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## Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism

Productive labor—or even production in general—no longer appears as the pillar that defines and sustains capitalist social organization. Production is given an objective quality, as if the capitalist system were a machine that marched forward of its own accord, without labor, a capitalist automaton.

—Michael Hardt, “The Withering of Civil Society”

*Automaton*, n. Thing imbued with spontaneous motion; living being viewed materially; piece of machinery with concealed motive power; living being whose actions are involuntary or without active intelligence.

—*Oxford English Dictionary*

### Prolegomenon

What might zombies have to do with the implosion of neoliberal capitalism at the end of the twentieth century? What might they have to do with postcolonial, postrevolutionary nationalism? With labor history? With the “crisis” of the modernist nation-state? Why are these spectral, floating signifiers making an appearance in epic, epidemic proportions in several parts of Africa just now? And why have immigrants—those wanderers in pursuit of work, whose proper place

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is always elsewhere—become pariah citizens of a global order in which, paradoxically, old borders are said everywhere to be dissolving? What, if anything, do they have to do with the living dead? What, indeed, do any of these things, which bear the distinct taint of exoticism, tell us about the hard-edged material, cultural, epistemic realities of our times? Indeed, why pose such apparently perverse questions at all when our social world abounds with practical problems of immediate, unremitting *gravitas*?

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

### **Spectral Capital, Capitalist Speculation: From Production to Consumption**

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries consumption was the hallmark illness of the First Coming of Capitalism; of the industrial age in which the ecological conditions of production, its consuming passions, ate up the bodies of producers.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the twentieth, semantically transposed into another key, it had become, in the words of Wim van Binsbergen and Peter Geschiere, the “hallmark of modernity.”<sup>2</sup> Of its wealth, health, and vitality. Too vast a generalization? Maybe. But the claim captures popular imaginings, and their mass-media representation, from across the planet. It also resonates with the growing Eurocultural truism that the (post)modern person is a subject made by means of objects. Nor is this surprising. Consumption, in its ideological guise—as *consumerism*—refers to a material sensibility actively cultivated, ostensibly for the common good, by Western states and commercial interests, particularly since World War II.<sup>3</sup> In social theory, as well, it has become a prime mover, the force that determines definitions of value, the construction of identities, even the shape of the global ecumene.<sup>4</sup> As such, tellingly, it is the invisible hand that animates the political and material imperatives, and the social forms, of the Second Coming of Capitalism; of capitalism in its neoliberal, global manifestation. Note the image: the *invisible hand*. It recalls a moving spirit of older vintage, a numinous force that dates back to the Time of Adam. Adam Smith, that is. Gone is the *deus ex machina*, a figure too mechanistic, too industrial for the post-Fordist era.

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

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

Symptomatic, in this respect, are the changing historical fortunes of gambling. Until very recently, living off its proceeds was, normatively speaking, the epitome of immoral accumulation; the wager stood to the wage, the bet to personal betterment, as did sin to virtue. Now it is routinized in a widespread infatuation with, and popular participation in, financial “investments” that take the form of vast, high-risk dealings in stocks and bonds and funds whose rise and fall appear to be governed purely by chance. It also expresses itself in a fascination with “futures” and with their downmarket counterpart, the lottery; banal, if symbolically saturated fantasies these of abundance without effort, of beating capitalism on its own terms by drawing a winning number at the behest of unseen forces.<sup>5</sup> Once again that invisible hand. At a time when taxes are anathema to the majoritarian political center, gambling has become a favored means of raising revenues, of generating cultural and social assets, in what were once welfare states. Some even talk of the ascendance of “casino capitalism.” Argues Susan Strange, who likens the entire Western fiscal order to an immense game of luck, undignified even by probability “theory”:

Something rather radical has happened to the international financial system to make it so much like a gambling hall. What that change has been, and how it has come about, are not clear. What is certain is that it has affected everyone . . . [It] has made inveterate, and largely involuntary, gamblers of us all.<sup>6</sup>

The gaming room, in other words, has become iconic of the central impetus of capital: its capacity to make its own vitality and increase seem independent of all human labor, to seem like the natural yield of exchange and consumption.<sup>7</sup>

And yet crisis after crisis in the global economy, and growing income disparities on a planetary scale, make it painfully plain that there is no such thing as capitalism *sans* production; that the neoliberal stress on consumption as the *ur*-source of value is palpably problematic. At once in perception, in theory, in practice. Indeed, if scholars have been slow to reflect on the fact, people all over the world—not least those in places where there have been sudden infusions of commodities, of wealth without work—have not. Many have been quick to give voice, albeit in different registers, to their perplexity at the enigma of this wealth. Of its origin and the capriciousness of its distribution. Of the opaque, even occult, relation between means and ends embodied in it.<sup>8</sup> Our concern in this essay grows directly out of these perplexities, these imaginings: out of worldwide speculation, in both senses of the term, at the specters conjured up by real or imagined changes in the conditions of material existence at the end of the twentieth century.

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

of social disruption, periods characterized by sharp shifts in control over the fabrication and circulation of value, periods that also serve to illuminate the here and now.

We argue that the half-life of zombies in South Africa, past and present, is linked to that of compromised workers of another kind: immigrants from elsewhere on the continent, whose demonization is an equally prominent feature of the postcolonial scene. Together, these proletarian pariahs make visible a phantom history, a local chapter in a global story of changing relations of labor to capital, of production to consumption—indeed, of the very *pro* and *con* of capitalism—on the cusp of the millennium. Their manifestation here also allows us to ponder a paradox in the scholarly literature: given that the factory model of capitalist manufacture is said now to infuse *all* forms of social production,<sup>9</sup> why does labor appear less and less to undergird the social order of the present epoch?<sup>10</sup>

Thus we bring you the case of the Zombie and the (Im)Migrant; this being the sequel to an earlier inquiry into work, labor, and the nature of historical consciousness in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> But first a brief excursion into the problematic status of production in the age of global capital.

### Labor's Lost

The emergence of consumption as a privileged site for the fashioning of society and identity, it may be argued, is integrally connected to the changing status of work under contemporary conditions. For some, the economic order of our times represents a completion of the intrinsic “project” of capital: namely, the evolution of a social formation that, as Mario Tronti puts it,<sup>12</sup> “does not look to labor as its dynamic foundation.”<sup>13</sup> Others see the present moment in radically different terms. Scott Lasch and John Urry, for instance, declare that we are witnessing not the denouement but the demise of organized capitalism; of a system in which corporate institutions could secure compromises between employers and employees by making appeal to the national interest.<sup>14</sup> The internationalization of market forces, they claim, has not merely dislocated national economies and state sovereignties; it has led to a decline in the importance of domestic production in many once industrialized countries. All of which, along with the worldwide rise of the service sector and the feminization of the workforce in many places, has dramatically eroded the bases of proletarian identity and its politics—dis-

persing class relations, alliances, and antinomies across the four corners of the earth. The globalization of the division of labor reduces workers everywhere to the lowest common denominator, to a disposable cost, compelling them to compete with sweatshop and family manufacture.<sup>15</sup> It has also put such a distance between sites of production and consumption that their relationship becomes all but unfathomable, save in fantasy.

Not that Fordist fabrication has disappeared. Neither is the mutation of the labor market altogether unprecedented. For one thing, as Marx observed, the development of capitalism has always conduced to the cumulative replacement of “skilled laborers by less skilled, mature laborers by immature, male by female . . .”<sup>16</sup> For another, David Harvey reminds us, the devaluation of labor power has been a traditional response to falling profits and periodic crises of commodity production.<sup>17</sup> What is more, the growth of a global free market in commodities and services has *not* been accompanied by a correspondingly free flow of workers; most nation-states still regulate their movement to a greater or lesser extent. Yet the likes of Harvey insist, nonetheless, that the current moment is different, that it evinces significant features which set it apart, rupturing the continuing history of capital—a history that “remain[s] the same and yet [is] constantly changing.”<sup>18</sup> Above all else, the explosion of new monetary instruments and markets, aided by ever-more-sophisticated means of planetary coordination and space-time compression, have allowed the financial order to achieve a degree of autonomy from “real production” unmatched in the annals of modern political economy. Indeed, the increasingly virtual qualities of fiscal circulation enable the speculative side of capitalism to seem more independent of manufacture, less constrained either by the exigencies or the moral values of virtuous labor.

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

The end of apartheid might have fired utopian imaginations around the world with a uniquely telegenic vision of rights restored and history redeemed. But South Africa has also been remarkable for the speed with

which it has run up against problems common to societies—especially to postrevolutionary societies—abruptly confronted with the prospect of liberation under neoliberal conditions.<sup>19</sup> Not only has the miraculously peaceful passage to democracy been marred by a disconcerting upsurge of violence and crime, both organized and everyday, but the exemplary quest for truth and reconciliation threatens to dissolve into recrimination and strife, even political chaos. There is widespread evidence of an uneasy fusion of enfranchisement and exclusion, hope and hopelessness; of a radically widening chasm between rich and poor; of the effort to realize modern utopias by decidedly postmodern means. Gone is any official-speak of an egalitarian socialist future, of work-for-all, of the welfare state envisioned in the Freedom Charter that, famously, mandated the struggle against the ancien régime.<sup>20</sup> Gone, too, are the critiques of the free market and of bourgeois ideology once voiced by the antiapartheid movements, their idealism reframed by the perceived reality of global economic forces.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, we have suggested that these conditions, and similar ones in other places, have conduced to a form of “millennial capitalism.”<sup>22</sup> By this we mean not just capitalism at the millennium, but capitalism invested with salvific force; with intense faith in its capacity, if rightly harnessed, wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered. At its most extreme, this faith is epitomized by forms of money magic, ranging from pyramid schemes to prosperity gospels, that pledge to deliver immense, immediate wealth by largely inscrutable means; in its more mundane manifestation, it accords the market itself an almost mystical capacity to produce and deliver cash and commodities.

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

world order, which forge expansive connections between the local and the translocal, short circuit established ways and means, disarticulate conventional relations of wealth and power, and render porous received borders, both within and between nation-states. In the vacuum left by retreating national ideologies—or, more accurately, by ideologies increasingly contested in the name of identity politics—people in these societies are washed over by a flood of mass media from across the earth; media depicting a cargo of animated objects and lifestyles that affirm the neoliberal message of freedom and self-realization through consumption.

Under such conditions, where images of desire are as pervasive as they are inaccessible, it is only to be expected that there would be an intensification of efforts to make sense of the hidden logic of supply and demand, to restore some transparency to the relation between production and value, work and wealth. Also to multiply modes of accumulation, both fair and foul. The occult economies of many postcolonial societies, and the spectacular rise within them of organized crime, are alike features of millennial capitalism, disturbing caricatures of market enterprise in motion, of the impetus to acquire vast fortunes without ordinary labor costs.<sup>23</sup> Yet, distinctive as they are, the conditions we speak of here are not unprecedented. In Africa at least, they recall an earlier moment of global expansion, of dramatic articulations of the local and the translocal, of the circulation of new goods and images, of the displacement of indigenous orders of production and power. We refer to the onset of colonialism. It, too, occasioned world-transforming, millennial aspirations.<sup>24</sup>

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

### **Alien-Nation—the Nightshift: Workers in the Alternative Economy**

No job; no sense. Tell him, Joe, go kill. Attention,  
quick march . . .

Open your hat, fall in, fall out, fall down . . . Order:  
dismiss.

—“Zombie,” Fela and Africa

There can be no denying the latter-day preoccupation with zombies in rural South Africa.<sup>25</sup> Their existence, far from being the subject of elusive tales from the backwoods, of fantastic fables from the *veld*, is widely taken for granted. As a simple matter of fact. In recent times, respectable local news-



papers have carried banner headlines like “‘Zombie’ Back from the Dead,” illustrating their stories with conventional, high-realist photographs<sup>26</sup>; similarly, defense lawyers in provincial courts have sought, by forensic means, to have clients acquitted of murder on grounds of having been driven to their deadly deeds by the zombification of their kin;<sup>27</sup> and illicit zombie workers have become an issue in large-scale labor disputes.<sup>28</sup> Public culture is replete with invocations of the living dead, from popular songs and prime-time documentaries to national theatrical productions.<sup>29</sup> Not even the state has remained aloof. The Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders, appointed in 1995 by the Northern Province administration to investigate an “epidemic” of occult violence, reported widespread fear of the figure of the zombie.<sup>30</sup> The latter, it notes in a tone of ethnographic neutrality,

is a person who is believed to have died, but because of the power of a witch, he is resurrected . . . [and] works for the person who has turned him into a zombie. To make it impossible for him to communicate with other people, the front part of his tongue is cut off so that he cannot speak. It is believed that he works at night only . . . [and] that he can leave his rural area and work in an urban area, often far from his home. Whenever he meets people he knows, he vanishes.<sup>31</sup>

Speechless and unspeakable, this apparition fades away as soon as it becomes visible and knowable. It is a mutation of humanity made mute.

The observations of the commission are amply confirmed by our own experience in the Northwest Province since the early 1990s; although our informants added that zombies (*dithotsela*; also *diphoko*)<sup>32</sup> were not merely the dead-brought-back-to-life, that they could be killed first for the purpose. Here, too, reference to them permeates everyday talk on the street, in private backyards, on the pages of the local press, in courts of law. Long-standing notions of witchcraft (*boloi*) have come to embrace zombie-making, the brutal reduction of others—in South Africa, largely unrelated neighbors—to instruments of production; to insensible beings stored, like tools, in sheds, cupboards, or oil drums at the homes of their creators.<sup>33</sup> In a world of flextime employment, it is even said that some people are made into “part-time zombies,” whose exhaustion in the morning speaks of an unwitting nocturnal mission, of involuntary toil on the night shift.<sup>34</sup>

Thus do some build fortunes with the lifeblood of others. And, as they

do, they are held to destroy the job market—even more, the very essence of self-possessed labor—in the process. Those typically said to conjure up the living dead tend, unsurprisingly, to be persons of conspicuous wealth; especially new wealth, whose source is neither visible nor readily explicable. Such things, of course, are highly relative: in very poor rural communities, where (almost) all things are relative, it does not take a great deal to be seen to be affluent. In point of fact, those actually accused of the mystical manufacture of night workers, and assaulted or killed as a result, are not always the same as those suspected: much like peoples assailed elsewhere as witches and sorcerers, they are often elderly, relict individuals, mostly female. *Note:* Mostly, not all, although there is a penchant in much of northerly South Africa to refer to anyone alleged to engage in this kind of magical evil as “old women.”<sup>35</sup> Conversely, their primary accusers and attackers, more often than not, are young, unemployed men.<sup>36</sup>

Zombie-makers, moreover, are semiotically saturated, visually charged figures. In contrast to their victims, who are neutered by being reduced to pure labor power, they are stereotypically described as sexual perverts whose deformed genitalia and poisonous secretions make them unable to reproduce; worse yet, to make them likely to spoil the fertility of others. Also, by extension, of the collectivity at large, be it a clan, a village, a town. Which is why they have become iconic of a perceived crisis of household and community in rural South Africa.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, they fuse, in a single grotesque, the very essence of negative value: the simultaneous, reciprocal destruction of *both* production and reproduction.<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, by manufacturing spectral workers, they annihilate the very possibility of productive employment, imaginatively if not manifestly; on the other, by taking jobs away from young people, they prevent them from securing the wherewithal to establish families and to reproduce—and so make it impossible for any community to ensure its future. No wonder that, in one of the most poignant witch-killings of the 1990s, the old woman set alight by morally outraged youths—determined to save their community by removing all evil-doers—was to hear in her final agony the words, “Die, die you witch. We can’t get work because of you!”<sup>39</sup>

Discourse in a range of overlapping public spheres, from “customary” tribunals and provincial courts through local religious and political assemblies to the print and broadcast media, makes it clear that, for many, the threat of a spectral workforce is all too concrete. And urgent. On more than one occasion, large crowds have gathered in towns in the region to watch the epic

effort of healers to “liberate” zombies from their captors; in vernacular parlance, to “return them home.” Here the spectral becomes spectacle. The fantasy of forcing underground evil into public visibility, of reversing the arcane alienation that creates phantom workers, is a palpable feature of the domestic cultural scene. The media, widely Africanized since the fall of apartheid, have been crucial in all this. They have taken the conventions of investigative reporting far beyond their orthodox rationalist frame in order to plumb the enigma of new social realities; harsh realities whose magicality, in the prevailing historical circumstances, does not permit the literary conceit of magical realism, demanding instead a deadly serious engagement with the actuality of enchantment.<sup>40</sup>

Thus a long-running saga in 1993 on the pages of *Mail* (formerly the *Mafeking Mail*, a small, town newspaper, now a northwest provincial weekly with large circulation in the region) in which a pair of journalists sought to verify the claims of a healer, one Mokalaka Kwindi. Kwindi had claimed that he had revived a man who had been living for four years as the “slave” of witches in the nearby Swartruggens district; this before the “eyes of his,” the zombie’s “weeping mother.”<sup>41</sup> Likewise a quest that same year to cover the efforts of four diviners to “retrieve” a “zombie woman” from the clutches of a malevolent in the nearby Luhurutshe district.<sup>42</sup> These stories marry the surreal to the banal, the mystical to the mundane: in former case, the healer told the reporters that his elusive patient was undergoing “preliminary” treatment, so that he might be “able to speak and return to normal life.”<sup>43</sup> Such events are not confined to the outback. In Mabopane, in the eastern part of the Northwest Province, “hundreds of students and workers” reportedly filled the streets one weekday in May 1994, eager to witness a “zombie hunt.”<sup>44</sup>

The fear of being reduced to ghost labor, of being abducted to feed the fortunes of a depraved stranger, occurs alongside another kind of specter: a growing mass, a shadowy alien-nation, of immigrant black workers from elsewhere on the continent. So overt is the xenophobic sentiment that these workers are disrupting local relations of production and reproduction—that they usurp scarce jobs and resources, foster prostitution, and spread AIDS—that they have been openly harassed on South African streets. Like zombies, they are nightmare citizens, their rootlessness threatening to siphon off the remaining, rapidly diminishing prosperity of the indigenous population. Interestingly, like zombies too, they are characterized by their impaired speech: the common term for immigrant, *makwerekwere*, is a Sesotho word

implying limited competence in the vernacular. Suggesting a compromised capacity to engage in intercourse with autochthonous society, this usage explains why migrants live in terror that their accents might be detected in public.<sup>45</sup>

Their apprehension is well founded. In September 1998, for example, a crowd returning by train from a march in Pretoria—held, significantly, to protest mass unemployment—threw three *makwerekwere* to their deaths, purportedly for stealing scarce jobs; two were Senegalese, one from Mozambique.<sup>46</sup> Three months later, in December, there came alarming reports of a band of hoodlums in Johannesburg who seemed bent on the “systematic elimination” of foreign nationals.<sup>47</sup> Immigrants from neighboring countries, and from further abroad, have worked in industry, on farms, and across the service sector in South Africa for over a century. But, in the 1990s, the tight regulation of these labor flows has given way to less controlled, often subcontracted, sources of supply.<sup>48</sup> Employers are ever more attracted by the potential of this cheap labor; it is said that as many as 80 percent of them use casual, “nonstandard” workers.<sup>49</sup> A recent investigation shows that, while the preponderance of immigrants in the past decade have actually been male entrepreneurs plying their trade in large cities, a great number do find their way into other areas of the economy, often in provincial towns;<sup>50</sup> some, especially those lacking legal documentation (frequently, women and children), land in the highly exploitable reaches of rural agriculture—in places like the Northwest Province.

Wherever they land up in South Africa, immigrants take their place on a fraught historical terrain. Anxieties about unemployment have reached unprecedented levels: by common agreement, the rate is much higher than the unofficial 38 percent to which the state admits. According to one estimate, 500,000 jobs, virtually all of them held by blacks, have evaporated over the last five years.<sup>51</sup> And this is probably a conservative reckoning, based primarily on shrinkage in the formal sector. “No jobs means our youth are destroyed,” a resident of Soweto told a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune* in February 1999.<sup>52</sup> Even that eternal optimist Nelson Mandela, his retirement imminent, recently quipped, “In a few months, I’ll be standing by the road with a sign: Please Help. Unemployed with a new wife and a big family.”<sup>53</sup>

In the northerly provinces, which are among the poorest in the country, there has been scant evidence of the prosperity and redistribution that was expected to follow the fall of apartheid. True, the newly deregulated economy has granted some blacks a larger share of the spoils: postcolonial

South Africa has seen a raised standard of living for sections of the African middle class, most notably for the “liberation aristocracy,” a few of whom have become instant millionaires—and living personifications of the triumph of nonracial, neoliberal capitalism.<sup>54</sup> In spite of all this, or perhaps because of it, the so-called transition has, as we noted earlier, kindled a millennial faith in the opportunities of “free” market enterprise, now ostensibly open to all. “I want every black person to feel that he or she has the opportunity to become rich and only has himself to blame if he fails,” declared Dan Mkhwanazi, launching the National Economic Trust.<sup>55</sup>

But, for the vast majority, millennial hope jostles material impossibility. The much vaunted Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), designed to root out endemic poverty, has thus far had minimal impact. Indeed, its broad reformist objectives, which harked back to the age of the welfare state, soon hardened into GEAR, the government’s Growth, Employment and Reconstruction strategy, which privileges development understood in terms of privatization, wage flexibility, and massive public service cutbacks.<sup>56</sup> Little of the positive effects of these policies, or of recent post-Fordist expansion in domains like tourism, finds its way into the arid rural landscapes of the North or the Northwest Provinces. Here a living has to be eked out from pitifully small-scale subsistence farming and (very) petty commerce; from such things as brewing, sex work, and the refashioning of used commodities, classically the pursuits of women. Such assets as pensions, paltry though they may be, have become the subject of fierce competition; their beneficiaries, mainly widows and surviving old men, are prime targets of bitter jealousy and allegations of avarice. Meanwhile, the regular migrant labor wages that had long subsidized agrarian endeavors, and had given young men a degree of independence, are noticeably diminishing; this, in turn, has exacerbated their sense of threatened masculinity, and has underscored the gendered, generational conflicts of the countryside. Which is why the overwhelming proportion of those accused of witchcraft and zombie-making are older and female. And why their accusers are overwhelmingly out-of-work young adult males.

At the same time, provincial towns in these northerly provinces are home to small but bustling black elites, many of them spawned originally by the late homelands, into which the apartheid regime pumped endless resources over several decades. Well positioned to soak up novel business opportunities and to engage in behind-the-scenes dealings, they have quickly taken charge of a sizeable proportion of retail marketing and the provision of ser-

vices in the countryside. For them, increasingly, the conspicuous consumption of prized commodities—houses, cars, TVs, cell phones—does more than just signal accomplishment. It also serves to assuage the inequities of the colonial past. But, as it does, it also marks the growing inequities of the postcolonial present. These distinctions, to those who gaze upon them from below, also seem to be a product of enchantment: given that they have appeared with indecent speed and with little visible exertion, their material provenance remains mysterious. So, even more, does the cause of joblessness amid such obvious prosperity. In the upshot, the two sides of millennial capitalism, postapartheid style, come together: on one is the ever-more-distressing awareness of the absence of work, itself measured by the looming presence of the figure of the immigrant; on the other is the constantly reiterated suspicion, embodied in the zombie, that it is only by magical means, by consuming others, that people may enrich themselves in these perplexing times.

The symbolic apotheosis of this syllogism is to be found in a commercial advertisement run by a “traditional healer” in Mmabatho, capital of the Northwest Province. It appears in, of all places, the *Mafikeng Business Advertiser*, a local trade weekly. Top among the occult skills on offer is a treatment that promises clients “to get a job early if unemployed.” The healer in question, Dr. S. M. Banda, should know. He is an immigrant.<sup>57</sup>

### Precursors: The Ghosts of Workers Past

Phantasmagoria comes into being when, under the constraints of its own limitations, modernity’s latest products come close to the archaic.

—Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*

On the face of it, much of this is new. When we did research in the Northwest in the late 1960s and mid-1970s—it was then the Tswana ethnic homeland—most males were, or had been, away as migrants in the industrial centers. There was barely a black middle class to speak of and no manifest anxieties about immigrants. Laborers had long come from elsewhere to seek employment in local towns and on the farms of the neighboring Western Transvaal; and there were “foreigners”—Zimbabweans, and Xhosa descendants of those who had built the railroad at the turn of the century, for instance—who lived quite amicably with Tswana-speaking populations.

There was also no mention of zombies at the time. True, many people spoke of their concern about witchcraft, understood as an unnatural means of garnering wealth by “eating” others and absorbing their capacity to create value. On occasion, moreover, malevolents would cause young migrants to lose their moorings, to forsake their kin at home and eschew the demands of domestic reproduction.<sup>58</sup> But there was nothing like the current preoccupation with the danger of humans being made into toiling automatons; nor with the sense that a spectral economy, founded on the labor of these and other aliens, might be draining the productive or reproductive potential of the community at large.

Yet these late-twentieth-century preoccupations are not entirely unprecedented either. In disinterring vernacular conceptions of work, labor, and consciousness during the high years of apartheid, we noted that Tswana regarded certain modes of migrant toil (*mmèrèkò*) as alienating; that they spoke of the way in which its disciplined routines reduced humans to draft animals, even to “tinned fish.”<sup>59</sup> These tropes implied a contrasting notion of self-possessed work (*tiro*), typically work-at-home, which created social value. By contrast to selfish activity, this form of exertion constructed personhood in a positive key through the simultaneous building up of others. And, concomitantly, of a centered collective world. But the historical record indicates that Tswana ideas of estranged labor are not limited to the experience of proletarianization alone. Accounts from earlier this century tell of a condition linked to the eclipse, typically by witches, of self-possession and, with it, the capacity to accumulate wealth and social power. An individual afflicted in this manner was “alienated from fellowship with his kith and kin,” noted J. Tom Brown, a missionary-ethnographer with a well-developed grasp of Setswana.<sup>60</sup> He goes on, in the real-time ethnographic present:

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

Here, patently, we have a precursor of the zombie. But, whereas the latter is conjured from a corpse, either killed for the purpose or already deceased, *sehihi* is a state of eclipse effected by the appropriation of the essential self-

hood of a living person, leaving behind a sentient shell as mute witness to the erasure of the social being it once housed. Moreover, where *sehihi* entailed the loss of *all* human creativity—often said to have been eaten whole by witches to enhance their own physical, political, and material potency—the zombie is transformed purely into alienated labor power, abducted from home or workplace, and made to serve as someone else’s privatized means of production.<sup>61</sup>

Evidence from elsewhere in southern Africa fills out this phantasmagoric history of labor, enabling us to track its fitful figurings, its continuities and breaks. Thus Harries’s study of the world of Mozambican migrants to South Africa between 1860 and 1910 shows that witches (*baloyi*), held to be prevalent on the mines, were said to seize the “life essence” of others, forcing them to toil for days as zombies (*dlukula*) in closed-off subterranean galleries, where they lived on a diet of mud.<sup>62</sup> The poetic particularity of phantom workers—here, as elsewhere—is sensitive register of shifting experiences of labor and its value. The introduction of compensation pay for miner’s phthisis, for example, quickly led to a notion that zombies returned from below ground with numbers—potential payouts, blood money—chalked on their backs. Henri Junod, classic ethnographer of early southeastern Africa, remarked on similar fears in the southern Mozambique countryside around 1910.<sup>63</sup> “Modernized” witches there, anticipating their latter-day South African counterparts, were thought capable of reducing their fellows to a nocturnal agrarian workforce, masquerading by day as innocent children.<sup>64</sup> Some could even induce young men to wander off to the Witwatersrand mines, never to return. Once more we see the zombie as a “walking spectre,” an object of collective terror and desire, to use E. J. Clery’s description of the “terrorist genre” of haunted Gothic fiction in late-eighteenth-century England, where industrialization was similarly restructuring the nature of work and place.<sup>65</sup> Like these “Horrid Mysteries,” zombie tales dramatize the strangeness of what had become real; in this instance, the problematic relation of work to the production of social being, secured in time and place.

Other instances of ghost workers in Africa underline the point. Take Edwin Ardener’s piquant narrative of zombie beliefs among the Bakweri of West Cameroon.<sup>66</sup> These beliefs—an intensification, it appears, of older ideas about witchcraft—arose at the time of the Great War, with the relatively sudden penetration of German colonizers into this fertile agricul-



tural region. Their land expropriated for the establishment of plantations manned largely by foreigners, the Bakweri found themselves crowded into inhospitable reserves; as a result, they entered a period of impoverishment and reduced fertility. It was then that the zombie labor force (*vekongi*) first made itself felt, sheltering in tin houses built by those locals who had somehow managed to profit from the unpromising circumstances.<sup>67</sup> The living dead, many of them children, were said to be victims of the murderous greed of their own close kin; they were sent away to work in distant plantations, where witchmasters had built a town overflowing with modern consumer goods.

Here, as in newly colonized Mozambique, we see the sudden conjuncture of a local world—in which production is closely tied to kin groups—with forces that arrogate the capacity to create value and redirect its flow. Above all, these forces fracture the meaning of work and its received relation to place. Under such conditions, zombies become the stuff of “estranged recognition”: recognition not merely of the commodification of labor, or its subjection to deadly competition, but of the invisible predations that seem to congeal beneath the banal surfaces of new forms of wealth.<sup>68</sup> In their iconography of forced migration and wandering exile, of children abused and relatives violated, the living dead comment on the disruption of an economy in which productive energies were once visibly invested in the reproduction of a situated order of domestic and communal relations; an order through which the present was, literally, kept in place. And the future was secured.

Ardener notes the complex continuities and innovations at play in these constructions, which have, as their imaginative precondition, ideas of the occult widely distributed across Africa and the new world; in particular, the idea that witches, by their very nature, consume the generative force of others.<sup>69</sup> Zombies themselves seem to be born, at least in the first instance, of colonial encounters; of the precipitous engagement of local worlds with imperial economies that seek to exert control over the essential means of producing value, means like land and labor, space and time. It is in this abstract, metaphorical sense that René Depestre declares colonialism to be “a process of man’s general zombification.”<sup>70</sup> In purely historical terms, the affinity between colonization and zombification is less direct: colonialism does not always call forth zombies, and zombies are not always associated with colonialism. What they *do* tend to be associated with, however, are rapidly changing conditions of work under capitalism in its various

guises; conditions that rupture not just established relations of production and reproduction, but also received connections of persons to place, the material to the moral, private to public, the individual to the communal, past to future. In this respect, the living dead join a host of other spectral figures—vampires, monsters, creatures of Gothic “supernaturalism”—who have been vectors of an affective engagement with the visceral implications of the factory, the plantation, the market, the mine.<sup>71</sup>

However abstract a set of ideas may be embodied in the living dead *sui generis*, any particular zombie congeals the predicament of human labor at its most concrete, its most historically specific. How, then, might those we have encountered in rural South Africa be linked, in more precise terms, to the late-twentieth-century transformations with which we began? Or to the impact of millennial capitalism in this postcolony?

## Conclusion

These questions have been anticipated, their answers foreshadowed, elsewhere. Thus Harries has argued that, among early-twentieth-century Mozambican miners in the Transvaal, zombie-making magic was a practical response to the unfamiliar: specifically, to the physical depredations of underground work and to the explosion of new forms of wealth amid abject poverty.<sup>72</sup> Witchcraft, in a virulently mutated strain, he says, became a proxy for capitalist exploitation; witch-hunting, a displacement of class struggle. Isak Niehaus, writing of the rural Northern Province at the other end of the century, arrives at a similar conclusion: mystical evil is a “cultural fantasy” manipulated by the dominant to defend their positions of privilege.<sup>73</sup> Explanations of this sort belong to a species of interpretation that brings a critical understanding of ideology to Edward Evans-Pritchard’s classic conception of witchcraft as a “socially relevant” theory of cause.<sup>74</sup> Many would agree with their underlying premise that witches and zombies are to be read as etiological principles which translate structural contradictions, experiential anomalies, and aporiahs—force fields of greater complexity than is normally implied by “class struggle”—into the argot of human agency, of interpersonal kinship, of morality and passion.

But herein lies the rub. How does this very general truism, as valid for early colonial witchcraft as it is for latter-day zombies, relate to the implosive, shifting histories of which we have spoken? If the living dead are merely

walking specters of class struggle, why have they not been a permanent fixture of the modern South African scene? What accounts for their comings and goings—and, to return to our opening conundrums, for the dramatic intensification of their appeal in the postcolony? How, furthermore, do we make sense of the particular poetics of these fantasies, whose symbolic excess and expressive exuberance gesture toward an imaginative play infinitely more elaborate than is allowed by a purely pragmatic, functionalist explication?

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

The backwash of this process, as we have seen, is readily evident in contemporary South Africa, where rapid deregulation, increasingly labile employment arrangements, and the gross shrinkage of the job market have altered the generic meaning of labor, the specific relationship of production to reproduction, and the connection of work to place. Where, also, labor migration—which had become a rite of passage to social manhood—has all but vanished. In the void left behind, especially in the countryside, there have risen new, unaccountable manifestations of wealth; wealth not derived from any discernible or conventional source. In this void, too, jobs seem available only for “nonstandard” workers: those, like immigrants, who will

take anything they can get. Zombies, the ultimate nonstandard workers, take shape in the collective imaginary as figurations of these conditions. In their silence they give voice to a sense of dread about the human costs of intensified capitalist production; about the loss of control over the terms in which people alienate their labor power; about the demise of a moral economy in which wage employment, however distant and exploitative, had “always” been there to support both the founding of families and the well-being of communities. This bears its own measure of historical irony. In the colonial epoch, the migrant contract system was regarded as a social, moral, and political travesty, breaking up black households and forcing men to toil under exacting conditions for pitiable earnings; then a frequent object of protest, it is seen, in retrospect, as having been one of the secure foundations of the social landscape. Shades, here, of earlier revolutions, earlier metamorphoses in the articulation of capital and labor.

Here, then, is what is unique about the moment in the South African postcolony; what it is that has called forth an alien-nation of pariah proletarians, dead and alive. It is a historical moment that, in bringing together force fields at once global and local, has conducted to a seismic mutation in the ontological *experience* of work, selfhood, gender, community, and place. Because the terms of reference for this experience are those of modernist capitalism—indeed, these are the only terms in which the present may be reduced to semiotic sense and sensibility—it is framed in the language of labor lost, factories foreclosed, communities crumbling. Which is why the concern with zombies in the northerly reaches of the country, while in many ways a novel confection, replays enduring images of alienated production. In Adorno’s phrase, “It sounded so old, and yet was so new.”<sup>75</sup> Much like the story of labor itself, which, in an abstract sense, is still subject to the familiar “laws” of capitalism, yet, as concrete reality, has been substantially altered by the reorganization of the world economy as we know it. To reiterate: it all “remain[s] the same and yet [is] constantly changing.”

One final point. Although we have tried to subdue the fantasy of spectral labor by recourse to historical reason, its key animus still eludes us. What, finally, are we to make of its symbolic excess? What does the intricate discourse about alien workers tell us of the subterranean workings of terror, of the life of standardized nightmares in a world of “daylight reason”?<sup>76</sup> There is little question that this discourse gives motive and moral valence to disturbing events; that, in the classic manner of ideologies everywhere, it links

etiology to existing orders of power and value. But zombie-speak seems to do much more: its productive figurations feed a process of fervent speculation, poetic elaboration, forensic quest. The menacing dangers of zombification—the disoriented wanderings, the loss of speech, sense, and will, the perverted practices that erase all ties to kith and kin—serve to conjure with inchoate fears, allowing free play to anger and anguish and desire. Also to the effort to make some sense of them. Like Gothic horror, the elaboration of these images “encourage[s] an experience of estranged recognition.”<sup>77</sup> And not only at the immiserated edges of polite society. The hardboiled social analyst might insist that the obsession with the living dead misrecognizes the systemic roots of deprivation and distress. But its eruption onto the fertile planes of postapartheid public culture—via sober press reports, TV documentaries, and agitprop theater—has had a tangible impact. It has forced a recognition of the crisis in the countryside, of the plight of displaced youth, of an alien-nation within the postcolony itself. As the very conditions that call forth zombies erode the basis of a conventional politics of labor and place and public interest, we would do well to keep an open mind about the pragmatic possibilities of these creatures of collective dread; about the provocative manner in which they, perhaps more than anything or anybody else, are compelling the state to take note. Even to act.

## Notes

We would like to thank Patrick Harries for both his insightful comments on an earlier presentation of some of this material and his very useful bibliographic suggestions. Hylton White, whose insightful ethnographic research in KwaZulu-Natal is sure to make a major contribution to Africanist anthropology, was kind enough to share some of his comparative knowledge with us. We also owe a major debt of gratitude to Maureen Anderson, our research assistant, for her help in preparing this essay for publication.

- 1 Susan Sontag, *Illness As Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978); compare Jean Comaroff, “Consuming Passions: Nightmares of the Global Village,” in “Body and Self in the Postcolonial World,” ed. E. Badone, a special issue of *Culture* 17 (1997): 7–19.
- 2 Wim van Binsbergen and Peter Geschiere, *Commodification: Objects and Identities: The Social Life of Things Revisited* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming), 3.
- 3 Not only by Western capitalist states. By the early 1990s, even Deng Xiaoping was calling for “consumption as a motor force of production” (Arif Dirlik, “Looking Backwards in an Age of Global Capital: Thoughts on History in Third World Cultural Criticism,” in *Pursuit of Contemporary East Asian Culture*, ed. X. Tang and S. Snyder [Boulder: CO: Westview Press, 1996], 194).
- 4 *Ecumene* refers to a region of “persistent cultural interaction and exchange” (Igor Kopy-

- toff, "The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Culture," in *The African Frontier*, ed. Igor Kopytoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 10; compare Ulf Hannerz, "Notes on the Global Ecumene," *Public Culture* 1 (1989): 66–75; quotation from 66).
- 5 The mounting, increasingly millennial allure of lotteries is evident across the globe, from mass-mediated images originating in the West to reports of "lottery mania" in Asia. Note, in respect to the former, the film *Waking Ned Divine* (1998), which replays the ideology of the national lottery in Britain, fantasizing about the way in which a large win might enable communal regeneration in a peripheral, impoverished village. The latter appears to have occasioned suicides and mobilized state government in India; see "Lottery Mania Grips Madhya Pradesh, Many Commit Suicide," *India Tribune* (Chicago ed.), January 2, 1999, 23(1), 8.
  - 6 Susan Strange, *Casino Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1–3; compare David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 332; Roman Tomasic, *Casino Capitalism: Insider Trading in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, 1991).
  - 7 Michael Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," *Social Text* 45 (1995): 39.
  - 8 John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony," *American Ethnologist* 26 (1999): 279–301; van Binsbergen and Geschiere, "Commodification: Objects and Identities," 3.
  - 9 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1986).
  - 10 Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," 39.
  - 11 John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "The Madman and the Migrant: Work and Labor in the Historical Consciousness of a South African People," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987).
  - 12 Mario Tronti, "The Strategy of Refusal," *Semiotext(e)* 3 (1980): 28–36; quotation from 32.
  - 13 Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," 39.
  - 14 Scott Lasch and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 232.
  - 15 Terence Turner has argued, in this respect, that the globalization of the division of labor has elevated class conflicts to the level of international relations. Terence Turner, "Globalization, the State and Social Consciousness in the Late Twentieth Century" (unpublished manuscript).
  - 16 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), vol. 1: 635.
  - 17 Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 92.
  - 18 Engels, as cited by Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 36.
  - 19 By *postrevolutionary* societies we mean societies—such as those of the former Soviet Union—that have recently witnessed a metamorphosis of their political, material, social, and cultural structures, largely under the impact of the growth of the global, neoliberal market economy.
  - 20 The Freedom Charter was, for all practical purposes, the founding document in the populist fight against the apartheid state. Signed in 1956 by all the protest organizations in the so-called Congress Alliance, it made a commitment, among other things, to national-

ize major industries and to mandate a heavily state-run, welfare-freighted political economy. See, for example, Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress, 1912–1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London: Longman, 1983); Francis Meli, *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Heidi Holland, *The Struggle: A History of the African National Congress* (New York: G. Braziller, 1989).

- 21 Compare John Sharp, "'Non-racialism' and Its Discontents: A Post-Apartheid Paradox," *International Social Science Journal* 156 (1998): 243–52; Steven Robins makes the point cogently in noting how quick the ANC government was to disparage John Pilger's film *Apartheid Did Not Die*, which provides harsh evidence of the continuing contrast between white opulence and black poverty: "Whereas critiques of racial capitalism were once accepted as truth within the liberation movements, they are now dismissed by the new ruling class as pure polemic and/or naive utopian socialist rhetoric" (Steven Robins, "The Truth Shall Make You Free? Reflection on the TRC," *Southern Africa Report* [August 1998]: 9–13; 13).
- 22 Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction."
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Compare Karen E. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- 25 We are grateful to Nathan Sayre for alerting us to the song, a portion of whose lyric appear at the opening of this section; also to Josh Comaroff for transcribing it and, more generally, for availing us of his creative imagination.

In our discussion of rural South Africa, we focus primarily on two provinces, the North and the Northwest. These have been the sites of the most concentrated occult activity in the country over the past decade or so. See Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction." The Northwest is also the region in which we have done most of our ethnographic and historical research since 1969.

- 26 Sonnyboy Mokgadi and Moopelwa Letanke, "'Zombie' Back from the Dead," *Mail* (Mafikeng), June 11, 1993, 1, 7. See also Sonnyboy Mokgadi and Moopelwa Letanke, "Zombie Missing," *Mail* (Mafikeng), December 17, 1993, 1, 4; Joe Davidson, "Apartheid Is Over, But Other Old Evils Haunt South Africa: Witch-Burning Is on the Rise As Superstitious Villagers Sweep House of Spirits," *Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 1994, A1, A10. Sonnyboy Mokgadi, coauthor of the first two stories and many others on the topic, was killed some two years later, in mysterious circumstances involving a "township fight"; rumors soon spread that his violent death was due to his investigation of zombies.
- 27 See, for example, "Petrol Murder Denial," *Mail* (Mafikeng), June 2, 1995, 2; Nat Molomo, "Bizarre Zombie Claim in Court," *Mail* (Mafikeng), March 31, 1995, 2.
- 28 In 1995, for example, striking workers on an Eastern Transvaal coffee plantation demanded the dismissal of three supervisors accused of killing employees to gain control of their jobs; even worse, of keeping zombies for their private enrichment. See "Spirits Strike at Labour Relations," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, December 27, 1995.
- 29 See Ntokoza Gwamanda, "Disturbing Insight into Kokstad Zombie Killings," *Sowetan*, July 15, 1998, 17; also the SABC2 documentary series, *Issues of Faith*, whose program on

- July 12, 1998, dealt with the topic. The program made reference to *Zombie*, a play by Brett Bailey featured at the popular and prestigious Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown July 4–14, 1996. The events on which it was based began with a taxi van accident in Kokstad in which twelve schoolboys were killed, and 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.
- 30 N. V. Ralushai, et al., *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders in the Northern Province of the Republic of South Africa (To: His Excellency the Honorable Member of the Executive Council for Safety and Security, Northern Province)* (1996).
- 31 Ibid., 5. As we note elsewhere the report of this commission, chaired by a retired professor of anthropology, N. V. Ralushai, speaks in two different registers (see Comaroff and Comaroff, “Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction”). It gives an orthodox ethnographic account, couched in cultural relativist terms, of African beliefs; it also offers a stark condemnation, phrased in Western legal language, of the evils of occult violence. What is more, it speaks explicitly of the contradiction between European law, which criminalizes witchcraft, and its African counterpart, which accepts it as a pervasive, mundane reality (Ralushai, et al., *Report of the Commission*, 61). For their own part, the commissioners do not call the actuality of witchcraft itself into doubt.
- 32 The use of *diphoko* for zombie—*diphoko* being from the Afrikaans *spook* (earlier, from the Dutch; see note 64 in this article)—points to the existence here of a cultural interplay, across lines of race and language, of ideas of haunting and enchantment.
- 33 Ralushai, et al., *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, 50.
- 34 Ibid., 224–25.
- 35 Our own collection of narratives about zombies and ritual murder in the Northwest, where we elicited both descriptive accounts of the phenomena and specific case histories, evinced a sharp gender distinction. Ritual murder—that is, the killing of people to harvest their body parts for medicine—could be perpetrated by either men or women, with or without the help of a “traditional” healer. But zombie conjurers were, more often than not, said to have been female.
- 36 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction.”
- 37 For an unusually fine analysis of the crisis of domestic reproduction in South Africa, centered in northern KwaZulu-Natal, see Hylton J. White, *Let Us Speak of Ancestors! Sacrifice and Social Reproduction in a Zulu Countryside* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, in preparation). Of course, the connection between a shrinking labor market and the threat to community is not purely a South African phenomenon. Several recent films from Britain, a few of them popular successes like *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, make it clear that the north of England is suffering precisely the same unhappy conjuncture, ushered in by the Thatcherite attempt to force a neoliberal revolution.
- 38 Compare Nancy D. Munn, *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim Society (Papua New Guinea)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 39 Ralushai et al., *Report of the Commission*, 193; Comaroff and Comaroff, “Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction.”



- 40 Lesley Fordred, *Narrative, Conflict and Change: Journalism in the New South Africa*, (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1998).
- 41 See Mokgadi and Letanke, "'Zombie' Back from the Dead," 1, 7; Sonnyboy Mokgadi, "Healer Vows to Expose Those Behind Zombie Man," *Mail* (Mafikeng), June 18, 1993, 7; Sonnyboy Mokgadi, "Death and Revival of 'Zombie' Man Still a Mystery," *Mail* (Mafikeng), June 25, 1993, 2; Mokgadi and Letanke, "Zombie Missing," 1, 4.
- 42 Sonnyboy Mokgadi and Moopelwa Letanke, "New 'Zombie' Claims, But Now about a Woman," *Mail* (Mafikeng), August 13, 1993, 1, 5.
- 43 Mokgadi, "Healer Vows to Expose Those," 7.
- 44 See Mthake Nakedi, "Witch-hunt Sets Town Ablaze," *Mail* (Mafikeng), May 27, 1994, 2; see also "Petrol Murder Denial," *Mail* (Mafikeng), June 2, 1995, 2, which describes a similar exorcism, this time in a village in the Molopo district.
- 45 See, for example, Chris Barron, "Meet SA's Strange New 'Racists'," *Sunday Times* (South Africa), September 13, 1998, 19. The connection between immigrants and zombies is visible in other domains as well; in rural Zimbabwe, for instance, stories abound about figures termed *ntogelochi* (from *thokoloshe*, the Nguni term now universally used for witch familiars in South Africa). Said to be brought from South Africa, they are purchased as general factotums to do all manner of work. But they come to haunt their possessors, following them everywhere—onto planes, into church—like unruly shadows. Or the alienated essence of their own labor (Dana Bilsky and Thomas Asher, personal communication).
- 46 "Jobless Mob Goes on Death Rampage," *Cape Argus*, September 4, 1998, 9.
- 47 Tangenu Amupadhi, "African Foreigners Terrorized," *Mail and Guardian*, December 18–23, 1998, 3.
- 48 A refugee bill was tabled by the South African Parliament in the fall of 1998, aiming to bring the country into line with international and constitutional obligations in respect to migrants and refugees (previously regulated under the provisions of the Aliens Control Act). The move was also seen to be related to growing national concerns about immigration and other threatening forms of cross-border traffic; in particular, those involving gun-running, drug-trading, money laundering, and organized crime syndicates. See "New Bill for Asylum Applications," Chiara Carter, *Mail and Guardian*, September 11–17, 1998, 6.
- 49 Horwitz, cited in Herbert Adam, et al, *Comrades in Business: Post-Liberation Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1998), 209.
- 50 See the findings of the South African Migration Project, reported in Chiara Carter and Ferial Haffajee "Immigrants are Creating Work—Not Taking Our Jobs," *Mail and Guardian*, September 11–17, 1998, 6, 7.
- 51 Paul Salopek, "Mandela Stresses Success, Struggle," *Chicago Tribune*, February 6, 1999, 3.
- 52 Paul Salopek, "S. Africa's Uncertain Future," *Chicago Tribune*, January 31, 1999, 1, 14.
- 53 Salopek, "Mandela Stresses Success, Struggle," 3.
- 54 Adam, *Comrades in Business*, 203.
- 55 Ibid., 217. In a telling irony that speaks volumes about the Midas touch of neoliberalism, Adam et al., note that even the South African Communist Party is considering establishing an investment arm in order to "trade its way out of the red" (ibid., 207).
- 56 Ibid., 206.

- 57 Dr. S. M. Banda claims to be “one of the best traditional healers from Malawi.” His special expertise, he says, includes a knowledge of the means “to get promoted” and “to help your business be successful” (*Mafikeng Business Advertiser*, December 1998, 2(1), 11).
- 58 This point is made in a divination sequence in the film *Heal the Whole Man* (Chigfield Films, London, 1973), based on our research in the Mafikeng District.
- 59 John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 169; see also Hoyt Alverson, *Mind in the Heart of Darkness: Value and Self-Identity among the Tswana of Southern Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 225. The reference to tinned fish captures the spatial congestion of the notorious mine hostels in which workers’ bunks were stacked above each other in tight rows.
- 60 Tom J. Brown, *Among the Bantu Nomads: A Record of Forty Years Spent among the Bechuana* (London: Seeley Service, 1926), 137–38.
- 61 Geschiere, writing of the rise of similar beliefs about zombies in Cameroon, observes 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” (Peter Geschiere, “Globalization and the Power of Indeterminate Meaning: Witchcraft and Spirit Cults in Africa and East Asia” [unpublished manuscript]).
- 62 Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860–1910* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), 221.
- 63 Henri Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe* (London: Macmillan, 1927), 298–99; compare Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity*, 221.
- 64 These unfortunates were termed *shipoko* (from the Dutch or Fanagalo *spook*, “ghost”), a word borrowed, Junod notes, from European animism; Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe*, 488; see also note 32 above.
- 65 E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 174.
- 66 Edwin Ardener, “Witchcraft, Economics, and the Continuity of Belief” in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. M. Douglas (London: Tavistock, 1970).
- 67 Ardener’s account—he also describes a resurgence of the phenomenon in the 1950s—makes it necessary to complicate Geschiere’s claim that zombie witchcraft (*nyongo, ekong*, and the like) is a “new” phenomenon in Africa; Ardener, “Witchcraft, Economics, and the Continuity of Belief”; Geschiere, “Globalization and the Power of Indeterminate Meaning,” 14.
- 68 Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 114.
- 69 Ardener, “Witchcraft, Economics, and the Continuity of Belief,” 148.
- 70 René Depestre, “Declaration à la Havane,” *Violence II*, no. 9 of *Change* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), 20. This phrase is also cited by Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 75.
- 71 Compare Ardener, “Witchcraft, Economics, and the Continuity of Belief,” 156; Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 9.
- 72 Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity*, 221.
- 73 Isak Niehaus, *Witchcraft, Power, and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South African Lowveld* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2001); Isak Niehaus, “Witches of the Transvaal Lowveld and Their Familiars: Conceptions of Duality, Power, and Desire,” *Cahiers d’Etudes Afri-*

- caines*, 35.2 (1995): 138–39, and 35.3 (1995): 513–40; Isak Niehaus, “Witch-hunting and Political Legitimacy: Continuity and Change in Green Valley, Lebowa, 1930–93,” *Africa* 53 (1993); Isak Niehaus, “Witchcraft in the New South Africa: From Colonial Superstition to Postcolonial Reality?” (unpublished manuscript).
- 74 Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937); Geschiere, “Globalization and the Power of Indeterminate Meaning”; James Ferguson, “Demoralizing Economies: African Socialism, Scientific Capitalism, and the Moral Politics of ‘Structural Adjustment,’” in *Moralizing States and the Ethnography of the Present*, ed. S. F. Moore (American Ethnological Society Monograph Series, no. 5, 1993); John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, introduction to *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- 75 Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 96.
- 76 Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 143. It was Monica Wilson who first spoke of witch beliefs as the “standardized nightmares of a group” (Monica Wilson, “Witch Beliefs and Social Structure,” *American Journal of Sociology* 56 [1951]: 307–13).
- 77 Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 114.