 361). In addition, the establishment of the ethnic “homelands” under apartheid facilitated and funded the emergence of small new elites set apart by their evident prosperity and conspicuous consumption. And so, in towns like Madura, new material distinctions, of widely variable magnitude, have become discernible among neighbors. Such differences are made incarnate, personified even, in prized commodities: in houses, automobiles, televisions, cell phones. Said one man, Abraham Maharala, a pensioner forced to flee his village by evil-seeking neighbors, “The trouble began with the arrival of a radio.”⁴⁴ The alleged witch of Madura was the occasional employer of several of her attackers, and sometimes let them watch her television (Ralushai et al. 1996:212). The petrol that consumed her was seized from the few local men who could afford cars.

There is, in short, a good deal of evidence—both from the *Report* and from our own observations in the Northwest in 1994–96—of widespread anxiety about the production and reproduction of wealth, an anxiety that frequently translates into bitter generational opposition. Witch-hunting youth in the Northern Province acted as a cohort, much like an age-regiment (*mophato*) in Sotho-Tswana society of old. Ridding the countryside of witches (*baloi*) was all of a piece with the other forms of “mass action” that had sought to subvert an oppressive social order; not long ago, it should be noted, urban “comrades” denounced their parental generation as passive sellouts to colonial oppression. Indeed, the war against mystical evil fused, in a synthetic set of practices, political and ritual means of both recent and older vintage. In addition to singing songs of freedom as they carried out their exorcisms (Ralushai et al. 1996), “comrades” in Venda and Giyani also intoned one of the best known local circumcision chants, a chant also associated with soccer matches, drinking parties, and other sites of male age-grade formation (Ralushai et al. 1996:50, 179, 244).

Age, of course, is a relational principle. The youthful comrades forged their assertive identity against the foil of a sinister, secretive, gendered gerontocracy; significantly, those attacked were referred to as “old ladies,” even when they were men (Ralushai et al. 1996:211). The antisocial greed of these predators was epitomized in the idea of unnatural production and reproduction, in images of debauched, ungenerative sexuality, of adultery, rape, and abortion (cf. Ritchken 1994:325, 363). The commission, for example, makes repeated reference to the inability of witches to bear natural children, to their red vaginas, and to their lethal, “rotten” sperm (Ralushai et al. 1996:141, 150, 158, 168). Attacks upon them were accompanied by the cursing of their genitalia, and sometimes those of their mothers or their offspring (Ralushai et al. 1996:139, 144, 155, 158). Killing these “perverts” by fire—itself a vehicle of *simultaneous* destruction and rebirth—bespoke the effort to engender a more propitious, socially constructive, mode of reproduction.

Threats to local viability, as we have said before, were also attributed to the creation of a zombie work force. Thus one finds the following fragment from a case record:

On a certain day [when] the accused arrived, [people] shouted from the street that she is a witch with a shrinked [sic] vagina. They further said that she had killed people by means of lightning and that she has a drum full of zombies. They also said that her son "Zero" has no male seed and that he could not impregnate a woman. [Ralushai et al. 1996:50, 158]

It is hard to imagine a more pointed portrait of perversion of the zero-sum economy of witchcraft and its negation of life-giving material, sexual, and social exchange. In place of fertile procreation, and the forms of wealth that benefit a wider community, the witch makes ghost workers out of the able-bodied. She thrives by cannibalizing others, robbing the rising generation of a legitimate income and the wherewithal to marry or to establish their own families indeed, of becoming fully adult.

Precisely this sense of illegitimate production and reproduction pervades youthful discourses of witchcraft in much of South Africa. Many young black men, their masculinity ever more at risk,⁴⁵ blame their incapacity to ensure a future for themselves on an all-consuming, aged elite. Their concern is underscored by the preoccupation with zombies (sing., *setlotlwane*, Northern Sotho; *sethotsela*, Tswana). Long a feature of Caribbean vodoun but relatively new in Africa (Geschiere 1997, in press), their appearance here owes much to a diasporic flow of occult images (Appadurai 1990) although they resonate with an indigenous affliction known as *sefifi*, a state of "living death" or social nonbeing first described by 19th-century missionaries among Southern Tswana (see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:143). Spliced into local mystical economies, these shadowy figures take on the color of their surroundings. As one of our opening fragments suggests, they are persons who are thought to have been killed and revived by witchcraft.⁴⁶ The living dead exist only to serve their creators, generally, in the South African context, unrelated neighbors.⁴⁷ Bereft of tongues to give voice to their affliction, they are believed to work after dark, mainly in agriculture (Ralushai et al. 1996:5; cf. Ritchken 1994:329); a woman suspected of profiting from phantom labor was accused, for example, of having a "tractor that makes a lot of noise during the night" (Ralushai et al. 1996:166). Ghost workers can also be magically transported to urban centers; in fact, to any place where they might accrue riches for their owners. In this era of increasingly impermanent employment, there are even "part-time zombies" (Ralushai et al. 1996:224–225): people who wake up exhausted in the morning, having served unwittingly in the nocturnal economy to feed the greed of a malign master.

Although they have no tongues, zombies speak of a particular time and place. The end of apartheid was partly the product of a global moment, one in which the machinations of multinational capital and the fall of the Soviet Union had drastically restructured older polarities. When black South Africans at last threw off their colonial constraints, much of the rest of the continent had learned the harsh truth about the postcolonial predicament, having experienced unprecedented marginalization and economic hardship or, at the very least, striking new distinctions of wealth and privation. Such conditions disrupt grand narratives of progress and development (Roitman n.d.:20; cf. Comaroff 1994). But they do not necessarily dispel their animating desires; to the contrary, they may feed them. Hence the situation that Roitman (n.d.:20), writing of the Cameroon, describes as "negotiat[ing] modernity in a time of austerity." In these circumstances, there tends to be an expansion both in techniques of producing value and in the meaning of wealth itself. It is an expansion that often breaks the conventional bounds of legality, making crime, as well as magic, a mode of production open to those who lack other resources. This is why violence, as an instrument of income redistribution, is such a ubiquitous feature of postcolonial economies, in Africa and beyond.

The zombie is the nightmare citizen of this parallel, refracted modernity. Reduced from humanity to raw labor power, he is the creature of his maker, stored up in petrol drums or sheds

like tools. His absent presence suggests a link to otherwise inexplicable accumulation. Being solely for the benefit of its owner, the toil of the living dead is pure surplus value (Marx 1976:325): it has “all the charms of something created out of nothing.” Zombie production is thus an apt image of the inflating occult economies of postcolonial Africa, of their ever more brutal forms of extraction. As spectral capital, it will be evident why these forms of extraction are typically associated, as is witchcraft in general, with older people of apparent affluence—and why zombies are thought to have multiplied as wage work has become scarce among the young and unskilled. Not only does the rise of a phantom proletariat consume the life force of others, it also destroys the labor market, conventional patterns of social reproduction, and the legitimate prospects of “the community” at large. This, in essence, was the point made by striking workers on an Eastern Transvaal coffee plantation in 1995: they demanded the dismissal of three supervisors accused of killing employees to gain control of their jobs and, even worse, of keeping zombies for their private enrichment.⁴⁸

But zombie production is merely one means among several. Recall that there has also been an increase in the incidence of so-called “ritual murder,” of killing for the purpose of harvesting body parts—hence our opening fragment about eyes for sale in a Johannesburg shopping mall. As Ralushai et al. explain:

These body parts are used for the preparation of magic potions. Parts of the body may be used to secure certain advantages from the ancestors. A skull may, for instance, be built into the foundation of a new building to ensure a good business, or a brew containing human parts may be buried where it will ensure a good harvest. [1996:255]

A victim’s hands are “symbols of possession.” Eyes imply vision, genitals imply fertility. As we know from elsewhere in South Africa, avaricious people are thought to enhance their own vigor by draining the vitality diffused in the organs of others, preferably cut out while the body is still warm (Ralushai et al. 1996:271)⁴⁹—and, best of all, if taken from children under 12.⁵⁰

While they have long been part of the ritual repertoire of indigenous southern African societies, these practices appear to have been relatively rare in the past (Le Roux in Ralushai et al. 1996:255; Schapera, personal communication, August 22, 1997). But now a great deal of ghastly evidence confirms that, in this domain too, market forces have stimulated production. In addition to horrifying accounts of mutilated remains, newspapers publish the going rate for various parts: R 5,000 for testicles or gallbladders, R 1,000 for a kidney, R 2,000 for a heart (\$1 = R 4.90).⁵¹ Ordinary people, as we discovered in the Northwest in 1996, are obsessed with such minutiae; also with tales of butchered bodies turning up in places where they look just like raw meat. Hence the popular preoccupation—part fear, part fascination—with those corpses in the freezer of the Mmabatho casino (Ralushai et al. 1996) and with any number of other, equally murky stories.

This commerce seems to be eroding conventional social, cultural, and moral margins; in December 1994, a white policeman was charged with having removed the insides of a cadaver at the Braamfontein state mortuary in Johannesburg for retailing as medicine.⁵² Meanwhile, in different regions of the country, two young couples, both jobless and expecting babies, confessed in court to slaying young girls for their organs—in order to make ends meet.⁵³ In each case, an older male ritual practitioner was implicated. These young people acted on the understanding that the occult economy feeds the malevolent ambitions of their elders, to whom the purloined parts were to be retailed: already in 1988 it was noted that, in the Northern Province, any disappearance of persons, especially children, was “immediately linked to businessmen and politicians” by young activists (Ralushai et al. 1996:271). It was consternation about a string of such killings in the former homeland of Venda that caused its government to fall in the same year;⁵⁴ while, across the border at Mochudi, Botswana, public discontent over the handling of a girl’s ritual murder in 1994—allegedly by local entrepreneurs, abetted by her father, who testified to having “given her up” for P 1200 (\$310)—brought youth onto the streets

of the capital, prompting the Office of the President to call in Scotland Yard to help solve the crime (Durham 1998:5; Deborah Durham, personal communication, February 24, 1998).⁵⁵

We reiterate yet again that the traffic in human organs is neither new nor restricted to South Africa; that there is now a global economy in body parts (see e.g. Frow 1997; Scheper-Hughes 1996; White 1997:334), which flow from poor to rich countries, from south to north, east to west, young to old (Ralushai et al. 1996); that some national governments are widely rumored to raise revenue by farming corneas and kidneys for export; that, from the Andes through Africa to East Asia, mysterious malevolents are believed to extract blood, fat, members, and living offspring from the unsuspecting. At issue in these panics about corporeal free enterprise is a fear of the creeping commodification of life itself. Among Sotho and Tswana, people speak ever more apprehensively of a relentless process that erodes the inalienable humanity of persons and renders them susceptible as never before to the long reach of the market.

Notice the emphasis on distance. The translocal dimension of dealings in the occult economy is crucial to the way in which its workings are understood in rural South Africa. Throughout the northerly provinces, people ponder the interplay of mobility and compression in the production of new forms of wealth. These forms appear to be a consequence of the capacity to siphon goods, people, and images across space in no time at all. By what means and through what vectors? Movement, especially instant movement, adds value. But how? How are its mechanics to be mastered? How are they to be harnessed to prevailing patterns of local production and exchange? How, to use the idiom of an earlier era, is it possible to make cargo planes from far away places land on nearby runways? As South Africa casts off its pariah status and seeks ever greater integration with world markets, the growing velocity of long-range transaction—of the almost instantaneous flow of signs and styles and commodities across the earth—is discernible all around; it is legible in logos on T-shirts and song lyrics, in sitcoms and street-smart television series, in mass-mediated advertisements. In the rural Northwest, as we observed earlier, its impact is traceable in, among other things, the fast-growing interest in Satanism—which is manifesting itself as a feature of the millennial moment everywhere, from the east coast of Africa to the west coast of America (La Fontaine 1997; Wright 1993; cf. Meyer 1995).⁵⁶

Once more, however, a planetary phenomenon takes on a strikingly particular local form. Among rural Tswana, discourses of the diabolical center widely, if not exclusively, upon the most recent in a long line of missions from “overseas,” the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus) of Brazil (Ralushai et al. 1996). Highly controversial in its country of origin, this new Protestant denomination—which is rumored to issue charmed credit cards that register no debt—promises instant goods and gratification to those who embrace Christ and denounce Satan;⁵⁷ but, as the local pastor put it, believers have also to “make their faith practical” by publicly “sacrificing” as much cash as they can to the movement. Here Pentecostalism meets neoliberal enterprise: the chapel is, literally, a storefront in a shopping precinct. It holds services for all manner of passersby during business hours, appealing frankly to mercenary motives, mostly among the young. Tabloids in its windows feature radiant, well-clad witnesses, from all over central and southern Africa, speaking of the gainful employment, health, and wealth that followed their entry into the Church; eloquent testimonies, these, to rapid material returns on a limited spiritual investment. The ability to deliver in the here and now, again a potent form of space-time compression, is given as the measure of a truly global God. Bold color advertisements for BMWs and lottery winnings adorn the altar, under the legend: “Delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalms 37:4). The immediacy of this, of religion at its most robustly concrete, resonates with a pragmatic strain long evident in black Christianity in South Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:ch. 2).

But, for those middle-class Tswana schooled in a more ascetic Protestantism, the hordes that pack the storefront in hope and curiosity are being lured by the devil; this notwithstanding his ostentatious denunciation. Others are less sure, however. With the radical reorientation of local

contours of desire and despair, of wealth and inequality, the diabolical has been invested with provocative and ambiguous powers. Its intervention into everyday life is hotly debated. We were ourselves witness to an intriguing argument among history graduate students at the University of the Northwest: is the Universal Church the work of the Antichrist or a vindication of Max Weber?⁵⁸ To be sure, if Satan did not exist, crusading Christianity would have had to invent him: in order to assume its global mandate, neo-Pentecostalism summons up, perhaps as a condition of its possibility, a worthy, world-endangering antagonist to conquer. Like the Universal Church—which, by contrast to most other denominations, conducts much of its proceedings in English—Satanism is a globalizing discourse: “The devil and his demons,” says its page on the worldwide web (see n. 57), “have been deceiving people all over the world.”

Remember, in this respect, the television programs mentioned earlier, the ones in which “reformed” devil worshippers spoke to callers. When asked to explain the relationship of the diabolical to *bolo*i (witchcraft), one laconic young man said, in a fluent mix of Setswana and English: “Satanism is high-octane witchcraft. It is more international.”⁵⁹ So it is that old ideas are extended and novel tropes domesticated to meet altered conditions.⁶⁰ Satanists, significantly, were said predominantly to be youthful. “It is we,” offered another young ex-practitioner, “who really go for material things. We love the power of speeding around in fast cars.” The devil’s disciples were rumored to travel far and wide, fueling their accumulation of riches with human blood. As the “high octane” petrochemical image suggests, the basis of their potency was, again, the capacity to “ride the tiger of time-space compression” (Harvey 1990:351): to move seamlessly between the parochial and the translocal—here and there, then and now—thus to weave the connections of cause-and-effect that hold the key to the mysteries of this new, postcolonial epoch.

IV.

Perhaps the overriding irony of the contemporary age—the Age of Futilitarianism, we called it, in which the rampant promises of late capitalism run up against a thoroughly postmodern pessimism—is how unanticipated it was. None of the grand narratives of the orthodox social sciences came anywhere near predicting the sudden transformation of the 20th-century international order, the fall of the Soviet Union, the crisis of the nation-state, the deterritorialization of culture and society, the ascendance of an unevenly regulated global economy. The surprising recent past of South Africa is one instance of this irony, one refraction of this world-historical process. Here too, notwithstanding an intense struggle, the end came unexpectedly.

Apartheid might not have ended in a bloodbath or in a race war, but the birth of the “new” nation has nonetheless been tempestuous. Most perplexing, to many, is the apparently post-political character of the turbulence. Violence, by common agreement, is epidemic (cf. Adam et al. 1998); it is widely said to be throttling the embryonic democracy. Almost none of it, though, is clothed in an ideological agenda, a social vision, a political program. *Not yet*. Which is why, perhaps, it is traumatizing the populace at large. The new nightmare is of street terror run amok; of a state in retreat; of crime as routinized redistribution; of police unwilling to protect ordinary citizens, preferring to profit from the privatization of force and the sale of arms; of “faction fights” that, having outrun their original bipartisan logic, take on a ferocious life of their own; of a new topography of public space marked by few zones of safety and many of danger; of gated communities and razor-fenced houses; of uncivil cityscapes viciously contested by youth gangs, Islamic vigilantes, drug dealers, car-jackers, and other distinctly unromantic social bandits; of an economy, as much underground as above board, in which “new” black bureaucrats and businessmen, politicians, celebrities, and criminals, grow rich while the rest struggle to survive.⁶¹

This, we stress, is a popular nightmare, a fast materializing mythos for the postrevolutionary moment. Sociological reality, as always, is much more complex, much less coherent. Not all is apocalypse. Nor does everyone participate in the scare scenario. In the wake of apartheid, all sorts of legitimate new ventures prosper alongside older ones. From the quiet backyards of rural homesteads through the teeming taxi ranks of large “townships” to sedate urban corporate quarters, inventive African entrepreneurs “do business.” Postcolonial commerce ruptures and dissolves long-standing racial lines in its millennial pursuit of virgin markets. And many whites continue to live in great physical comfort. A politics of optimism is actively purveyed by the ANC, not altogether in vain; refreshingly, the broadcast media envisage a future in which black is not bleak. What is more, some forms of cultural production—often exhilaratingly experimental, spirited, intense—thrive just off the most mean streets. Still, the fright nightmare persists. Indeed, it grows increasingly baroque, medieval almost, as it is represented with ever greater facticity, ever greater statistical certainty.⁶²

Reports of escalating witchcraft and ritual murder, of zombies and Satanism, must be situated on this restless terrain. The specter of mystical violence run wild is a caricature of postapartheid “liberty”: the liberty to transgress and consume in an unfettered world of desire, cut loose from former political, spatial, moral, sexual, and material constraints. Socialist imaginings, like all utopian ideas for a new society, falter. In their place reigns the rhetoric of the market, of freedom as the right to exercise choice through spending or voting or whatever, of personhood as constructed largely through consumption. Talk in the public sphere about violence—in official commissions and the press, on television talk shows and in “people’s” courts, in artistic representation and radio debate—expresses a pent up lust for the things that apartheid denied, from iconic objects (notably, the BMW) and an omnivorous sexuality unbound by Calvinist stricture, to extravagant self-fashionings and the flamboyant sense of independence communicated by the cell phone. But it also evokes a world in which ends far outstrip means, in which the will to consume is not matched by the opportunity to earn, in which there is a high velocity of exchange and a relatively low volume of production. And yet, we repeat, it is a world in which the *possibility* of rapid enrichment, of amassing a fortune by largely invisible methods, is always palpably present.

The preoccupation with the occult is closely connected to all this. At one level, it is about the desire to plumb the secret of those invisible means; at another, it is concerned to stem the spread of a macabre, visceral economy founded on the violence of extraction and abstraction (1) in which the majority are kept poor by the mystical machinations of the few; (2) in which employment has dwindled because of the creation of a virtual labor force from the living dead;⁶³ (3) in which profit depends on compressing space and time, on cannibalizing bodies, and on making production into the spectral province of people of the night; (4) in which the old are accused of aborting the natural process of social reproduction by preventing the next generation from securing the bases of its material and social existence—and youth, reciprocally, are demonized.⁶⁴ The fact that none of this is truly new makes it no less significant to those for whom it has become an existential reality.

In no small part, witch hunts are instruments of social divination, dramatic discourses of discovery in the public sphere, whose unspoken object it is to yield explanations, to impress clarity on bodies and persons (cf. Appadurai 1995). That ambiguity concerns many aspects of the “new” South Africa: the rights of citizens, the role of the state, the significance of cultural identity and of social difference, the meaning and the point of postapartheid politics, the infinitely complex articulations of race, class, and ethnicity; the legitimacy of an economic order that has sanctioned dramatic polarities of wealth and caused intense jealousy among neighbors. But, most of all, there is perplexity—in this Hobbesian universe where social and moral anchors seem to be aweigh, where everything appears at once possible and impossible—about the very

nature of human subjects, about their covert appetites, about dark practices of the heart that show themselves in spectacular new fortunes and orgies of consumption.

Here, then, are the answers to our questions. It will be clear now why, in the South African postcolony, there has been such a dramatic intensification of appeals to enchantment. And why it is, in a world alleged to be filled with witches and ritual murders and zombies, that generational antagonisms loom so large. The rise of occult economies in postcolonial, postrevolutionary societies, be they in Europe or Africa, seems overdetermined. For one thing, these tend to be societies in which an optimistic faith in free enterprise encounters, for the first time, the realities of neoliberal economics: of unpredictable shifts in sites of production and the demand for labor; of the acute difficulties inherent in exercising stable control over space, time, or the flow of money; of an equivocal role for the state; of an end to old political alignments, without any clear lines, beyond pure interest, along which new ones take shape; of uncertainty surrounding the proper nature of civil society and the (post?)modern subject. Such are the corollaries of the rise of millennial capitalism as they are felt in much of the contemporary world (Comaroff 1996). Perhaps they will turn out to be entirely transitory, a mere passing moment, in the long run. But this makes them no less momentous.

Which takes us to our final question, our final point. What is the salience of our story for the present and future of the discipline, for a postcolonial anthropology of the global age?

“Globalism” and “globalization,” as everyone knows, have become tropes for our times. Like all catchwords and clichés, they are cheapened by overuse and underspecification, by confusing an expansive metaphor for an explanatory term. As a result, much of what is currently being written about them in the social sciences is Anthropology Lite, fact-free ethnography whose realities are more virtual than its virtues are real. At the same time, it is important not to overreact, not to treat anything labeled “global” either as a feckless fashion or as a threat to the existence of a discipline traditionally concerned with the parochial—this last by dissolving all things culturally contingent and close to the ground into the great Eurocentric solvent of late capitalism. In point of fact, the processes involved in the rise of novel forms of planetary integration and compression—especially in the electronic economy, in mass communications, in flexitime flows of labor and capital, in the instantaneous circulation of signs and images, in the translocal commodification of culture, in the diasporic politics of identity—challenge us by re-presenting the most fundamental question of our craft: how do human beings construct their intimate, everyday life-worlds at the shifting intersections of here, there, elsewhere, everywhere?

This, finally, is a problem of scale: of determining, in respect of any given ethnography—contemporary, historical, or both—the stretch of relations, concrete processes, imaginings, spatial planes commensurate to its realization. “Locality” is not everywhere, nor for every purpose, the same thing; sometimes it is a family, sometimes a town, sometimes a nation, sometimes a flow or a field, sometimes a continent or even the world; often it lies at the point of articulation among two or more of these things. Similarly, translocal, planetary connections and forces do not impinge equally or in like manner on all aspects of human thought, action, and interaction. In this respect, it is important not to forget that “the local” and “the global” do not describe received empirical realities. They are analytic constructs whose heuristic utility depends entirely on the way in which they are deployed to illuminate historically specific phenomena (cf. Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b). Which is why we have taken such pains here to trace the causal determinations of the occult economy in postapartheid South Africa across generations and genders, villages and provinces and regions, and a nation-state in transition—not to mention along the labile vectors of a post-Fordist, millennial economy.

As all this implies, there is little to be gained any longer from avoiding the methodological challenge posed by the global moment, a strategy effected, on the part of some anthropologists, by retreating back into the local. This move is typically rationalized by affirming, sometimes in an unreconstructed spirit of romantic neoprimitivism, the capacity of “native” cultures to remain

assertively intact, determinedly different, in the face of a triumphal, homogenizing world capitalism. Apart from being empirically questionable, this depends upon an anachronistic, ahistorical idea of culture. Of culture transixed in *opposition* to capitalism—as if capitalism were not itself cultural to the core, everywhere indigenized as if culture has not been long commodified under the impact of the market. In any case, to reduce the history of the here and now to a contest between the parochial and the universal, between sameness and distinction, is to reinscribe the very dualism on which the colonizing discourse of early modernist social science was erected. It is also to misrepresent the hybrid, dialectical, historically evanescent character of *all* contemporary social designs.

Here lies one future for anthropology, at least as the discipline looks from the vantage of the South African postcolony. It is to interrogate the *production*, in imaginative and material practice, of those compound political, economic, and cultural forms by means of which human beings *create* community and locality and identity, especially on evanescent terrains; by means of which, in the face of material and moral constraint, they *fabricate* social realities and power relations and impose themselves on their lived environments; by means of which space and time are made and remade, and the boundaries of the local and the global are actualized. Observe the stress on the active voice: from this perspective, the epistemic objects of our inquiry are no longer nouns—culture, society, institutions, or whatever—but compound verbs describing the construction and deconstruction of more-or-less stable practices, conventions, forms, commodities, abstractions. Even the most overdetermined, most complex, most inchoate of world-historical forces—colonialism, the global market, cyberspace, “late” capitalism—take shape in sociocultural processes that inhabit particular places during particular periods in particular persons (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). Without human agents, without specified locations and moments and actions, realities are not realized, nothing takes place, the present has no presence.

These locations and moments, people and practices—to return one last time to the spirit of Max Gluckman—comprise the fragments from which an anthropology of millennial capitalism and the culture of neoliberalism is to be constructed: the fragments from which we may recuperate the mechanisms by which the local is globalized and the global localized. For in these processes lies an explanation for the most parochial of things, like the “new” occult economy in South Africa, also for the most universal. Like the fact that enchantment, far from slipping away with the resolute march of modernity, seems everywhere on the rise.

notes

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1. This line, from *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic* (Evans-Pritchard 1937:513), is contained in a passage quoted by Gluckman at the opening of his radio broadcast on Mau Mau, published as “The Magic of Despair” in *The Listener* (1959) and as chapter 4 of *Order and Rebellion* (1963). We return to both the quotation and the essay below. The following citation, from George Eliot, is to be found in *Silas Marner* (1994[1861]:189).

2. The story was carried by the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* on March 16, 1996; we read it from a Reuter report, via the University of Chicago news server on the internet on March 17, 1996, under the number/title a0698reuter i BC- SAFRICA-BABOON 03-17 0209, 17.3.96, “S. African Villagers Kill ‘Witch Disguised as Baboon.’” Necklacing, notoriously, involved putting an old rubber tire, drenched in petrol, around the suspect and then setting it alight.

3. The incident occurred near the Kruger National Park, a celebrated (now controversial) game reserve that has drawn innumerable tourists over the years. Note that the animal at the center of the story seems neither to have come from the Park nor to have had an owner. Interestingly, a state witchcraft commission (Ralushai et al. 1996:17), discussed below, was told by its informants in the Northern Province that witches “should be kept with wild animals in the Kruger National Park!”

4. See, for example, Hammond-Tooke 1981:98 on the Kgaga, a Northern Sotho people who live in the area. Elsewhere he adds that, for Kgaga, baboons are “disconcertingly like men” (1981:133)—and, hence, were not eaten.

5. Reuter, via the University of Chicago internet news server, a0022LBY703reulbr c BC-SAFRICA-MONSTER 06-10 0610, 6.10.96, “Is It a Duck? No, It’s the Howick Monster,” by Ellis Mnyandu. The anthropologist mentioned in the piece is Sian Hall, a resident of Howick.

6. The notion that fearsome reptiles inhabit deep pools is common throughout rural southern Africa. In the 1820s, John Philip (1828, vol. 2:117), Superintendent of the London Missionary Society in South Africa, remarked on the prevalence of this notion among Southern Tswana. David Livingstone (1857:44), in fact, took it as evidence of the “remnants of serpent-worship” in this part of Africa. We encountered it ourselves in the 1960s and 1970s, as had Breutz (1956:77) and, across the border in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, Schapera (1971:35–36). The latter reports that rainmakers were thought able to charm enormous snakes, who could draw water from the heavens (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: ch. 2, 4).

7. This fragment comes from a posting on the nuafrica mailing list (nuafrica@listserv.acns.nwu.edu), centered at the Program of African Studies, Northwestern University. It was posted by Lumkile Mondl (Lumkile_Mondl_at_DDT.ZA.JHB.MC@dtus.com) on February 22, 1996.

8. Here, though, the story becomes a little murky. Earlier in his account, Mondl says that “all but one [of the schemes had] closed down as the owners disappear[ed] with millions.” But then he goes on to speak of “the scheme”—in the singular—and its successes. We assume he means to suggest that earlier pyramid operations had failed amidst corrupt practice, but that the most recent one, which features in the story, had survived and grown to its present scale.

9. These investors believed that state involvement posed a threat to their economic prospects: they told Mondl, quite explicitly, that “intervention by the authorities” promised to “push them back to poverty.”

10. A report by Bruce Cameron for Independent Newspapers (“Pyramid Schemes under Fire, Yet in South Africa They Are Flourishing Daily at Your Expense,” 1997) is to be found on the worldwide web at <http://www.ifsin.com/indpfpvr.htm>. According to this report, “new get-rich-quick schemes are cropping up almost every week” in South Africa. Cameron mentions two more pyramids, Newport, run from a Netherlands address, and Balltron. “Some” of these schemes, he adds,

are attached to other financial products like unit trusts, others have a magazine, while others like Rainbow [in South Africa] offer discounts on various products like airline fares. What most of the schemes have in common is that they depend on one or more layers of people being recruited to ensure the earlier entrants recover their money. When the stage of implosion is reached . . . many thousands of people [are] left out of pocket.

11. Reuter, via the University of Chicago news server, a1061reuter i BC-SAFRICA-WITCHCRAFT, 04-29-0206, 4.29.96, “S. African Arrested for Selling Pair of Blue Eyes.”

12. See, for example, Wright 1996. He tells of a case before the Bisho Supreme Court (Eastern Cape) in which the accused had been seen, by his “girlfriend,” to disembowel an eight-year-old female in the bedroom of his home at Mdantsane (near East London) in July 1995 and package her organs for sale.

13. Reuter, via the University of Chicago news server, a0345reuter i BC-SAFRICA-WITCHES, 11-15-0307, 11.15.96, “S. Africa Witches Accused of Abducting Dead Relatives.”

14. See, for example, Andrews 1997, Bohlen 1997, *New York Times* 1997. This last report comments on the secretive operation of the funds, and on the fact that, early on, protesters berated the government for intervening, believing that they would otherwise have been paid out; and Andrews notes their magical, miraculous dimension (see below). Shades here of our fragment from South Africa. For a left-wing analysis of the Albanian debacle, posted on the worldwide web by Alan Woods under the title “Revolution in Albania,” see <http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~zac/woodal.htm> (undated). According to Woods,

The spark which ignited the fire was the bankruptcy of the financial companies which were promising interest rates up to 100 per cent a month to people investing their savings [in pyramid schemes]. Tens of thousands of Albanians sold all their belongings, including their homes, in order to put their money in the accounts of the fraudsters. They have lost everything. The people responsible for this fraud they all belong to the clique around President [Sali] Berisha.

15. Large-scale scams have occurred in Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and almost every other formerly Communist country. See, for example, Andrews 1997.

16. Recall that, while operating in South Africa, Rainbow and Newport had administrative addresses in Liverpool and the Netherlands, respectively.

17. This type of swindle, says Leslie Eaton (1997), works as follows: promoters take over a small company and issue its shares—most of which they own, and for which they paid little or nothing—at a public offering. Public relations operatives, market analysts, and brokers are then hired to drive up the price of these shares by championing the company and by selling its stock to clients, often in return for secret commissions. But if stockholders try to sell, the conspiring traders fail to execute their orders. When the value of their paper has risen enough to make a substantial gain, the promoters sell, causing the price to plunge and leaving

conned investors with large losses. There have recently been reports of soaring fraud of this kind in the United States, a result, it seems, of the fact that many investors are presently “predisposed to throw dollars at get-rich-quick schemes” (Eaton 1997:1). While not new, such scams appear to be more elaborate and common than ever before: \$6 billion was lost to them in 1996, a year in which complaints against brokers numbered 3,100 (40 percent over the year before). This has been exacerbated “by the rise of low cost telecommunications and . . . the internet” (Eaton 1997:24).

18. One of the pyramid operators in Albania, Andrews notes, was “a gypsy fortune-teller, complete with crystal ball, who claimed to know the future” (1997:3).

19. We are not suggesting that “get-rich quick schemes” of various kinds are new; patently, national lotteries, pyramid schemes, and the like have been around for a long time. What strikes us as remarkable are the widespread reports of their intensification—and their integration into mainstream economic practice—at this moment in history. We shall return to the point below.

20. New Era was created by John Bennett, Jr., who was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment in Philadelphia on September 22, 1997, for fraud. Bennett pleaded to having suffered “delusions that he was doing God’s work.” These delusions—which produced the “biggest charity scam in U.S. history”—convinced a large number of philanthropic money managers to invest in the scheme in pursuit of unusually large returns (*Chicago Tribune* 1997).

21. The play on the phrase “consuming passions” comes from Comaroff 1997. For further discussion of the general point, see, for example, Bastian 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997, in press; Schmol 1993; White 1997.

22. Daniel Rothenberg, a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, is currently doing an ethnographic study in Guatemala and Peru of “social panics” occasioned by the alleged activities of *sacaos*, white Americans who were thought to steal the eyes of local children.

23. There have been countless stories in the British tabloid press about such matters. For one especially vivid one, see Radford 1997. The two undertitles of this story—“Cult Is Cover for Paedophile Sex Monsters,” and “They Breed Tots to Use at Occult Rites”—summarize aptly the content of the moral panic to which they speak.

24. Interestingly, in the United States there has been a recent spate of rumors, circulated through the internet, about the theft of kidneys from unsuspecting (male) business travelers. According to this urban myth, the telling of which is always accompanied by a welter of authenticating detail, the victim is offered a drink at an airport—New Orleans appears to be a favorite—and awakes in a hotel bath, body submerged in ice. A note, taped to the wall, warns him not to move, but to call 911. He is asked by the operator on duty to feel very carefully for a tube protruding from his back. If he finds one, he is instructed to remain absolutely still until paramedics arrive: both his kidneys have been harvested. We are grateful to Shane Greene (1997) for first alerting us to the story—which, to close the circle, has made its way back into Southern African cyberspace via a Botswana newsgroup [Botsnet@newton.ccs.tuns.ca], where it is retold, in an exquisitely embellished version, as a cautionary tale about the United States.

25. There is presently something of a moral panic in Central Europe about the “trafficking in women from Ukraine, Russia and other nations of the former Soviet bloc” on the part of “slave traders” who force their victims into prostitution in Western Europe, the United States, Japan, China, and elsewhere (Isachenkov 1997).

26. Indeed, these phenomena go back a very long way. In 1888, to take just one example, a “Baby War” occurred in Korea. It began when rumors spread that “Europeans and Americans were stealing children and boiling them in kettles for food.” These foreigners were also thought to capture women—rendering them insensible by means of a drug that became a powerful gas when blown out of the mouth—and cut off their breasts in order to extract “condensed milk,” a commodity that the aliens somehow came to possess and consume even though they had no cows (Hulbert 1962[1905], vol. 2:245).

27. Compare Ashforth, who also reports that, especially since 1994, “witchcraft is commonly thought to be rapidly increasing” (1997:1). In Soweto, he adds, “There is a good deal of [popular] pressure” for the state to take a hand in solving this very serious problem (1997:2).

28. See “Donker Jonker’s Righteous Crusade,” in the Mark Gevisser Profile, *Weekly Guardian and Mail*, October 6, 1995. Colonel Kobus Jonker, head of the Unit, is known by the nickname “Donker,” the Afrikaans word for “dark.” Note that references to the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* here and elsewhere lack pagination, as they were taken from the worldwide web editions.

29. For background material on Max Gluckman and the Manchester School, see, for example, Brown 1973, 1979; Colson 1977; Handelman 1976; Kuper 1973:184; Werbner 1984.

30. This phrase is taken from the opening of Kluckhohn’s *Mirror for Man* (1954); see Gluckman 1963:1.

31. “Occult economy” may be taken, at its most general, to connote the deployment of magical means for material ends or, more expansively, the conjuring of wealth by resort to inherently mysterious techniques, techniques whose principles of operation are neither transparent nor explicable in conventional terms. These techniques, moreover, often involve the destruction of others and *their* capacity to create value. Note that we do not seek to define “the occult” substantively. What counts as magic varies across time and place and context, although it is always set apart from habitual, normative forms of production. Our primary concern here is to examine how—as well as by whom, why, and with what implications—occult practices have come to be *imagined* in contemporary rural South Africa.

32. We have also argued (1993:xii), as have many anthropologists before us, that “tradition” is itself a chimera that it is an ideological construct forged, in teleological European narratives by contrast to

"modernity." Anthropological deconstructions notwithstanding, the concept retains its currency in Western discourses of Otherness.

33. The *Report* of the commission opens with a section on "Methods of Research" (Ralushai et al. 1996:4). It defines vernacular terms, discusses "Unstructured Interviews" and "Problems Encountered in the Field" (1996:6), and it ends with a bibliography of relevant scholarly publications, including one of our own (Comaroff 1985).

34. The exception was J. A. van den Heever, professor of criminal law and procedure at the University of the North. The others were drawn from the judiciary and legal profession, the churches and theological studies, "traditional" rulers, the Council of Traditional Healers, the South African Police, and the ANC (Ralushai et al. 1996:1–3).

35. The *Report* begins its recommendations with a call to "liberate people mentally to refrain from participating in the killing . . . resulting from their belief in witchcraft" (Ralushai et al. 1996:6). It urges the government to sponsor mass workshops, rallies, media campaigns, and an international conference of traditional healers; it also urges the government to bring "eminent local and international scholars"—for example, the anthropologist Jean La Fontaine—to address the topic (Ralushai et al. 1996:60). As elsewhere in the document, Ralushai et al. are concerned here with ways of dissuading people from taking violent action against witches. They do not address the problem of eradicating *beliefs* in witchcraft itself; this because the latter is assumed to be a reality, not a matter of belief at all (see below).

36. See "Northern Province Targets 'Witch' Killers," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, September 27, 1996. We have one point of clarification: we are concerned here to account for the dramatic rise in, and intensification of, witchcraft violence—and in occult activity, real or imagined—during the postcolonial era and the years leading up to it. It follows that the occurrence of parallel phenomena in earlier times are to be explained in terms appropriate to their specific historical circumstances; hence our argument, in the text below, for the protean character of beliefs in witchcraft and magic.

37. Note that this dramatic increase *cannot* simply be attributed to more extensive reporting in recent times. Local anthropologists have long kept a close watch on incidents of witch-related violence, incidents that, by their very nature, seldom go undiscovered; indeed, more often than not they are *intended*, by their perpetrators, to be visible to the communities in which they occur. Similarly, the governments of the ethnic "homelands," in tangent with the agencies of the apartheid state, sustained close surveillance over such things. The evidence, in sum, seems indisputable.

38. This is especially evident in witch-finding campaigns in central and southern Africa sparked, in the past, by a sense of momentous social, political, and economic change. Such campaigns have tended to give expression, in highly local terms, to feelings of disempowerment in the face of exogenous forces (see, e.g., Auslander 1993; Richards 1935).

39. In a *Wall Street Journal* article on the rise of witch burnings in the Northern Province, Davidson (1994) mentions a case involving the disappearance of Johannes Mashala. According to the article, some of Mashala's kin kidnapped him in order to try to turn him into a zombie. The ritual specialist called in to divine his whereabouts "fed muti [medicine] to his mother, his sister and three young male villagers and had them stare at a green cloth." (Note, the cloth in this instance was green, not white, as reported by Ralushai et al. 1996.) The boys said they could see the kidnappers on the screen; shortly thereafter four of Mashala's relatives were found burned to death (Davidson 1994). As its title ("Apartheid Is Over, but Other Evils Haunt South Africa: Witch-Burning Is on the Rise as Superstitious Villagers Sweep House of Spirits") suggests, this account is mired in stereotypic misunderstandings of "native" life in rural South Africa. But the basic facts of the story come from somewhat more reliable local sources.

40. A parallel to this form of divination seems to have occurred in the celebrated case of the lost head of the Xhosa ruler Hintsa. (According to local tradition, Hintsa was shot and decapitated in 1835 by a member of the Highland Regiment; his head is said to have been taken to Scotland and buried in the regimental museum, although this version of the story has been widely disputed in the United Kingdom.) When a Xhosa healer traveled to Britain in 1996 to bring the head home, Luise White recalls, he "announced that a message from Hintsa's spirit scrawled on a blank television screen" told him where the missing skull was to be found (1997:335). Technologically based transformations in ritual practice seem to be becoming a worldwide phenomenon. To take just one striking instance, reported to us by Mark Woodward of Arizona State University, Muhammad Zuhri, self-styled "Revolutionary Sufi Master From Indonesia," undertakes to cure HIV by e-mail (<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/5739>); for another example, see n. 63 below.

41. Most respondents said that the youth were "manipulated" by adults and political cadres who wanted to render the country ungovernable. They added that young people were used in this way because, as juveniles, they would be treated lightly by the courts (Ralushai et al. 1996:15). While there might be some validity to this, it does not explain the broader phenomenon in question. Not only does it fail to make sense of the continuing escalation of witchcraft incidents in South Africa *after* the transition to majority government; it is also unable to account for the obvious passion that underlay youthful witch hunting, a passion shared by most adult members of their communities. A similar criticism may be leveled at those who argue that the youth who led the popular resistance to apartheid in its final years were mere tools of adult instigators. Much more complex political and economic forces, parsed in intergenerational terms, were at issue.

42. *State v. Mutshutshu Samuel Magoro and Others*, case no. CC36/91, Supreme Court of Venda, heard May 5–7, 1992, delivered June 3, 1992.

43. On the ongoing incidence of witch-related violence in the Northern Province, see, once again, "Northern Province Targets 'Witch' Killers," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, September 27, 1996. In the

Northwest Province, as we observed in August 1997, orchestrated witch finding tends to occur primarily in remote rural areas—such as those south of Taung and in the northeast Hurutshe district—which are quite far from the urban hub of Mafikeng-Mmabatho. We are grateful to Neil Roos of the Department of History, University of the Northwest (personal communication, December 16, 1997), whose insights on this pattern confirm our own.

44. See “Outcasts of the Witch Village of the North,” *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, November 3, 1995.

45. Ritchken observes that, in Mapulaneng, males who did not find jobs, either at home or as migrant workers, were liable to be called “women” (1994:344, 375). We found much the same thing in the Northwest. The recessions of the 1980s and 1990s, which seriously reduced the access of young men to employment, and to female partners, seems to have exacerbated their feminization in many parts of the country.

46. The popular and prestigious Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown featured a play entitled *Zombie*, by Brett Bailey, on July 4–14, 1996. The events on which it was based are remarkably similar to those reported in the fourth of our opening fragments: they began with a taxi van accident in Kokstad in which 12 schoolboys were killed, and they ended with the murder of two elderly “witches” by comrades of the deceased. The appearance of this play on such a prominent stage suggests that the phenomenon itself is entering into the mainstream of public consciousness. We are grateful to Loren Kruger, of the Department of English at the University of Chicago, for sharing with us a review of the production.

47. Unlike the cases reported by Geschiere (in press), there is little evidence that zombies here are created by the sacrifice of close kin, although it seems largely to have been the immediate relatives of missing persons who voiced suspicions about their having been made into phantom workers. The one exception of which we are aware is the story, published in the *Wall Street Journal*, quoted in n. 39 above.

48. See “Spirits Strike at Labour Relations,” *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, December 27, 1995.

49. Geschiere suggests that the rise of zombie-like beliefs in Cameroon implies that “witches see their fellow men no longer as meat to be eaten . . . as life to feed upon in order to strengthen one’s own life force—but rather as laborers that have to be exploited” (in press). This shift is not born out in the South African material. Mounting evidence of a market in human body parts indicates that faith in the productive power of immoral consumption has strengthened along with other dimensions of the occult economy. Whereas most Africans insist that whites neither practice witchcraft nor are susceptible to it (Ralushai et al. 1996:23)—which may or may not be true—there has long been evidence (as in the case of the blue eyes, mentioned above) that their bodies are especially effective sources of strengthening substances.

50. See, for example, “The Human Parts that Heal,” Vusi Khoza and Annie Mapoma, *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, December 9, 1994. This is a preference attributed, speculatively, to ritual murderers and their putative clients. It derives largely from the “fact” that many victims of homicides *alleged* to have been committed for the culling of body parts have been young children. We have ourselves heard such speculations on countless occasions.

51. These were the given prices at the end of 1994; see “The Human Parts that Heal,” Vusi Khoza and Annie Mapoma, *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, December 9, 1994. According to the Johannesburg *Star*, mentioned in the fourth of our opening fragments (and annotated in n. 11), the eyes of white children fetched \$700 in April 1996.

52. See, again, “The Human Parts that Heal,” Vusi Khoza and Annie Mapoma, *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, December 9, 1994.

53. One of these cases, cited above (n. 12), was heard in the Bisho Supreme Court; see Wright 1996. The other is State vs. Edward Nkhumeleni and Others, Venda Supreme Court, case no. CC17/94, February 1995.

54. Dissatisfaction with the investigation into a clutch of murders in the territory led to protest on the part of the Northern Transvaal ANC Youth Congress, which organized stay-aways and a boycott of schools and local stores (Ralushai et al. 1996:257). A local businessman, a former official of the Venda homeland government, and a ritual practitioner were finally convicted in these cases.

55. Another incident occurred in 1997 in Mmankgodi (population 4,000), just outside Gaborone. After a five-year-old girl disappeared, presumed to have fallen victim to ritual murder, “a mob of riotous youths . . . went on the rampage, burning almost all government buildings in the village” (Durham 1998:1, from the *Botswana Gazette*, April 16, 1997). As in the earlier case, this was followed by demonstrations involving students at the University of Botswana, who demanded that government take steps to prevent such attacks.

56. Also in white South Africa, where rising fears of the diabolical are part and parcel of an apocalyptic vision of the world after apartheid—and where the Occult-related Crime Unit of the Police Service, mentioned above (Ralushai et al. 1996; n. 28), wages “valiant battle” against “Satanic subcultures” said to be rampant among white teenagers; see “Donker Jonker’s Righteous Crusade,” *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, October 6, 1995.

57. The genealogy of the church can be traced back to the Pentecostal revival of the 1950s and 1960s in Brazil, and to the ideas of such proponents of the American “Prosperity Gospel” as Kenneth Hagin. For details, see Eric Kramer 1994, to whom we are grateful for sharing his extensive knowledge of this religious movement. See also the web page of the Universal Church in South Africa (<http://www.surfnet.co.za/stop.suffering>). In hypertext, under *Financial Testimonies*, it carries a story entitled “BMW and Business,” in which one Lorraine Maila recalls how, by joining the denomination, and by “making a chain of prayers”—echoes of the chain letter?—she “was blessed with a BMW 316 Dolphin and brand new equipment in [her] shop.” By way of comparison with the religion closer to home, there is, in

Annie Proulx's recent *Accordion Crimes* (1996), a pointed portrait of an African American radio preacher, one Reverend Ike, whose Christianity speaks in similar terms:

I am telling you, get out of the ghetto and get into the get-mo. Get some money, honey. You and me, we are not interested in a harp tomorrow, we interested in a dollar today. We want it NOW. We want it in a big sack or a box or a railroad car but we WANT it. Stick with me. Nothing for free. Want to shake that money tree. There is something missing from that old proverb, you all know it, money is the root of all evil. I say LACK OF money is the root of all evil. The best thing you can do for poor folks is not be one of them. No way, don't stay. Don't stay poor, its pure manure, and that's for sure. [1996:338]

58. Eric Kramer (see n. 57) tells us that, in Brazil, the Universal Church denounces both the Catholic Church and Umbanda as "satanic," sometimes accusing Afro-Brazilian religions of such visceral practices as the sacrifice of children and the consumption of their organs. Kramer (personal communication, January 15, 1998; cf. Pagels 1995), however, differentiates the satanic, itself an integral part of Christian history, from Satanism. This distinction is not relevant in South Africa, where it is the latter, unequivocally, that is invoked in the moral panic of the present.

59. *Metsweditswedi* ("Source of Sources"), Bophuthatswana TV (Mmabatho); broadcast on July 31, 1996.

60. In the Northwest Province, the Universal Church holds special services for the victims of witchcraft, which it sees as the work of Satan; all over the world, it seems, the demonic must come to terms with local idioms of evil.

61. Compare Adam et al. 1998. A report about neighboring Namibia gives a vivid example of just this imagery—and of much of what we have discussed here. According to the *New York Times*,

Popular anger is directed at the 43 members of Parliament who are Cabinet ministers or deputy ministers. They get \$55,000 a year, plus allowances for housing, furniture, electricity, telephones and drivers. They also get free television satellite dishes, cellular phones, a Mercedes for weekdays, a Land Cruiser for weekends, [overseas travel allowances and so on]. [McNeil 1997:4]

Note, again, how these perquisites stress means of mobility, and of the transmission of signs and people across space and time. A national scandal has also occurred over the purchase of airplanes for President Sam Nujoma. Said an opposition politician, Mishake Muyongo, of a plan to spend \$45 million on a new one with sufficient range to fly to Europe nonstop: "Planes are like toys Sam Nujoma has to play with. But we are holding out our left hands to beg while our rights are digging into our pockets to pay for his jet" (McNeil 1997:4).

62. We were struck, in 1996, by the confidence with which white Johannesburg residents told us, in the pseudoscientific argot of probability statistics, that they would fall victim to violent crime(s)—before the year 2000.

63. Compare Ashforth 1997:2, 14. Ashforth also links growing anxieties over witchcraft with the problem of rising unemployment and lack of jobs—which is seen in Soweto, apparently, as both a cause and an effect of mystical evil. By way of comparison, in Thailand—where fortune telling has been transformed by global technology and the rise of e-mail and dial-in divination—a "traditional" seer, auspiciously named Madam Luk, reports that her clients nowadays ask three questions to the exclusion of all else: "Is my company going broke?" "Am I going to lose my job?" and "Will I find another job?" Clearly, in East Asia, too, the connections between global capitalism and occult practice are readily visible (Schmetzer 1997).

64. The demonization of youth takes diverse forms and occurs widely across rural South Africa. (We are grateful to Zolani Ngwane, personal communication, April 2, 1998, for alerting us to parallels in the Eastern Cape.) Like the allegations leveled by the young against their elders, these recriminations are often cast in terms of perverse sexuality and the disruption of established reproductive norms. Males in particular are accused of promiscuity, rape, and spreading AIDS. They are also charged with indiscipline and uncontrolled violence; with disrespect for people, property, community, and the commonweal; with a lack of appreciation for "civilized" skills, self-possession, and hard work; and with a desire to spend and consume profligately without a thought for the future.

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