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Jean Comaroff
University of Chicago

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THE PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN SOUTH AFRICAN: IDENTITY IN A GLOBAL AGE

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I. Introduction: Figuring the Nation

In September 1995, the South African National Gallery in Cape Town staged an exhibition titled "People's Portraits."[1] While the aim of the show was clearly to depict an emergent nation, the clash of images[2] suggested that the national self remained undefined.[3] This was hardly surprising: the exhibition came at a time of epic transition and was itself the product of collaboration between two very different national institutions — the gallery, which had been a window of high culture in the neocolonial mode, and a critical newspaper, the *Weekly Mail*, that had long struggled to reveal the ordinary face of a diverse, suppressed population. As Jane Taylor notes,[4] this contrast bequeathed two inimical styles of imagining a people. One, expressing the gallery's sense of South Africa's new national cultural identity, consisted of individual portraits, representing the "people" as a range of identities making up a multicultural aggregate. The second, faithful to a legacy of nationalist struggle, depicted a populace in its exemplary figures — heroes, martyrs, and ordinary citizens — all of them products of a particular political history. It was an uneasy juxtaposition that sparked its share of controversy.

This story is instructive. It captures well the problem that surrounds the relation of persons and collectivities, "identity" and "citizenship," in a rapidly changing world, a world that struggles ever more stridently over what Salman Rushdie has termed

"Imperso-nation"[5]—the process of figuring the nation in exemplary human form.

In the "new" South Africa, the problem poses itself in a stark, highly contentious manner: What nation? Which face? Many regard the issue as primarily one of ethnic identification, of primordial differences now voluntarily embraced rather than imposed by law. Others, raised in socialist struggle, view the post-apartheid polity as a democracy at last: a community of newly enfranchised, universally conceived citizens, each a member of a thoroughly modern "rainbow nation" whose unity transcends all other distinctions. As I write, though, the image of shared generic identity is increasingly being called into question; hence the story of the "People's Portraits" exhibition and the argument to which it gave rise. Indeed, one of the ironies of contemporary South Africa has been the speed with which its people have begun to move to the beat of other advanced capitalist countries, even embracing a politics of difference that recalls the most divisive features of colonial rule.

Why should this be so, especially in a population keenly aware of the dehumanizing effects of racism? More generally, why does the assertion of ethnicity — an assertion, that is, of exclusive, coherent, and unambiguous identity — occur in the "postmodern," translocal age, an age in which selfhood is supposedly unstable and global forces appear to rob local life of its uniqueness and coherence? How is it that a sense of difference manifests itself in a world ever more dominated by homogenizing forces, a world watching the same news, drinking the same Coke, moving to the same electronic pulse? Does this form of difference arise from a "clash of civilizations"? Or is it an integral dimension of the emerging global order itself, of a planetary system at once unified and divided by identity and nationhood, privation and privilege? Why is it that, in the era of "Jihad vs. McWorld,"[6] society itself has become so difficult to envisage as an inclusive human order—an order composed of people capable of seeing themselves as a fraction of a generic species?

II. Continuities and Breaks

Perhaps all epochs, at their close, encourage forward and backward glances. Perhaps all of them give rise to an ambiguous mix

of nostalgia and apprehension, evoking the kind of portentousness that leads us to contemplate the "end of the world as we know it." The late twentieth century is also the end of a millennium, making the period seem yet more apocalyptic than the fin-de-siècle 1890s, with which it otherwise shares a certain Zeitgeist. To be sure, the world as it has evolved over the past two decades has challenged, as never before, the vision of society bequeathed us by the Enlightenment, making us aware that the "modern"—with its particular definition of person and society, citizen and nation—described a historically and culturally specific age, not the last stage in human social evolution. A growing dis-ease with that age, and with its progressivist assumptions, is expressed in many of the terms given to the contemporary moment, most of them (postmodern, postcolonial, post-Fordist) attached by a hyphen to the past. These uncertain terms suggest less a confident march into the future than an edging backward into the unknown. And they contrast markedly with the thrusting optimism of phrases like "the new world order" or the "global epoch."

Both of these perspectives—backward and forward glancing—obviously express a truth about the way our world is experienced just now. Yet each is only a partial truth, an inadequate basis for understanding the contemporary era and the place within it of the human subject. For ours is a world that produces both strong identification with, and alienation from, the tenets of modern universalism, a world that seems to breed ever greater measures of human difference as it draws humanity into ever-tighter interdependence. One need not agree altogether with *Atlantic Monthly* alarmists such as Robert Kaplan, Matthew Connelly, and Paul Kennedy[7] or with "Clash of Civilizations" Cassandras[8] to conclude that unilinear models of progress no longer grasp the realities of a universe that is moving in many directions at once. But these multiple movements are no more legible if viewed from beyond the "posts," from the fragmentary position of postmodern and postcolonial thinkers who reject grand histories of modernity and who see the present largely as a radical break with the immediate past. This preoccupation with disjuncture and distinctness blinds us to continuities and precludes our understanding of how the present has been produced out of the past. Why have similar assertions of ethnic dif-

ference emerged simultaneously in some parts of the world and not in others, for example? How do these professions of difference vary from the kind of identities long conferred by the nation-state? Why have the axioms of modern secular citizenship, once framed in the language of universal rights, given way in many places to a kind of ethnic essentialism that undercuts such universal assumptions? Why have such apparently counter-modern tendencies emerged under conditions of industrial capitalism and within the nation-state, indeed, out of the very forms of modernity itself?

Let me approach the matter in the broadest possible way. It might well be argued that we are currently in the midst of a period of radical transformation, an age of revolution, akin perhaps to the European Age of Revolution of 1789–1848.[9] That, after all, was an era of great shifts in relations of production and modes of communication and exchange; an era in which local communities were drawn into more "global" systems of transaction through increasing monetization, numeration, and literacy; an era in which the free market became both the model of the self-regulating economy and the engine of the Wealth of Nations, not to mention the means of this-worldly salvation for the individual citizen-worker-consumer. True, the basic institutional forms of Euro-modernity had older material and political roots. But they took definitive shape at that point, championed by the rise of what Hobsbawm has termed the "conquering bourgeoisie."[10]

These European cultural forms presumed a world of individuated human beings, each responsible for his own salvation, on earth as in heaven. Such self-determining creatures, at least in theory, had rights — "civil" rights, ensured not by Church or King but by the nation-state, in whose eyes all citizens were alike and equal. The integrity of the "modern" nation, as Anderson[11] and others[12] have shown, was a complex cultural construction. Vested in tightly bounded legal and fiscal jurisdictions, it wielded control over the exercise of force — not least upon the bodies of its subjects. A distinctly modern idea of "society" was implicated in all this: society as a generic human fabrication, resting on secure distinctions between the sacred and the secular, the private and the public, the (feminine) home and the (masculine) workplace. The nuclear family was its basic atom,

its moral and material core, being the site where the complementary principles of gendered labor fused in the reproduction of persons, virtue, and value.

This order, I stress, was a *cultural* ideal. During the Age of Revolution it was still in formation, often the stuff of urgent evangelical campaigns, and, in some places, of bitter contestation. Its practical arrangements were also always in conflict with historical realities: generic humanism was rapidly and deeply compromised by growing inequalities of class, also by the insidious evolutionary racism that accompanied nineteenth-century colonial expansion, itself complexly intertwined with categories of sexual difference that became ever more enshrined in ideas of biological function.

With this in mind, let me consider some of the features of our current "new world order." We, too, live in an epoch of radical change with regard to the location and organization of production, the nature of money, and the media of communication and transaction. These shifts have drawn existing communities into ever more translocal systems of exchange. Accelerated processes of globalization have been marked by the speedy growth of planetary institutions, movements, and diasporas. These also have precedent: the late eighteenth century saw the rise in Europe of market-driven imperialism, foreign missions, and empires that were worldwide in their reach. Now, as then, localized economic structures have been quite suddenly and dramatically transcended. And commodities have invaded, with seemingly novel intensity, domains of life once beyond their grasp. The hidden hand of that key theorist of the earlier revolutionary age, Adam Smith, has shown itself once more. The "free market" is more assertively invoked than ever as *the* prime mechanism of social and moral regulation.

Such parallels support the view of Mandel and Jameson[13] that, far from signalling a sudden rupture with the age of modernity, the new era of globalization is yet another chapter in the long history of capitalism, even an intensification and consolidation of its universal reach. But all this has also been accompanied by significant changes in technology, in the organization of production and communication, and in patterns of wealth distribution. These changes have disrupted many of the social arrangements and cultural values of Euro-modernity, exposing contradictions

long held in check by the power of bourgeois ideals. Above all, they have challenged the sovereignty of the nation-state and the model of civil society it presumed. Indeed, "society" itself has become an ever more contested object, and a politics of plural, alternative modernities is undermining the idea of one universal order vested in the unity of the nation and its common weal. Along with this, shifts in means and relations of production have altered the gender and age of labor forces across the globe, further unsettling established modernist notions of home, family, work, and personhood. Not only is the material base of national economies usurped by forces beyond the control of sovereign parliaments, but the very organs of social and moral reproduction, the cradles of "family values," are themselves in peril.

We ought to explore these features in a little more detail since they turn out to be very significant. Globalization is a concept of relatively recent vintage, usually used to refer to forces of new scope and salience. In its unspecific sense, it tends to imply a world increasingly subject to cultural and material compression, to diverse (and grossly unequal) interdependencies, and to a growing awareness of its one-ness.[14] In this regard, again, the phenomenon is hardly unprecedented.[15] European modernity itself presumed what Heidegger[16] termed a "world picture" (*Weltbild*), a composite map on which a universal history could be staged and empires staked out. What is more, capitalist markets have always been translocal, just as nation-states have always been embroiled in worldwide webs of relations. Even more definitively, "modern" memory has been shaped by world wars that have long taught grim lessons in the deadly entanglement of the planet's populations.[17]

Nevertheless, there are those who insist that "postmodern globalization" differs significantly from "modern internationalism,"[18] which was largely a matter of controlled exchanges between bounded and centered sovereign states. Postmodern globalization, by contrast, involves relations that are first and foremost *translocal*; that cut across preexisting groups, cultures, and regions to form vast and virtual commonalities; and that dissolve and reconfigure old borders and polarities. Such systems are of various kinds (economic, cultural, technological, ecological) and are most frequently described in terms of com-

munications models as made up of "networks," "webs," and "flows" — that is, in terms of the very technologies that have helped to construct the new world of which they are part.[19]

Jameson has criticized efforts to depict the global order as "some immense communicational and computer network."[20] I agree with him. These models, he asserts, are "distorted figurations" of something deeper, something as yet very hard to grasp: the world system of multinational capital. In this respect, we are in much the same position as were theorists of modernity like Marx and Weber, who strove to map and conceptualize the expansion of capital and the new worlds it conjured up. We also strain to follow the pathways of a monetary system that appears suddenly to be much more abstract and mobile; to register the reach of the market into enclaves hitherto set off, in whole or in part, from the relentless reach of the commodity — into non-Western and former statist economies, and into relatively insulated realms in our own being, where human organs are now for sale and wombs are for rent.[21]

Central to the era of multinational capital, and hence to its distinctive social effects, is the rise of a transnational monetary system to replace its international predecessor. Joel Kurtzman has argued that the growth of a global electronic economy — based on an "electronic commons" in which virtual money and commodities may be exchanged instantly via an unregulated world computer network — has shattered the financial and productive integrity of nation-states.[22] In particular, it has eroded their monopolistic control over the money supply, their ability to contain wealth within borders, and their power to levy taxes on citizens and corporations. As Kurtzman puts it, the "functional economic unit becomes the world instead of the nation-state," and countries are drawn into a global workshop and economy.[23] The division of labor now spans the planet, turning whole countries into the sweatshops or migrant labor forces of others, others who seem to live by consumption alone. Class relations have become so dispersed as to be invisible; few products or transactions are purely "national" anymore. If goods are the bearers of encapsulated worlds, as Mauss and Marx insisted, most things we buy today are icons of multinationalism. For translocal corporations, their "offshore" bases increasingly bypassing established capitals, can move production around the

world almost at will. They can also evade monopoly and environmental controls and the effects of organized labor. To wit, the forces of global capital, Robert Ross claims, now determine state policy, causing governments to restrain regulations, cut taxes, and subsidize corporate production with public funds.[24]

The effect of all this is to undermine the sovereignty of states and the wealth of nations. The rhetoric of the market increasingly dictates the terms of national politics, with leaders of *all* political parties vying with one another to balance budgets, pare welfare costs, and privatize public services. Nations derive ever greater proportions of their revenues from sources like lotteries and the sale of heritage; citizens are redefined as patriotic consumers ("Buy British"). Government itself becomes a dirty word, and many Westerners are now strongly suspicious of it. Some even set out to destroy it. New political-economic confederations, such as the European Union (EU) and NAFTA, are further subserviating sovereign polities to broader market considerations. As European countries struggle variously with the impact of the EU, their elites tend to compensate for reduced authority with more strident national chauvinism. Meanwhile, marginalized regional groups (Scottish, Flemish, Basque) now see prospects of independence beyond old hegemonies.

While the dislocation of local and national identities might seem liberating to some, others find them disconcerting. Ordinary people often express their dis-ease with such shifts in terms of the rather mundane practices that once secured more enclosed, familiar worlds. In England over the past year, for instance, many have voiced distress at the idea of losing their national currency. In December 1995, a talk-show participant on BBC Radio 4 drew implicitly on three interconnected notions of the "sovereign" — coin, king, and country — when she asked anxiously, "If we have to adopt European money, whose head will be on our pennies?" Here once again is the problem of fixing the state in exemplary human form, the problem of the South African portrait in another guise. Whose head will it be? Sovereigns, sovereignty. Heads on coins, heads of state. All of a piece, all falling to pieces. Or so it seemed to those Euro-challenged English subjects.

The mobility of money, manufacture, and markets across national borders has also caused rapid reallocations of employ-

ment opportunities over the globe, encouraging large-scale human migrations. This, too, has had profound effects on the constitution of "countries" and their connection to their inhabitants. Translocal communities have grown greatly in strength and cohesiveness in recent decades. Far-flung, assertive diasporas (African, Islamic, Sikh, Jewish, Cuban) complicate the very idea of the nation as a homogeneous "body" of people within a continuous terrain, or, for that matter, of "citizenship" as a form of undivided allegiance. In many contexts, minorities make up ever larger fractions of the majority, and institutions of public culture espouse "multicultural" and "polyethnic" solutions to problems of collective representation. Along with this, there has developed a preoccupation with universal human rights and so-called "world citizenship."[25] For many workers today live permanently translocal lives: people wait on tables in Chicago to support families in the Yucatán, mind children in Milan to build homes in the Philippine countryside, tend the sick in Johannesburg to secure retirement in Uganda. Globetrotting brokers and cosmopolitan intellectuals create novel cultural hybrids and demonstrate the virtues of an existence beyond partisan traditions.[26] And virtues there surely are, especially for those of us who travel by choice and in relative comfort. The racial/ethnic mix of many current "national" sports teams are living instances of a marriage of convenience between patriotic chauvinism and the world market in migrant athletes.

But multiculturalism, like the concern with universal rights, often fails to engage underlying structures of inequality and exploitation that are themselves global in scale. As unbalanced wealth and resources drive the poor toward more prosperous centers, ("First World") governments become preoccupied by illegal immigration, raising the specter of dwindling employment, welfare scrounging, and cultural dilution. At the same time, the global economy has so radically restructured the labor market in advanced industrial societies that workers *every*where are now being made to compete with the most exploitative productive contexts in the world. Once denounced as examples of oriental despotism, the profitable "tiger economies" are now hailed by many Western industrialists as models of efficiency.

In the United States, the move of manufacture "offshore" or south of the border has rendered entire communities redundant

and all workers insecure (a point powerfully made in the recent *New York Times* series "The Downsizing of America").[27] As the remaining work force becomes more feminized, youthful, part time, and low paid, sizable sectors of our population must contemplate life without the kind of jobs that once created a sense of self and place. For most of us are products of a world in which labor remains the major source of value and status—but a world in which full-time, long-term employment is also a thing of the past. Instead, various twilight economies have burgeoned. Yet these, like the forms of contract work that are now so prevalent in all sectors of the economy, often deny the experience of permanence and coexistence that once underpinned our sense of moral community and local context. New forms of association have arisen, from health clubs and youth gangs to a host of new, often intensely materialistic, world-transforming religions. The kinds of social imaginary they will foster remains to be seen.

Globalization, then, has complex material bases; as Jameson insists, it is not made of ether alone. As I noted earlier, however, new communication technologies *have* been crucial instruments in reconfiguring the contours of the world; all the more so when these technologies are viewed as a planetary "ecumene," a domain of cultural interaction and exchange.[28] Not only do distant populations consume the same CNN soundbites, the same American, Brazilian, or Australian soaps, but the satellite signals beamed to their dishes evade control — control once exercised by states and governments—over flows of images and information, flows integral to the creation of collective consciousness and national "publics." Anderson has argued persuasively that the monitoring and translation of "news" into local idiom were significant in producing an imagined community, in evoking a sense of national culture and a shared "simultaneity through time."[29] Global media, on the other hand, tend to operate at the level of the most common symbolic denominator on a worldwide scale, most often in English.

This does *not* mean that their images lack meaning in local terms. I shall argue the very opposite. But, as Hannerz has observed, translocal cultural traffic does tend to ignore, dissolve, or devalue national boundaries.[30] Its media often lack the contextual cues that situate local experience in wider sociopolitical communities, that make a particular place out of unbounded

space—a place, that is, other than urban America, which is often more familiar to consumers elsewhere than much of their own countries. Sometimes this very quality can be put to liberating effect: South African youth drew on the culture of the black American inner city to imagine a world beyond the reach of the apartheid state. But their disengagement from the local moral community has also proved resistant to the efforts of the new regime to capture their hearts and minds. As this suggests, in the postcolonial era, cultural flows draw complex maps whose borders defy old center-periphery schemes, and exist more in electronic than in geographical space. The new centers are pulse points in complex networks or are sites of world-scale image production (Los Angeles, Atlanta, São Paulo, Dakar) rather than the capitals of nation-states.

The expansion of media such as electronic mail has exacerbated the production of spaces with virtual (and hence, virtually no) boundaries. True, the relative cheapness and flexibility of the Internet have inspired varied sorts of communal uses and have made it a favorite with politicians trying to reconcile democracy with the free market. Remember the Electronic Town Hall? But the nature of the medium seems to be more suited to dreams of libertarian enterprise untrammeled by state censorship or regulation (as recent examples of high-tech neo-Nazi militia networks confirm).

And so we return directly to the reconstruction of the world in this Age of Revolution. As I have tried to show, the era of global capital has seen the erosion of both the legitimacy of sovereign states and their capacity to localize the manufacture of value and meaning. As the division of labor is dispersed across the earth, national economies and/or polities are superseded as tangible terrains on which production, exchange, and consumption exist in close connection to one another. Here, then, is the point: There has arisen a palpable discrepancy between the way we in the West think about "society" and the way in which we currently experience it. For our conceptual categories — our notions of moral community, personhood, identity—owe their origins to the ascendance of the nation-state and to the kinds of arrangement contained within it. In popular perception we have tended to envisage Western society (and also its "non-Western" opposites) in terms of national political economies and intellec-

tual patrimonies. And within the social sciences, too, concepts of "the social order" and "culture" have been largely synonymous with territorially defined polities.[31] But, for all the reasons given, none of these concepts, molded in the cradle of Euro-modernity, will do any longer. Our selves and worlds are in the grip of forces whose outlines we only partially see, forces that ambiguate prevailing categories but as yet offer few alternatives, few, at least, that link vast impersonal mechanisms to situated people and their moral concerns.

Of course, not all that was solid has melted into air. Or ether. The complexity of the current moment lies *not* in the fact that it is definitively postmodern, postindustrial, or post-anything else. Instead, it combines core features of the modern world in unfamiliar, uneasy combinations — speeded up, stretched to the breaking point, recombined—whose very unfamiliarity is made plain by market forces of new intensity, new possibility. Nation-states have not died or even, by and large, withered away, although there are spaces on the map where they have splintered, where government is in the hands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), so-called warlords, or corporations. In short, their nature and their spheres of operation have altered as they have lost exclusive economic, fiscal, and political control over their domains. They have also, Appadurai notes, relinquished their monopoly over the idea of the "nation" itself.[32] That idea is now espoused by all manner of groups that seek self-realization in the only idiom they know—those of modern nationhood.

At the same time, states themselves have entered an era of devolution, privatization, and (in neoconservative-speak) retraction of rule. In response, they have intensified their efforts to shore up national patrimony in realms that remain under their suasion: in place of bread, they offer such circuses as public spectacles, monuments, gladiatorial sports; in place of import controls, they police immigration; in place of a politics of production, they obsess over the politics of population and reproduction. Thus government becomes ever more embroiled in patrolling borders and controlling access to abortion, its rhetoric linking bodies politic to bodies personal by way of the idioms of health, sexual orientation, family values, and the rights of the unborn. As if to confirm this, a "quality" British newspaper

Exit Elizabeth . . .
You choose the President of Britain
Readers' poll 2/3

The mega-museum
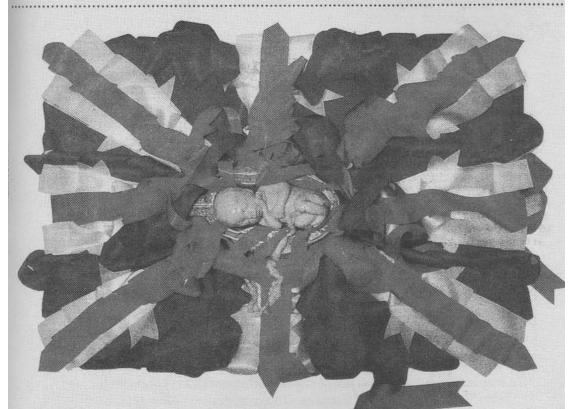Culure palace or catastrophe?
The house that Alessandro built
Arts 12/13

Leader or liability?
Is Alan Yentob up to running BBC1?
Media 14/15

New Republic

2

*The*Guardian

Monday 9 January 1995

Birth of the
New Republic

recently coined a cover image to accompany an article on the constitution of nation in the next century ("Birth of the New Republic"). It pictured a fetus nestling at the heart of a large Union Jack (see Plate 1).[33] Here, again, the so-called postmodern replays, albeit with a novel emphasis, long-standing modernist themes — like the tendency to root nationality in nature and in the essence of the human form.[34]

III. Globalization and Nation-State

This leads us back to the portrait of the (as yet) unknown South African and to the issues it raises with respect to ethnicity, nationalism, and the politics of identity.

The interplay between globalization and the nation-state has spawned two simultaneous, interrelated processes, both of which I have already mentioned. The first is the effort of governments to redress breaches of sovereignty by reasserting their control and presence in registers they still command, from patriotic spectacles to biopolitics. The second, exacerbated by worldwide movements of peoples and cultures, is an increasingly urgent assertion of difference, an explosion of ethnic and other forms of identity politics within and across national communities. It was precisely these two tendencies that ran up against one another in the matter of the South African portrait. The prior question, however, is *how* did they come to coexist in the first place?

Several answers have been posited. Perhaps the most common is that expressions of ethnic and religious difference are assertions of persisting primordial sentiments among those whose passage to rational modernity has somehow been impeded by history — people like fundamentalists, tribalists, or survivors of the Soviet Empire. Others suggest the reverse, but invoke the same evolutionary logic: that the global economy has dissolved local identities everywhere, but rather than rejoice in universal civilization, many "chafe at becoming just another interchangeable part" of a world market and manifest a "new 'tribalism.' "[35] Hence the florescence of ethnic consciousness all over, from East Africa to Central Europe and North America.

Neither of these positions is tenable. In the first place, both alike treat ethnic assertion (with its claims to difference) and the

spread of modernity (with its homogenizing effects) as if each described a distinct, exclusive phase of history, a teleological stage in human development. Yet all the evidence shows not only that the two often coexist, but also that they are reciprocally defining features of the same historical moment. As this implies, ethnic consciousness is *not* the preserve of the premodern: those who profess it tend to do so in fairly standard and recognizably modernist terms—terms whose currency has been coined by the imprint of the contemporary world. As this implies, too, ethnicity is less an essence than a relation,[36] sharing strong family resemblances with other forms of distinguishing identity in advanced capitalist societies. Nor, by extension, is its assertion an atavistic response to homogenization. Few ethnicized populations actually withdraw from the global economy; a large number (like Zulu Inkatha supporters, Scottish Nationalists, or Canadian Québecois) seek more independent and equitable access to it. Far from arising out of a spreading sense of sameness, their self-awareness is owed to a particular, culturally situated take on the new world order, one that tries to make sense of why a market that is "free" and rights that are "universal" yield so many palpable exclusions and inequalities.

Well, why do they?

The answer has already been anticipated.

Recall. The Enlightenment legacy of human liberty, equality, and citizenship implied a moral community in the form of the nation-state within which rights could be exercised and wrongs redressed. Attachment to this community was invested with "primordial" emotions, emotions of the sort frequently ascribed, ironically, to "tribals." Those emotions, moreover, were inscribed, à la Foucault, on bodies as well as minds, forging a deep resonance between self and society. It is just this ensemble of connections — among national communities and the consciousness they produce among right-bearing, embodied citizens and their primal sentiments — that global forces are undermining. In these circumstances political elites tend to make ever more emotive, chauvinist appeals to national heritage, appeals that, by their very nature, further attenuate the position of the marginal. That the politics of difference, fostered by the "postmodern" condition, should be mobilized along those very fault lines would seem overdetermined: they offer

those excluded from the national imaginary alternative means and ends, alternative forms of moral community, envisaged in similarly visceral terms.[37] This is why ethnic movements replay the themes of modern nationalism in a discordant key, challenging states with their own stifled contradictions.

Let me stress how this view differs from the ones I mentioned a moment ago. In insisting on the modernity of contemporary forms of ethnicity, I obviously part company with those who explain the phenomenon in primordialist terms. In this, I echo the arguments of many others — although primordialism persists both in popular and scholarly discourse, perhaps *because* it resonates with the sentiments of many ethnic movements. But it is also insufficient merely to proclaim that ethnicity is a social construction. In order to account for its currency in the here-and-now, we have to explore its relation to prevailing social and material conditions; for, I repeat, it is a *relational* phenomenon, a product of the place of particular peoples in a populous world. Globalization and localization are two sides of the same coin, two dimensions of the same historical movement. For the transnational flow of goods and images *demands* their domestication, a process through which they are made relevant to parochial projects and everyday lives. As anthropologists have long insisted, there is no such thing as a universal symbol or icon, notwithstanding the fact that ever more signs circulate through the universe each day.

Meaning is always translated into vernacular terms, even if the act of translation modifies the terms themselves. That much was learned by those purveyors of planetary platitudes, American ad men, who discovered some years ago that the slogan "Coke Adds Life" is rendered in Chinese as "Coke Brings the Ancestors Back from the Dead." The very *experience* of globalism creates and re-creates a specific awareness of the local. It is this that gives texture to efforts to refigure moral communities; indeed, to refigure the nature of society itself. It explains why ethnic movements, far from eschewing translocal signs and commodities, often deploy them, brilliantly, in assertions of primordial tradition; why Andean folk dress is made of imported polyester fiber,[38] or Gangsta Rap has become a pulsing medium of "colored" identity politics in Cape Town.[39]

The newly animated politics of identity, in other words, is the sum of a compromised nationhood, often patriotically on the defensive, and a rising sense of local difference. The latter conjures with both the self-assertion and the contradictions of the state, typically taking the form of ethno-nationalism. Not all ethnic movements are nationalist, of course.[40] But there seems to be a growing convergence in the late twentieth century between ethnic consciousness and nationalist claims.[41] Other forms of identity also borrow national terms with which to imagine themselves (Queer Nation, Hip Hop Nation, the Nation of Islam). For, anachronistic though it may be, nationalism remains the prevailing political idiom, the predominant way of conceiving relations of subject and society in our world. Ethnonationalism, however, differs from modernist Euro- or universal-nationalism, Tambiah[42] and others have noted, partly because it is often the product — at least, initially — of struggle *against* the hegemony (and inherent ambiguities) of the Western nation-state. It is also a product of sociohistorical conditions unlike those pertaining to Europe, 1789 – 1848. What it envisages, I reiterate, is an alternative modernity, a late modernity that seeks to fashion moral communities in the global marketplace.

Perhaps, as Deane has said, all nationalisms exhibit a measure of "metaphysical essentialism."[43] But Euro-nationalism, born of an assertively humanist era—posits a territorially bounded, secular state founded on putatively worldwide principles of citizenship and social contract. Human differences—most notably race and gender — might qualify these universals but should never cancel them out. Although such citizenship was, and is, a matter of committed bodies, even souls, one need not be born a national. It is possible to become a "naturalized" member of the polity by a voluntary act of commitment. (Colonial "outposts" have always complicated this imaginary, of course, but that is another story.) Ethno-nationalism, in contrast, is primarily a matter of birth and blood, and occasionally of conversion and intermarriage. Ethno-nationalists may or may not root themselves in idealized homelands; some such lands, like the Sikh Khalistan, are territories of a hopeful imagination. Their sphere of allegiance is often virtual, being vested in strong, active diasporas that stretch across existing states and borders. Ethno-

nationalism, above all, celebrates cultural particularity, which is often explicitly religious in inspiration and charter. Ironically, while they frequently reject humanist universals, these movements still rely on certain de facto commonalities (among them, the global salience of cultural difference) to do business in the world.

As I have drawn them here, the two nationalisms are ideological types, not historical realities. For a start, universal- or Euro-nationalism is not confined to Europe. And several self-styled "European" nations, past and present, have assumed many of the features of ethno-nationalism (Israel, for instance, which has been hailed as inspiration by South African ethno-nationalists of all colors). The converse is also true; separatists with ambition tend to embrace many of the forms of the modernist nation-state. Both are capable of giving rise to hideous violence in the name of the collectivity; and while states often define their violence as legitimate — as opposed to "terrorist" or insurgent — force, cases like Northern Ireland; KwaZulu, Natal; and Sri Lanka show how difficult it may be to distinguish between the two. Those who subscribe to one form of nationalism roundly condemn the other: ethno-nationalists are portrayed as primitive, fanatical, and dangerous; Euro-nationalists are accused of mouthing global platitudes in defense of long-established privilege, espousing "amorphous nonracism and common humanity" (as a self-identified, South African "black communicator" recently put it)[44] to protect neocolonial interests.

Exchanges of this sort are common these days, not least because most polities are actually "hetero-nationalist,"[45] i.e., hybrids that seek to reconcile ethnic identity politics with a Euro-nationalist conception of civil society. Speaking the language of "pluralism," such formations try to accommodate cultural diversity within a community of autonomous, legally undifferentiated citizens — whose rights include the freedom to assert difference. The United States, which combines a strong republican tradition with a rich immigrant past and marked economic disparities, has become the epicenter of present-day hetero-nationalism. The mix encourages "multiculturalism" but has also resulted in bitter disputes wherever individual rights run up against group entitlements, especially to public resources and the means of political and cultural representation.

The "argument of images" captured in the "People's Por-
traits" exhibition was an aesthetic expression of this same ten-
sion. In South Africa, the long, hard struggle for a
European-style democracy finally triumphed at the very
moment when the Euro-nationalist ideal, and the ideological
scaffolding that held it in place, was being destabilized on a
worldwide scale. Here, as in the former USSR and Central
Europe, battles are now being fought between modernist and
ethno-nationalist forces. Bitter battles. Also revealing ones. For,
if ethno-nationalists have revivified the very principles of racial
and cultural difference that were the stock-in-trade of apartheid,
they have also laid bare the dark, divisive underside of Euro-
nationalism itself, especially in its colonial and postcolonial
manifestations.

The dangers of these confrontations are now seared on our
awareness. At their most extreme, they replay a thoroughly con-
temporary *Heart of Darkness* horror: the nightmare of difference
seeking to prevail by (literally) disembodying humanity.[46] In
claiming right by means of might, such desperate measures
promise to entrench, not erase, prevailing structures of disad-
vantage. More than this, identity politics, even in its more
benign forms, reproduces critical features of the culture of the
world-as-marketplace. Its ideology is one of assertion and enti-
tlement, of the "me generation" extended to the "we genera-
tion."[47] The group, here, is less an inclusive totality — where a
common denominator grounds difference and admits other dis-
tinctions — than the sum of individual self-interest. Whatever its
mythic charter, the sectarian struggles of our age often echo the
clarion call of free enterprise: in the words of Margaret Thatcher,
"There is no such thing as society."

One last corollary is especially significant: the language of
identity politics cannot adequately address the history of its
own making. Nor can it explain itself in terms other than its own
ideology. As a result, it obscures and mystifies the very
processes that continue to marginalize many peoples and to
widen the gap between privilege and privation on a planetary
scale. A UN survey published in July 1996, for example, found
that "an emerging global elite . . . interconnected in a variety of
ways, is amassing great wealth and power, while more than half
of humanity is left out." Among its conclusions was the observa-

tion that "the wealthiest and the poorest people — both within and among countries — are living in increasingly separate worlds."[48] It is not surprising, then, that humanist universals seem less and less plausible in subjective terms. Yet the politics of identity tend to take separation and difference as the prime mover of (post? neo?) modern history, thereby neglecting the very (general) forces that separate and differentiate in the first place: the forces of economic exploitation and political disempowerment inflected in gender and generation, race and ethnicity, culture and class.

IV. Identity in the "New" South Africa

Let me return, one last time, to South Africa, where these conundrums are currently much in evidence.

Here, several constituencies pursue ethno-nationalist politics in the name of primordial difference. Most conspicuous among them are conservative white Afrikaners and the Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party. Both have struggled hard to ensure that the principle of ethnic sovereignty be inscribed in the constitution of the post-apartheid nation-state. Three points of comparative salience may be distilled from their efforts. (1) Both groups have continued to conduct their campaigns along lines of ethnic and racial division — even, for certain purposes, making common cause *across* racial lines to do so. The so-called Freedom Front emerged in the early 1990s as a unity of various ethnic separatists, black and white, against the integrative politics of both the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party.[49] (2) There has been sustained violence as all-or-none distinctions have been reinscribed onto human flesh; the targets have been those who ambiguate sociopolitical contrasts, like Afrikaner liberals or Zulu ANC supporters, whose homes and families have been subject to special violation.[50] (3) The objective of these ethno-nationalists has been to secure group entitlements rather than universal human or civic rights; the predicament of those marginalized by poverty, age, or gender receives little mention.

The nonracial ANC, conversely, has always sought to transcend ethnicity. In its view, "tribalism," if not actually a colonial creation, was exploited and elaborated by imperial policies of "divide and rule." The "new" South Africa was to be a social

democracy, an unashamedly modernist Euro-nation[51] whose birth was long delayed by apartheid. Too long delayed, as it turned out. In the late twentieth century, a post-apartheid state could not remain indifferent to difference.[52] Along with strident Afrikaner and Zulu nationalist movements, a host of other groups (Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, Coloured, Griqua, Muslim) have begun to press for collective rights, often looking to American identity politics for models. Are these movements to be seen as a residue of colonialism? Or as the legitimate claims of people in a historically diverse society? In light of this dilemma, the ANC, now in government, has been forced to rethink the whole question of culture and ethnicity along familiar, hetero-nationalist lines. Celebrations of distinctive traditions, long frowned on by many who struggled against apartheid, are now freely indulged in, encouraged in no small measure by an expanding tourist market.

Is it any wonder, under the circumstances, that those entrusted with the nation's culture find it impossible to put a face on "the" new South African? Or that South Africans themselves find the question of who they are, the question of social membership or "identity," to be problematic in unprecedented, unexpected ways? Under apartheid, the state was enclosed by an ideology that imposed stark, and starkly different, subject positions—although it portrayed itself in the language of modernist nationhood, a language familiar to its "First World" allies. The unmaking of the Afrikaner state, on the other hand, was played out in parallel with the rise of the new global era. Its death throes occurred amidst internal resistance assisted not only by international campaigns but by the same large-scale, transnational forces that dissolved the lines of the Cold War map. The new South Africa was born into a universe of altered alignments and compromised sovereignties, fleeing capital, worldwide recession, and eroding national wealth.

Now the neophyte government struggles to balance a socialist legacy with the dictates of the global market, to reconcile vocal unions and a volatile, expectant populace with privatization and foreign investment.[53] In the space between optimism and foreboding, no single language has yet emerged with which to speak about the country's ironic history and present location, both in Africa and in the wider postcolonial world. Ethnic poli-

tics, with its unambiguous identities and its zero-sum logic of victimization and triumph, are beginning to fill the silence. The plausibility of the Euro-modernist model, couched in hopes of social improvement, has been undercut by contracting state services, persisting inequality, and rising unemployment. Meanwhile, the "rainbow nation" is tenuously bound by a sense of its own miraculous rebirth, by the charisma of Nelson Mandela, and by the short-lived effervescence of tele-triumphalism and sporting spectacles. But it is also threatened by forces that subvert the very experience of society as a shared moral order, of humanity as a common denominator, of the nation as a nonpartisan guardian of civic interests.

V. Conclusion

Essays of this sort in an earlier, *atomic* age, ended with calls to see the light in the eleventh hour.[54] In this, the *anomic* age, our predicament is less susceptible to hard-edged heroics. Not that urgent, heartfelt appeals are not made in our time, but they are more likely to advocate acts of conscious political resolve: "Let the globalists step aside," write Connelly and Kennedy. "One-world solutions do not work. Local solutions will."[55] Benjamin Barber is of similar mind: "Democrats need to seek out indigenous democratic impulses," he notes, although he cautions against quick-fix solutions. "[D]emocracy in a hurry," he observes, "often looks something like France in 1794 or China in 1989."[56]

I would urge us to be less hasty still, to think *beyond* this well-intentioned vision for a brave new McWorld. For ours is a universe more fitting to the imagination of Lewis Carroll than George Orwell; one that requires more than mere rearrangement of the pieces in our existing global game. For the nature of the play has changed before our very eyes: the board has expanded beyond recognition, the mallets have become flamingoes, the balls fly about at an alarming pace, and the stately sovereigns have all but vanished. Under these conditions, and in the absence of a universally acknowledged referee, it is not clear whether those in the field are all part of the same action, or hold much shared idea of the contest and its rules. It is our task, then, to make some sense of this field with enough imagination to

grasp its absurdities and novel moves, and enough realism to relate them to our known past and our possible futures. To infuse our understanding and collective will with the boldness, complexity, and historical vision that the moment demands.

Notes

1. This essay owes much to ideas developed in collaboration with John L. Comaroff, especially those first set out in John L. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution," in *Perspectives on Nationalism and War*, ed. John L. Comaroff and P. C. Stern (Luxembourg: Gordon & Breach, 1994).

2. James W. Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 555.

3. Jane Taylor, *People's Portraits: Some Meditations on Identity*, n.p., 4.

4. Ibid., 1–2.

5. Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Vintage, 1996), 329.

6. Benjamin R. Barber, "Jihad vs. McWorld" in *Atlantic* 269, no. 3 (March 1992): 53–63.

7. Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy" in *Atlantic* 273, no. 2 (February 1994): 44-65; and Matthew Connelly and Paul Kennedy, "Must It Be the Rest against the West?" in *Atlantic* 274, no. 6 (December 1994): 61–73.

8. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49.

9. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference"; and John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

10. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789 – 1848* (New York: New American Library [Mentor Book], 1962), 19.

11. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

12. E.g., Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

13. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. J. De Bres (London: Verso, 1978); and Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92.

14. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference."

15. Cf. Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), 6 and 58f.

16. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 128f.

17. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

18. John Carlos Rowe, et al., *The Forces of Globalization*. Statement of a Research Project (1995-98) of the Critical Theory Institute, University of California, Irvine, 3.

19. Ibid., 2; and Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" in *Public Culture* 2 (1990): 1–24.

20. Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 79 f.

21. Jean Comaroff, "Contentious Subjects: Moral Being in the Modern World" (Eleventh Westermarck Memorial Lecture, 1993) in *Suomen Antropologi* 19, no. 2 (1994): 2–17.

22. Joel Kurtzman, *The Death of Money: How the Electronic Economy Has Destabilized the World's Markets and Created Financial Chaos* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 85 f and 214 f.

23. Ibid., 214.

24. Robert J. S. Ross, "The Relative Decline of Relative Autonomy: Global Capitalism and the Political Economy of State Change," in *Changes in the State: Causes and Consequences*, ed. E. S. Greenberg and T. F. Mayer (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990), 211.

25. Robertson, *Globalization*, 59.

26. Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994).

27. "The Downsizing of America," *New York Times*, 3–9 March 1996.

28. Igor Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Culture," in *The African Frontier*, ed. Igor Kopytoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 10; and Ulf Hannerz, "Notes on the Global Ecumene" in *Public Culture* 1 (1989): 66.

29. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 63.

30. Hannerz, "Notes on the Global Ecumene," 70.

31. Cf. Akhil Gupta, "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism" in *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1992): 63–79.

32. Arjun Appadurai, "Identity, Uncertainty, and Secret Agency: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization." Lecture delivered at the Chicago Humanities Institute, 28 November 1995, 3.

33. "Birth of the New Republic," *Guardian*, 9 January 1995, sec. 2.

34. Cf. Appadurai, "Identity, Uncertainty, and Secret Agency," 2.

35. Kurtzman, *The Death of Money*, 214.

36. John L. Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice, and the Signs of Inequality" in *Ethnos* 52 (1987): 301–23.

37. Appadurai, "Identity, Uncertainty, and Secret Agency."

38. Rebecca J. Tolen, *Wool and Synthetics, Countryside and City: Dress, Race, and History in Chimborazo, Highland Ecuador*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1995.

39. Abdou M. Simone, *In the Mix: Retaking Coloured Identities* (Cape Town: Foundation for Contemporary Research, 1994); and Shannon Jackson, *Youth*

Culture, Race, and Coloureds: An Investigation into the Politics of Identity in South Africa. Doctoral dissertation proposal, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, June 1995.

40. Crawford M. Young, "The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism: Concept and Reality," in *Etnichnost' i Vlast' v Polietnichnyh Gosudarstvah* (Ethnicity and Power in Multiethnic States), ed. V. Tishkov (Moscow: Nauka, 1994). Published in Russian; English version in manuscript.

41. Cf. Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today" in *Anthropology Today* 8 (1992): 4.

42. Stanley Tambiah, "Ethnic Conflict and Democratization," in *Etnichnost' i Vlast' v Polietnichnyh Gosudarstvah*.

43. Seamus Deane, introduction to *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, ed. Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward W. Said (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 9.

44. Sandile Memela, "How Do You Know the Real Black Communicators?" in *Star and South African Times*, 25 October 1995, 12. In a fascinating parallel case, Tswana ethnic nationalists in the early 1990s dismissed the ANC as merely the tool of "the Xhosa ethnic group." Michael Lawrence and Andres Manson, "The 'Dog of the Boers': The Rise and Fall of Mangope of Bophuthatswana" in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20, no. 3 (1994): 459.

45. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference."

46. Ibid.; and cf. Appadurai, "Identity, Uncertainty, and Secret Agency."

47. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference."

48. Barbara Crossette, "UN Finds Separate Worlds of Rich and Poor Widening," *International Herald Tribune*, 16 July 1996, 6.

49. Lawrence and Manson, "The 'Dog of the Boers,'" 459.

50. Cf. Appadurai, "Identity, Uncertainty, and Secret Agency."

51. Hobsbawm, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today," 4.

52. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference."

53. Of Nelson Mandela's state visit to Britain in July 1996, Anthony Sampson wrote, "It was at the Bank [of England] that Mandela most candidly explained . . . his overall political strategy, of converting the unions to privatization and disarming radical opponents by showing the benefits of foreign investment." *Observer*, 14 July 1996, 17.

54. John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "Postcolonial Politics and Discourses of Democracy in Southern Africa" in *Journal of Anthropological Research* (forthcoming, 1997).

55. Connelly and Kennedy, "Must It Be the Rest against the West?", 91.

56. Barber, "Jihad vs. McWorld," 63.