

Capetown and the Cape of Good Hope



Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse, and the Postcolonial State

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the predicament of the postcolonial nation-state through the prism of environmental catastrophe: how is it that plant "invaders" can become an urgent political issue, and what might this reveal of the shifting relations among citizenship, community, and national sovereignty under neo-liberal conditions? Pursuing these questions in relation to a case from the "new" South Africa, we posit three key features of postcolonial polities in an era of laissez-faire: the refiguration of the subject-citizen, the crisis of sovereign borders, and the depoliticization of politics. Under such conditions, aliens - both plants and people - come to embody core contradictions of boundedness and belonging; and alienature provides a language for voicing new forms of discrimination amidst a culture of "post-racism" and civil rights.*

*The White Heat of Apocalypse,
or "The Week the Cape Burned"*

Helicopters scampering over the blazing vineyards of Constantia became the "motif" of the Cape of Storms this week as the Peninsula burst into flames producing scenes that could have been staged for a mega disaster movie. From the beaches of Muizenberg columns of smoke rising above the mountains...looked like Mount Vesuvius in full rage burying the fleeing victims of Pompeii...Overhead the tiny helicopters buzz mosquito-like against the sky, heroic in purpose, but only adding to the sense of helplessness as they dash their toyish...waterbombs against the...advance of the lunatic flames.

Mail & Guardian, 21-27 January 2000, p.6¹

"Lunatic flames" at the southern tip of Africa. What might they tell us about the ecology of nationhood? Or about the contemporary predicament of the postcolonial nation-state? How might the flash of environmental catastrophe illuminate the meaning of borders and the tortured politics of belonging? "Ecology,"

1 "The Week the Cape Burned," M. Merten, *Mail & Guardian*, 21-27 January 2000, p.6.

here, is not an idle figure of speech, a mere metaphor. Our subject is an all-too-real drama in the kingdom of plants, one that reveals much about the changing role of nature in figuring the nation under neoliberal conditions; also about the conundrums of identity and exclusion--not to mention sovereignty and its violation--to which those conditions are increasingly giving rise. How is it, for instance, that plant "invaders" can become an urgent affair of state? And what might their presence disclose of the shifting relations among citizenship, community, and national integrity in an era of global capitalism? Pursuing these questions in South Africa, we run up against two faces of "naturalization" in the politics of the postcolony: one refers to the assimilation of alien persons, signs, and practices into the received order of things; the other, to the deployment of nature as alibi, as a fertile allegory for making people and objects strange, thus to forge critical new social and political distinctions. But we shall make our way back to such matters of theory--about naturalization, about the postcolonial state, about the ecology of nationhood--in due course. We begin our narrative with the fire.

Apocalypse, African Style

While Cape Town had been strafed by several acts of terror in the closing weeks of 1999--most notably bombings aimed at courts, police stations, and tourist sites--the turn of the millennium came and went without incident; this despite public fears of violence and mass destruction. Then, two weeks later, the blaze began. On an unusually hot, dry Saturday afternoon the veld caught fire in a number of places across the greater metropolitan area. A gale-force south-east wind soon carried walls of flame up its stately mountain spine, threatening historic homes and squatter settlements that had taken root, often in uneasy proximity, in its verdant folds. As those in the path of the inferno were evacuated, the media projected disjunctive images of civic collaboration: of the poor helping each other carry paltry possessions from doomed shacks; of the wealthy, having put their valuables in swimming pools and on their capacious streets, lining up to pass buckets of water.²

On Monday, as the bush continued to burn, airforce helicopters dumped thousands of tons of water on the flames. Volunteers aided emergency fire-fighters brought from as far afield as Pretoria, more than 1 500 km. to the north. Round-the-clock reports told a distressing tale of cheetahs and ostriches grilled alive in local game parks, of landmark churches facing incineration and world renowned vineyards razed to cinders. As the week wore on, record temperatures stoked the blaze on both sides of the Cape Peninsula and in its immediate hinterland. The Mother City sweltered under a blanket of smoke as ash rained down on her boulevards and

² See e.g. "Kaap Lek Sy Wonde; Weskus Veg Met Hulp Uit Noorde," *Die Burger*, 21 January 2000, p.1; "Bokkie se Trane," *Die Burger*, 22 January 2000, p.8; "A Chronology of Destruction," Marianne Merton, *Mail & Guardian*, 21-27 January 2000, p.7; "Ash City: Why the Fires Were So Bad," *Sunday Times*, 23 January 2000, p.7; "Flames Past, Present--and Future?" Victoria Foxcroft, *Cape Times*, 3 February 2000, p.11.

beaches. Air pollution increased by 20%, causing the closure of many major roads--and rendering traffic chaotic as workers headed home early. At the national naval headquarters in Simonstown, shore leave for sailors was cancelled as flames devoured key administrative buildings.

In total, some 9,000 hectares burned. The mountains smoldered on sullenly for weeks. So, too, did the temper of the local population. One man was charged with viciously assaulting a youth whom he suspected of starting a blaze along a rural road³ and attributions of blame flew in many directions, none of them politically random. Fire is endemic to the region and is crucial to the regeneration of its vegetation; those who profit from its bounty have no option but to live with the risk. This, though, was a conflagration of unprecedented scale. As a result, it raised fears about the very sustainability of the natural kingdom in the "fairest Cape." For weeks, the blaze, some termed it "the holocaust," would dominate public discourse. Its livid scars and apocalyptic proportions evoked elemental anxieties, calling forth an almost obsessive desire to construe it as an omen, an indictment, a call to arms. This public divination--the debate in the streets, the media, the halls of government--laid bear the complex social ecology from which the fire itself had sprung, enabling it to cast penetrating light on conditions-of-being in the postcolonial state.

For, however unprecedented, apocalypse eventually becomes history, a process Davis (1995) aptly terms the "dialectic of ordinary disaster." Thus, while early discussion of the fire was wild and contested, refracted along the divers facets of communal interest, it would reduce, over time, to a dominant interpretation. That interpretation would never be shared by all. As we shall see, some people, barely audible in the media debate, had a rather different reading of the issues at stake. But the dominant view *did* draw a wide consensus; wide enough to authorize strong government action and broad civic collaboration. This, clearly, was an instance of "ideology-in-the-making." As such, its efficacy rested, first, on producing a plausible, parsimonious explanation for the extent of the blaze. But it also succeeded in making the flames illuminate an implicit landscape of affect and anxiety, inclusion and intrusion, prosperity and loss. Through a clutch of charged references, it linked the fire to other domains of public experience, domains in which natural images frame urgent issues of being-and-identity, especially being-and-identity in the body of the "new" nation-state.

In the initial heat of the event, "official" opinion blamed stray cigarette ends and abandoned cooking fires for the blaze. But this was rapidly overtaken by the suspicion of arson, a theory buttressed by evidence that the conflagration had multiple points of origin;⁴ some even detected a new front in the campaign of urban terror that

3 "Man Arrested For Beating Up Young 'Fire Bug'," Norman Joseph, *Cape Argus*, 2 February 2000, p.5.

4 This explanation was given added credibility when fire destroyed numerous luxury cars at Cape Town's Kenilworth racecourse a few days later, on 29 January 2000; "Fire Havoc: 150 Cars Up in Flames as Blaze Disrupts Glamour Race," Henry Ludski, Natalie Kammies, and Jessica Bezuidenhout, *Sunday Times*, 30 January 2000, p.1.

had gripped the Cape Peninsula for several years⁵. Then, like the flames, the discourse abruptly changed course, alighting on an etiology that took hold with extraordinary force: whatever sparked it, the calamitous scale of the blaze was the result of invasive alien growth, imported vegetation that burns more readily and fiercely than its native counterparts. Fire might be a "natural part" of the Cape ecosystem, government advisors attested, but the presence of invasive aliens had changed the characteristics of that system significantly.⁶ Outrage against these intruders grew steadily, particularly in the English-speaking press; the Afrikaans media had a somewhat different agenda (see below). "Reprehensible" landowners, who had allegedly allowed these interlopers to spread unchecked, were denounced for putting life and limb, even "our natural heritage" itself, at risk.⁷

"Our natural heritage," note. Heritage has become a productive construct to conjure with as global markets erode the distinctive wealth of nations, forcing them to redefine their sense of patrimony. And its worth: the mayor of Cape Town, for example, is wont to describe Table Mountain as "a national inspiration," whose asset value could be "measured by every visitor it attracts".⁸ Not coincidentally, South Africa is currently engaged in a bid to have the Cape Peninsula declared a "World Heritage Site" in recognition of its unparalleled biodiversity. This diverse heritage is embodied, above all, in the Cape *fynbos* (Afrikaans, "fine bush;" from the Dutch *fijn bosch*) the sclerophyllous shrublands and heathlands--or small-leaved evergreen plants--that compose a major proportion of the vegetation of the mountains of the Cape and their coastal forelands (Kruger, 1978; Day *et al.* 1979). In recent decades, fynbos has become the prime incarnation of the fragile, wealth-producing beauties of the region, and environmentalists have become ever more concerned that it is caught up in a life-or-death struggle with tenacious interlopers, bent on reducing its riches to "impenetrable monotony" (Hall, 1979:134).

The blaze brought all this to a head. "Wake Up Cape Town,"⁹ screamed front page headlines set against the image of a red fire lily poking, phoenix-like, from a deep bed of ashes. Efforts by botanists to cool the hysteria--to insist that "fire in fynbos [is] normal," not a "train smash in terms of biodiversity"¹⁰--had little effect on the public mood. A cartoonist, allowing a rare moment of irony to flicker amid millennial anxiety, drew a UFO hovering over Cape Town as the city sank into the

5 "Ash City: Why the Fires Were So Bad," *Sunday Times*, 23 January 2000, p.7.

6 Guy Preston, special advisor to Water Affairs and Forestry Minister Ronnie Kasrils and national leader of the Working for Water Program, quoted in "Force Landowners to Clear Invading Alien Plants," John Yeld, *Sunday Argus*, 22-23 January 2000, p.7.

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

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

9 "Wake Up Cape Town," John Yeld, *Cape Argus*, 7 February 2000, p.1.

10 Richard Cowling, distinguished scholar of the Cape fynbos biome, as cited in "The Peninsula's Fynbos Will Flourish Again," *Sunday Argus*, 29 January 2000, p.6.

globally-warmed sea, its mountain tops covered by foreign flora. Peering down, the occupants of the space ship declare: "They seem to have a problem with aliens."¹¹

A problem with aliens indeed! Whether or not he knew it, the satirist had touched a deep nerve: the anxiety over foreign flora gestured toward a submerged landscape of civic terror and moral panic. Significantly, when the fire was followed some two weeks later by ruinous floods to the north, another headline quipped: "First fires, now floods--next frogs?"¹² By then, it was not altogether surprising to read that "huge forests of alien trees" were being held by experts to have "caused all the trouble" in the water-logged Mpumalanga Province.¹³ In this, one of the poorest regions in the land, "large stands of invading aliens," the vast plantations of powerful logging corporations, were blamed for their disastrous effect on the capacity of indigenous plants to act as "natural sponges."¹⁴ At much the same time, a lead story in the national press, apparently unrelated, told how the Aliens Investigation Unit of the South African Police Services had swooped down on a luxurious club in Johannesburg, ostensibly because it employed a growing army of undocumented, unhealthy sexworkers from abroad.¹⁵ Within days, the South Africa public was promised, again in banner newsprint, a "US-style bid to rid SA of illegal aliens."¹⁶

What exactly was at stake in this mass-mediated "chain of consciousness" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:29), this litany of alien-nation? Why the propensity to "blame it on the weeds,"¹⁷ as one journalist put it? How much does it all tell us about the meaning of moral panics inside South Africa, or about perceived threats to the nation and its patrimony? Observers elsewhere have noted that an impassioned rhetoric of autochthony, to which alienness is the negative counterpoint, has edged aside other images of belonging at the end of the twentieth century; also that a fetishizing of origins seems to be growing up the world over in opposition to the liberal "credo of *laissez-faire*" (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000:23). But why? Why, at this juncture in the history of postcolonial nation-states, and of South Africa in particular, has the question of boundaries and their transgression, of membership and citizenship, become such an incendiary issue? Why, in the face of the burning bush, has nature presented itself as a persuasive alibi for the conception of nationhood and its

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

12 "First Fires, Now Floods--Next Frogs?" Ivor Powell and Heather Hogan, *Mail & Guardian*, 11-17 February 2000, p.9.

13 "The Trees That Caused All the Trouble," Fiona Macleod, *Mail & Guardian*, 11-17 February 2000, p.8.

14 The expert cited here, Guy Preston (above, n.6) was the one who had been most vocal in linking alien vegetation to the Cape fires; "The Trees That Caused All the Trouble," Fiona Macleod, *Mail & Guardian*, 11-17 February 2000, p.8 (see also below).

15 "The Best Little Whorehouse in the Civil Service," Matthew Burbidge, *Saturday Star*, 12 February 2000, p.1-2; "Wee Willie Keeps a Leery Eye on Assets That Go Bump in the Night," Karen Bliksem, *The Sunday Independent*, 13 February 2000, p.8.

16 "US-Style Bid to Rid SA of Illegal Aliens: focus will shift to tracking down border-jumpers at workplaces and imposing penalties on employers," Robert Brand, *The Star*, 14 February 2000, p.1.

17 "Blame it on the Weeds," Marianne Merten, *Mail & Guardian*, 21-27 January 2000, p.7.

frontiers? And how, in turn, does the naturalization of nationality relate to the construction of older identities framed in terms of history, culture, race, ethnicity? Could it be that the anxious public discourse here over invasive plant species speaks to an existential problem presently making itself felt at the very heart of nation-states everywhere: in what does national integrity consist, what might nationhood and belonging *mean*, what moral and material entitlements might it entail, at a time when global capitalism seems everywhere to be dissolving sovereign borders, everywhere to be displacing politics-as-usual?

These questions are not meant to cast doubt on the danger actually posed by fire or flood; nor on the effort to explain and manage them with reference to the effects of foreign flora. It is precisely *because* these matters are so real and urgent that they carry the charge that they do. But the extent to which aliens of all kinds became a public preoccupation in South Africa just after the millennium went far beyond the usual bounds of botany, far beyond the concerns of the environmental sciences, beyond even the imperatives of disaster control. It is with this excess that we are concerned here. For, as we have already hinted, the explosion of events, emotions, and arguments "after the fire" has a compelling story to tell about citizenship, identity and nation-building in this and other postcolonies.

The Postcolonial Nation-State in Perspective, Retrospectively

First things first, however. *The* postcolonial nation-state of today--and here we write specifically from an Africanist perspective--is not, for all the tendency to speak of it in the singular, a definite article. It refers to a labile historical *formation*, a polythetic class of polities-in-motion. South Africa, famously, is the latest country to join the class. As such, it reveals, with harsh clarity, many of the contemporary obsessions of postcoloniality, many of the contradictions which confront the effort to make modernist polities in postmodern, neoliberal times. That effort, those obsessions, reach into diverse realms of both governance and collective being-in-the-world: into the struggle to arrive at meaningful terms with which to construct a sense of belonging--and, hence, of moral and material community--in circumstances that privilege difference; into the endeavor to regulate sovereign borders under global economic and political conditions that not only encourage the transnational movement of labor and capital, money and goods, but make them a necessary condition of the wealth of nations; into the often bitter controversies that rage as people assert various kinds of identity to make claims of entitlement and interest; into troubled public discourses on the proper reach of twenty-first century constitutions and, especially, their protection of individual rights; into the complicated processes by which government, nongovernmental organizations, citizens acting in the name of civil society, and other social fractions seek to carve out a division of political and social labor; into the implications of moral panics about the decay of public order, about crime both organized and random, about corruption and its policing.

Such issues have not always dominated the discourses of postcolonial nation-states--in the plural, note--or saturated their public spheres. For one thing, those

polities have long entertained mass flows of contract labor in and out, not to mention immigration and emigration (see e.g. Crush *et al.*, 1991) or the transportation of flora and fauna across sovereign borders (see e.g. Fraser and McMahon, 1988:147; see below); but never before has the presence of aliens occasioned the same sort of alarm as it seems to nowadays (see e.g. Reitzes, 1994:7). As this suggests, many things have changed since the dawn of the postcolonial age, an age still uneasily defined by a prefixation upon what it is not. Even at the most gross of levels, postcolonies have moved through two epochal phases, a passage from the past that casts into relief much about the present.

Epochal Shifts: from the past to the postcolony

The first was born, historically and figuratively, in India at midnight on 14 August 1947. It lasted forty years or so. This is the period conventionally associated, in master narratives of the Age of Empire, with the *decolonization* of the so-called Third World. It is also a period in which the new states of Africa found the promise of autonomy and growth sundered by the realities of *neocolonialism*, which freighted them with an impossible toll of debt, dependency, and structural *maladjustment* (see e.g. Amin, 1974; Leys, 1974; Wallerstein, 1979). Under these conditions, the master narrative goes on, the idyll of European-styled democracy, the "black man's burden" according to Basil Davidson (1992), gave way to ever more authoritarian rule, itself buttressed by the coldwar imperatives of the First and Second Worlds. The details need not detain us; they have been dissected by a generation of Africanist scholars (see e.g. Rothchild and Chazan, 1988). What is most important for now is that, in its formative years, postcoloniality was a product of the "old" international political order, of its organization of sovereign nations, of the industrial capitalist world system. In that order, people, plants, commodities, and currencies moved across frontiers under more-or-less tightly enforced, normatively-recognized state regulation. Every so often, right-wing alarmists in Europe called for the repatriation of immigrants or for rigorous control over foreign flora and fauna. But cross border movement, predominantly along the coordinates of former colonial maps--the British commonwealth, Greater France, the Black Atlantic--was regarded as a routine part of the bureaucratic work of governments everywhere, be they democratic or autocratic.

The second epoch in the genealogy of postcolonial states, the epoch with which we are more immediately concerned, is very different. According to Bayart (1993:x) it may be dated to 1989, when, he says, "most sub-Saharan African countries" began to experience "an unprecedented wave of demands for democracy." These events were a product of the same world-historical movement that transformed Central Europe and reverberated across the planet at the time: the *political* coming of age--its economic roots and its ethos, patently, long predate the 1980s (see e.g. Dicken, 1986)--of neoliberal global capitalism. This world-historical movement, the recitative now goes, metamorphosed the old international order into a more fluid, market-driven, electronically-articulated universe: a universe in which supranational institutions burgeon; in which space and time are radically recalibrated; in which

geography is perforce being rewritten; in which transnational identities, diasporic connections, ecological disasters, and the mobility of human populations challenge both the nature of sovereignty and the sovereignty of nature; in which "the network" returns as the dominant metaphor of social connectedness; in which liberty is distilled to its postmodern ontological essence, the right to choose identities, subjectivities, commodities, sexualities, localities, and other forms of collective representation (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).

As this suggests, the second postcolonial epoch has been marked by a great deal more than just a move "back" to democracy, procedural or substantive (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997). Indeed, while the renaissance of participatory politics has reanimated some of the institutions of governance eclipsed in Africa during the years after "independence" (see e.g. Harbeson *et al*, 1994), its promise to empower "the public" in affairs of state came at a juncture when institutional power departed most states as never before, dispersing itself everywhere and anywhere and nowhere tangible at all (cf. Mbembe, 1992a): into transnational corporations and associations, into nongovernmental organizations, into syndicated crime, into shadowy, privatized para-statal cabals (see e.g. Roitman, 1998; cf. Korten, 1996). Which may, in part, explain why there has been a strong contrapuntal stress on the reconstruction of civil society since 1989. Elsewhere (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000), we have argued that the force of latter as a call to action exists in inverse proportion to its density and content as a concept; its appeal is largely underwritten by its inchoateness, its vacuity. We have also argued that its return as a dusted-off fetish in the late twentieth century bears strong parallel with its first enunciation in the late eighteenth. In each case, it has come to the fore under conditions of rapid transformation: conditions in which the present and future of economy and society, of community and family, of selfhood and the social division of labor have been forced into question.

Almost everywhere in the postcolonial world, it seems, community and family are said to be widely at risk; the very existence of "society" is under scrutiny, called ever more acutely into question as other kinds of attachment take precedent; regular, standardized blue collar jobs are thought to be a fast-disappearing anachronism in ever more labile material environments; masculinity is felt to be compromised with the reconstruction of gender roles and relations. What is more, the politics of ideological struggle melt away into the politics of interest as the "me-generation" folds into the "we-generation" (J.L. Comaroff, 1996). And generation itself, in the guise of *youth*, becomes a major vector of political action, a problem, and an ever more salient principle of social distinction (J. Comaroff, 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff, n.d.).

For its part, "the" state, an ever more polymorphous entity, is held, increasingly, to be in perpetual crisis (Worby, 1998:560), its power ever more dispersed, its legitimacy tested by debt, disease, and poverty, its executive control repeatedly pushed to the limit and, most of all, its hyphen-nation--the articulation, that is, of the state to the nation, of *the* nation-state--everywhere under challenge. In

the circumstances, offers Mbembe (1992b:3), "the postcolony" tends to be "chaotically pluralistic," even when it evinces a semblance of "internal coherence." Which is why, it is often said, postcolonial regimes evince a strong predilection to appeal to new or intensified magicalities, especially, to anticipate what is to come, under the sign of autochthony. That ruling cadres rely on magical means to do the work of hyphen-nation is not new of course. But resort to mass-mediated ritual excess--to produce state power, to conjure up national unity, and to persuade citizens of the reality of both--does seem to feature prominently in the second postcolonial age; in rough proportion, perhaps, to populist perceptions of crisis. Thus, notes Worby (1998:560), in those parts of Africa where the hold of government is stretched, its authority has become dependent on the performance of quotidian ceremonial, extravagant in its theatricality, to win the collusion of citizen-subjects. The latter, he goes on (p.562; after Mbembe, 1992b:3f), live with the state in a promiscuous hybrid of accommodation and refusal, power and parody, embodiment and alienation.

Belonging, Borders, Autochthony, Antipolitics

These symptoms of the second age of postcoloniality are the stuff of anxious public discourse across Africa; so, too, is the huge disparity between rich and poor countries. In point of fact, the stereotypically bleak portrait of states in states of imminent demise, of nations falling into an unhyphenated, Hobbesian state of nature, of nature itself out of control, tends to be overdrawn; the political sociology of postcoloniality is much more complex, more diverse, than it allows. At the same time, both the contradictions and the perceptions of crisis experienced by many post-colonies are part of a broader condition; one that affects not just these polities--although it *is* felt most acutely within them, largely because of the predicament in which they were left by the political economy of colonialism and its aftermath. We refer, of course, to the much debated issue of the present and future of the nation-state under the impact of globalization. Elsewhere (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000) we have offered an extended commentary on this question, seeking to chart the transformation of the modernist polity in the Age of Neoliberal Capitalism. Here, however, it is enough to note just three things about that transformation.

The *first* arises out of the refiguration of the modernist subject-citizen. One corollary of the changing face of nationhood in the neoliberal age, especially after 1989, has been an explosion of identity politics. Not just of ethnic and cultural politics. Also of the politics of gender, sexuality, age, race, religiosity, economic combination, life-style preference, and, yes, social class. As a result, imagining the nation rarely presumes a "deep horizontal fraternity" any more (Anderson, 1983). While most human beings still live as citizens *in* nation-states, they tend only to be conditionally, partially, and situationally citizens *of* nation-states. Identity struggles, ranging from altercations over resources to genocidal combat, seem immanent almost everywhere as selfhood is immersed--existentially, metonymically--into claims of collective essence, of innate substance and primordial sentiment, that nestle within or transect the polity.

In short, homogeneity as a "national fantasy" (Berlant, 1991) is giving way to a recognition of the irreducibility of difference; so much so that even countries long known for their lack of diversity--Botswana comes to mind (Durham, 1999)--are now sites of identity struggles. And culture, at once essentialized and open to constant re-invention, becomes yet another possession, a good to be patented, made into property, merchandised, consumed (see e.g. Hegeman, 1991; Coombe, 1998). All of this puts even greater stress--in both senses of the term--on hyphen-nation. The more diverse nation-states become in their political sociology, the higher the level of abstraction at which "*the* nation-state" exists, the more compelling appears the threat of its rupture. And the more imperative it becomes to divine and to negate whatever is perceived to endanger it. States, notes Harvey (1990:108), have always had to sustain a "sense of community," to conjure up "a definition of public interests over and above...class and sectarian" concerns. One solution that has presented itself in the face of ever more assertive claims on society and the state, of claims formulated in the name of intransitive sorts of identity, has come to lie in autochthony: in elevating to a first-principle the ineffable interests and connections, at once material and moral, that flow from "native" rootedness, and special rights, in *a place of birth*. Nor is this merely a strategic solution that appeals to those caught up in the business of government; it resonates with deeply felt populist fears--and with the proclivity of citizens of all stripes to deflect shared anxieties onto outsiders of one kind or another.

Autochthony is implicit in many forms of identity, of course; it also attaches to places within places, parts within wholes. But, as a claim against aliens, its mobilization appears to be growing in direct proportion to the sundered hyphenation of the sovereign polity, to its popularly perceived porousness and impotence in the face of exogenous forces. Citizens *in* contemporary nation-states, whether or not they are primarily citizens *of* nation-states, seem able to re-imagine nationhood in such a way as to embrace the ineluctability of internal difference: "multiculturalism," the "rainbow nation," and terms of similar resonance provide a ready argot of accommodation, even amidst bitter contestation. However, when it comes to the limits of that difference, to the threshold between inside and out, autochthony constitutes an ultimate line. Whatever other identities the citizen-subject of the twenty-first century polity may bear, s/he is unavoidably either an autochthon or an alien. Nor only s/he. It too. As we have seen, and will see further, nonhumans may also be ascribed the status of indigene or other.

The *second* follows closely: it concerns the heightened obsession of contemporary polities with the policing of their borders--and, by extension, with the limits of their sovereignty. Much of the debate over the "crisis" of the nation-state hinges upon the contention that governments can no longer control those borders; that the unregulated flow across them of currencies and commercial instruments, of labor and commodities, of flora and fauna, of information, illegal substances, and unwanted aliens has increased by an order of magnitude unknown in the past (see above). It is true, of course, that international frontiers have always been more-or-less porous. But technologies of space-time compression *do* appear to have effected a sea-

change in patterns and rates of global flow, human and virtual. Which is why so many states, most maybe, act as if they were constantly subject both to invasion from the outside and to the seeping away of what should properly remain within. South Africa, for instance, numbers its brain drain in public lament,¹⁸ and regrets the pull of the market on its sports and media stars--albeit taking nationalistic pride in their fame--while anguishing, xenophobically, over the inflow of millions of immigrants, *makwerekwere*, who, as we shall see, frequently suffer gross violations of their human rights.¹⁹

Similar xenophobia has hit Western European countries--most recently, Spain²⁰ and, with the political rise of Jörg Haider, Austria²¹--on a rising scale. Much of the time it focuses on "unassimilable" migrant workers (cf. Connelly and Kennedy, 1994); for which read "black." But not always. Recall the British fear that the Channel Tunnel would open England up to rabies, that the coming of the Euro would herald the end of sterling as its sovereign currency, that the authority of the European courts would destroy its legal dominion (Darian-Smith, 1999); or the phobic French reaction, translated into protectionist legislation, against the infiltration of US cultural products; or the Italian effort to protect *grappa*, a beverage become national intellectual property, from makers of the same thing in other countries. All alike express *angst*, in the face of global flow, about boundaries and their breach. Globalization, after all, has provoked antagonistic responses not only among peoples of smaller and/or less powerful nation-states, for whom it represents itself as colonialism in a new, largely North American guise; nor only among the marginalized of the world. It also asserts itself, as we all know, in "the West," sometimes with the tacit connivance of government. Jeremy Seabrook recently observed, in this respect, that the "European left scarcely distinguishes itself from a right whose faith in global laissez-faire is matched only by a hysterical defense of evaporated sovereignties and atrophied national powers."²² An exaggeration, perhaps. But it does capture the spirit of the moment.

Our object, though, is not just to remark the heightened concern with borders and their transgression--important as that turns out to be. It is also to observe that this concern is itself the product of a paradox. Under contemporary global conditions, given the logic of the neoliberal capitalist economy, nation-states find themselves in a double bind. In order to partake of that economy, to garner the value that it spins off, governments require at once to open up their frontiers and to secure them: on one

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

19 See also "Defy Barney's Thought Police," Rhoda Kadalie, *Mail & Guardian*, 18-24 February 2000, p.31

20 See "Race Riots Hit Spain as Foreign Labourers Pour in," Marlise Simons, *The Sunday Independent*, 20 February 2000, p.16.

21 See e.g. "Fortune Favours Austrian Right-Wing Haider, William Drozdiak, *Saturday Star*, 19 February 2000, p.9; "Racists and Hypocrites, Jeremy Seabrook, *Mail & Guardian*, 18-24 February, p.22.

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

hand, to deregulate as far as possible the movement of currencies, goods, people, and services, thus to facilitate the inflow of wealth; on the other, to regulate them by establishing enclaved zones of competitive advantage so as to attract transnational manufacture and media, investment, information technology, and the "right" kind of migrants--among them, tourists, highly skilled personnel, NGOs, development consultants, even laborers who will work more cheaply and tractably than locals without claim to the entitlements of citizenship. In this way, the nation-state is transformed, in aspiration if not always in reality, into a mega-management enterprise, a business in the business of attracting business into its sphere of interest; this in the interest of "stakeholders" who desire simultaneously to be global citizens and yet to enjoy the protections that come with belonging to a sovereign nation. The corollary is plain. The border is a double bind because the national commonwealth appears to demand, but is simultaneously threatened by, *both* openness and closure. No wonder the *angst*, no wonder the constant public debate in so many places about what ought or ought not to be allowed in, what is or not in the common good. And for whom.

The *third* salient feature of the predicament of the nation-state, which again follows from what we have just said, is, baldly stated, the depoliticization of politics. The argument goes like this: neoliberal capitalism, in its triumphal, all encompassing global phase, offers no alternatives to *laissez-faire*; nothing else--no other ideology, no other political economic system--seems plausible. The primary question left to public policy is how to succeed in the "new" world order. Why? Because this new order hides its ideological scaffolding in the dictates of economic efficiency, in the fetishism of the free market, in the inexorable needs of capital growth, in the exigencies of science and technology. Under its hegemony, the social is dissolved into the natural, the biological, the organic (cf. Abu El-Haj, n.d.). "Political choices," as Xolela Mangcu puts it for South Africa²³:

are depoliticized and given the aura of technical truth. Public policies that get implemented are those backed by "growth coalitions" which span government, business, the media and other interest groups--the best organized and financed sectors of society--which shape national consensus on priorities.

Politics, then, are reduced either to the pursuit of pure advantage or to struggles over "special" interests and issues: the environment, abortion, health care, child welfare, rape and domestic abuse, human rights, capital punishment, and the like. In the circumstances, there is a strong tendency for urgent questions of the moment, often sparked by ecological catastrophe and rationalized with reference to the imperatives of nature, to become the stuff of collective action, cutting across older,

23 "The Score So Far: Poverty Alleviation 0, Soccer World Cup 10," Xolela Mangcu, *The Sunday Independent*, 12 March 2000, p.8.

now defunct, lines of ideological and social commitment. Each takes up its time in the limelight as it flares into public awareness, becomes a "hot" issue for a while, and then burns down, its embers consigned to the recesses of collective consciousness--only to flame up again if kindled by contingent conditions or vocal coalitions. Or both.

Our evocation here of the imagery of fire--now situated in the macroscopic imperatives of the postcolonial nation-state, its location in the global world of neoliberal capitalism, its contemporary political sociology, its altered forms of citizenship, its obsessions with boundaries, aliens and autochthony, its displacements of the political--return us to the apocalyptic events that followed the millennium in Cape Town.

Naturing The Nation

...Ralph Waldo Emerson once commented on the impact of immigration: "A nation, like a tree, does not thrive well till it is engrafted (sic) with a foreign stock."

Hopewell Radebe, *The Star*, 16 March 2000, p.13²⁴

A Lesson from Fynbos

It is possible to read, in the burning bush, an epic instance of nature's deadly caprice. Such, to be sure, is a construction to which "white Africans," who are disproportionately represented in conservationist circles, are especially prone. But the full impact of the blaze was the consequence of much more than this. It flowed from the capacity of those flowers and flames to signify charged political anxieties, many of them unnamable in everyday discourse. Also from the promise that there might arise, out of the ashes, a greater good: a distinctly local, distinctly "new" South African, sense of community, nation, civil society. But we are running ahead of ourselves. How exactly did those flowers and flames come to mean so much?

First, the flora. Flowers have long served as signifiers of modern states, of course. *Protea cynaroides* (Giant/King protea)--the bloom that most typifies fynbos, its most readily recognized exemplar--has been South Africa's emblem for many years; since 1994, in fact, the national cricket team has been known by it, rather than by the tainted, apartheid-era image of the springbok. *Sui generis*, as an inclusive category, however, fynbos is associated primarily with the autochthonous identity and patrimony of the Western Cape; it is the distinctive mark, the "rich cloak," of the region.²⁵ Also with Cape Town, whose emergence as a global city it has come to symbolize. To both, it stands in a relationship resembling that of classic African totemism (Evans-Pritchard, 1956): in a relationship of humans to nature, place to

24 "Time We Became a Bit More Neighbourly," Hopewell Radebe, *The Star*, 16 March 2000, p.13.

25 "The Peninsula's Fynbos Will Flourish Again," John Yeld, *Saturday Argus*, 29-30 January 2000, p.6.

species, in which each enriches the other so long as the former respects, and does not wantonly consume, the latter. Thus, while the export of fynbos plants has developed into a huge industry since the 1960s--market demand has actually stimulated the development of many new "wild" cultivars (Fraser and McMahon, 1988:155)--Cape Flora have simultaneously become the focus of ever greater conservationist concern. Even "passion" (Bond, 1993). This vegetation, the object of ever widening state protection, is commonly described by researchers as being under serious threat. It is a threat born, increasingly, by invasive aliens (Richardson and Cowling, 1992; Manders and Richardson, 1992), whose significance in environmentalist discourse has overtaken that of human beings (cf. Stirton, 1978: 8) but...it was not always so. None of it.

For a start, use of *fynbos* for the indigenous plants of the southwestern Cape--as in the "Fynbos Biome"--is quite recent. Described by early naturalists as "Flora Capensis" (Harvey, 1859-65; cf. Cowling and Richardson, 1995:12) or "Cape Flora" (Bolos 1886), this vegetation was "officially christened" as the "Cape Floral Kingdom" in the early twentieth century (Fraser and McMahon 1988:119), and was known as such for decades (Levy, 1936; Adamson, 1958). Fynbos does appear in Acocks' *Veld Types of South Africa* in 1953 (p.13), but only as Afrikaans translation for "Coastal Macchia." This suggests that the term was colloquially used at times to refer to the narrow-leaved, evergreen plants of the region. But it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that it became established, both in popular and botanical parlance. Note that this was precisely the time when international demand for Cape Flora began to take off, and a national association was formed to market them. It was also the point at which politicians began to dub fynbos a "natural asset" and a "treasure-chest" (Munnik, 1978:7)--and at which botanists began to argue that it merited conservation as a "unique biome type" (Kruger, 1977).

In short, for all the fact that fynbos has come to stand for a "traditional" heritage of national, natural rootedness, it emerged as unique, and uniquely threatened (Stirton, 1978), at a particular moment in the history of the South African state; at a moment, too, in the historical development of global capitalism when new relations were being forged between transnational markets and the fashioning of subnational identities, cultures, and ecologies that appear endangered by the very forces that produce them. Before then, Cape Flora seemed resilient; changes in the balance of existing species were transient (Adamson, 1929:22). As recently as 1953, furthermore, an authority on the subject actually described fynbos as an *invader* whose expansion threatened the mixed grassveld of the southwestern Cape (Acocks, 1953:14f,17); what is now said of aliens was being said, not so long ago, of this "national treasure."

Admittedly, the vegetation of this ecological niche *has* altered much since then. But so have the values that inform our perceptions of it. Where, once upon a time, farmers saw Cape Flora as useless, as poor grazing on barren soil (Cowling and Richardson, 1995:21), a "fynbos landscape"--rather than a landscape of grassveld or of trees that bind soil and provide fuel--is widely taken for granted as the "climax

community" (Cronon, 1983:10); i.e. an evolutionary end-point to be achieved and conserved. This despite the fact that other views are possible. One has it that a "fynbos landscape" might be less an end-point than "a stage in succession to forest" (Manders *et al*, 1992; cf. Gandar and Forster, 1994:19). However compelling, the ideal of sustaining such a landscape in perpetual equilibrium is an instance of the kind of functionalism that, Cronon (1983:10) argues, "remove[s] ecological communities from history."

Encounter with Aliens

But it is not just as fragile natural heritage that fynbos has captured the imagination of the public in the postcolony. It is also as a protagonist locked in mortal struggle with alien invaders that threaten to colonize its habitat and choke off its means of survival. "These [foreign] plants currently use...3300m cubic meters of water each year...7% of South Africa's mean annual runoff," declared the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry at a high level symposium on invasive species, held in Cape Town a month after the blaze.²⁶ As international interest in the meeting made plain, anxiety about these invaders is not limited to South Africa. The issue has become urgent in other Western nations as well; among them, the USA, Australia, Britain and Germany. Ironically, in Australia, it is South African flora (like yellow soursobs and Capeweed) that are demonized (Wace, 1988; Carr *et al*, 1986); ironic because it was Australian species, vegetation that "grows taller and burns easier than fynbos," that bore the brunt of blame for the Cape fires of January 2000,²⁷ the "chief nasties" being wattles (including the infamous rooikrans), pines, bluegum, and hakea--this last, to close the ironic circle, a "Protea-type shrub."²⁸ Again, neither the origin of these invaders, nor their introduction, was accidental; although the offending plants are almost invariably spoken of, these days, as somehow self-propelling. There are, it is true, some telling contrasts between the other Western cases and the South African preoccupation with alien-nature. Still, alien plants *do* seem to have become the stuff of melodrama, of resonant allegory, on a worldwide scale. This, we shall argue, is because they transform and re-present diffuse political terrors as natural facts.

Time was when there was great enthusiasm at the Cape for plant imports. Early European settlers so exploited the trees on the mountain slopes of the Peninsula that, by the opening decades of the eighteenth century, species such as Mediterranean cluster pine had to be introduced in large numbers to cater for their timber demands (Fraser and McMahon, 1988:147). By the mid nineteenth century, interest in horticultural borrowing had turned to Australia; again, that other antipodean British colony--and South Africa's enduring rival--whose heathlands constitute a Mediterranean biome so similar to the southwestern Cape that some discern an evolutionary

26 Ronnie Kasrils as quoted in "Invasive Plants are Costing SA Dearly," John Yeld, *The Star*, 24 February 2000, p.9.

27 "Ash City," Bobby Jordan, *Sunday Times*, 23 January 2000, p.7.

28 "Blame it on the Weeds," Marianne Merten, *Mail & Guardian*, 21-27 January 2000, p.7.

convergence between them (Cody and Mooney, 1978). When repeated efforts failed to bind soils on the windswept Cape Flats, the most sizeable agricultural plain in the region, the then Colonial Secretary began bringing in Australian wattles and myrtle to provide screens and enable dune formation. By 1875, the government forestry agency was encouraging large plantations of cluster pine and other imports, including hakea and Port Jackson, to shelter them. So eager were the authorities to see these exotics take root that they distributed millions of seeds and awarded prizes for the greatest acreage planted. This is in stark contrast to the present day: now there are moves to tax foreign seed and force landowners to clear their properties of these very same imports (Hall, 1979:134).²⁹

What happened in the intervening hundred years? How did desirable imports become invasive aliens? For one thing, exotic species spread beyond the confines of plantations and gardens--both spontaneously and through human effort--establishing themselves with great success among Cape Flora in both mountainous and riparian locations. An emotional politician would later say that these "polluters of our proud landscapes" had "escaped," freed from the "bondage of their natural enemies in their countries of origin" (Munnik, 1978:7). Experts see this process as having gained ground through the twentieth century. They note that, until quite recently, it evoked little interest among botanists, government, or the population at large; this despite the fact that some disquiet about plant imports had already been voiced in the late nineteenth century, and legislation to curb some "noxious weeds" was passed, if ineffectually, as early 1937 (Hall, 1979:135; Macdonald *et al* 1985). Note the terminology in play here. Although the word "alien" was used once or twice before the 1970s (see e.g. Adamson, 1927), it was not at all common. Terms like "foreign plants" and "imports" were favored, giving way, as the years wore on, to "pests," "invaders," "colonizers," even "green cancers"³⁰--a progression that betrays a mounting sense of alarm. More vocal concern began to be expressed in the late 1950s and 60s, when the Botanical Society of South Africa established a committee to promote awareness of the problem and voluntary "hack groups" first took up cudgels against the interloper.

During the 1970s and 1980s, plant invasion at the Cape came under increasing scrutiny. Botanists concluded that invasive weeds had "outgrown any merits they might have had in the fynbos region" and argued that foreign "infestations" were visible even on satellite pictures (Hall, 1979:135,139). The Department of Nature and Environment Conservation published a popular source-book, *Plant Invaders: Beautiful but Dangerous*, and more hack groups were founded in upper middle class rural white areas; although, as it turned out, the effect of their efforts remained uncertain as the aliens seemed to thrive on chopping and burning (Macdonald *et al*, 1985; Fraser and McMahon, 1988:151). At the same time, local expert opinion still

29 "Force Landowners to Clear Invading Alien Plants," John Yeld, *Sunday Argus*, 22-23 January 2000, p.7.

30 See *The Green Cancers in South Africa* (Anonymous 1959).

might have had in the fynbos region" and argued that foreign "infestations" were visible even on satellite pictures (Hall, 1979:135,139). The Department of Nature and Environment Conservation published a popular source-book, *Plant Invaders: Beautiful but Dangerous*, and more hack groups were founded in upper middle class rural white areas; although, as it turned out, the effect of their efforts remained uncertain as the aliens seemed to thrive on chopping and burning (Macdonald *et al*, 1985; Fraser and McMahon, 1988:151). At the same time, local expert opinion still had it that aliens, in controlled populations, *did* have some utility; that, in any case, it was impossible to eliminate them altogether; and that, even if it were possible, "other species might appear as weeds in the future" (Hall, 1979:140f). All of which implied a sense that botanical categories might shift over time, a view reflected in debates on the topic elsewhere--like Australia, where the line between the "naturalized" and the "native" is taken to be much more fluid. At this juncture, too, threats to the Cape Flora were described in multidimensional causal terms, terms that embraced fire, climatic change, and human intervention (Day *et al*, 1979; Cowling *et al*, 1987; Fraser and McMahon, 1988).

It was not always to remain so.

Playing with fire

The 1990s witnessed a marked tendency to reduce multidimensional causes to monolithic agents--above all, to alien plants--in accounting for the fragility of Cape Flora. This becomes abundantly clear from the way in which attitudes to fire in the fynbos shifted over the decade, culminating in the "holocaust" of January 2000.

As we have said, fire has long been recognized as endemic to the Cape floral ecology (Marloth, 1924; Adamson, 1958); although botanical attitudes toward its effects have altered greatly over time (Kruger, 1979:43). As even the earliest colonial observers noted, "natural" blazes consume large expanses every year, their rate and intensity varying with the age and state of the vegetation, with topography, and with prevailing weather conditions. Much burning is also intentional: African views of regeneration have long set great store on it, for instance--despite the fact that colonial authorities, unnerved by the prospect of natives playing with fire, applied stringent discouragement. Official disapproval continued until quite recently, when systematic research began to paint a more complicated picture of the forms and functions of fynbos combustion (Van Wilgen *et al*, 1992; Kruger, 1979). Thus, while the media almost invariably labels these fires "devastating" (Fraser and McMahon, 1988:140), expert opinion has often disagreed of late, acknowledging that the conservation of species diversity is "at least partly dependent" on burning (Kruger, 1979:44; van Rensberg, 1987:41). But these caveats were muted by the popular debate that raged after the millennial conflagration in Cape Town.

Most salient to our concerns here is the changing place accorded to aliens in both scientific and lay arguments about the connection of fire to fynbos--not to mention in the politics and the perceptions that inform them. True, it has long been

said that certain imports burn more intensely than Cape Flora, which is itself quite flammable. But foreign vegetation was, in the past, only one of several (human and natural, complicatedly interacting) factors held to produce fires of distinct kinds, scale, and effects. An authoritative report by Kruger (1979), for example, does not even discuss invasive plants; van Rensburg's (1987:41) popular introduction to fynbos lists exotics at the very end of a diverse list of combustible agents. As we have seen, not even the public discourse after the fires of 2000 alighted immediately on aliens. When it did, however, they became a burning preoccupation.

Not everybody blamed them. But dissenting voices were largely drowned out as the dialectic of disaster gained momentum. One view attributed the conflagration to exogenous causes--specifically, to global climatic change. It was given remarkably short shrift;³¹ this, tellingly, was a calamity that seemed to demand an explanation grounded in *local* contingencies. Another line of argument was to be read in the Afrikaans press which, while it reported the same events, dealt with them very differently. Indicative, here, was the stance of *Die Burger*, major organ of the New National Party, which still holds a majority in the Cape provincial parliament. While the paper did say that experts blamed aliens for the blaze, it glossed the whole event as indictment of the ANC regime, of its inefficiency in government, of its wanton neglect of the Cape, and so on. The editorial of 21 January 2000 complained that better, more coordinated, effective planning was required to meet such disasters.³² Where the English press praised the civic collaboration forged by the fire, Afrikaans journalists dwelled on the lack of cooperation between the administration and local emergency services.³³ The Peninsula, now a prestigious national park, they wrote, deserved better.

These, of course, were divisions among more or less enfranchised fractions of the population; aside from echoing party political oppositions, they gave voice to the kinds of tension that often arise in postcolonies between regionalisms and national governance. But many others were excluded from the public debate. For some of them, as it happens, alien plants had another significance altogether. We refer to the large numbers of poor and unemployed of the Peninsula--in particular, those living in informal settlements.

Squatter "camps" have loomed ever larger in the Cape metropolitan area since the late apartheid years. During those years, migrants to the city resisted forced removal to impoverished "homelands" and, in so doing, brought the savagery of the ruling regime to the attention of the world. Africans have long felt unwelcome in the Western Cape, predominantly the preserve of whites and Coloreds in days gone by. But, since the transition, black in-migration has become a veritable flood. Informal communities have burgeoned along national roads and on mountain sides, many in

31 See "Scientists Pour Cold Water on Global-Warming Claim," Melanie-Ann Feris, *The Star*, 17 February 2000, p.3.

32 "Totaalplan Teen Brande," *Die Burger*, 21 January 2000, p.8.

33 "Regering en Dienste Moet Beter Koördineer--Minister", *Die Burger*, 22 January 2000, p.3; "Bokkie se Trane," *Die Burger*, 22 January 2000, p.8.

close proximity to healthy populations of combustible alien trees--like the Australian rooikrans (*acacia cyclops*), fuel of choice for the *braaivleis* ("barbecue"), a key rite of white South African commensality.

What is extraordinary about many recent migrants to the Cape is the degree to which their lives are provisioned by alien timber. Their unelectrified settlements in the hollowed-out bush comprise row upon row of square houses, most of them built of slim, laterally-laid logs of rooikrans and other Australian wattles. Threading between these abodes walk women and children, heads piled high with kindling of "imported" provenance; the search for fuel is a permanent feature of the lives of squatters, wherever they reside. Along the roadsides men sell small bundles of *braai* wood to commuters, the vast majority of them white and middle class, as they travel to leafy suburbs or the fynbos coast. Used in domestic food fests, these aliens, condemned in public, are, in private, the stuff of a hallowed cultural practice.³⁴

Not surprising, then, that the first reaction to the blaze of wood vendor Thami Mandlana--one of only squatter camp residents interviewed by the press at the time--was to exclaim that "the price of logs will soar this month!"³⁵ He was right. The cost of a bundle of rooikrans went up 50% after the fire. But its longer-term implications for these woodcutters was more alarming. Mandlana again:

[L]ots of people...cut wood around here and now there won't be enough to go around. Our hearts are sore because of this fire ...This is our only livelihood and now we hardly have any left.

This is the other face of the story of alien vegetation in regions like the Western Cape. That vegetation has long been an integral part of the local economy--the underclass part, which is all but invisible to the more fortunate who touch its convenient roadside edges. But in the postcolony, where wealth is ever more polarized and state provision is largely absent, it is a vital part; a recent survey of "people's plants" estimates the value of rooikrans as fuel wood in the Cape at R30m p.a. (van Wyk and Gericke, 2000:284). But it is the part that touches hardly at all on the interests of those for whom aliens have become anathema, those by whom they are seen to jeopardize the future of a shared natural, national heritage. Where, in fact, imported flora *does* feed mainstream commerce, those who publicize its dangers have run into difficulty: Guy Preston (see n.5), quoted as having blamed huge forests of non-indigenous trees for exacerbating floods in poverty-stricken Mpumalanga--where giant logging corporations are major employers--was later prompted to "clarify" his remarks. He went to some lengths to say that the planting of these forests was "usually acceptable," that it provided much needed jobs and yielded foreign

34 In the national campaign to extirpate invasive plants, burning alien wood for domestic fuel has been suggested as a patriotic duty; see "Hack Day 2000," special supplement to mark Water Week, *The Star*, 20 March 2000.

35 "Ash City," Bobby Jordan, *Sunday Times*, 23 January 2000, p.7.

currency.³⁶ The discourse of invasive aliens clearly has its limits. Still, as we shall see further, its ideological scope has become strikingly broad, encompassing the integrity and regeneration of the nation-state itself.

As Preston's "clarification" makes plain, scholarly experts find themselves playing a delicate role as the drama of alien-nature has caught fire, fanned by an avid press. With the conservation of "natural heritage" being sucked deeper and deeper into a space of intense public passion, botanists are invoked as never before, their work taken to be a matter of urgent national import. But, as their findings become the stuff of political mobilization, nuances--like the fact that not *all* imported plants are aggressive invaders--are lost. To wit, polite protest to the media has added little subtlety to the escalating excitement.³⁷

How has this ideological inflation occurred? To what anxieties, interests, emotions does it respond?

Aliens and the African Renaissance

Until a few years back, the term "alien" had rather archaic connotations in South Africa, enshrined in laws--like the Aliens Act (1937) and Aliens Registration Act (1939)--which aimed to prevent an influx of European refugees prior to World War 2. This legislation remained largely intact until the 1990s, when "aliens" once again become a charged political issue, now in the "new" South Africa. It was at about the same time that, alike in academic and in popular consciousness, foreign plants began to take on fresh salience; that they became both the subject of ecological emergency and an object of national renewal. Perhaps the most telling evidence of this was the *Working for Water Programme* (WFW), launched in 1995 by then Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Kader Asmal. Part of the post-apartheid government's Reconstruction and Development initiative, the scheme centered squarely on the eradication of alien vegetation. Billed as a flagship public works project to create jobs and combat poverty, the Programme envisaged twenty years of bush clearing, costing R600m p.a., in partnership with other departments of state and NGOs. Its tone was urgent: "[Alien plants] are similar to a health epidemic, spreading widely out of control," declared the WFW home page.³⁸ It added that laws would be promulgated to prosecute those landowners who failed to curb non-indigenous flora; also those who allowed them to put their "feet in the water" (i.e. to grow in riparian zones), draining the liquid resources of the nation. Concerted intervention, it claimed, would not merely restore the productive potential of the land. It would also invest in "the most marginalized" sectors of South African society, thus bequeathing a legacy of social equity. Unemployed women and youth, ex-offenders, even the

36 Loving the Alien," letter to the *Mail and Guardian* from Guy Preston, 18-24 February 2000, p.29.

37 See e.g. the efforts of Richard Cowling to insist that "fire in fynbos is normal"; "The Peninsula's Fynbos Will Flourish Again," John Yeld, *Saturday Argus*, 29/30 January 2000, p.6.

38 <http://www-dwaf.pwv.gov.za/idwaf/projects/WFW/Default.htm>.

homeless would be rehabilitated by joining alien eradication teams, and by working in industries turning the invaders into marketable products. Meanwhile, the general public was exhorted not to buy or sell foreign plants--and to inform the authorities of anyone who encouraged their spread.

Alien-nature, in other words, was to become the raw material of communal re-birth. At first, the scheme met with mixed success. Financing eradication units in any sustained fashion proved difficult, although stirring pictures of the formerly unemployed hacking away at unwanted aliens appeared in the media. In July 1997, the *Cape Argus* reported that Minister Asmal had been "given the brush-off" by the Cape Metropolitan Council, which refused to fund the clearing of invasive plants on Table Mountain.³⁹ Efforts to pass legislation were equally controversial: proposals to introduce levies on "water interception" (a.k.a. rain) and "alien seed pollution" drew strong protest from the forestry industry.⁴⁰ But, while the eradication plan was made to "tread water" for a year or two, public anxiety about invasive species became ever more audible.

By the time the fires broke out in January 2000, there was no half-heartedness about attacking the alien. *Ukuvuka*, Operation Firestop, was launched within days of the blaze, media and corporate sponsors stepped in to bolster the Working for Water Programme,⁴¹ and even the powerful Forestry Owners Association, formerly on "collision course" with the Program, came to an uneasy compromise about clearing foreign flora from river banks.⁴² With diffuse popular feeling becoming sharply focussed on attacking the "scourge," public commentators seemed intent on coaxing "a spirit of community"⁴³ from the ashes. A newly elected Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry put it succinctly:⁴⁴

The fire has united us all. All key stakeholders--the authorities, the commercial interests, the landowners and the general public--now can come together to ensure that we are never again placed at such risk. And the key to it all is the clearing of these alien plants...

There appeared now to be widespread faith in the fact that a purge of aliens had "huge potential for job creation," itself a nation-making priority here. The Director of the Botanical Society of South Africa took the occasion to suggest that

39 "Alien Plants Plea by Asmal Rejected: Dispute Over Water Supply," Andrea Weiss, *Cape Argus*, 3 July 1997, p.4.

40 "Asmal Defends Pay for Rain Plan," *Cape Argus*, 5 May 1997, p.22.

41 "'Firestop' Launched to Save Mountains," Buntj West, *Cape Times*, 7 February 2000, p.1; "Four Fire-Hit Hotspots Get Top Priority in R3,6m Rescue Effort," John Yeld, *Cape Argus*, 21 February 2000, p.2.

42 "Working for Water Has Deal with Forestry on Alien Plants," Judith Soal, *Cape Times*, 22 February 2000, p.3.

43 "Take Decisive Steps to Avoid Future Fire Disaster," letter to the *Cape Times* from Louis de Villiers (Chair, Peninsula Mountain Forum), 28 January 2000, p.11.

44 "Wake Up Cape Town," John Yeld, *Cape Argus*, 7 February 2000, p.1-2.

the "environmental sector" deserved 15% of the proceeds of that neoliberal substitute for the commonweal, the National Lottery.⁴⁵ A national Water Week and Hack Day would soon follow, with special newspaper supplements illustrating the most offensive aliens, calling on the population at large to report those who harbored them, and appealing, in the name of patriotism, for recruits to voluntary hack groups.⁴⁶

As time went by, politicians made ever more overt connections between the war against aliens and the collective prosperity of the nation. A symposium to discuss international cooperation in the prevention and control of invasive species, held in Cape Town a month after the blaze (see above), drew no less than four government ministers, one bearing a message from the state president. "We are all in this together," pleaded the Minister for Water Affairs, "for alien species do not respect lines drawn on maps." Global trade and tourism, it was noted, had created a class of "unwanted international travelers" like foreign flora and disease-bearing insects.⁴⁷ But the most portentous words of all were those of President Mbeki himself: These alien plants, he avowed, even "stand in the way of the African renaissance."

Foreign Objects: The Politics of Estrangement in the Postcolony

And so, in rhetoric that both mirrored and magnified the public mood, invading plants become embroiled in the state of the nation. But this does not yet answer the questions we posed a moment ago: To what anxieties, interests, historical conditions does the allegory of alien-nature, the allegory fed by fire and flood, finally speak? What underlies the ideological inflation which began with the burning bush, went on to inflame patriotic passions, and has flared so fiercely as to endanger the African renaissance? An answer is to be found in a cluster of implicit associations and organic intuitions that, as they surfaced into the public sphere, gave insight into the infrastructure of popular consciousness-under-construction; in particular, into the way in which processes of naturalization (see above) made it possible to speak the unspeakable, to assail the unassailable, thus to deal with the contradictions inherent in the making of postcolonial nationhood under post-1989 conditions. Also to deal with the sense of apprehension that seems accompany it in this age of global flow, of borders at once open and closed, of people unavoidably on the move, of irreducible social and cultural difference, of compromised politics, of a shrinking commonweal.

Take this comment by a well-known newspaper columnist, satirist, and self-confessed cynic:⁴⁸

Doubtless there are gardening writers who would not think twice about sounding off in blissful praise of something as innocent...as the jacaranda

45 Dr. B. McKenzie in "Many Lessons to be Learnt from Fires, Floods," *The Star*, 15 February 2000, p.9

46 See "Hack Day 2000," special supplement for Water Week, *The Star*, 20 March 2000

47 "Eradicating Invasive Aliens," Marianne Merten, *Mail & Guardian*, 3-9 March 2000, p.33.

48 "Only the Truly Patriotic Can be Trusted to Smell the Roses, and Weed Them Out," Karen Bliksem, *The Sunday Independent*, 22 February 2000, p.8.

tree...But...you may be nothing more than...a racist. Subliminally that is...Behind its blossoms and its splendid boughs, the jacaranda is nothing but a water-hogging...weed-spreading alien.

As *naturalized* immigrants, plant imports used, in the past, to grace the nation; a popular guidebook describes the jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*) as "almost...South Africa's national tree" (Moll and Moll, 1994:49). Now, in a bizarre drama in which flora signify what politics struggles to name, they are objects of estrangement, even racination; this in a land obsessed with who is or not a citizen, with constitutional rights and wrongs, with routing out all vestiges of racism from within the body politics, not least in the liberal press.⁴⁹ A second columnist made this yet more explicit in speaking of the "ethnic cleansing" of the South African countryside. For centuries, she wrote, people enjoyed the shade of oaks, the smell of roses--aliens all. Now, "floundering in the complacency of democracy," they blame all evil on those very aliens.⁵⁰ But it was a wry letter written from the University of Venda to the *Mail & Guardian*, perhaps South Africa's most distinguished weekly, that made the political subtext most brutally plain.⁵¹

It is alien-bashing time again. As an alien...I am particularly prickly about criticisms of aliens even if they are plants ...Alien plants cannot of course respond to these accusations. But before the Department of Home Affairs is dragooned into investigating the residence permits of these plants I, as a concerned fellow alien, wish to remind one and all that plants such as maize...soybean, sunflower...originated outside of the continent of Africa. In any case, did the fire-and-flood-causing alien plants cross the borders and establish plantations ...by themselves?

For this interpolated alien, himself under no illusions, the allusions are obvious. They flow from the naturalization of xenophobia. Barely displaced in the kingdom of plants is a distressingly familiar crusade: the demonization of migrants and refugees by the state and its citizenry alike.

It has been noted that the migrant, and more recently the asylum seeker, is the "specter" on whose wretched fate the triumphal neoliberal politics of the "new" Europe has been founded.⁵² In South Africa too, a phobia about foreigners, above all

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

50 "Forget Alien Plants, What About Guns?" Carol Lazar, *The Star*, 7 March 2000, p.8. For a response on behalf of the Working for Water Program, see letter to *The Star* from Dr.B.W. van Wilgen, 14 March 2000, p.9.

51 Michael E. Aken'Ova, "Loving the Alien," *Mail & Guardian*, 18-24 February 2000, p.29.

52 "Racists and Hypocrites," Jeremy Seabrook, *Mail & Guardian*, 18-24 February 2000, p.22; see above.

from elsewhere in Africa, has been the illicit offspring of the fledgling democracy--waxing, paradoxically perhaps, alongside appeals to the African Renaissance and to *ubuntu*, a common African humanity. That this is occurring among a people themselves familiar with exile, who in the past lived reasonably peaceably with immigrating labor, seems all the more ironic--and all the more in need of explanation. Of late, the phobia, which started out as a diffuse sense of misgiving, has congealed into an active antipathy to what is perceived as a shadowy alien-nation of "illegal immigrants"; the qualifier has become all but inseparable from the sign, just as, in the plant world, *invasive* has become locked, adjectivally, to alien. Popularly held to be "economic vultures"⁵³ who usurp scarce jobs and resources, who foster crime, prostitution and disease, these doppelganger anticitizens are accused--in uncanny analogy with non-indigenous flora--of spreading wildly out of control. And of siphoning off the rapidly diminishing wealth of the nation (Reitzes, 1994; Sinclair, 1996).

Aliens are a distinctive species in the popular imagination. In a parodic perversion of the past, they are marked ineluctably by skin color and "native" culture. This is most dramatically revealed, as such things often are, at moments of mistaken identity--when South Africans are themselves thought to be outsiders and treated accordingly. Like the national volleyball star, apprehended by police because she looked too dark, or the son of a former exile, arrested eight times over the past few years because his "facial structure" and accent marked him as foreign.⁵⁴ Once singled out, "illegals" are seldom differentiated from bona fide immigrants or refugees.⁵⁵ All are referred to as *makwerekwere*, a disparaging Sotho term for incompetent speech--and, by implication, for exclusion from the moral community. Which explains why they live in terror that their accents will be detected in public.⁵⁶

Their fears are well-founded. With the relaxation of controls over immigrant labor, previously secured by intergovernmental agreements and electrified borders, South Africa has become the destination of choice for unprecedented numbers of people from troubled countries to the north; estimates vary from two to eight million.⁵⁷ This influx has occurred amidst transformations in the domestic economy that have significantly altered relations of labor to capital (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999c). Not only has drastic downsizing, euphemized as "jobless growth," cost some

53 "Time We Became a Bit More Neighbourly," Hopewell Radebe, *The Star*, 16 March 2000, p.13.

54 "Persecuted For an Incorrect Facial Structure," Hopewell Radebe, *The Star*, 16 March 2000, p.10; "My Four Hours as an Illegal Immigrant," Lungile Madywabe, *Mail & Guardian*, 3-9 March 2000, p.16.

55 "My Four Hours as an Illegal Immigrant," Lungile Madywabe, *Mail & Guardian*, 3-9 March 2000, p.16.

56 "Meet SA's Strange New 'Racists,'" Chris Barron, *Sunday Times*, 13 September 1998, p.19.

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

500,000 jobs in the past five years, most of them held by blacks;⁵⁸ even more noteworthy, over 80% of employers now opt for flexible, "non-standard" labor (see Adam *et al*, 1998:209), much of it done by lowly paid, non-unionized "illegals," whom farmers and industrialists see as essential to their survival in competitive markets (Reitzes, 1994:8). Small wonder, then, that unemployment is a ubiquitous anxiety; that it is seen as a major impediment to postcolonial prosperity; that routing *the alien*, who has come to embody the threat to work and welfare, presents itself as a persuasive mode of confronting economic dispossession.

Thus it is that foreigners--in particular, black foreigners--are the object of consternation and contestation across the new nation, from politicians and their parties, through the media and trade-unions, to street hawkers and the unemployed. In September 1998, a crowd returning by train from Pretoria, where they had been protesting the loss of work, threw three *makwerekwere* to their deaths for purportedly stealing jobs.⁵⁹ A few months later came reports of a gang of hoodlums in Johannesburg dedicated to the "systematic elimination" of aliens.⁶⁰ Immigrants and their property have regularly been attacked by local communities, who have forced them into "ghettos" where they are criminalized and scapegoated (Reitzes, 1994:7; Sinclair, 1996:16).⁶¹ A survey conducted in 1997 by the South African Migration Project, under the aegis of the Institute for Democracy, ranked the hostility of South Africans toward newcomers as one of the highest in the world. So acute is it that the Human Rights Commission has launched a "Roll-back Xenophobia Campaign" and various agencies of government are actively supporting cultural projects aimed at combating discrimination against outsiders.⁶²

Yet the state is itself an ambiguous actor in this drama. On one hand, it strives volubly to uphold the standards of liberal universalism, insisting on the uncompromising protection of human rights; on the other, it sometimes contributes, wittingly or not, to the mood of xenophobia. Thus its law enforcement agencies have been unable to resist the temptation of attacking the foreign specter. As its ability to maintain public order has increasingly been questioned, the Ministry of Safety and Security has grown proportionately more active in its war on non-citizens: while

58 See "Mandela Stresses Success, Struggle," Paul Salopek, *Chicago Tribune*, 6 February 1999, p.3.

59 Two were Senegalese, one from Mozambique; "Jobless Mob Goes on Death Rampage," *Cape Argus*, 4 September 1998, p.9.

60 "African Foreigners Terrorized," Tangenu Amupadhi, *Mail & Guardian*, 18-23 December 1998, p.3

61 Our observations in the North West Province confirm this. A letter to the *Mail* in Mafikeng from a "concerned villager," for instance, reported on two "illegal aliens" running businesses on the outskirts of the town, and accused them of "robbing hard working South African citizens"; "Illegal Aliens--Where's the Justice?" *The Mail*, 23 July 1999, p.4.

62 "Media Berated for Stoking Xenophobia," Pamela Dube, *The Sunday Independent*, 27 February 2000, p.3. An exhibition entitled *Kwere Kwere: Journeys into Strangeness*, held at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town in March-April 2000, was supported by, among other bodies, the Arts and Culture Trust of the President and the National Arts Council of South Africa.

anxiety about invasive plants was escalating in the opening weeks of 2000, and legislation was being formulated to prosecute those who harbored them, government announced a "US-style bid to rid SA of illegal aliens" and to penalize those who knowingly employed them.⁶³ The parallel could not have been more clear. Not long after, police officers around the country carried out high profile raids on "gentlemen's clubs" suspected of trafficking in undocumented sexworkers.⁶⁴ Onslaughts on "illegals" in show business, the media, and the music industry followed.⁶⁵ Then, within weeks, the Minister of Safety and Security personally initiated a "blitz" on the Johannesburg neighborhoods of Hillbrow, Yeoville, and Berea, well-known strongholds of immigrant business, vowing to "thoroughly ventilate" all criminal elements and illegal immigrants out.⁶⁷ Senior police in Pretoria followed suit.⁶⁸ Panic ensued as some 14,000 people were searched, over 1,000 arrested⁶⁹ and, despite their protests, "honest, taxpaying citizens" were humiliated in the streets and in taxis.⁷⁰ Distressing reports, reminiscent of the apartheid era, told of violence on the sidewalks as refugees, desperate for documentation, camped outside the Home Affairs Department, which was brought to a halt as the army of applicants swelled beyond control. Foreign nationals, held at a privately-owned deportation center, contracted by the state to deal with prohibited immigrants, were said to have been harshly beaten, their property looted.

Then began the reaction: amidst accusations of excess, senior newsmen maintained that the clamp down had seriously backfired, putting human rights at risk. They and others voiced urgent calls for a more adequate, enforceable immigration policy. Meanwhile, suspicion started to surface, just as it did in the case of invasive plants, that the zeal for weeding out aliens was misplaced. Why this harassment of strangers? asked one "appalled citizen." It was not as if *they* were guilty of the "rape, murder, hijacking and bank robberies" that South Africans were perpetrating on each other.⁷¹ The answer seems plain, at least to Steven Friedman, a columnist whose take

63 "US-Style Bid to Rid SA of Illegal Aliens," Robert Brand, *The Star*, 14 February 2000, p.1.

64 "The Best Little Whorehouse in the Civil Service," Matthew Burbidge, *Saturday Star*, 12 February 2000, p.1-2; "Brothel Raided," *Pretoria News*, 3 March 2000, p.1; "Brothel Owner Granted Bail of R10 000," Phomello Molwedi, *The Star*, 7 March 2000, p.2.

65 "Bitter Informants Flush Out Successful, but Alien Celebs," Elias Maluleke, *City Press*, 13 February 2000, p.3.

66 "Illegals Deserve Better Than This," Mathatha Tsedu, *The Star*, 20 March 2000, p.12.

67 "Time We Became a Bit More Neighbourly," Hopewell Radebe, *The Star*, 16 March 2000, p.13.

68 "121 Illegal Immigrants Held in Swoop East of City," *Pretoria News*, 3 March 2000, p.3.

69 "Police Raid Sex Club," *Sunday Times*, 19 March 2000, p.4.

70 "My Four Hours as an Illegal Immigrant," Lungile Madywabe, *Mail & Guardian*, 3-9 March 2000, p.16; "Anti-Crime Blitz Should be Extended to All Suburbs," letter to *The Star* from Lisa Mitchelson, 17 March 2000, p.7.

71 "Anti-Crime Blitz Should be Extended to All Suburbs," letter to *The Star* from Lisa Mitchelson, 17 March 2000, p.7.

on contemporary South Africa styles itself as a "worm's eye view."⁷² Arresting "illegal" immigrants may do "nothing to reduce crime." But it *does* create "the impression of activity and effectiveness" on the part of government, an illusion "often as important as reality." Here, in short, is an instance of precisely the kind of symbolic activity of which we spoke earlier; of the mass-mediated ritual excess, directed to producing state power and national unity, that features so prominently in the second postcolonial age. It appears to work. According to a Human Sciences Research Council poll, notes Friedman, most citizens believed, in December 1998, that the regime had lost its capacity to contain crime and, by extension, to assure public order. Now some 60% think that it actually *does* have some control--despite no change in the incidence of serious felonies.

Ends and Meanings

Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000:1-2) argue that the growing stress in Africa on autochthony--and, concomitantly, on the exclusion of the *allogène*, the stranger--departs in important respects from older ontologies of being, belonging, and difference. Like ethnicity, for instance, with which it shares many features, among them a capacity to arouse strong affect and to justify the erection of unambiguous social boundaries. Despite these resemblances, they say, autochthony is less specific, more protean in its substance, and thus more readily open to political manipulation on many levels at once; not least in reaction to the kinds of social and economic processes set in motion by "seemingly open-ended global flows." As we shall see, yet more may be said about its contemporary salience as a mode of producing collective consciousness, as a naturalizing allegory of collective being-in-the-world, as a motor of collective action. But it is the case that, in post-apartheid South Africa, outrage against aliens *has* provided a supplé, versatile call to arms, uniting people long divided by class, color, and culture. What is more, it is enthusiastically mobilized by those who seek to conjure a new nation, a new commonweal, not merely by bridging familiar antinomies, but by erecting finite frontiers under conditions that, by all appearances, threaten to dissolve them altogether. And, with them, the coordinates of material and moral community. We have spelled out the conditions in question. They lie in the particular historical circumstances of postcolonial nation-states at the close of the twentieth century, of their absorption into a global capitalist economy whose neoliberal ways and means have altered modernist patterns of production and consumption, the articulation of labor to capital, the nature of sovereignty and civic identity, geographies of space and time, and much else besides. Hence the insistence earlier on situating our understanding of those nation-states not in a comfortable sociology of ideal-types, but in the hard-edged specificities of their second, post-1989 coming.

Here, then, lies one theme in the theoretical counterpoint that animates this

⁷² "Action With Too Little Discussion," Steven Friedman, *Mail & Guardian*, 24-30 March 2000, p.25.

essay: the conceptualization of postcolonial polities. It is beyond our present scope, patently, to "theorize" those polities--whatever that might mean at this moment in the history of Western social thought. However, because of the manner of their insertion into world history, we have argued, they evince three notable features. Each is an intensification of the predicament of the contemporary nation-state *sui generis*, each a corollary of the changing face of capitalism, all of them interconnected. The first is the transfiguration of the modernist political subject: a move away *from* a sense of belonging in a homogeneously imagined community of right-bearing individuals *towards* one in which difference is endemic and irreducible, in which the polity subsumes persons with a range of diversely constituted identities and, therefore, collective entitlements; *from* a stress on citizenship based on "deep horizontal fraternity" to which all other connections are secondary *toward* one in which each national is a "stakeholder" vertically rooted, like homegrown plants in soil, in a body corporate; *from* a notion that attachment may be acquired equally by ascription, residence, immigration, and naturalization *toward* the primacy of autochthony, making it the most "authentic," the most essential, exclusive, and compelling of all modes of connection. The second is the contradictory logic of sovereign borders: the simultaneous necessity that they be open to various forms of flow--of finance, workers, commodities, consumers, infrastructure--and yet enclaved enough both to offer competitive advantage for global enterprise and to mediate between that enterprise and their citizens, ostensibly in the material interests of all concerned; in other words, to husband the kinds of difference, the kinds of distinction between the local and the nonlocal, from which transnational capital may profit and rich nations protect their preeminence. The third is the depoliticization of politics, their displacement from the realm of the social and the cultural, the moral and ideological, into the technical, apparently value-free dictates of the market--and its attendant forms of economic and legal "rationality." Also into the imperatives of nature, however those come to be constructed, disseminated, taken-for-granted. Of which more soon.

Put these things together, and the moral panic about strangers and immigrants becomes over determined. Take human aliens. Their very existence embodies the contradiction of borders and boundaries in the age of global capital. On one hand, by crossing those borders, often transgressively, they import value into the heart of the polity, be it as cheap, manageable labor for agribusiness or industry, as traders who undersell indigenous merchants to the advantage of local consumers, as people with skills in short supply, or whatever. On the other, they are held to take away jobs and benefits from already stretched nationals, to undercut the struggles of local workers, to bring contagion, to commit the kinds of crime (drug trafficking, major fraud, murder-for-profit) that unravel the social fabric itself. Moreover, their presence raises difficult questions about the changing nature of political citizenship in the postcolony: given that South Africa, like other nation-states, fetishizes human rights--rights, that is, which transcend parochial identities and borders of all kinds--should outsiders not enjoy them like any autochthon? What precisely ought to separate the entitlements of the citizen from those of any other human being? On what basis is discrimination

against foreigners justified in a society dedicated to "nonracism," in a nascent national culture that speaks the language of *ubuntu*, a common Africanity? Taking into account the apotheosis of the free market, why should strangers be the object of local protectionism? This, in sum, is where the liberal ideology of universal inclusion runs up against a politics of exclusion whereby identity is mobilized to create "closed" spheres of interest within "open" neoliberal economies. Note here, too, the depoliticization of politics in the treatment of the alien-as-specter, of their displacement into a technicist discourse about demography and economic sociology, about health and disease, about social pathology and criminality.

Much the same may be said of alien vegetation. We have seen how that vegetation may, simultaneously, be one person's livelihood and another's apocalypse. The passage across frontiers, among plants as among people, illuminates all the contradiction of openness and closure, of regulation and deregulation, of otherness and indigenization: *Is* the jacaranda, "almost the national tree," a naturalized South African? Or a hateful interloper? The fact that it has just now become the subject of ironic comment about subliminal racism and ethnic cleansing--something almost unthinkable a short while ago--makes clear how much the concern with borders, belonging, autochthony, and alien-nation has imploded in very recent times. It is, of course, but a short step to posing the same questions about humans. Who, exactly, *is* a South African? As this suggests, the transference into the floral kingdom of profoundly political questions is perhaps the most dramatic instance of the process of depoliticization of which we have spoken. While there is no doubt that real issues of ecology *are* raised by the effect of imported vegetation on fire and flood--as we have said, their urgency and gravity are *not* to be underestimated--the effort to construct a nation with reference to a rhetoric of exclusion, a rhetoric validated by appeal to the apparent value-free exigencies of botany and the environmental sciences, is a cogent instance of naturalization. Of which, as we noted a moment ago, more is to be said.

Before that, however, a parenthetical remark. Self-evidently, South Africa is not alone in its obsession with aliens and alien-nature. Earlier we noted that many countries, some of them postcolonies some not, are caught up in similar moral panics. These nation-states share a common feature: all are former labor importers and centers of capital--and, as such, nexus of wealth within a vastly unequal world economy--into which job-seekers and fortune hunters are popularly imagined to be pouring, usually across ill-regulated borders, in order to take scarce work and resources away from locals. This standardized nightmare evokes exactly the same anxieties as those to which we have alluded in South Africa. It has historical precedents, as we all know. Similar panics about immigration and belonging, and about inclusion and exclusion, have characteristically occurred at the close of imperial epochs, when people from former "overseas possessions" have sought entry to the "mother country" only to find that, as colonial subjects, they were barred from citizenship--and from the sovereign wealth that accrued to it.

But this leaves one remaining topic not yet resolved: Why *nature*? Here lies the other strand of our theoretical argument. It concerns naturalization. Central to our

analysis are the claims (a) that the apocalyptic fire in Cape, under-determined by the proximate events themselves, became the lightning rod for a panic about non-indigenous vegetation, a panic (b) which crystallized inchoate fears about alien-nature, named them, and called them into the heart of public consciousness; (c) that this is owed, over determinedly, to the fact that the anxiety concerning foreign flora, while real enough in and of itself, was, at the same time, also a metonymic displacement of more deep-seated questions facing the postcolonial state about the nature of its sovereign borders, about the right to citizenship within it, about the meaning and the passion inherent in national belonging--and, in particular, about the tendency to invoke autochthony in answering those questions, both pragmatically and figuratively.

This is where naturalization enters the picture. Recall again what we said about it at the outset: that, classically, it has had two contrary connotations. One is the assimilation of alien persons, signs, and practices into a world-in-place; its prototype is the metamorphosis of outlanders into citizens of the liberal modernist nation-state. The other, whose genealogy stretches from Marx through Gramsci to Foucault, is the deployment of nature as alibi, as a fertile allegory for rendering *some* people and objects strange, thereby to authenticate the limits of the ("natural") order of things; also to interpolate within it new social and political distinctions. It is tempting, in the South African case, to invoke yet another connotation--one owed to Durkheim--according to which processes in nature are taken to be a direct reflection of processes in society. Some local commentators did precisely this, as we have seen, finding in the panic about invasive plants a mirror for the angst about immigrants. But such a reading of the events in question is insufficient. Nature is everywhere more directly, more dynamically implicated in the social practices by which history and ideology make each other. Here the unfolding controversy about indigenous plants and alien-nature became the vehicle for a public debate, as yet unfinished, over the proper constitution of the polity, over the limits of belonging, over the terms in which the nation, the commonweal, and the stakeholding subject are to be constituted in the age of global capitalism and universal human rights. In so doing, it permitted a vocalization of anxieties and conundrums not easily addressed by politics-as-usual. Even more, the displacement of the argument about outsiders into the floral kingdom made it possible, by analogy, to contemplate and legitimate discrimination against those humans not embraced in the body of the nation, those cast adrift on the currents of the new world order. And sanctioned, albeit unwittingly, a new, postracist form of racism; a form of racism that, by concealing itself in the language of autochthony and alien-nature, has come to co-exist seamlessly with a transnational culture of universal rights.

As this implies, discourses of nature cast a sharp light on the everyday actions and events through which definitions of belonging and citizenship--and their dark underside, the politics of exclusion--are being reframed in the postcolony. In particular, they illuminate the question of why it is that autochthony--the form of affective and material attachment that ties people to place, that natures the nation,

that authorizes entitlement--has become so central in an epoch when nationhood seems at once critical and yet in crisis, when borders everywhere present themselves as paradoxes, when a beleaguered political imagination strives to make sense of social being in a world of *laissez faire*.

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