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The Production of the Sacred in Postcolonial Africa

By

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of the
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Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to discuss the persistence of religion in colonial and postcolonial narratives of confinement and exclusion. I begin by first exploring the history of religion in relation to colonial representations of Africa(ns) as savage and, situating the narratives of confinement and exclusion in the context of South Africa's colonial history, I set out to demonstrate the temporal and spatial expressions of the sacred as it is invoked/ produced by both the colonized and colonizer. I then proceed to explore such contests of power to produce the sacred in Frantz Fanon's *On National Culture* and the indigenous authorities in post-apartheid South Africa. In doing so, I draw upon the resources of postcolonial theory, subaltern studies and African/Fanon studies to demonstrate how strategies of containment and exclusion have been employed to mediate the persistence of the sacred in colonial, anti-colonial and African nationalist discourses.

A further distinguishing feature of this study is that it seeks demonstrate through the metaphor of infection, the persistence of religion regardless of, and in fact activated by, these strategies that seek to domesticate and disinfect the sacred. To this end, I propose to simply trace the vectors of the sacred in the context of post-apartheid South Africa to highlight its unintended effects on discourses of resistance and self-determination as always subversive and ambivalent. It is finally my argument that those who control the production of the sacred (thus making knowledge meaningful), holds the power to contain and exclude – but the sacred (whether temporal or spatial) is by nature open to re-inscription and therefore always ambivalent. As such, the postcolonial state's intention to

promote and protect must also be considered as a strategy to contain and to domesticate – producing paths of the sacred that are infectious and subversive in character.

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INTRODUCTION

Upon reading material that concerns itself with the questions of postcolonialism, my curiosity about the multi-layered nature of resistance to colonialism and apartheid ideology was provoked. I sought to engage with the material as an activist who was at once glad to see the end of the history of apartheid, but saddened by the end of old positions and its meaning. The end of apartheid marked not only an end to segregation but also the end of the politics of positionality that has informed so much of what we South Africans have come to regard as sacred. That whilst meta-structures of resistance and governance were being reconfigured by those with power, the material conditions and the struggles of those who lived on the periphery appeared to have remained the same. Further questions of meaning were provoked when I considered the fragments and residues of the religious that might be extrapolated from less celebrated acts of resistance. In the absence of “the struggle” it appears to me that local communities seek to draw upon resources of the sacred that are not mediated by the rhetoric of the struggle or liberation.

For a great deal of the history of occupation and oppression in southern Africa, religion played probably the most significant role in the mediating and mobilization of forces that gave birth to the narratives of exclusion and the counter-narrative of resistance. At the beginning of his *Religions of South Africa*, David Chidester speaks of the “many experiments, denials, and recoveries of humanity that have been at the heart of religions in South

Africa.”¹ Notwithstanding the *tour de force* of Christian theology in shaping the contending ideologies in South Africa during colonialism and apartheid, I will address the question of religion from the position of the academy. I regard religion as an expression of the human imagination and aspiration therefore I hope to locate this study within the history of the phenomenology of religion. Historians of religion seem forever to have battled to integrate data collected in the colonies with prevailing conceptions of religion within the Comptean triad of monotheism, polytheism and fetishism.² More recently, it is argued of religion by Talal Asad that, "there cannot be a universal definition of religion not only because its constituent elements and relationships are culturally specific, but because that definition itself is the historical product of discursive processes."³ Charles Long proposes that we consider the phenomenology of religion as concerned with "those forms of the world as they reveal themselves to the human consciousness"⁴. A proposal that points to a conception of religion that seeks a clear departure from earlier concerns with taxonomy and allows for a consideration of the behaviour of religion in a context of transnational exchange, or at least makes it possible to trace the vectors of the sacred in the postcolonial context without being limited to the arresting notion of religion as legitimation. The conception of religion as more than belief in (a) god allows us to discriminate between the religious aspects of human life, and its otherwise

¹ David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*. (London: Routledge, 1992), xvi.

² Edmund Leach, "Anthropology of Religion: British and French Schools", in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West, Vol.3*, eds. Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Patrick Sherry and Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 232.

³ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 29.

⁴ Charles Long, *Significations*. (Aurora: The Davies Group, 1999), 33.

political and economic characteristics. On the whole, I find myself more than simply partial to the Durkheimian connotation of religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things.”⁵ This definition speaks to the purpose of this thesis as I am not so much concerned with the defense of traditions, or a treatment of the essential unity of religion but the production of ‘sacred things’ that give meaning to a variety of human motivations and practices.

Motivated by a curiosity about the various ways in which people who had lived through a protracted period of oppression, domination and denial, I was anxious to consider how the evangelical zeal of the imperial colonist and the sacred covenant history of later settler governments impacted on the production of meaning. In Chapter One, I set out to interrogate the history of religion in the colonial context and its impact on practices of representation and resistance, as well as demonstrating the persistence of religion through expressions of the sacred that are reproduced to inform the positions people assume in the post-colony. Postcolonial studies as a field of inquiry propose that we consider the possibility that, where there is contact between native and colonist, there is inevitably resistance. Thus these encounters are said to always produce strategies through which people give expression to local struggles or reconfigure their subjectivity.⁶ More than simply the cultural and literary phenomenon that it is regarded as, postcolonialism is also concerned with the

⁵ Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religion*. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), 47.

⁶ E San Juan, Jr., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 266.

interrogation of the residual structures of imperial hegemony in the colonies – elsewhere referred to by Raymond Williams as the “lived system of meanings and values”.⁷ It further seeks to problematise the various ways in which the psyches of both the colonizer and the colonized have been affected to result in a range of unexpected and unanticipated outcomes. Finally, postcolonial theory allows us to recognize the networks that are produced by the context of postcolonialism, a context characterised by the transnational movements of people, capital and ideas.⁸ This is critical for the argument being developed in this study as it is the emergence of postcolonialism that has made the peripheral voices audible and de-centres prevailing enlightenment assumptions so as to produce new struggles for power over knowledge.

The post-colony, as an open landscape of knowledge production, afforded people endless resources for the positioning of self, community and nation. But with transnational access to resources comes the unavoidable tension between politicized local struggles and multinational interests. By accessing these transnational networks the specifics of the locale come to matter less⁹, producing ambivalent linkages between reactionary indigenism and the commodity culture of the transnational networks of exchange. To access these networks of exchange, local struggles are fashioned in terms of imperialist nostalgia or the rights discourse that accompany nativist claims for the protection of the indigenous. Spivak remind her readers that “a nostalgia for lost

⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110.

⁸ Ania Loomba, *Postcolonialism: the New Critical Idiom*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 13.

⁹ *ibid.*, 17.

origins can be detrimental to the exploration of the realities within the critique of imperialism” in its historical and contemporary forms.¹⁰ On the other hand, post-independence nationalist movements have been cautious about inhibiting association with indigenous or other religio-ethnic discourses. This segregation of culture-specific institutions as guardians of the primordial from the mechanisms of postcolonial state creation reflects a classic privatization of religion thesis of naïve secularism. It is my conviction that these tensions, and the distance between what people set out to achieve and what is produced in practice, suggest that both the commodification and the privatization of religion in the post-colony serve to obscure the persistence of religion in the postcolonial context. Like the failure of colonial and apartheid discourses to contain the persistence of the sacred, a failure to attend to the production of the sacred in the post-colony is to replicate imperialist practices of exclusion and confinement. These practices of containment, by their structure, produce resistance through subversion, appropriation, mimicry and infection of ‘beliefs and practices relative to sacred things’.¹¹

In a critical discussion of rule and resistance, Chapter Three situates the colonial strategies of exclusion and confinement in the context of South Africa where I seek to argue that these practices served not only to regulate social relations, but also to gain mastery over narratives of the sacred. To this end, I highlight the ambivalent character of temporal and spatial expressions of the

¹⁰ Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 211.

¹¹ Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religion*. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), 47.

sacred by illustrating how the rhetoric of nationalism is invoked by both settler and native to legitimate rule, oppression and resistance. From the beginning of the European presence in the Cape during the seventeenth century, scholars and activists have sought to make sense of the role of religion in the South African context. One can clearly track the ways in which religion has been implicated in the region's history of colonialism and apartheid, as well as native resistance to locally produced sacred narratives of oppression.¹² For much of this protracted period, reflections on religion in South Africa tended to be concerned with the imperial expansion of Victorian Christendom with the accompanying denial of native religion as savage superstition. The period of apartheid saw the dominance of a Christian theology of redemption whereby on the one hand, Afrikaner nationalist invoked a sacred covenant with God as sanction to oppress the native Africans. On the other hand, those engaged in the struggle against the institutionalized segregation of apartheid invoked Christian theology in support of the oppressed, with the Christian God depicted as liberator or guardian.¹³ Although in direct opposition, both these narratives mediate the sacred character of their respective struggles through the rhetoric of the nation. This period in South African history also saw a tremendous proliferation of African Independent Churches as acts of resistance and collaboration became more diverse. In post-apartheid South Africa, however, the state is faced with critical questions as it seeks to assert the secular foundation of its constitutional democracy. The old categories of religion have become redundant and new

¹² James Leatt, Theo Kneifel and Klaus Nurnberger, eds., *Contending Ideologies in South Africa*. (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1986), 79-80.

¹³ *ibid.*, 294ff.

expressions of the sacred are being produced as both native, and former settler communities, draw on the invented and the real, the traditional and the modern to mediate power relations in a postcolonial Africa.¹⁴

In Chapter Four I use the lens of postcolonial theory to discuss the production of knowledge through the manufacturing of the “Other” and ethnicity. I discuss the powerful and pervasive impact of these regimes of knowledge in replicating practices of exclusion and confinement of the sacred. It enables us to consider religion, whether invented or not, as having real and lasting effects on the ways in which communities position themselves. In the colonial context where the notion of the nation, the ethnic and the indigenous were contested, new networks had to be configured to provide linkages with the past, but at the same time provide the freedom from the arresting narratives of legitimation and the primordial that have inhibited thinking about religion in Africa. Equally, the treatment of religion in nationalist struggles was under threat, on the one hand from those forces that consider it as detracting from the development of the national struggle and view it as simply of use insofar as it enables the mechanism of national culture to be reinvented. On the other hand, nativists were adamant in their recovery of indigenous knowledge and values, regardless of whether these remnants of the primordial were real or not – a trend accelerated by the ‘postcolonial’. It is my conviction that these approaches to religion are not offering anything new, but are simply an inversion of older narratives and a replication of strategies of confinement and exclusion.

¹⁴ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 229.

Chapters Five and Six examines Fanon's *On National Culture* and the traditional authorities of post-apartheid South Africa as two sites of struggle that evidence the persistence of religion in spite of strategies to domesticate the sacred. The context of the post-colony – characterised by its simultaneous erosion of old forms of domination or resistance and its proliferation of local struggles – have produced notions of the sacred that are local in its concern but utilize transnational resources of the commodity culture to achieve its ends. These sites of struggle demonstrate the persistence of religion, not so much through formal traditions and practices, but by reinscribing the mundane with profound meaning - the production of the sacred. I will specifically consider the approach to religion in the anti-colonial rhetoric of Frantz Fanon. He would argue that, on the whole, religion must be regarded as something that has alienated African from their humanness, materially and mentally. I hope to pay specific attention to the fact that while religion was considered an inhibiting force within Fanon's anti-colonial struggle, he found that in producing a rhetoric of national cohesion, he had to invoke sentiments of the sacred. It is at this point in the development of his thesis that the practices to exclude and contain religion emerges. It is also at this point that it become clear that the strategies that are configured to domesticate the sacred, in fact, serve to activate new inventories of the sacred. I hope then to compare the persistence of religion in Fanon's *On National Culture* to the post-apartheid state. I will discuss that like Fanon, the post-apartheid state's treatment of traditional authorities reflect

a regulation of the sacred through the very practices of containment and exclusion of both colonialism and apartheid. In particular, I will consider the ways in which the post-apartheid state provides legislation that offers protection to traditional authorities from the forces of secularism but in doing so, the state finds itself protected from the forces of indigenism. This configuration of the secular-indigenous dichotomy provides the Mbeki-government with a sacred warrant for its Africanism, without having to give expression to it elsewhere in policy structures. But here perhaps more clearly than in Fanon's *On National Culture*, we are able to observe the regulation and domestication of the sacred. I thus argue that the legislative provisions that the post-apartheid state offers for the protection and promotion of traditional authorities, ultimately, emerge as practices that are intended to contain and disinfect.

These postcolonial approaches to religion are intended to undermine the history of social evolutionism that found expression in the colonies. But it appears that the politics of confinement and exclusion, as well as the practices of domesticating the sacred are now replicated in the postcolonial context. In seeking to come to terms with its increasing institutionalization, be it medical, educational or criminal, the exotic stories of primitive people with their lack of reason and religion served to reinforce representations of a terrifying and savage underclass.¹⁵ In turn, these practices of institutionalization, which were such a success in Europe, provided the framework of paternalism during late

¹⁵ Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault", in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens (Hoy Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 58.

colonialism – the institutionalization of the savage. Thus producing one of the most enduring icons of colonialism: the doctor in a white coat attending to the ill in darkest Africa. Consistent with the metropolitan practices of institutionalization, whether medical, educational or criminal, the representations of disease and mental health emerged as a primary force for the confinement and exclusion of native people. This is also due to the fact that Africans were considered differentially susceptible to diseases, not because of larger environmental issues but on account of indigenous social and cultural practices and, as such, African communities were ultimately considered reservoirs of disease.¹⁶ Intervention in the colonies was therefore markedly accompanied by policies and departments of sanitation.¹⁷ Practices of segregation could therefore be regarded as contributing towards good health and as a general provision for protection of life and civilization. The Comaroffs remind us that, in South Africa, “inequality was made into a sacred instrument of moral sanction” and that a failure to deal with the (health) threats facing the colonial administration “might threaten the providential market”.¹⁸ In the colonial context practices of segregation were accompanied by an aggressive education programme and, where these rules of sanitation were disregarded, the violation would be considered criminal. Finally, it would seem that in the colonies these medical narratives served only to further reinforce imperial interest by curing the ultimate disease of native savagery.

¹⁶ Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 46.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 47.

¹⁸ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa. Vol.2*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 667.

In Leon De Kok's *Civilising the Barbarians* the nineteenth century black newspaper produced at the Cape, *Imvo* is demonstrated to be one such act of resistance to colonial narrative of civilization and sanitation. *Imvo* position on the political landscape of the time is articulated as subversive subservience by Leon de Kok.¹⁹ By drawing attention to Frantz Fanon and traditional authorities in postcolonial South Africa respectively, I hope to illustrate how through acts of appropriation, Fanon is able to re-inscribe the representation of the savage and utilize it to produce vectors of the sacred in the development of a 'national culture' of resistance. Quite differently, traditional authorities of post-apartheid South Africa found that the resource for their resistance to secularism democracy is made possible through the replication of colonially produced notions of the sacred in indigenous traditions. By reinforcing the colonially produced claims about the primordial character of indigenous institutions, these patriarchal traditional authorities are able to secure protection from the state that seeks to regulate, and at worse, erode their power. However, what is clear from the contest over the power to produce the sacred is the suggestion that the anti-colonial and postcolonial practices intended to domesticate the persistence of religion, do so by replicating strategies of confinement and exclusion that informed colonization.

¹⁹ Leon de Kok. *Civilising the Barbarians*. (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 1996), 105.

In Chapter Seven, I draw the conclusion that in tracing the postcolonial state's strategies to contain and domesticate the sacred, theories of religion emerge that can be best articulated in terms of the metaphor of infection. I wish to argue that through the metaphor of infection we are able to trace productions of the sacred, and vectors of religion in the politics of contact. Like Mary Pratt, I believe that by foregrounding 'contact', we could possibly highlight "the interactive, improvisational dimension of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination".²⁰ The mutual imbrication of the native and the colonist that is produced in the colonial encounter must be regarded, in part, as abrasion or fracture when traditions are infectious - both vital or volatile. I find the epidemiological metaphor useful because it is concerned with how "social factors influences disease/ infection processes by creating a vulnerability or susceptibility to disease in general rather than to any specific disorder".²¹ It is thus my argument that like epidemiology, religion in the post-colony is similarly concerned with such forces as the "socio-economic stratification, social networks and support, discrimination, work demands and control".²² I find Niels Berker's description of the infection process very helpful in developing a conception of the vectors of the sacred in the post-colony:

The infectious disease is transmitted to a susceptible host, to be called a **susceptible** for short, when he takes in a sufficient quantity

²⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.

²¹ Lisa F. Berkman and Ichiro Kawachi, "Introduction: A Historical Framework for Social Epidemiology", in *Social Epidemiology*, eds. L.F. Berkman and I. Kawachi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

²² *ibid.*, 6,

of causative organism. When a susceptible takes in a quantity of infectious material, sufficient to induce an infection, we say he has made an infectious contact. The first infectious contact a susceptible makes leads to his infection and further infectious contacts are assumed to have no further effect on him, unless they occur when he later becomes susceptible again. Following the time of his infection the newly infected individual generally passes through a **latent period** during which the infection develops purely internally, without the emission of any kind of infectious material. The latent period ends when the infected individual becomes infectious and for the duration of his infectious period we refer to him as an **infective**. The infectious period ends when the infectious individual ceases to be infectious and he either becomes susceptible again or becomes a removal for some time. A **removal** is an individual who plays no part in the spread of the disease. An individual becomes a removal by being isolated or by death or by becoming immune. The states of isolation and immunity may be temporary or permanent.²³

Finally in the postcolonial context we are able to ask very different questions about the spatial, mental and physical segregation of native people during the periods of colonialism and apartheid. Departing from the questions concerned with what constitutes religion, or how religious traditions might be implicated in the legitimating of oppressive or liberative ideologies, postcolonial theory offers the scope to consider the behaviour of religion, or the production of the sacred wherever it may occur. Thus I wish to argue that these practices of exclusion became increasingly robust as theories of ethnic determinism (apartheid) failed to contain the infectious nature of the sacred – those powerful and pervasive forces that cohere and mobilise people. Ultimately, as colonist and native sought to gain mastery over the production of the sacred in their respective narratives of oppression, resistance and nationalism, these practices of confinement and domestication served not simply to exclude native people

²³ Niels G Becker, *Analysis of Infectious Disease Data*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1989), 10.

from metropolitan privilege and franchise but it sought to contain the infection and contagion of the very ideologies that brought Europeans to Africa, as well as the ideologies that privilege African nationalism. For here the basic premises of hegemonic regimes of power, their motivations and, finally, the conception of self as master would be savagely interrogated.

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CHAPTER ONE

POLITICS AND PROBLEMATICS OF RELIGION IN THE POSTCOLONY

This chapter addresses the broad concerns raised by the intersection of religion and postcolonial theory as it reflects on the relationship between conceptions of religion and the forms of knowledge produced in the colonial context. In investigating the landscape of theory-making, I will draw upon the use of the colonial categories concerned with sameness and difference in general, and in particular, with the representation of the Other as “savage” as it informed practices of rule. I will trace the history of the discourse as it emerged in the contexts of the local and global, in definition and denial, through acts of oppression and resistance, and finally, in terms of practices of exclusion and confinement.

All too often treatments of the relations between the colonial centre and conquered colonies appear to be largely articulated in oppositional terms which simply juxtapose the competing interest of the civilised Christian against the simple, childish and playful native. Other categories of opposition include the distinction between the centre and the periphery, the metropolitan and the provincial, the urban and the rural, the masculine and feminine and, of course, the ultimate fetishization of the exotic and the savage. It is in using this binary of the civil and savage, that I want to illustrate the ways in which particular relations of power came to be imagined and exercised in both the colonies and in the imperial centre. I will demonstrate various ways in which the colonial conceptions

of religion were drawn upon to inform configurations of power intended to domesticate the production of the sacred.

Although the field of postcolonial studies accepts the suggestion of some historical relationship between religion and colonial regimes of power that are reproduced through acts of representation, the very theoretical landscape of postcolonial studies remained unaffected by the persistence of religion. Though postcolonialism, as a discourse, seeks to give greater agency to subject interests, it would appear that this self-reflective field is reluctant to consider the ways in which religion has informed people's articulations of their struggles. It is my argument that in giving expression to their desire for collective self-determination or liberty, native peoples have produced notions of the sacred that reject or re-inscribe colonial connotations of religion. These are the strategies that explain the persistence of religion in the post-colony. Finally, I argue that while postcolonial theory offers new perspectives as to how we can critique colonial and postcolonial relations, postcolonial studies is reluctant to theorise religion. I will demonstrate the persistence of religion by arguing that religion is not so much redundant as it is privatised,¹ commodified² and, finally, "infectious".³

The notions of what constituted religion in the colonial period offered the colonisers the resources for the construction of representations of native peoples. The production of

¹ Jose Casanova, *Public Religion in the Modern World*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12-17.

² Kwame Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodern the Post- in Postcolonial", in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*. ed. Padmini Mongia (New York: Arnold, 1996), 57.

³ Talal Asad, "Religion, State and Nationalism", in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, eds. Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 187.

these representations might be conceived as a repository for the conceptions of religion in the colonies, thus illustrating the variety of ways in which natives in colonies were represented in relation to the civilised centre. In *Savage Systems*, David Chidester suggests that contests over what constitutes religion on the colonial frontier work to expose the fabricated character of social relations between coloniser and colonised. He argues that in this frontier context, attempts to deny colonised peoples' religion, and thus their humanness, significantly informed the encounters between the colonised and the colonisers.⁴ I consider it curious that religion was a central defining feature in the procedures for defining the actors of the colonial encounter and its aftermath, yet religion as a category of knowledge production is conspicuous, by its absence, from recent postcolonial theory.

Postcolonialism and Religion

To situate the discussion, I offer a provisional treatment of the notion of the postcolonial. Edward Said and other contemporary theorists argue that postcolonialism offers resistance to the meta-narrative of Western "history" with its notions of modernity that can only be articulated in terms of the binarisms of primitive and sophisticated, urban and rural, the civil and the savage.⁵ In the critical study, *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin propose that we should read the postcolonial as a project of problematising or subverting conceptions of colonialism rather than simply as the period

⁴ David Chidester, *Savage Systems*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 6.

⁵ Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical Inquiry*, 15.2 (1989): 205-225.

coming after colonialism.⁶ As a field of study, postcolonial theory is premised on the recognition that all cultures, whether imperialist or colonised, were deeply affected by the colonial experience from the moment of encounter. Ashcroft, et al. identify three characteristic features in the development of colonial and imperial discourses that helps us to appreciate this necessary departure from earlier conceptions about colonial relations of power and of the emergence of postcolonial identities. Firstly, they indicate the widespread silencing and marginalisation of the colonial voice by the imperial centre. Secondly, they point to the emergence of a tradition where the imperial centre is absent from the text. Thirdly, they highlight the active reception and ownership of culture and language, largely through practices wherein colonial convention is transformed by parochial or native interests.⁷ Thus postcolonialism seeks to give expression to a fuller variety of responses, as well as outcomes, of the colonial encounters between colonisers and natives.

The elements of syncretism and notions of disruption, subversion and inter-textuality are articulated as secondary features of postcolonialism by Ashcroft, et al. In contrast, Achille Mbembe argues that these elements of the postcolonial encounter, particularly subversion and religion, played a significant role when seeking to distil the agency of the native subject, as opposed to focusing on the ways in which the coloniser sought to obscure their entanglement.⁸ In thinking about colonialism and religion, scholars tend to operate with a rather narrow conception of religion by reducing discussions about

⁶ Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 35.

⁷ *ibid.*, 83.

⁸ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 102.

religion to a treatment of Victorian Christianity and consider the particular ways in which it sought to provide theological justification or resistance to imperialist endeavours. This reflects an understanding of religion as a mechanism for homogenizing disparate ideologies, and then sanctioning collectively produced actions. As such, religion is constrained to being a by-product of more salient ideologies, providing the rhetoric for mobilising collective consciousness.⁹ Similarly, African nationalist responses to colonialism and apartheid relied on such a conception of religion to analyse and critique the role of religion during the colonial period, as well as to justify their acts of resistance. It is therefore unsurprising that Wulf Sachs, in *Black Anger*, describes a meeting of African elites in which the conversation predictably turns to religion:

The white people came to our country, it was the natives' country (he was emphatic about it), took everything away from us – the land, the cattle – and made us work. We cannot move without a pass, we have to pay taxes, and they have given us Jesus.¹⁰

The statement reflects an anxiety about religion that is present in most texts pertaining to the colonial period when the authority of civil, mission and indigenous religion became inextricably entangled with the economic and socio-political relations of the colonial frontier. As such, religion functioned to serve changing political interests whilst its ritual purpose, to legitimate the *status quo*, remained the same. On the one hand, Christianity functioned to sanction the African struggle for collective self-determination, whilst on the other hand it served to legitimise colonial oppression of native communities - still obscuring the role of religion outside contest over state-power. In *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Jean and John

⁹ Barbara Bush, *Imperialism Race and Resistance*. (London: Routledge, 1999), 273.

¹⁰ Wulf Sachs, *Black Anger*. (New York: Grove, 1947), 106.

Comaroff observed that in terms of the imperial project, “the (Christian) mission was to establish (Christianity) at the heart of the indigenous social order, besides the ruler, just as God and the state stood side-by-side in Britain”.¹¹ For the Comaroffs, colonial relations primarily revolved around conceptions of power and truth in the colonial project and its aftermath.

Their work has been criticised by Ortner because it appears to articulate colonial power distribution only in terms of settler, mission and imperial relations and situates the native as a passive agent in the colonial context. Ortner asserts that practices of colonial power are significantly characterized by the possibility of resistance when she argues that:

power is only a certain type of relation between individuals - the characteristic feature of power is that some men can more or less entirely determine other men's conduct ... There is no power without the potential refusal or revolt.¹²

Although the Comaroffs' 'colonisation of consciousness and consciousness of colonisation' thesis simply illustrates the competing interests that inform the definition of religion in the colonies, it does suggest that we critically consider the colonisation of religion, elsewhere referred to by Russel McCutcheon as the 'imperial dynamic in the history of religion'.¹³ I believe that both conceptions of religion and the social contexts within which religion assumes authority beg investigation if we are to fully appreciate the role of religion in terms of the multiple expressions of power in colonial situations. It is in this context that knowledge about the religion of the savage was produced, suppressed,

¹¹ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa Vol.2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 667.

¹² Barbara Ortner, "Specifying Agency", *Interventions*, 3.1 (2001): 78.

¹³ Russel McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 61.

subverted and reconstructed. This production of knowledge served to guard the material and political interests of the already unstable relations of power that existed between the colonisers and the colonised. David Chidester suggests that in relation to the colonial encounter we need to view the history of religion as a “history of denial and discovery, of displacement and containment, of global mediation and local negotiations; it is not only an Enlightenment product but was expanded, thought out, worked out, fought out in local colonial situations and global imperial relations.”¹⁴ Thus I hope to point to a conceptual disjuncture between the representations that were produced of native people and the political interests, of both the colonised and the colonizers, in a context of change.

The project of colonialism provided a backdrop against which images of the “Other” were to be reinforced or contested. Rattansi reminds us of the conflicting interests that informed the production of particular representations of the colonised arguing that, “it [the colonial encounter] did make western man definitionally non-eastern and handed him a self-image and a worldview which were basically responses to colonialism. The discovery of the Orient... was designed to expel the other Orient which had been part of medieval European consciousness.”¹⁵ The notions of savage religion as superstitious and childlike, produced in the colonies, began to significantly inform Europe’s consolidation of its colonial interventions and policies of rule. The idea of the natives as having the mental state of a child reinforced the idea that the colonies were underutilised and without religion. These ideas of religion continued to inform the representations of the “Other” that were being produced in both the colonies and the metropolitan centre. Of the

¹⁴ David Chidester, “Situating the Programmatic Interests of the History of Religion in South Africa”, (unpublished manuscript, 2000), 14.

¹⁵ Ali Rattansi. “Postcolonialism and its Discontents”, *Economy and Society*, 26.4 (1999): 481.

sentiments frequently expressed by nativists of an essentialist persuasion, is the belief that indigenous cultures are inherently static and unchanging. Essentialists would further argue that the fact that indigenous traditions continue to be practiced is evidence of its legitimacy. Some scholars have argued that such claims of authenticity emerge particularly out of colonial situations where identities were always ambivalent and fragile.¹⁶

Religion and Colonization

The history of religions in colonial situations has traditionally been concerned with explaining the origins of religion as a human desire to make sense of elements within their environment that they cannot explain, or to mark boundaries of civility through order and social control. These explanations have emerged out of a protracted study of the history of religions in Europe and in the areas that it colonized. A characteristic feature of these accounts appears to be the desire to contain the unpredictable or that which is beyond the border of the familiar, and ultimately, to classify knowledge about religion in terms of social, moral and economic hegemonies.¹⁷ This was not a tendency unique to religion but was an intrinsic feature of nineteenth century politics of contact, as Europe sought to come to terms with explaining its own history within the larger history of the world. The nineteenth century's colonial expansion was characterized by the proliferation of theories that sought to provide explanation about the diversity of human culture encountered. For the most part, this diversity of human cultures encountered in

¹⁶ Gareth Griffiths, "The Myth of Authenticity", in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. (London: Routledge, 1995), 237-241.

¹⁷ Tonya Taylor, "Blaming The Infected African Other: an Epidemic Of Discrimination", Sixth Annual African Studies Consortium Workshop, 02 October 1998, www.africa.upenn.edu/Workshop/tonya98.html

the colonies was explained in terms of origins. This period also saw the development of classificatory models that set out to organize religion in terms of hierarchies, families, genres and species. Early theorists of religion such as E.B. Tyler and Max Muller sought to explain religion in terms of a hierarchy of race, with the lower or savage races constituting that part of humanity that was beyond the boundaries of contemporary explanation, or in fact, control.

From the advent of the history of religion as a discipline, anthropologists and historians of religion have outlined a number of interdependent factors that have contributed to conceptions of religion in the colonies and among colonized people. Edmund Leach argues that among these are (1) theories of taxonomy drawing analogous comparisons between human development and that of plants and animals, (2) using travelers' tales of exotic cultures to bolster support for Enlightenment ideas, (3) political and economic motivations of European governments, (4) evangelical missionary activity among savage races, and (5) the abolition of slave trade and the development of rights discourses.¹⁸ He concludes that, by the end of the nineteenth century, anthropologists had departed from the value judgments of early travelers and missionaries who regarded native people as degraded children. In conclusion, Leach argues that what was observable in primitive or savage religion is seen to be present in all cultures except that it has become largely attenuated among literate cultures.¹⁹

¹⁸ Edmund Leach, "Anthropology of Religion: British and French Schools", in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West, Vol.*, eds. Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Patrick Sherry, Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 216.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

The devastation of the wars that marked the first half of the twentieth century revived conversations about the nature of religion and its relation to the state. While performing a legitimating function in state making, religion found itself increasingly privatized within the modern state.²⁰ As the modern state asserted its thoroughly secular character, the idea of religion as a private matter did not necessarily explain the effective role of religion in general. While many scholars have argued that the secularization of society was characterized by the transfer of control over social institutions from the church to the state, others have suggested that this structural differentiation of society was largely the result of the emergence of distinctly professional roles largely influenced by the changing economic context and practices.²¹ This latter argument that favour the force of commerce over religion fails to account for the functions that institutional religion previously served within society, such as to organize, order and cohere in terms of a Durkheimian definition now being performed by other forces within a society. That religious institutions have lost social influence in the modern public arena reflects a facet of the secularization process but it does not explain how religion prevails at the margins of society. Thus the Nietzschean axiom: “God is Dead” rings redundant as religion was not so much dead as privatized.

The modern era is characterised by another movement that increasingly sought to explain the contemporary flows of ideology, technology and people: postmodernism. These changes have led to the emergence of a number of narratives that seek to explain the

²⁰ Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*. (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 3.

²¹ Bryan Wilson, “Secularization: Religion in the Modern World”, in *The Study of Religion, Traditional and New Religion*, eds. Stewart Sutherland and Peter Clarke (London: Routledge, 1991), 199.

spread or dispersal of religious, performative and representational practices.²² These discourses of global exchange draw upon local traditions or struggles for collective self-determination and reconfigure it for transnational consumption. This process of exchange precipitated a type of market context that fuelled native constructionist projects concerned with the recovery of indigenous integrities that was driven by local political and economic interest. These two forces of exchange converged to produce the commodification of indigenous traditions and struggles which did not lead to the disappearance of religion but to its fetishisation for global consumption.²³ In tracing the transnational flows of technology, ideology and tradition through an archeology of the present, one is struck by the prevalence of hegemonic practices to control and contain. These practices are obscured because narratives of religion have sought, not to trace the flows of the sacred, but rather to explore its effects within the life of a community, or to police the boundaries of that which constitutes religion through strategies of denial and discovery.

Against the backdrop of religion, as either commodified or privatised, I propose that we consider a theory of religion that relies on the metaphor of infection and contagion. Reading religion as “infection”, I follow the paths of contagion because I assume that the production of the sacred, like the character of infection, is both coincidental and yet opportunistic. The metaphor is invoked at the moment of postcolonial contact, whether national or cultural, to account for incidents of imbrication and inversion. With this

²² Barbara Browning, *Infectious Rhythms: Metaphors of Contagion*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 6.

²³ William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I-IIIa”, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (1985): 9,13,16.

conception of religion, I will trace productions of the sacred activated by the practices of exclusion and confinement that characterise the politics of contact. Like Mary Pratt I believe that by foregrounding “contact”, we could possibly highlight “the interactive, improvisational dimension of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination”.²⁴ The mutual imbrication of the native and the colonist that is produced in the colonial encounter must be regarded, in part, as abrasion or fracture where the vital and volatile potential of religion is like an infection. The metaphor of religion as infection appropriately captures the postcolonial notion that both the colonized and the colonizer were ‘infected’ through contact. Further, this conception of religion offers a thorough consideration of religion in the postcolonial context while avoiding an apolitical approach to questions of native resistance.

Decolonise, Deracialise and Democratise

The context of colonial South Africa was a context of limited political participation for native peoples – a context of rule that further contributed to increasingly diverse expressions of native agency. A provisional outline of the practice of indirect rule in southern Africa helps to further situate various acts of dominance, resistance and subversion. A number of studies have sought to theorise the social and political relations under colonisation but few, with the exception of Mahmood Mamdani, have managed to extrapolate their complexity. Indirect rule served as a central part of the British imperial project in the administration of colonies in southern Africa.²⁵ As the title text *Citizen and Subject* suggests, the colonies were essentially inhabited by two groups of people: those

²⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.

²⁵ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subject*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 62.

who were citizens with basic rights and protected by the law; and those who were subjects, ruled at will by colonial administrators for the sole benefit of providing labour power.²⁶ Mamdani seeks to investigate three crucial questions about the nature of rule in the colonies. First, he asks whether the structures of power in Africa were inherited from colonial authorities. Second, he reflects upon the role of local ethnic power, whether expressed in term of compliance or in terms of resistance. Finally, he offers a critique of why African states failed to transcend internal ethnic differences in the post-independence period. These concerns are critical because they raise questions about the ways in which we theorise about Africa and allude to the institutionalised relations of power that continue to reside in post- (after)-colonial societies.²⁷ His work is particularly important for its reflections on indigenous authorities and the relations of power produced by such institutions of indirect rule in South Africa. Mamdani argues that while the postcolonial state in Africa was deracialised, it was never democratised. That undemocratic institutions and practices continue to prevail in postcolonial African states is obscured by the native nationalist exoticizing of African conventions and institutions by simply representing it as part of European history. As such, this failure to attend to the nuances of social and political formations in Africa deprives the reader from fully comprehending the condition of postcoloniality.

The failure of most post-independence states to deal adequately with the roles, prestige and power of indigenous local leaders threatens to produce a bifurcated state – a

²⁶ *ibid.*, 92.

²⁷ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 42-3.

condition of state administration that enables the existence of two forms of rule under one hegemonic authority. Generally, this ambiguous relation of power between democratic and traditional authorities was further complicated by the desire for a characteristically African nationalist approach to governance by seeking to incorporate traditional knowledge systems. In the context of the postcolonial state, this Africanisation process took the form of institutionalising traditional leadership and extending the power of chieftanships when “cultural practices were given meaning in, and by, practices in formal politics”.²⁸ Whilst many changes have occurred in towns and cities, little has changed within rural areas regarding traditional forms of rule, particularly with regard to more equitable land-ownership and gender equality. The rapid migration of people from rural areas to cities saw the values and practices of unreformed native authorities being reproduced through people defining themselves in terms of ethnicity.²⁹ This leads Mamdani to suggest that the more society asserted its deracialised character, the greater the pressure from forces seeking to produce indigenous political and social relations. It appears, therefore, that it was not only native authorities that subscribed to discourses of indigeneity but also the non-racial native nationalist who previously condemned narratives of the indigenous and now saw it as a resource for nationalism.³⁰ The paradoxical expressions of ethnicity in practices of rule and resistance under colonialism have significantly informed the way we think about Africa. This requires that we pay

²⁸ Dlamini, S. Nombuso, “The Construction, Meaning and Negotiation of Ethnic Identities in KwaZulu-Natal”, in *Social Identities in the New South Africa*, ed. Ababe Zegeye (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), 198.

²⁹ Mahmood Mamdani, “When Does a Settler Become a Native? Reflections on the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa” (Inaugural Lecture as A. C. Jordan Professor of African Studies, (University of Cape Town, 1998), 7.

³⁰ Zola S. T. Skweyiya, “Chieftancy, the Ethnic Question and the Democratisation Process in South Africa” (Occasional Paper, Cape Town, 1993), 5.

closer attention to the anti-colonial position on indigenism and to the institutionalisation of native authorities in a (post) colonial context.³¹

A postcolonial emphasis on plural subjects opens theorising about Africa to the possibility of de-centred forms of civil participation based on a democracy of fractured identities. As Ahluwalia, in his treatment of postcolonialism in Africa, reminds us:

for most African and Third World countries such identities are a reality, and they have learnt to negotiate these as part of the practice of their everyday lives... and that notions of the nation (are) no longer necessary or tenable.³²

This emphasis on the plural subjects further acknowledges the contested context within which new forms and strategies of inclusion and exclusion will emerge, and these assumptions increasingly dominate the social and political landscape. Mamdani's investigation suggests that the binaries of citizen and subject continue to be a dominant force in South Africa well beyond the formal end of colonialism. He argues that these political positions are mediated through customary authorities but he stops short of acknowledging their religious effects. Although these structures also serve to obscure acts of resistance to domination because of its over-reliance on particular representations of Africa(ns), I suggest that it is the religious character of these institutions that provide the tools for resistance and subversion in the colonial context.

³¹ Vali Moosa, House of Assembly Debates 14 November 1994, cl.4237, RSA

³² Pal Ahluwalia, *Politics and Postcolonial Theory: African Inflections*. (London: Routledge 2001), 11.

Proliferation of Indigenous Collectivities

In postcolonial states the force of religion, whether Christian, Muslim or indigenous, significantly contributed to the production of new nationalisms and the postcolonial politics of identity. The relationship between religion and ideology in South Africa tends to explain religion as sanctioning the struggle against colonialism, or as legitimising the oppression or subjugation of the savage. Thus the themes of "knowledge" and "representation" dominate this enquiry of the relationship between religion and colonialism. While it has also been widely recognised that the study of the "symbiotic and mutually exploitative relationship between Christianity and state power"³³ has been largely exhausted, references to religion in much postcolonial writings still operate within conventional categories. In his study on Christianity, Sinkwan Cheng, for example, seeks to illustrate the inevitable presence of ambivalence in a "non pathological" or "pure" conception of Christianity (or religion) that allows it to be employed to advance both colonialism and the struggle against colonialism. Other treatments of religion in the colonial context assume a modernist position - with roots in Weberian concepts of rationality - that argue for the inevitability of the secular. In this context, secularisation might be understood as the necessary consequence of modernisation, a process that emerges out of a "rationality generated by the logic of capital... and by means of binary opposition to another term, that of "traditional" societies."³⁴ These conceptions of modernisation give priority to socio-economic analysis and generally dismiss charismatic authority as antirational.

³³Sinkwan Cheng, "The Kingdom of Heaven versus The Kingdom of Earth: Christianity and the Displacement of Africans in Black Anger", *Jouvert*, 3. 1 (1999): note 5.

³⁴ John Frow, "What is Modernization?" in *Last Past the Post*, eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 140-141.

While nineteenth century notions of modernisation informed much of colonial expansionist ideology with suggestions of the end of charisma and the universalisation of the secular, the twentieth century has increasingly observed a movement, not so much towards classical secularism, but rather a greater incorporation of the public and private spheres into the market economy.³⁵ The contested conceptions of modernisation in the colonial and postcolonial context demonstrate, clearly, that earlier definitions of religion failed to account for the persistence of the sacred and parochial traditions. In seeking to make sense of the salience of religion in the colonial context, Chidester proposes a working definition of religion as a category of explanation and justification that provided a moral centre around which to organise diverse popular projects of colonialism.³⁶

It is not insignificant that religion, often expressed as indigenous collectivities, continue to be presented as either complicit in the production of oppressive regimes or as an imperative in the development of an anti-establishment ethic under the rubric of social and political equality and human rights.³⁷ A great deal of scholarship has found itself concerned with these particular sets of material implications of religion and much of it continues to locate religion in relation to colonialism, with particular reference to socio-political rights³⁸ and inculturation³⁹. In this context, postcolonialism represents an expansive integration of diverse disciplinary work and offers new 'tools' to problematise

³⁵ A.R. Desai, "The Need for Revaluation of the Concept", in *Comparative Modernization: A Reader*, ed. E. Black (New York: Free Press, 1976), 101-102.

³⁶ David Chidester, *Savage Systems*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 254.

³⁷ Abdullahi A.An-Na'im, "Human Rights and the Challenge of Relevance: The Case of Collective Rights", in *The Role of the Nation-State in the 21st Century*, eds. Monique Castermans-Hollerman, Fried von Hoof, and Jacqueline Smith (Leiden: Kluwer Law International, 1998), 11.

³⁸ Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Civil Disobedience and Beyond*. (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1990).

³⁹ Aylward Shorter, *Theology of Inculturation*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

the category of religion. It might allow for the critical departure from scholarship primarily concerned with defending the legitimacy of religion, as indigeneity, or asserting its currency, as a hybridity, in the context of a postcolonial society. Both traditions continue to rely on “pathological” definitions of religion that produce powerful material consequences and, as such, require a closer reading.

The tradition concerned with the defense of religion, often accompanying movements for indigeneity, has generally been focused on the place of religion in both academia and public life in order to assert the theoretical and material authority of religion. Such movements for the recovery of indigenous worldviews are sometimes referred to as traditionalism or essentialism.⁴⁰ These movements assert that the integrity of traditional societies can only be represented through a set of essential values that characterised pre-colonial relations.⁴¹ Proponents of essentialism have argued for a recognition of the way in which traditional religion and culture have permeated the academy and the broader society, and suggest that it is impossible to separate such discourses from the process of social development. They would tend to argue that the modernist pre-occupation with rationalism and empirical sciences has pushed traditional religions to the periphery of theory making. The second conception of religion in the colonial context sought not to defend religion, but to assert its currency evidenced through acts of syncretism and hybridity. It recognises that there can be no return to an essential, pre-colonial period where African worldviews and value-systems determine social and political relations. It

⁴⁰ James A. Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aime Cesaire*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 37.

⁴¹ Ran Greenstein, “History and the Production of Knowledge”, *South African Historical Journal*, 32 (1990), 227.

also recognises the tremendous impact of colonialism on African communities; in terms of how indigenous social relations were altered permanently and, at times, beyond recognition. Both this process of change, and the range of responses, can be referred to as syncretism. Chinweizu and Mechukwu suggest that:

this cultural task demands a deliberate and calculated process of syncretism: one which, above all, emphasises the valuable continuities with [African] pre-colonial culture, welcomes the vitalising contributions from other cultures, and exercise inventive genius in making a healthy and distinguished synthesis from them all.⁴²

In *Civilising the Barbarians*, Leon de Kock suggests that such performances of syncretism must also be read as acts of anti-colonial resistance by means of strategies of “subversive subservience”.⁴³ More recently, scholars have sought to illustrate the complexity of syncretism by producing new categories to give expression to this phenomenon, such as creolisation or cosmopolitanism, with the most significant being hybridity. It has been suggested that hybridity represents those processes concerned with eroding the notion of a coherent Occident. Said defines it as “the conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it”.⁴⁴ In these processes of resistance to colonialism, it would appear that the category of religion is a significant ingredient in the production of strategies for the expression and inflection of postcolonial identities.

⁴² Onwu-Chekwa Chinweizu and Madubuike Mechukwu, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature: African Fiction and Poetry and their Critics*. (London: KPI, 1985), 239.

⁴³ Leon de Kok, *Civilising the Barbarians*. (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 1996), 105

⁴⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1993), 261.

A great deal of analysis has emerged out of these two intellectual archives of indigeneity and hybridity. The first archive has been concerned with the recovery of traditions of local native communities obscured by the influence of the European presence in the colonies. The second archive has focused on a range of responses by native communities to the colonial condition and the ways in which the West had been influenced by other-than-Western religious traditions.⁴⁵ In this context knowledge about the indigenous is mediated through the (re)production of representations. Through his critique of the representations that seek to depict the Khoisan or so-called “Hottentots” of the Cape as permanent children, David Chidester argues that colonial relations were informed by the currency of particular representations. He further argues that colonial conceptions of religion reinforced the production of the colonial “Other”.⁴⁶ The continuities and discontinuities between the production of representation and religion is well illustrated in Richard King’s recent text, *Religion and Orientalism* wherein one is confronted by the competing authority of textual and oral traditions. The author attempts to problematise taken for granted categories of religion by demonstrating the extent to which these notions of religion are colonially produced. However King’s argument risks replicating dubious colonial representations of India, as the descriptions “previously literate”, or “differently literate” all evoke the assumptions about what might be regarded as high culture. King finally argues that, “such representations only serve to foster stereotypical and ahistorical forms that palpably fail to represent accurately the heterogeneity of human experience”.⁴⁷ As such, religious and material expression of colonial identities have become active not only in relation to a coherent centre but to a series of fragmented and

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 265.

⁴⁶ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 56.

⁴⁷ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1999), 94.

ambivalent axes of self-representation at the periphery in relation to political agency within subject communities.

The Ambivalence of the Postcolonial in Africa

More recently, the study of religion has had to come to terms with those institutions of indigenous tradition that possibly emerged as a consequence of colonization; though at the same time these institutions may be viewed as strategies of resistance that emerged in reaction to and quite independently of colonialism. Such an analysis of agency and resistance sees itself concerned with the recovery of indigenous and pre-colonial religious traditions as resources for cohesion and self-determination. These movements are not primarily concerned with the mechanical and comprehensive reconstruction of ancient indigenous ritual, but rather with the exploration of ways in which the values contained in supposedly pre-colonial traditions can be translated into a postcolonial context as assertions of self-definition. Similarly, the emergence of the *Subaltern Studies Collective* of India saw itself as a collective concerned with destabilising the metropolitan constructions of the Orient and articulating subject agency.⁴⁸ Evidently, such movements are not uniform and face conflict between a romantic nostalgia for a heroic subaltern and the nationalist' skepticism about legitimacy of claims for anything that operate outside discursive power relations.⁴⁹ In post-apartheid South Africa, we have seen similar trends towards the recovery of African traditional religion, languages and indigenous cultural practices at various levels of society. A variety of stakeholders have sought to secure

⁴⁸ Ranajit Guha, "On some aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", in *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 8.

⁴⁹ Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia", *Modern Asian Studies*, 22.1 (1988): 217.

political and social legitimacy for traditions that have ceased to exist due to the cultural genocide of colonialism and apartheid. While the tendency towards nativism is characteristic of post-independence governments in Africa, this tension between the right of national self-determination (sovereignty) and the restitution of cultural integrity (nostalgia) remains hugely problematic in a postcolonial context. In an attempt to resolve this tension within the *Subaltern Studies Collective*, Gayatri Spivak proposed the notion of “strategic essentialism” which acknowledges that while uncritical indigenism is counter-productive, some level of restorative essentialism is necessary for the evolution towards new nationhood.⁵⁰ Similar sentiments are expressed by King when he suggests that the study of religion in a postcolonial context requires that our attention be turned to emerging styles of comparativism. He suggest that:

primary to this emerging style of comparativism is a recognition of the mutual imbrication of a variety of axes of domination as well as a concern for the mutuality of cross cultural interaction and influence – opening up a space for comparative dialogue and preventing isolationist appeals to indigenism.⁵¹

This relationship between the postcolonial preoccupation with collective self-determination and the increasing popularity of previously suppressed religious traditions has disrupted colonially produced positions and interests. Situated within human-rights discourses, indigenous religion is being invoked by native groups to legitimise their respective parochial political projects. Or it can be argued, that religion has come into its own, generating it’s own power with disparate material consequences. The intersection of religion and postcolonialism, at a scholarly level, promises to produce additional sets of

⁵⁰Gayatri Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography”, in *The Spivak Reader*, eds. Landry and Maclean (London: Routledge, 1996), 287-308.

⁵¹ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 216.

lenses through which we might come to read social and political positions in the post-colony.

It is evident that modes of speaking about Africa, as well as the theorising of Africa have been replicated in postcolonial theory, as illustrated by the manner in which religion, religions and the religious is dismissed by scholars in the field. Thus the relationship between anti-colonial rhetoric and imperial representations of indigenous communities remain highly ambivalent.⁵² According to Richard King, “indigenous discourse remains deeply indebted to Orientalist presuppositions and have generally failed to criticise the essentialist stereotypes embodied in such narratives.”⁵³ Frantz Fanon, for example, has been criticised recently for his deployment of imperially generated representations in his anti-colonial writing and work. The critique is directed at his use of colonial stereotypes of native women, imagery and icons of gender oppression, as he imbued them with rhetoric of independence to generate adequate anti-colonial support.⁵⁴ Such oppressive representations of marginal groups, in this instance, native women, are generated largely out of the colonial or Western experience of contact with its “Other”. This ambivalent strategy of resistance is reminiscent of Leon De Kock’s notion of “subversive subservience” when he seeks to frame the experiences of Xhosa Christians at the Cape during the eighteenth century. Their acts of subversion found expression in the organising of black political ambition through the publication of a local newspaper. The contextual

⁵² Bill Ashcroft, “Globalism, Post-colonialism and African Studies”, in *Postcolonialism: Culture and Identity in Africa*, eds. Pal Ahluwalia and Paul Nursey-Bray (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1998), 11.

⁵³ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 116.

⁵⁴ Francois Verges, “I am not the Slave of Slavery’: The Politics of Reparation in (French) Postslavery Communities”, in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anthony Alessandrini (London: Routledge, 1999), 258-275.

significance of such acts of resistance is well argued in Robert Young's *White Mythologies* when he reminds his reader that subject groups are only constituted as subjects through the resources and positions that have been permitted.⁵⁵

I would want to suggest that the problematic images and strategies of representation that have emerged in Africa, and elsewhere, are partly the result of the re-inscribing area-specific conceptions of Otherness, as such representations generally assume meaning in relation to the West only.⁵⁶ Consequently, the colonial representation of the savage/exotic, the irrational/ rational, the masculine/ feminine continue to haunt postcolonial studies due the field's inability to deal adequately with questions of religion and local traditions. The study of religion in postcolonial theory is inhibited by the continuing conceptual policing over the terms of engagement between the two fields. The apparent canonisation of postcolonial theory seems to have emerged due to a lack of vigilance about the supposedly fixed boundaries of the field itself.⁵⁷ There appears to be disparity between silence about religion in postcolonial theory more generally, and the multiple explanations for the prevalence and priority of religion in former colonies. The presence of such strategies of exclusion and containment in postcolonial studies, and their reproduction of representations of African traditions in relation to the savage-imagery (and the European in terms of the civil) are alarmingly paradoxical. Although nativist re-inscriptions of colonially produced representations of the "Other" and self can be argued as being conservative, they have emerged as a result of parochial (as other-than-Western)

⁵⁵ Robert Young, *White Mythologies*. (London: Routledge, 1990), 150.

⁵⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1978), 58.

⁵⁷ William D Hart, *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17-19.

theorising about the way in which indigenous and other hybrid expressions of religion have sought to find an authentic voice in a postcolonial world. The rational bias of modernism finds itself accompanied by assumptions about the inevitability of secularisation, generally understood as the decline of religion. Early conceptions of secularisation argued that religion should be relegated to the domain of leisure because it had very little to offer society in terms of social construction and cohesion.⁵⁸ But as ideas about secularisation developed, scholars sought to problematise the modernist assumptions about the public sphere. Jose Casanova, among others, proposes a distinction between the individualisation of social relations and the privatisation of religion as distinct consequences and movements of modernism.⁵⁹ Developing a postmodernist critique of secularisation theory, Kwame Appiah suggests that with regard to religions of the colonial periphery, there is little sign of the predicted demise of religion. Instead, we see a proliferation of indigenous assertions of local religion. Appiah argues that we should critically review these trends of re-invention and the accompanying use of global networks of communication. He suggests that this use of a postcolonial public space by movements for indigeneity might be viewed as the "commodification of religion" and because of their commodification, "religions have further reached and grown - their markets have expanded - rather than died". He further suggests that with the clearing of space – where the Protestant Christian mission used to dominate - comes the inevitable "proliferation of distinction" and invention of new identities or new ways of articulating identity.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Niklas Luhman, *Funktion der Religion*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 232-242.

⁵⁹ Casanova, *Public Religion in the Modern World*, 49-50.

⁶⁰ Appiah, "In the Post- in Postmodern the Post- in Postcolonial", 61.

In a rather different treatment of religion in a postcolonial context, Talal Asad attempts to theorise the presence of religion in public space but he also seeks to illustrate the religious character of the ways in which public space is managed and facilitated by the state. He argues that the tendency to privatize, or commodify, are largely the result of the relationship between state and religious institutions within various historical formations. Asad suggests that the attempts to disentangle the two inextricably linked ideas of privatisation and commodification are futile and calls for a conception of religion as infection.⁶¹ He makes the argument that the very structure of religious ideas is replicated within the domain of the secular, and possibly, also as part of the postcolonial condition. In conclusion, Asad argues that the modern state has a clearly demarcated space to classify and regulate the sacred but that the space for religion has to be continually redefined because of secular life within and beyond the nation-state.⁶² In the metaphor of infection, the sacred assumed conscious, indiscriminate and unconscious forms within the postcolonial state and frequently occurred as the result of social fracture, or from the sediment and residues of each other's traditions. Further the metaphor of infection provides a postcolonial definition of religion in that it accounts for the vitality of infection through mobile, mutable forms such as oral narrative, music and dance: all methods of social cohesion and coherence, but also of resistance. Finally the metaphor of religion as infection allows for the possibility of exchange that can be violent, uncontrollable and hostile or it can provide for religious infection as vital, irresistible and life giving.

⁶¹ Asad, "Religion, Nations-state and Secularism", 185.

⁶² *ibid.*, 192.

In this chapter I have sought to outline some of the challenges and problematics of religion in a postcolonial context. While postcolonialism explains the characteristics of mutual imbrication in colonial Africa, most studies tend to be limited to the study of power relations between the coloniser and the subject, often in relation to a particular set of religious values. I hope to demonstrate in this work the changing nature, active content and meaning of religion as strategies of containment and exclusion that find expression in the postcolonial context. Such a focus, I believe, will allow for equal concern with the production, appropriation and use of religion from the moment of the colonial encounter through to the postcolonial era.

CHAPTER TWO

RULE AND RESISTANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Postcolonialism is, evidently, a term that cannot be applied as a monolithic, all-encompassing discourse because it is clearly riddled with contradictions that require qualification. What is certain, is that traditional linear, and/or originary approaches to the history of both the coloniser and colonised have been shown to be inadequate. Thus postcolonialism offers a treatment of conflicting narratives of conquest and empire, and yet it is also liberating with regards to social relations in colonial Africa. This postcolonial condition has led some scholars to suggest of post-independence African states that these “nations and their constitutive identities are brought into being partly, but significantly, by acts of imaging and of narration”.¹ The last hundred years have seen the development of oppositional discourses and an extensive review of some of the Enlightenment presuppositions that informed colonialism as well as subsequent anti-colonial movements. As Padmini Mongia has noted:

Postcolonialism is an umbrella term that covers different critical approaches which deconstruct European thought in areas as wide-ranging as philosophy, literary studies, anthropology, sociology and political science. In this perspective the term postcolonial refers not to a simple periodisation but rather to a methodological revision which enables a wholesale critique of western structures of knowledge and power.²

¹ Leon De Kock, *Civilising the Barbarians*. (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 1996), 2.

² Padmini Mongia, ed. “Introduction”, in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*. (London: Arnold, 1996), 2.

Postcolonialism can, at its most elementary level, be seen as concerned with periods in recent history during which, those areas formerly colonised by Western imperial powers, have articulated aspirations for independence and those periods within which these colonies have gained formal independence. Postcolonialism cannot be understood as one singular moment and that “reference must be given to a *series* of transitions situated between and with the moments of colonisation/ decolonisation.”³ Some scholars have sought to restrict the application of the term postcolonial to denote only the post (Second World) war era, a position that fails to recognise the extent of imperialist occupation throughout the world and the resistance that it generated. It also marks a failure to recognise that the West possessed, in one form or another, in excess of two thirds of the world on the eve of the First World War. Ali Ratansi suggests that:

the central defining theme of postcolonialism or post-colonial studies is the investigation of the mutually constitutive role played by colonizer and colonized, centre and periphery, the metropolitan and the ‘native’ in forming, in part, the identities of both the dominant power and the subalterns involved in the imperial and colonial projects of the ‘West.’⁴

The coming into being of nations and national cultures that were formerly colonised must be viewed as ambivalent outcomes of the imperial project as much as they are also the result of the resistance to imperialism. These outcomes are generally assumed as leading to the formal independence of colonies, while other outcomes of the imperial project have included the sanitised extinction of cultures and active extermination of native peoples. Regardless of the absence of extinct and silenced groups, the colonial encounter has had a

³ Ali Rattansi, “Postcolonialism and its Discontents”, *Economy and Society* 26.4 (1999): 481.

⁴ *ibid.*, 481.

lasting impact on the identity of the colonists at the centre as well as on the colonies themselves.

The postcolonial focus on this plurality of imperial encounters seeks to deconstruct the binary positions of the dominant coloniser and the subaltern. It is often argued that imperialism operated as an aggressive process that undermined indigenous traditions. Whilst it seldom sought to overtly destroy local authority, the imperial project must be seen as a process that permanently scarred the psyches and value-systems of the colonised, where control and representation emerged as two sides of the same coin.⁵ To fully appreciate the significance of the term postcolonialism, I believe it is critical that we explore the context that gave rise to this discourse - that of colonialism and imperialism. Colonialism and imperialism are terms that are often used, almost inter-changeably, and therefore I would like to clarify their relationship at the outset. Colonialism and imperialism can be separated in both temporal and spatial terms, the latter being more useful. Imperialism can be thought of as a discourse primarily located at the metropolitan (European) centre and refers to that project which led to domination and rule. Imperialism is also a process that can function without the formal existence of colonies. Colonialism, on the other hand, can be understood as those acts of power and mechanisms of control that happen as a result of imperialism. In his *Christianity and Colonialism*, Robert Delavignette seeks to make a distinction between colonisation and colonialism in order to distinguish between political acts of expansion and deliberate acts

⁵Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subject*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 90.

of economic exploitation. He defines colonisation as the “political expression of one nation dominating a geographical external political unit inhabited by people of another race and culture”.⁶ For Dalevignette, colonisation is defined as a political act of acquiring control over a people without their consent. He suggests that colonialism is “an imperialist policy of exploiting colonies for the profit of the motherland”.⁷

Interrogating Postcolonialism

Initially, it is against this background that postcolonialism emerges as a term that provokes intense, ongoing debate, and it is some of these contested interpretations which I want to address. It has been suggested that the most significant influences that inform the development of postcolonial theory include: the end of formal colonialism, transnational migration of once-colonised peoples and their descendants, the emergence of independent and indigenous polities, a postmodern critique of Western modernity and the secularisation thesis. However, these diverse influences also mean that the term, “postcolonialism”, remains highly contested. Thus the prefix, “post” in postcolonial implies both the temporal and ideological aftermath of colonialism and its material consequences for former colonies and colonisers.

Critics have claimed that although colonialism has formally come to an end, its disparate legacy continues to be a social and political reality to formerly colonised people. It is this

⁶ Robert Delavignette, *Christianity and Colonialism*. Trans. J.R. Foster (NY: Howthorne, 1966), 9.

⁷ *ibid.*, 9.

critique that forms the basis of Anne McCintlock's argument that it is doubtful that one can speak of formerly colonised countries as being postcolonial at all.⁸ Similarly, it might also be argued that to speak of the postcolonial in primarily temporal terms is equally problematic if one speaks of postcolonialism as encompassing all responses to colonialism. This is because processes of decolonisation, as well as anti-colonial sentiment, spanned at least a century before the emergence of postcolonialism, each representing a different response to colonialism. Out of this we need to ask: "When did the postcolonial start?" Such an enquiry clearly alludes to suggestions that colonialism had been challenged in its history and that these acts of resistance found expression through a multiplicity of strategies by people in colonial situations, and perhaps, at the metropolitan centre. One such resource was religion whether settler, mission or savage, because it made it possible to give expression to political aspirations through embedding it in practices considered religious or cultural.

In South Africa, during the first half of the twentieth century, it was white settlers that sought independence from British colonists, and as such, produced a rather unique narrative of nationalist, civil religion.⁹ This is quite unlike the narratives of African nationalist independence movements which tended to depict indigenous communities in a struggle to overthrow white, European settlers in that Afrikaners depicted themselves, like the ancient Israelites, as endowed with a sacred legitimation to live in the promised

⁸ Anne McCintlock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the term 'Post-colonialism'", in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

⁹ T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 97.

land of the covenant. The South African situation was further complicated by Afrikaner independence from British administration in 1948 – this being a crucial moment in the history of the black majority as one form of colonial administration was supplanted by another. The transition from colonial administration to Afrikaner nationalism, although regarded as South Africa acquiring independence from British rule, did not translate into freedom for all of its' people. A reading of the postcolonial in South Africa, therefore, requires that the significance of the particular social and political nuances be treated seriously without falling into the trap of uncritically essentialising the local experience. The conditions and critiques of the postcolonial outlined above resonates with the work of Ania Loomba who concludes that, at times:

The term (postcolonial) is not only inadequate to the task of defining contemporary realities in once-colonised countries, and vague in terms of indicating a specific period in history but may also cloud the internal social and racial difference of many societies.¹⁰

The complexity of the term is further illustrated by the fact that scholars of postcolonial studies have sought to include not only people at the bottom of the material/ economic hierarchies produced by colonialism –“so that nothing is ‘post’ about their colonisation”¹¹ - but also the experiences and interests of the native elite. As such, the inclusion of the experiences of settler communities in formerly colonised countries (e.g. Australia, South Africa, Canada) as postcolonial continues to challenge the boundaries of the field. It could be argued that such distinctions are artificial and that, regardless of the

¹⁰ Ania Loomba, *Postcolonialism: the New Critical Idiom*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 8.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 9.

epistemological and cultural distance from the European metropolitan centre, an even greater distance exists between such settler communities and indigenous communities' experiences of economic exploitation, genocide, cultural decimation and exclusion from political participation. These internal contradictions about what and who constitute the "national" are also found in anti-colonial arguments. For example, the postcolonial status of Frantz Fanon's treatment of the Algerian struggle for independence is seldom contested.¹² The tension between the majority of native Algerians and the political elite committed to national emancipation is well illustrated in Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. This leads to the conclusion that nation-building projects tend to show little tolerance for tribal traditions and customary law with many illustrations of native communities being represented as mysterious, superstitious, uncivilised and backward. In other words, drawing on colonially invented descriptions of natives as savage or childlike, indigenous traditions are seen as inconsistent with nationalist interests. The tensions between nationalist and nativist interest continue to disrupt the consolidation of nationalism in postcolonial Africa. Kwame Appiah suggests that an emphasis on these fissures is not only indicative of a post-independence trend but as an emerging post-nationalist conception of citizenship whereby the citizens are "no longer committed to the (nation-) state".¹³

¹² H. L. Gates Jr., "Critical Fanonism", *Critical Inquiry*, 17.3 (1991): 357-370.

¹³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots", in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, eds. Martha C. Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 28.

It has become impossible to proceed with any kind of social science investigation of the colonial subject without questioning assumptions about the production of histories and the archaeology of knowledge. Historians have, traditionally, viewed the archive of colonial history as primarily a repository of events, records and reflections that are said to have occurred at some point. Elsewhere, most notably by a French historian of the *Annales* school, this tradition is referred to as *histoire evenementielle* or ‘event-bound history’. Recently, the influence of universalised humanism in the perception of history as a long-term structural process has received more attention and criticism. Beyond the critique of humanism – a trait of the knowing Western subject, schooled in post-enlightenment thinking¹⁴ - postcolonialism recognises the need to engage across disciplinary boundaries for an effective critique of Western hegemony. The desire to destabilise, and decentre, modernist assumptions requires a substantive conversation with postcolonialism, amongst scholars, across traditional disciplines. In this regard Leon De Kock suggests that:

The idea of postcolonialism, relies on an enquiry into western ways of objectification and domesticating the Other and their worlds from a central point of humanist influence (Europe). It involves the recognition that language was employed within the larger configurations of power and influence, as discourse, to gain mastery over the worlds of Europe’s Other.¹⁵

In the wake of poststructuralist critiques, and certainly since the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, academic reflections on the production of knowledge have

¹⁴ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*. (London: Routledge, 1999), 214-215.

¹⁵ Leon de Kok, *Civilising the Barbarians* (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 1996, 7-8.

undermined the idea that subjectivity can operate independently of socio-historical political, cultural and linguistic influences. The idea of discourse deployed in postcolonial theory assumes, as a primary premise, that the subject is embedded in the greater context of signification. In this regard, Charles Taylor argues that “power can only be understood in context; and this is the obverse of the point that the context can only be understood in relation to the kind of power which constitutes them”.¹⁶ In conclusion, Taylor reminds us that in a treatment of subjectivity, one cannot give absolute priority to either structure or action. Consequently, there can be no independent, objective and originary sources of truth and value authority – a kind of total beginning.¹⁷ Foucault is clear in his work that any attempt to mediate control of events and the representation of history and text is impossible. This is underpinned by an anxiety about the humanist assumption that individuals are the sole source of meaning and actions. It is argued that *Orientalism* served as a catalyst in the field of postcolonial enquiry and that it emerged in an academic environment saturated by the influence of post-structuralism – a critique of Western hegemony – and the notion of discourse in particular. Although postcolonial studies inherited various post-structural modes and strategies of theorising, some scholars have remained skeptical of poststructuralist readings of colonialism as simply symptomatic of the problematic relationship between power and knowledge.¹⁸ Thus Foucault views power as an anonymous network of relations, or as an impersonal

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth”, in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 89.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 90.

¹⁸ H. L. Gates Jr., “Authority (White Power) and the (Black) Critic: It’s all Greek to Me”, in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, eds. Jan Mohamed and Lloyd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 88-89.

force that operates through a multiplicity of sites and channels through which it seeks to control its subject. He argues that the rules that police and govern the production of knowledge are what may be referred to as *discourse*.¹⁹ Anxious about the apparent lack of political critique of Foucault's work, Moore-Gilbert suggests that discourse constructs the objects of knowledge through a conscious framework governed, not only by the will and intentions of individuals, but also by institutional interests.²⁰ He begins this line of argument citing poststructuralism's failure to:

...address the question of (neo-)colonial history and cultural relations, its inability to theorize resistance to dominant discourses and structures of power satisfactorily and its tendency to domesticate political activism.²¹

This reluctance to theorise resistance and political activism has prevented scholars from fully exploiting the field. Postcolonialism is argued to have become vulnerable to privileging the marginal at the expense of struggles of resistance to colonial hegemony. Those who argue this position view such particularist approaches as likely to produce parochial hostilities thus limiting the possibility of grouping native interests organised around class, gender or religion. Derrida has argued that such fragmentation of oppositional discourses often resulted in re-centering the centre of knowledge regimes that it seeks to de-centre.²² On the other hand, it would appear that the 'equivalential' character of postcolonial critiques is under stress because of its failure to recognise

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 49.

²⁰ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory* (London: Verso, 1997), 37.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

²² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 302.

situating nationalism as a privileged form of resistance has resulted in a tendency to “undervalue modes of resistance based on class gender and religion”.²³

Theorizing Resistance

This poststructuralist reading of discourse is what drives postcolonial theory in its deliberate re-inscription of agency and its adamant intentionality on the part of the subject. It is this potential of postcolonialism to extrapolate a multiplicity of interests that distinguishes it from post-structuralism. Whilst lacking Said’s (and latterly Aijaz Ahmad’s) retrospective political and non-Western reading of colonial relations, Foucault concludes with clear ambivalence toward Enlightenment presuppositions - that there can be no authentic subject, only representations of it. According to this position, every utterance, recording or imagining is merely a representation embedded in the culture and dominant ideology of the presenter.²⁴ In the development of his critique of Foucauldian notions of “representation”, Bruce Robbins cautions the reader against wholly accepting Foucault’s relativistic anti-representationalism, by arguing that:

if everything is representation then representation is not a scandal. Or if all representation is scandal then no representation is especially scandalous.²⁵

In his rejection of the universalist enterprise, Foucault also rejects the assumption that all political acts of resistance necessarily require, as their foundation, an absolute and universally applicable knowledge. He does acknowledge that political activism is

²³ Moore-Gilbert, 200.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. (New York: Random House, 1970), 308.

²⁵ Bruce Robbins, “The East is a Career: Edward Said and the Logics of Professionalism”, in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 54.

inevitable²⁶ but concludes that such struggles emerge only through participation in parochial incidents of resistance to particular local hegemonic constellations of knowledge and power – cynically expressed by him as “domination to domination”.²⁷

A more decisive critique of Foucauldian analysis focuses on its sole concern with the deconstruction and destruction of older metropolitan regimes of Europe that were founded upon the humanist assumption of the European Enlightenment project and modernist passions that fuelled colonialism. It is this preoccupation that has largely informed the critique that much of poststructuralism is acutely Eurocentric, initially in terms of geography of knowledge production but also significantly, the methods by which certain ideas came into circulation. However, the Foucauldian conception of power as dispersed and networked is a welcome departure from the more traditional conception of power as emanating from a central authority, as is often assumed to be characteristic of primitive or feudal societies. To this end we must consider the proposition that ‘where there is power there is resistance’. This revised conception of power has laid the foundation for the postcolonial preoccupation, with not only cultural resistance, which includes the socio-political, but also it offers the potential reversal of the dominant discourse.²⁸ The general subversion of the notion of power as necessarily destructive allows for the replacement of the more familiar politics of negation - the view that the

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 222-3.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Trans. Donald Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 151.

²⁸ Benita Parry, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse”, *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1978): 40.

colonised can be domesticated and silenced - with the politics of negotiation. In the study of colonial power relations involved in truth and knowledge, claims have been mediated either through the prevalence (institutionalisation) or an absence (silencing) of religion.

Postcolonialism asserts that it seeks to problematise the relations of power between agents of competing subjectivities.²⁹ Thus the treatment of religion in the colonial will need to attend to subject agency, knowledge production and the mutual constitution of the identities of both the coloniser and the colonised.³⁰ A further element of originality lies within the ability to identify and analyse the chronic instabilities inhabiting the colonial project.³¹ No longer are we allowed to see the colonial project as a set of pre-given directives concerned with civilising the “Other” through imparting the higher values and traditions of colonising European cultures. Similarly, the colonised cannot be conceived of as a passive recipient of such alien values. Finally, postcolonial theorists have argued that resistance must not simply be viewed as a 20th century phenomenon associated with the coming into being of new nations. Postcolonialism suggests that native resistance is imbedded in public and private ritual strategies that can be traced as emerging, not only from those moments of national independence or anti-colonial revolt, but rather as an immediate necessary consequence of encounter.³²

²⁹ Eric San Juan Jr., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) 22.

³⁰ P. Williams and Chrisman L., eds. “Introduction”, in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. (New York, Columbia, 1994).

³¹ Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 68.

³² *ibid.*, 8.

Benedict Anderson is credited with contributing to our understanding of nationalism as a construct that emerge out of the acts of memory and forgetting.³³ It is at such points - 'nations' coming into being – that questions of identity forces communities to collectively articulate what is acceptable memory and what is worth forgetting. In the section below I will review the relationship between identity and agency in postcolonial contexts – a relationship that seldom receives adequate treatment in postcolonial writing. In considering the particular configurations of power, we need to ask *who* is allowed to do *what* in the imperial context: what type of actions is considered legitimate and who mediates the process. In response to this question, I would like to follow Maud Eduard's conception of agency as a "transformative and transcending capacity"³⁴ when she suggests that, by nature, all human beings have agency: the ability to initiate change and to commit to a certain set of actions regardless of circumstances. James Scott suggests that people are, in most cases, inclined to utilise this capacity to influence their circumstances rather than be the passive recipients of another's will and interest, and that they will use a range of possible responses to oppose and subvert the exercise of power over them.³⁵ I agree with Eduards that within a social hierarchy people are equipped with different resources in terms of the kind of agency they are able to generate in acts of domination or acts of resistance. Rothenberg suggests that the discourse of difference is not only constructed by who is dominant but simultaneously, and possibly equally, by the

³³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso, 1991), 133.

³⁴ Maud Eduards, "Women's Agency and Collective Action", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 7.2 (1994): 181.

³⁵ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

victim who seeks to create difference. She reminds her reader that in contexts of competing power relations – such as colonial and apartheid South Africa - “placing the victim outside the community (of equals, or adults, or citizens) is essential if one is to rationalise the violence and denial of personhood”.³⁶ The South African colonial context with its diversity of social and political interests offer plenty of evidence that acts of agency finds expression not only in negation, but also through mediation, negotiation and at times acts of subversive compliance.³⁷ These themes are central to the readings of religion in the South African colonial context developed by the Comaroffs and De Kok. I introduce the question of agency at this point to outline the backdrop against which native resistance needs to be understood. To understand agency as more than a contest for power to rule allows for the interrogation of peripheral acts of resistance as well as the influence of religion in native struggles for self-determination. To illustrate the usages of agency in the colonial context, Sherry Ortner’s work enables us to problematise restrictive conceptions of agency by distinguishing “agency of (unequal) power, of both domination and resistance” and “agency of intentions – of projects, purposes and desires”.³⁸ Similarly, using feminist discourses as a point of departure, Rothenberg encourages the reader to conceive of women’s agency not only in terms of women’s mobility but also in terms of what they can do, thus pointing to the fact that their agency might include their intentionality. I believe that these reflections on female agency enable us to transcend the historical debates about sameness and difference that have

³⁶ Paula Rothenberg, “The Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Difference”, *Hypatia*, 5 (1990): 42-3.

³⁷ de Kock, 105-116.

³⁸ Barbara Ortner, “Specifying Agency”, *Interventions*, 3.1 (2001): 79.

predominated in colonial discourses of race which have been largely expressed in terms of agency of power.³⁹ We can thus focus critically on the occasions and locations of the sameness-difference discourse as it is utilised as an expression of dominance or resistance in terms of intentionality.⁴⁰

Description and Strategies of Control

Postcolonialism offers an opportunity to interrogate religion as a site of knowledge formation that produces representations of the “Other” in apparent complicity and resistance to it. David Chidester suggests that, not only did rationalist readings of indigenous traditions fail to comprehend the vastness of local knowledge systems, but that it also produced representations of the “Other” that legitimated those methods of knowledge formation. Prior to the popularity of this field, the language of the “Other” was arrested by the semiotics/ semiology of Saussure and Peirce although late 20th century scholarship did inherit from them recognition of complex strategies of description and representation. Whilst Peirce was convinced that his theories of logic - as self-controlled thought - would sweep away dogma and belief, it offers an interpretive structure that assists our understanding of religion in the colonial and postcolonial context. Charles Peirce’s *semiotics* and his idea of the ‘representatem’, in particular, suggests that we can define the modes and means of knowledge production by paying attention to its reliance upon local signs or responses to it, such as religious phenomena.⁴¹

³⁹ Carlos Moya, *Philosophy of Action*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 60-61.

⁴⁰ Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 28.

⁴¹ Charles Peirce “Applications for support of his logic” from Memoir 19, Draft E, *On Arguments*. (1902) <http://www.carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/mem19.html>

He argues for three fields of knowledge production: icon, index and symbol. Icon, which implies direct or factual likeness, points to a sense of experience or direct knowledge of the phenomenon. Thus according to Peirce we could through deduction start from the point of asking: “What is religion?” And then proceed to propose and consider any variety of responses. Deduction is the practice of drawing on knowledge about one matter acquired from the experience of other sources and proposes that one should translate such vague guesses into formulas. Thus deduction is consistent with the latter field of knowledge formation, through index and symbol. Such a rationalist or pragmatist reading of religions in the colonies promises only recognition and recording of data about indigenous traditions that fit comfortably into these categories. For this reason, it might be reasonable to assume that failure to meet such criteria must be considered, “not knowledge”. Chidester concludes that as strategies of knowledge production: icon, index and symbol may be limited as sub-sets for understanding indigenous traditions because these sub-sets can, and have been used, as strategies of conquest and domination.⁴²

Evidently, the ability to produce descriptions or representations of natives has always accompanied programmes of domination and control. Donna Haraway in the closing chapter of *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, entitled “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies”, argues that the “body of the colonised was constructed as the dark source of infection, pollution and disorder, and so on, that threatened to overwhelm white manhood

⁴² Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 20.

(cities, civilisation, the family, the personal white body) with its decadent emanations.”⁴³ But such descriptions of the African “Other” are not new. Jean Comaroff reminds us that as an object of the European imagination, Africans “personified suffering and degeneracy [in the] hothouse of fever and affliction”.⁴⁴ The critique of the practices of representation of Africa(ns) during the colonial period allows a reading of the conditions under which discourses of confinement and exclusion are produced, and how their meaning is transformed over time. Therefore I suggest that representation, like Foucault’s argument in his *Birth of the Clinic* about medicines supposed steady progression towards objectivity and precision of truth is in fact false, imagined or invented. Likewise, I am suggesting about religion, that an archaeology of events reveals that the history of religion is full of ideological ruptures, disjuncture and fractures.

The contest about what constitutes knowledge, in terms of the religions and traditions of indigenous people, was also a contest about governance, law and land. In the context of South Africa, these apparently disparate concerns proved inseparable for both the native and the settler. For the native, it was the land of their ancestors, for the settler it was the land given to them through a covenant with God. Inevitably, the locations(s) of colonialism, in this case, South Africa, informed the production of particular representations. Place and location is a complex interaction of language, history and environment. Places and locations are often conceived of as a parchment upon which

⁴³ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 223.

⁴⁴ Jean Comaroff, "The Diseased Heart of Africa: Medicine, Colonialism, and the Black Body", in *Knowledge, Power & Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*, eds. Shirley Lindenbaum and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 305.

successive generations inscribe and re-inscribe their respective histories.⁴⁵ South Africa has been a contested site of the imperial project operating as a discrepant locality of imperial domination – insofar as it reflected different sacred narratives of settlement – and repositories or archives of negotiated British metropolitan identities. South Africa was for much of its 350 year history subject to British colonial rule. So extensive was the impact of the British Empire that if we follow the postcolonial argument that identity and self-image of the coloniser is constantly re-defined in the encounter with the “Other”, colonists must have been constantly re-inventing their settler identities. It would seem reasonable therefore to conclude that the identities of British settlers in the colonies were shaped not so much by military conquest but by an increasingly ambivalent conception of themselves as metropolitan. Recent postcolonial theory prides itself on the notion of mutual imbrication of the colonised and the coloniser, the centre and the periphery, but it appear to continue to construct colonial relationships with a Eurocentric bias.

Homi Bhabha argues for a conception of the colonies as an open space within which new ‘nations’ come into being. Whilst he does not make this link explicitly, I want to suggest that the conception of the colony as empty space (materially and theoretically) proved strategic not only in relation to nationalism but also in the making of the Empire. In his introduction to *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha suggests that, “nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s

⁴⁵ Don Foster, *Space, Place and Race*. (Anti-racism Network Presentation, Cape Town, 12 March 1997), 16.

eye”.⁴⁶ Such an image of nation is, though impossibly romantic and extensively metaphorical, significantly informed by political thought and literary language that results in the nation emerging as a powerful historical idea in the West. He goes on to suggest that the idea of the nation contains an impossible sense of unity that adds to its ambivalent character:

The nation is no longer a sign of modernity under which cultural differences are homogenised in the horizontal view of society. The nation reveals, in its ambivalent and vacillating representation, the ethnography of its own historicity and opens up the possibility of other narratives of the people and their difference.⁴⁷

This notion of the nation as location and space could be understood as also a system of cultural significations. This suggested ambivalence is clarified by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* where he proposes that “nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being”.⁴⁸ In giving expression to Anderson’s notion of nationalism some scholars of postcolonialism have sought to distinguish between the formation and constitution of new and classic forms of nationalism. Simon During argues that new nations inevitably seek to develop a national identity which is “uncontaminated by universalist or

⁴⁶ Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*. (London: Routledge, 1990), 1.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 301.

⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso, 1991), 19.

Eurocentric concepts and images”.⁴⁹ He suggests that this desire for self-determination of new nations emerged in resistance to colonialism and the context of ethno-nationalism and, as such, requires that we turn our attention to the situations in which such acts of self-fashioning take place.

Resistance and Self-determination in South Africa

In the context of colonial and apartheid South Africa the development of nationalist narratives are characterised by primordial claims submitted by both the Afrikaner settlers and the natives. Scholars like Degenaar and Chidester have variously suggested that, prior to submitting claims for territoriality in rural areas and the increasing urbanisation of labour power, ethnic identities were organised locally.⁵⁰ Consistent with the arguments proposed by Degenaar, Afrikaans historian, Floors van Jaarsveld argues that until the late nineteenth century:

Such terms as South Africa or Afrikaans people [had] no spiritual or political meaning for them [Afrikaners]; since they lacked unity and national consciousness, such terms could not denote ‘fatherland’ or ‘nation’. In short, they had not yet become ‘nationally’ minded. Over a distance of nearly 1500 miles, stretching from the Cape to the Zoutpansberg, there were isolated groups and there was only limited intellectual exchange.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Simon During, “Postmodernism or Post-colonialism Today?” in *Postmodern Conditions*, eds. Andrew Miller, Philip Thomson and Chris Worth (Clayton, Vic: Monash University, 1988), 112.

⁵⁰ Johan Degenaar, “Suid Afrika kan nie Nasie Bou nie (trans. South Africa cannot Build a Nation)”, *Insig* Cape Town, May 1995, 9.

⁵¹ Floors van Jaarsveld, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism*. (Cape Town: Human Rousseau, 1961), 33.

Casting further doubts over the persistent claims to primordial “nationalism” made by Afrikaners, Janis Grobbelaar insists that Afrikaner nationalist history must be viewed as a symbolic catalogue of incidents that have been “carefully selected and incorporated into the inevitable and necessary “myth making” process that is inherent in the construction of appropriate histories for any social movement – particularly a nationalist one.”⁵² If we accept the suggestion by historians that political and economic contests in colonial/apartheid South Africa was essentially a contest over the means of wealth production, it seems inevitable, therefore, that much of the sacred “myth-making” of Afrikaner nationalism should be given expression in terms of the spatial. On the same landscape of the colonial frontier the indigenous people, like the Afrikaners, have sought to assert the legitimacy of various strategies and cultural practices that follow from a primordial link to the “land”. Generally, literature about indigenous traditions speaks of the organisation of the indigenous polity in relation to the ancestral, with social relations determined within the context of the homestead. Performances of power that are facilitated by sacred specialists, serve to reinforce the authority of the traditional authority which encompassed the homestead. At the centre of power configurations, the traditional authority was responsible for the political and ritual strengthening of the land.⁵³ Chidester reminds us that the nineteenth century also saw the rise of powerful states such as the Zulu, Swazi, or Pedi kingdoms, which we may regard as the inauguration of an African nationalism. The ethno-nationalist character of these traditional authorities would initially inform

⁵² Janis Grobbelaar, “Afrikaner Nationalism: The end of a Dream”, in *Social Identities in the New South Africa: After Apartheid*, ed. Abebe Zegeye (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), 304.

⁵³ David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*. (London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

resistance to colonialism, and more significantly later, shape the apartheid policy of separate development. In *Religions of South Africa*, Chidester illustrates how early scholarly perspectives on the archaeology of indigenous polities came to form the body of knowledge from which “new” originary claims were made, to re-inscribe an ethno-nationalism under apartheid’s homeland system. He reminds us that the “new nationalism was not only manufactured within the apartheid system, but it was built following the example set by Afrikaner nationalism.”⁵⁴ He cites, among others, Lennox Sebe invoking an African Christian Zionism to justify his support of the establishment of the Ciskei homeland during the early 1980’s. Drawing parallels between Ciskei and Israel, Sebe evokes the notion of the Semitic promised land, concluding: “Pharaohs of South Africa: let my people go so they may move on to the promised land”.⁵⁵

Returning our attention to the events of the late nineteenth century, it appears that with the increasing mobility from rural to urban settlements came also the erosion or conflation of indigenous traditions. This shift is most evident in the rise to prominence of Ethiopianism.⁵⁶ Natives sought to create sacred cultural spaces that were permissible with the social structures of power on the mines (urban spaces) and at the same time gave expression to the structures of power in the homestead, or traditional authority, of their rural origins. Over this period of mobility, conflict and contact, indigenous communities had begun to:

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 208.

⁵⁵ Lennox Sebe, *Challenges*. (Cape Town: Via Afrika, 1980), 18.

⁵⁶ Patrick Harris, *Work, Culture and Identity*. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994), 219-220.

construct narrower identities bound by a conformity to their own norms and standards, values, beliefs and ideals. These identities fitted (them) into a number of overlapping communities and, in a world without chiefs, provided them with pride,... and a degree of mobility and power.⁵⁷

While native people sought to find ways of giving expression to their cultural and political ideals, Afrikaner communities were anxious about re-asserting earlier legislation pertaining to the administration of native authorities. These policies were characterised by taxation, labour extraction, conscription into military service and land appropriation. These legislative provisions enabled the colonists, and later Afrikaners, control over resources of the land and the means to domestic political ambition among native elites and traditional authorities. However, the rise to rule over the natives was articulated in terms of a sacred covenant history whereby the land was the “promised land”. These mythical claims of the Afrikaners marked a clear departure from the civilising mission that was believed to have produced a sense of pride in the natives, and their consequent reluctance to being subjects of white rule.⁵⁸ Ultimately, their covenant history made it possible for the Afrikaners to claim a sacred primordialism as underscoring their rise to rule in South Africa and, as such, it set them apart from the civilising imperialism of the colonial administrators. Here a critical reading of the colonial practice of indirect rule developed by Mahmood Mamdani in his *Citizen and Subject* adds significantly to the discussion of religious nationalisms in South Africa. I agree with Mamdani that indirect rule was primarily a mode of subjugation but I wish to highlight that it also provided the

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 224.

⁵⁸ John Comaroff, “Images of Empire: Contest of Conscience”, *American Ethnologist*, Volume 16. No.4 (1989): 679.

broader context in which various strategies of resistance and compliance were developed by colonial subjects.⁵⁹ In developing these strategies of resistance or compliance, both the colonisers and the colonised drew on religious rhetoric and practice to inform their symbolic and material motivations. Further, we may reasonably assume that these strategies of resistance found expression in sites and performances that were considered legitimate in the broader context of colonial relations. In his book *Religion and Orientalism*, King argues that in colonial India the idea of “mysticism” served as one such site or performance through which native communities asserted their identities. He suggests that:

the emphasis on spirituality of India and the material superiority of the West allowed Hindus to turn western colonial discourses to their own advantage.⁶⁰

In the context of colonial South Africa, it might similarly be argued that, faced with the parameters of indirect rule and the persistence of the idea of Africa(ns) as savage and primitive, native communities - like in King’s India - produced sites and strategies of legitimacy to express their identity and culture. Thus it may be argued that colonially produced conceptions of indigenous traditions meant that sites such as sacred specialist (sangomas), and the independent “Ethiopian” churches of the nineteenth century acquired significant social and political currency.⁶¹ The production and re-inscription of such sites and performances demonstrate that whilst the intellectual archive of the colonial imperial project was perceived to be located at the metropolitan center the production of

⁵⁹ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 186.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 142.

⁶¹ Patrick Harris, *Work, Culture and Identity*. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994), 220.

knowledge was simultaneously shaped by native-settler relations in the colonies. The contests over the production of the sacred in ethno-nationalist discourses in colonial South Africa points to the persistence of religion in the production of knowledge. Thus the production of knowledge in the colonies can be said to have emerged through performances of self-determination and the re-inscription of representations of Africa(ns) as “Other”.⁶²

Mamdani argues that apartheid was a generic form of British colonialism, and as such rested on the same modernist rhetoric of religion. In his view, the institutional rule enshrined under apartheid, and in all late colonialism, was developed around the use of “indirect rule” over indigenous people by endorsing the authority of local chiefs and the use of customary law. Elsewhere, Moore-Gilbert reminds us that this practice occurred through the installation of “regimes drawn from a compliant local bourgeoisie”.⁶³ The paradoxes produced in the colonies illustrates how - by a naïve Foucauldian analysis - traditional leaders of South African indirect rule can be regarded as the champions of local causes for indigeneity - the only real form of resistance. On the other hand, traditional authorities have been criticised as being no more than representatives and local auxiliaries of colonial administrators. The difficulties of balancing these two elements are indicative of a multiplicity of responses to the colonial encounter and condition. Such diversity does not necessarily detract from the canonisation of representations about

⁶² Terry Eagleton, “Nationalism: Irony and Commitment”, in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, eds. Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, Edward W Said (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990), 23-24.

⁶³ Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 200.

Africa(ns). In terms of the African nationalist resistance to colonialism, the multiplicity of responses resulted in the privileging of nationalism over native interests because such plurality was perceived as lacking consensus and detracting from the development of a national struggle.⁶⁴ For colonists and Afrikaners, the absence of supposedly coherent and unified ideas about Africa among native communities meant that the authority to rule, and the power to produce representations could only be exacted from - and by those who - possessed the means of administration.

The colonial and apartheid histories of South Africa are distinctive in character because of the religious justification for both peaceful and violent encounters between native communities and colonists. The political and cultural landscapes of South Africa during the colonial period were configured through the definition, re-definition, the denial and the legitimization of indigenous religion. The colonial discourse was premised on its justification of various civilising mission interventions, which in turn, rested on the conviction that religion was in fact altogether absent among indigenous communities in nineteenth century Southern Africa.⁶⁵ This presumption informed a deeper imperial conviction that negated the possibility of humanness amongst the native peoples and served to justify imperial projects to civilise the colonies. In the South African colonial context, the negation of religion (and of rationality) was significantly informed by the Hegelian conviction that world history was marked by distinct stages of sophistication,

⁶⁴ Nelson Mandela, "1953 ANC Youth League Presidential Address", in *Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress*, eds. Sheridan Johns and Hunt Davis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 39.

⁶⁵ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 19.

much like those within human development - childhood adolescence and maturity - and that world history travelled from East to West. In this view of civilisation, sub-Saharan Africa played no part in history, as it was “still in the condition of mere nature”.⁶⁶ The representation of native people as being savage or child-like has informed various colonial projects and certainly underpins the view that indigenous African traditions are primitive and have nothing to offer modernity.

Religion, Modernity and the European Self-Imagination

David Chidester suggests that on the Southern African frontier, contact between natives and colonists was characterised by the politics of denial and discovery of religion.⁶⁷ Claims of denial often accompanied acts of domination and, as such, the belief that religion was entirely absent from the indigenous social landscape prevailed at times of conflict. However, it would appear that during times of native compliance to colonial authorities, indigenous communities would be said to possess forms of religion, even though they were perceived as primitive and irrational. Thus ideas regarding the absence, and prevalence of religion in South Africa almost always informed the modes of colonial administration and the accompanying rhetoric of modernity. This theme of the vacant but fertile land emerges time and time again, and often we find that it is uncritically coupled with the idea of the native’s lack of industry or general idleness.⁶⁸ In these articulations about modernity, the native is generally absent and when present, he/she is usually

⁶⁶ Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen, *The Myths of The Continents*. (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1997), 106.

⁶⁷ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 98.

⁶⁸ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology Vol. I*, 2nd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1877), 66-68.

characterised by a distinct lack of agency. During the colonial period, the rhetoric of modernity also justified the violent transference of land from native to imperial control. In his historical account of colonial genocide, *Exterminate all the Brutes*, Sven Lindqvist recalls the force of theories of social evolution during the eighteenth century and its impact on the development of imperial policies about the administration of tribal land in the colonies. He carefully recounts how this period of imperialism was characterised by rapid industrialisation, social Darwinism and the emergence of a clear middle-class in Europe. He concludes that colonialism was ultimately shaped by the post-Enlightenment determination of reason as the foundation of necessary secularism.⁶⁹ In this context of industrial and economic development, southern Africa's agriculturally under-cultivated condition was considered sufficient justification for imperial administrators to confiscate indigenous territory for the advancement of modernity. Commenting on the force of modernity in the colonies, scholars have suggested that the notion of the 'Protestant Ethic', developed by Max Weber, significantly informed the development of a spirit of capitalism that accompanied European imperialism. It is often regarded as a way to explain historical events and why capitalism thrived in Europe in particular. Weber suggested that:

man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate All the Brutes*. (New York: The New Press, 1992).

⁷⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (New York: Scribner's Press, 1958), 47 – 78.

Weber hypothesized that capitalism was a product of the Western mind for a number of reasons but particularly because of the Protestant Ethic. The Protestant Ethic is a code of morals based on the principles of thrift, discipline, hard work, and individualism which was spawned, and encouraged, by what Weber calls, the "spirit of capitalism." In terms of Weber's definition, this is more than simply capitalist activity. It is, in fact, the essence of what underlies the economic system. Robert Green suggests that Weber viewed capitalism as more than simply an accumulation of wealth and that capitalism does not emerge only as a natural consequence of rationality, but that it marks the very triumph of rationality over tradition.⁷¹ It is curious how, during a forcefully secularising period, such an apparently Christian ethic was employed to justify and serve the interests of the emerging middle classes and colonists. While previous studies sought to determine the conflicting interpretations of this ethic of industry in Europe, and its impact on the prevailing mood of a culture in the colonies, postcolonialism seeks to problematise the assumption that the West existed internally coherent, prior to colonial contact in the colonies. It further deconstructs the argument that throughout the colonial period, the idea of "Europe" remained a stronger set of social formation. Postcolonialism takes, as its premise, that the psyche, values and traditions of the dominant powers, prior to the imperial encounters, were not necessarily stable and comprehensive simply to be imposed upon passive recipients within African colonies. The contention that the "West" is white,

⁷¹ Robert Green, *Protestantism and Capitalism: The Weber Thesis and Its Critics*. (Boston: D. C Heath and Company, 1959).

Christian, rational, civilised, modern, sexually disciplined and indeed masculine has now been thoroughly discredited.⁷²

At the end of this chapter I wish to reiterate my argument that the configuration of social relations in colonial South Africa came into being through a protracted process in which the “Other” was defined in opposition to these emerging values of Western society. In the European context, the identity of low power groups were mediated through the domesticating catechistic church and the very real economic schism between the landed gentry and the under-classes to neutralise the threatening potential of “Otherness”. The modernisation of industry in the West, coupled with the colonisation of new territories, marked a shift in the power-relations at the centre through the emergence of a middle-class, and the further separation of the working-class.⁷³ The new middle-class emerges at the intersection of modernity’s formal secularisation of education and imperialism’s rampant acquisition of land (wealth). It is at this juncture that a critical investigation of the relationship between postcolonial identity and religion allows for a dynamic understanding of religion and social identity as mutually constitutive. Imperialists justified their attempt to civilise the “native” as fulfilling a God-given duty to govern from their religiously mandated construction of the “Other” and the landscape. As illustrated above, the “Other”, and representations of the native people, was primarily defined in terms of notions that set indigenous peoples apart as uncivilised, pre-modern,

⁷² Rattansi, 482.

⁷³ Ira Katznelson, “Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons”, in *Working Class Formation*, eds. Ira Katznelson and Astride Zolberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 3-44.

licentious, effeminate, irrational and ultimately *savage*. While the categories of the metropolitan centre and the colonized periphery remains defined in terms of the “Other”, there is little agreement as to the extent to which, if any, native enterprise and agency was able to shape the relations between the colonized and the colonizer. The idea of the savage finds itself repeatedly re-inscribed with colonial rhetoric about the discovery and denial of religion as postcolonial theorists seek to come to terms with the persistence of religion in contemporary African society.

The question of religion and postcolonialism in the context of South Africa demonstrates the various ways in which contact between the coloniser and the colonised have been configured. On the one hand we noted the increasing modernist rhetoric in colonial narratives and rule, and on the other hand, we are confronted by the deafening silence of the colonised. Above I sought to illustrate the inevitability of resistance in the colonial context. As colonial mechanisms of control found expression through forms of rule or categories of description, both natives and colonisers identified and activated sites or performances of resistance and self-determination. The discourse of modern imperial history was characterised profoundly by the politics of exclusion and containment, by denial and discovery.⁷⁴ I sought to argue that the nature of contact between natives and settlers in colonial South Africa was also marked by the unarticulated politics of fracture and invention, by contagion and infection. This active reading of social relations on the

⁷⁴ David Chidester, “Colonialism,” in *Critical Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000). 423-37.

colonial landscape rests within the contested field of postcolonial studies, particularly because of its deliberate development of the mutual imbrication that emerges out of the encounter between the coloniser and the native. I sought to explore a problematic of comparativism and indigenous apology in order to reflect on religion in terms of the rhetoric of origin and function. Finally, I attempted to offer a cursory glance at the context of modernity in which ideas about the origin and function of religion was produced, as well as to suggest that each position of rule and description reflects a set of competing social interests between the colonisers and the colonised. These sets of social interests included competing indigenous interests through the assertions and institutions of the indigenous cosmology, however obscure and muffled.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGION AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

A postcolonial conception of colonial practices of “Othering” finds its expression not only in terms of the Foucauldian analytical structure of exclusion and confinement, but ultimately through the politics of contact. The period of colonialism was not simply marked by the rapid expansion of industry, the introduction and formalisation of rule in the colonies and ultimately the movements of people; it was also significantly characterised by social fractures and social abrasions. In the previous chapter, I outlined the conditions that produced the structures of control as mediated through description and rule. Below I will proceed to analyse the strategies of exclusion and containment as it found expression through the politics of “Othering” and the invention of ethnicities. I will argue that in drawing on the categories of the “Other” and ethnicity, the practices of confinement and exclusion produced the conditions that would define acts of oppression as well as resistance.

A conception of religion as infection makes it possible to conceive of social and cultural practices that sought to invert and re-inscribe representations of the “Other” as a means to express indigenous political aspirations. The political aspirations of the late colonial period range from struggles for, and against, national self-determination to calls for ethnic primitivism. The metaphor of infection offers an understanding of religion as functioning in simultaneous, yet diagonally opposite ways, in resistance and as revival.

Thus Bruce Lincoln argues that, “religion must be understood – in part, at least – as the extreme form of ideology, whereby socio-political structures, attitudes and patterns of behaviour are provided not merely with abstract philosophical rationalisations but with sacred warrant and legitimation.”¹ The idea of religion as infectious enables us to interrogate resistance and recovery as categories for the analysis of the practices of “Othering” on the colonial frontier. In the politics of contact, subversion points to the expression of native resistance against the cultural imposition of the colonial settlers by exposing the partial and relative nature of all truth claims and the accompanying ideological biases informing the prevailing knowledge system. An example of such a response is the strategy of running *amok* which allowed the native subject to reject practices of domination through utilising metropolitan ideas about native irrationality and savage behaviour.² For example, in the Cape colony instances of insanity among slaves or native madness were regarded as an inability to cope with the pressures of modernity. As such, these individuals were allowed to opt out of the structural relations of the colonies because they were no longer part of the colonies’ labour resource and were seen to pose no political threat. I suggest that in resistance to the colonisers, the native seeks to identify and activate social institutions that correspond with categories of description and performances within the colonising culture through which they are able to translate indigenous aspirations and disquiet. Thus they adopt from the colonising culture only that which serves indigenous ends, but with minimal disruption to frontier social relations and

¹ Bruce Lincoln, *Religion, Rebellion, Revolution*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), 3.

² Vivian Bickford-Smith *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

the indigenous cosmology. In this regard the black newspaper of the nineteen-twenties, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, stands out as another example of such a form of resistance in that although it was a non-native form, it served the needs of the native bourgeois during the nineteenth century when forms of civil resistance were limited for the native communities.³ I wish to suggest that in the same way as infection produces resistance, these forms of resistance simultaneously work to facilitate the revival of more robust aspects of the indigenous public institutions that would serve as the vehicles for the translation and retention of indigenous values. It could be argued that social fractures occur where there are pre-existent weaknesses in the social structure, for example, where indigenous institutional provisions have become redundant and are in need of new resources.⁴

Postcolonial theory seeks to investigate and disrupt historical and contemporary constructions of political and sacred authority through its critical study of representations produced in the colonial encounter. As such, it is on occasions of frontier contact between the coloniser and the colonised that certain aspects of indigenous institutions are invoked and/ or renewed to meet the contemporary needs of the native community. Through the metaphor of infection religion can be regarded as vital or violent, whether in resistance or revival, to offer room for innovation that would not have occurred if not through social fracture and abrasion of contact. Finally, this chapter will seek to analyse a few sites of

³ Les Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 247-251.

⁴ Megan Vaughan. *Curing their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 5.

knowledge production, namely, (1) the practices of “Othering” in colonial South Africa, (2) the manufacturing of ethnicity, and finally (3) the native nationalism-(nativism) nostalgia dichotomy of late colonialism. I consider these the primary forces that have converged initially to obscure, but latterly frame practices of exclusion and confinement of the sacred in postcolonial South Africa.

I regard postcolonialism as a coherent field of analysis that provides conceptual tools for developing new ways of understanding power configurations between the coloniser and the colonised. As noted by Moore-Gilbert, the articulation of native nationalist aspirations for self-definition assume new meanings when considered as being more than simply resistance against formal colonialism. Postcolonialism allows for a reading of religious rhetoric and public institutions as particular means and strategies used to mediate anxieties about individual, ethnic and national identities. But Moore-Gilbert reminds us of “the ‘multiplication of margins’ which, perhaps inevitably, accompanies the ‘coming to voice’ of increasing numbers and kinds of national, linguistic, religious or ethnic groups, communities or sub-cultures in the contemporary era”.⁵ However, postcolonial theory also assumes that the inversion of signs and symbols occurred from the outset of contact between natives and colonists. As a field of knowledge, postcolonialism follows that in the colonial context, social relations between colonists and natives were characterised by the appropriation of one another’s signs, rituals and

⁵ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*. (London: Verso, 1997), 12.

rhetoric.¹ It takes a view of social relations in the colonial context as mutually infectious, making it possible for colonists and natives to assert their agency to effect particular national ethnic or religious interests. The process of re-inscribing sacred and social institutions within the colonies is marked by an underlying presumption that native engagement with colonial assumes two forms: childlikeness or savagery. During the eighteenth century, a whole body of knowledge emerged out of anthropology to confirm the fact that native peoples are essentially driven by physical desire, whether towards playfulness (lack of industry) or savagery (lack of civility). Postcolonialism will have us deconstruct this discourse as a regime of knowledge that emerged out of a context in which colonists needed sacred and rational justification of their rule over the natives, whether political or commercial. The legitimation of colonial rule over native peoples in southern Africa in particular was largely underscored by the representation of natives as locked into a kind of permanent state of childhood.² The early origins of these ideas are made explicit by Reverend Robert Gray, in 1609, when he suggested that most of the earth was:

possessed and wrongfully usurped by wild beasts... or by brutish savages, who by reason of their godless ignorance and blasphemous idolatry are worse than those beasts.³

As this passage indicates, what previously had been suggested about the moral status of animals now had very grave material consequences for native people. Clearly, lack

¹Homi Bhabha "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference", in *Postcolonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Hellen Tiffin. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 206.

²Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 56.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

religion is, for Robert Gray, a matter of moral status and that if the “brutish savages” lacked religion then they could not be afforded any kind of legal status. Chidester suggests that as the commercial interests of the colonial settlers stabilised, the denial of religion among natives became configured in new ways. Thus, while earlier stereotypes about native childishness persisted, these representations assumed a new significance during the nineteenth century development of a distinct labour market.⁹ As such, native reluctance to participate in the colonial labour market was now expressed in commercial rather than political terms. The apparent inability to value material objects and the imperial monetary system served to reinforce the early assertion about African child-likeness and ignorance. Thus as the position of native people in the colonies of southern Africa became increasingly presented in terms of their productive power within the economy, indigenous public institutions became increasingly redundant yet more ornate. But the salience of representations about African people’s lack of religion operated also as a profound marker in the positioning of white settlers in positions of domination over the natives. Chidester reminds us that the descriptions of Africa(ns) as lacking religion served to finally entrench colonial violence whether political, spatial or mental.¹⁰ In the European imagination, it was assumed that natives were arrested at an early stage of human development that could be accelerated by the establishment of civilisation through conversion. Reflecting on African religion during the period of colonisation, Christopher Miller argues that European interest in the colonies produced a discourse that obscured

⁹ Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society*, 106.

¹⁰ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 13.

more than it revealed.¹¹ The representations of Africans proliferated on the colonial frontier in conflicts over land and labour, thus producing sacred histories for both settlers and natives. This context of colonial conflicts operated as the backdrop against which ideas about African religion was produced in order to reinforce particular representations of Africa.

If we are to take seriously the postcolonial premise of mutual imbrication between the native and the settler, between centre and periphery, then it is no longer tenable to simply look at the production of colonial power relations. As postcolonial scholars, we also need to look at the responses to such power relations. Generally, the native subject is either absent or radically “Othered”, an absence reflected in the production of knowledge about practices and definitions of religion in the colonies. This does not mean that native communities lacked the intent and organisation to destabilise the supposedly fixed representations and conceptions of European hegemony in the colonies and at the metropolitan centre. We need to consider the possibility that like in King’s India, encounters with native Africans prompted settler identities to become increasingly fixed, and in reaction, colonists attempted to produce theories of religions that supported prevailing representations of native peoples as pre-modern. As previously suggested, this strategy of “Othering” assumes the natives to as either childlike or savage. Firstly, the notion of child - often regarded also as exotic - can be broadly referred to as a

¹¹ Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 6.

representation of the “Other” as effeminate, introspective, mysterious and innocent. The exotic frequently appears as the object of imperial nostalgia for a time when indigenous communities lived close to nature, lacked overt political aspirations and presented little resistance to colonial ambition.¹² The second form is the representation of the “Other” as savage. The idea of the savage is articulated in terms that denote the “Other” as aggressive, depraved, illiterate, licentious and unsophisticated. The savage is presented as lacking industry and ambition because he is driven simply by primal desire. Resistance to imperial labour projects was, in turn, explained away as the result of native laziness and a lack of a self-imposed work ethic after centuries of slavery.¹³ Clearly, the notion of the savage and the exotic both offer very different representations of the “Other” that emerged from the same broad imperial project, suggesting diverse but equally legitimate responses to the colonial condition. I believe that an interrogation of these representations, as well as indigenous responses to these imposed notions will reveal something of the infectious potential of sacred or public institutions. Public institutions and performances will be shown to have acquired infectious potential as indigenous people scrambled for honourable responses against colonialism or forms of resistance in a context of few formal political possibilities.

¹² Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 69.

¹³ Frederick Cooper, “Colonizing Time: Work Rhythms and Labour Conflict in Colonial Mombasa”, in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas Dirks (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 214.

The Politics of “Othering”

In seeking to maintain collapsing social relations, archives of the South Africa’s colonial history positioned colonist and indigenous forms of knowledge production as increasingly incompatible. This move effectively obscured the complexity of social relations by arresting them in terms of the oppositional narratives of settler nationalism and anti-apartheid/anti-colonialism. Beyond the restrictions of the meta-narrative of the South African colonial archive, notions of “Self” and “Other” are informed, simultaneously, by the politics of translation and transition, aspirations of independence and the desire to re-invent or recover the self. Commenting on colonisation, Edward Said reminds us that no amount of independent self-definition can eschew gross economic, social and political damage done by colonial occupation. He concludes that colonisation is “a fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results”.¹⁴ Further illustrating the critical contribution of postcolonial studies to a revision of postcolonial relations, Leela Ghandi suggests that:

rather than engage with the ambivalent condition of the colonial aftermath – or indeed, with the history and motivations of anti-colonial resistance – it (postcolonialism) directs attention to the discursive and textual production of colonial meaning and, concomitantly, to the consolidation of colonial hegemony.¹⁵

As previously indicated, the contribution of Edward Said to our understanding of the politics and practices of “Othering” is hotly contested, with some seeing his *Orientalism* as rather unremarkable in its treatment of imperialist violence, while others consider it a

¹⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 207.

¹⁵ Ghandi, 65

canonical contribution to critical and cultural studies.¹⁶ The debate about whether it is an extension of the anti-colonial polemic of earlier writers remains unresolved, primarily because it is seen as a treatment of the “epistemological and cultural attitudes which accompanies the curious habit of dominating”.¹⁷ Notwithstanding the limitations of Said’s study of *Orientalism* as “Othering”, his study focused on the variety of textual forms with which Western knowledge of non-Western areas and traditions, the East in particular, was produced. Finally, it proposed some ways in which this form of knowledge production influences a general understanding and expression of power in the colonies.¹⁸ I would argue that Said’s work offers a provisional framework for a postcolonial reading of the politics of producing the “Other” in South Africa. In the local context, it draws attention to strategies of resistance to the meta-narrative of Western history with its conception of time as linear, and the understanding of modernity in terms of binary oppositions such as the Self /Other, urban/rural, metropolitan/colony and black /white. Western scholars have been engaged in projects of self-definition (including colonial settler interests) through the production of images and stories to construct a history of the West. These constructs of the non-western “Other” emerged from a clustering of disparate but cumulative representations to produce a characterisation of the Saidian East, but also of Africa.

¹⁶ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*. (London: Verso, 1997), 62.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 67.

¹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 55-61.

Said's *Orientalism* is based on two primary theses: Firstly, Orientalism as writing and teaching about the Orient, a tradition that has always accompanied European adventures in the East. Secondly, these ideas about the East extensively informed Western, especially British, styles of domination and them having authority over the Orient. In other words, Said's argument follows that the styles and mechanisms of knowledge production, at the imperial centre, were inextricably linked to writing and records a whole range of Western interests engaged in such colonised areas. It has been suggested that *Orientalism* succeeded in drawing attention to the unmasking of the ideological disguises of imperialism by recognising that imperialism in itself remained an incomplete project.¹⁹ Whilst he has been widely recognised as having inaugurated this field of study, Said also has as many detractors. Aijaz Ahmad, for example, sees *Orientalism* as indicative of the ethos of the time, which he summarises as: "misguidedly anti-marxist, viciously post-structuralist and sentimentally tree-hugging".²⁰ Ahmad's critique of Said focuses on the apparent failure of *Orientalism* to present the agency of subject peoples in their struggles against domination. Said's critique of classical Marxism and post-structuralism, is based on the premise that although sometimes considered mutually antagonistic, both traditions are inclined towards an ethnocentrism, namely Eurocentrism. Concerned with the relation between power and knowledge within an essentially Western context, both classical Marxism and post-structuralism reinforce the conviction that the West functions as a coherent and self-produced entity unaffected by its colonies. Said reminds his reader that

¹⁹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature*. (London: Routledge, 1989), 83.

²⁰ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 192.

Marx's scholarship was not uncharacteristic of nineteenth century ideas about colonial relations when he cites Marx on colonisation:

England fulfilled a dual role in India: one destructive, the other regenerative – the annihilation of Asiatic society and the laying of material foundation of western society in Asia.²¹

Thus he sought to illustrate the manner in which Marxism is clearly indicative of a parochially focused critical tradition comprising theorists preoccupied with the construction of Western hegemony. But this critique of Marxism, according to Leela Ghandi, brings Said to a post-structuralist turn insofar as it demonstrates the “always-already complicity of Western knowledge with the operative interests of Western power.”²² This argument is further clarified in Derrida's meticulous investigation into the internal inadequacies, betrayals, and elisions within the notion of a homogenous Europe, an argument from which the influence of the “Other” or the external non-European is strikingly absent.²³ In her reflections on Foucauldian post-structuralism, Leela Ghandi suggests that in Said's work, “the discursive structure and order of western society remains myopic in relation to the non-European world”.²⁴ It is, at this juncture, that *Orientalism* makes its most decisive contribution by implicating the simultaneously absent yet active colonial periphery in the mechanisms and strategies of knowledge production within the West. In order to understand the West as a structure or system, Said suggests that greater recognition be given to the ways in which the idea of the Orient as

²¹ Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile*. (London: Pelican, 1973), 320. cited in Said, *Orientalism*, 54.

²² Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 72.

²³ Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism”, in *Literature, Politics and Theory*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret and Diana Loxley (London: Methuen, 1986), 148-149.

²⁴ Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 73.

“Other”, “helped to define Europe as its contrasting image, idea, personality and experience.”²⁵ In Chakrabarty’s view, Said offers us a set of critical propositions through which we might deconstruct the “Other” of formerly colonised areas and its relation to the history of European imperialism.²⁶ Thus, if all forms of knowledge are situated, then we must accept that representations of the “Other” are inevitably the product of both the context and variously competing interests of power. Discourses of “Othering” are understood by a Saidan definition as referring to a heavily policed cognitive system that controls the modes as well as the means of representation. Therefore I suggest that like Orientalism, the descriptions of Africa(ns) as other is a typically “discursive activity” that emerges whenever a claim is submitted that justifies the authority to speak *for* and/ or speak *about* an irrational, largely absent, passive and mute native. Foucault argues convincingly that the range of representations comprising the idea of the “Other” is only possible because:

the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by certain numbers of procedures whose role it is to ward off danger, to gain mastery over chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.²⁷

The African “Other”

It is with this conception of imperial and colonial power regimes that I will proceed to a critical consideration of the discourses about Africa(ns) as “Other” within the context of the South African experience of colonialism. South Africa’s recent history of

²⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

²⁶ D Chakrabarty, “Marx after Marxism: History Subalterneity and Difference.” *Meanjin*, 52.3 (1993):421-3.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse”, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 52.

reconciliation has also seen the revival of the rhetoric of representation, particularly by President Thabo Mbeki's revisionist approach to the idea of Africa(ns). In an address on the African Renaissance at the United Nations University, Tokyo, on 9 April 1998, President Mbeki outlines some of the paradoxical representations of Africa that have inhabited the canon of Western scholarship. He traces historically conflicting conceptions of Africa as desolate and terrifying, yet also noble and sophisticated. In the opening remarks of this address, he invokes the words of Pliny the Elder that "something new always comes out of Africa", before he proceeds to remind his audience of the more enduring images which, he believes, must have obliterated any positive conception of Africa that the Romans might have held, citing Pliny:

Of the Ethiopians there are diverse forms and kinds of men. Some there are towards the east that have neither nose nor nostrils, but the face all full. Others that have no upper lip, they are without tongues, and they speak by signs...²⁸

Having evoked these disturbing, medieval images of Africa(ns), Mbeki then contrasts Pliny's impressions with the recollections supposedly recorded by Leo Africanus, following a visit to the royal court of Timbuktu where he is said to have encountered a sophisticated society in which:

the rich king of Timbuktu... keeps a magnificent and well furnished court... great stores of doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men, that are bountifully maintained at the kings cost and charges. And hither are brought diverse manuscripts or written books of Barbarie, which are sold for more money than any other merchandise.²⁹

²⁸ John Reader, *Africa: A Bibliography of the Continent*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997).

²⁹ *ibid.*, 9-10. see also <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2001/011005346p1001.htm>

These contrasting images convey the paradoxical forms of knowledge production that has underpinned representations of Africa. With his rhetoric of Renaissance, Mbeki's revisionism seeks to attend carefully to the archive of frightening images of savagery (of the ancient and recent past) before proceeding with the recollection of a glorious past that has buried the history of European knowledge production. This raises a few questions with regard to the social and material conditions under which images of the "Other", and all its associated representations, came into being. However, the ambivalence of such representations is invoked, even by nineteenth century Africanist Leopold Senghor, when he suggests that "emotion is Negro and reason is Greek".¹ Thus contending that in Africa it is the political and economic interests of the colonists that informed the persistence of these representations in general, and that of the savage in particular. For example, general representation of Africans as child-like and innocent called for paternalistic interventions like the civilising mission of the European churches of the nineteenth century. In contrast, the idea of Africans as savage suggests a threat to European settlements and therefore required an active and more physical approach to either, contain through slavery and labour, or to expel Africans from the colonial frontier.

David Chidester suggests that during the more recent history of South Africa, a profound conflation of interests emerged between the conception of religion at the frontier and the politics of conquest and representation. I will survey, briefly, some of the key ideas developed in his *Savage Systems* insofar as it deconstructs the politics of "Othering" by

¹ Cheik Anta Diop, *Civilization and Barbarism*. Trans. by Yaa-Lengi Meena Ngemi (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1981), 224.

highlighting strategies of denial deployed against the religion of Africans. According to Chidester, the frontier was a contact zone, one that informed the practices by which knowledge about religion was produced.³¹ He argues that these practices informed particular regimes of knowledge about humanness and civility, as it played out in the power relations of this particular colonial context. With local political control at stake, indigenous and settler notions of human identity and origins marked the very boundaries of power and knowledge production. In travel reports, images of monsters, wild men, noble savages and earthly paradises generated strange and contradictory ways of imagining other human beings and other ways of being human. The invention of Africa reinforced – or perhaps actually reconstituted - the notion of Europe by centering it and surrounding it with a strange periphery.³² Situated in the context of intercultural encounters, travellers, missionaries and civil administrators practiced comparisons that mediated between the familiar and the strange, producing knowledge about the definition and nature of religion. Therefore, the relationship between representations of Africa and conceptions of religion must include not only European enlightenment concepts, but also the procedures of comparison that were practiced by travellers, missionaries and colonial agents in situations of cross-cultural contact. According to Chidester, the initial maneuver of the colonial encounter is most often marked by a strategy of denial through the assertion that the indigenous people had been “discovered”, and that they lacked religion.³³ At the very least, it called into question the humanity of those native

³¹ Chidester *Savage Systems*, 107-109.

³² Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 3-4.

³³ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 20.

communities, a question that the colonists answered in performative terms through brutal treatment, and at times, extermination.³⁴ According to Chidester, one might suppose that the denial and discovery of religion can be explained as a result of the politics of contact, alienation and the limitations experienced as a result of the physical terrain.³⁵ It is widely accepted that accounts of contact in the colonies tended to be presented in terms of the cultural interests of the observer, whether those interests had to do with commerce, politics or religion.³⁶ This leads Chidester to conclude that the absence of religion served as a range of socio-political functions to settler, frontier and apartheid interests, because:

the assertion that people lacked religion, signified, in general terms, an intervention in the local frontier conflicts over land, labour, trade and political autonomy.³⁷

King's *Orientalism and Religion* offers some indicators of how knowledge about religion in the colonies informed England's consolidation of its colonial interventions and policies of rule in South Africa, as in the case of King's India. This impact of the colonial experience on the British psyche is particularly paradoxical when we consider the construction of Africa and India. Africa is represented as naturally desolate, threatening and philosophically vacant, incomparable with the religious and cultural sophistication of India. The social relations in Africa are supposedly characterized by the absence of religion, thus making redundant any substantive discussions of religion in Africa. Author, J. M. Coetzee reminds his readers that the diversity of imperial interests in southern Africa rested on the binary positions of the charitable, industrious coloniser and the

³⁴ Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate All the Brutes*. (New York: The New Press, 1992).

³⁵ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 19

³⁶ Nicholas Dirks, eds. *Colonialism and Culture*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 3.

³⁷ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 14.

passive, introspective and lazy subaltern.³⁸ He argues that while imperialism operated as an aggressive knowledge regime that sought to undermine African indigenous traditions, it offered protection to indigenous sacred authorities through the endorsing of selected native public institutions, whether local and imperial. Commenting on the corresponding context of India, Bernard Cohn reminds us that:

Indians increasingly were to learn about their won culture through the mediation of European ideas and scholarship. The British rulers were increasingly defining what was Indian in and official and 'objective' sense. Indians had to look like Indians.³⁹

Accepting the situated-ness of subjectivity as historically produced and borne out of conflicting political positions, is to acknowledge the possibility that subjectivity is precarious and ambivalent. If the coloniser can no longer be regarded as in possession of a unique, socially fixed and morally robust character, then neither can the native be regarded as necessarily compliant and passive in his/her subjectivity. As such, colonial relations were infected by the force of competing subjectivities that emerged out of social institutions and representations of the "Other" that were produced by respective communities to manage their social interests. Furthermore, when the prevailing subject positions become redundant within the new context, rendering local indigenous institutions inadequate for mediating native interest, national resistance emerges and agency becomes tangible. Often this can find expression within the socio-legislative provisions of the state but is often embedded in more salient public institutions.

³⁸ J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing; On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. (Sandton: Radix, 1988), 1-35.

³⁹ Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 183.

It has been argued that such assertions of native agency are often disguised in individual performances of madness and hysteria⁴⁰ or that acts of discontent may find expression in subversive, but socially acceptable, public performances such as minstrel carnivals.⁴¹ The construction of representations of the native relied heavily on the gendered and familial privileges that accompanied the imperial project legitimised by the Victorian predisposition towards organizing social relations according to race, religion and sexuality.⁴² However, African nationalist struggles have frequently assumed their own momentum and, in the process, obscured the diversity of local native interests. This resulted in an intrinsic conflict between nationalists and nativists as to whether resistance to colonialism should be socio-political or socio-cultural. The question of an ethno-nationalism in the resistance movement in South Africa would remain unresolved well into the post-apartheid era.

Manufacturing Ethnicity in South Africa

A persistent idea about Africa(ns) during the victorian period was that Africans naturally organised themselves into tribes. Thus we need to consider how such colonially produced representations about Africa(ns) informed the making of democracy on the continent in the imagination of both the coloniser and the colonised. In this section I will argue that

⁴⁰ Vivian Bickford-Smith *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

⁴¹ George Lipsitz, "Mardi Gras Indian: Counter-Narratives in Black new Orleans", *Cultural Critique*, 10 (1998). 99-121

⁴² Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 98.

ethnicity was a social fracture where the power to describe the “Other” was asserted and re-inscribed. I hope to show that ethnicity in the context of colonialism was not so much a manufactured product of the encounter between natives and Europeans, but a means of containing and mediating liberative aspirations of indigenous communities. Whilst historians of religion occasionally refer to antiquity so as to suggest, for example, that the Ethiopians were “pioneers of religion”, the period of colonial expansion was marked by only the most tenuous linkages to practices of observation and generalisation in relation to antiquity. This period of observation and colonial contact is argued by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* as characterised by the emergence of nations, which like indigenous ethnic groups, are brought into being partly, but significantly, by acts of imaginings, and of narration.⁴³ The postcolonial nation reflects the diverse ethnic identities that emerged out of the colonial experience and the aftermath covering a long historical span, including the present. It serves not only as a landscape for inquiry into Western ways of objectifying and domesticating its “Other”, but it is also concerned with the identities of the colonisers.⁴⁴ When Mamdani suggests that the African state has been deracialised but not yet democratised, I interpret this to mean that the question of ethnicity remains unresolved in postcolonial African nations.

In terms of the South African context, Luli Callinicos argues that in the anti-apartheid struggle the question of ethnicity collapsed into the more generic categories of multi-

⁴³ Anthony Smith, *The Nation in History*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 57-59.

⁴⁴ Bronislaw Malinowski, “Dynamics of Cultural Change”, in *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, ed. Immanuel. Wallerstein (New York: Wiley, 1966), 14.

racialism or non-racialism.⁴⁵ The suppression of class and ethnic division within a movement such as the African National Congress, and the support and currency granted to the umbrella terms of non-racialism and multi-racialism simply served to suspend the question of ethnicity, leaving the tensions remained unresolved with the movement. Thus the frequent resurgence of ethnicity in the post-colony has presented political theorists with critical challenges about the apparent failure of nationalism, and the postcolonial tendency to one-party statism in Africa.⁴⁶ It demonstrates the ways in which ethnicity as a colonial discourse is a deeply ambivalent construct and demonstrates the possibility that colonialism is not susceptible to the constraints of a single agenda. Commenting on tribalism in sub-saharan Africa, Vail reminds his reader that ethnicity is essentially an “ideological construct, usually of the twentieth century, and not an anachronistic cultural artefact from the past”.⁴⁷ In the struggle against colonialism, ethnicity was commonly viewed as inhibiting the promise of modernising nationalism, and ultimately, as disruptive of the idea of secular nationalism in African. The idea of a postcolonial nation is therefore saturated with a competing, contextually mutating rhetoric of the sacred, producing diverse conceptions of religion as it emerged in Southern Africa. In the South African context, both the colonisers and the colonised invoked the rhetoric of the sacred to legitimate their claims and subsequent resistance to counter claims of ethnic nationalism. The Afrikaners of South Africa produced their own sacred history as an

⁴⁵ Luli Callinicos, “Oliver Tambo and the Politics of Class, Race and Ethnicity in the African National Congress of South Africa”, *African Sociological Review*, 3.1 (1999): 136-137.

⁴⁶ Leroy Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. (London: James Curry, 1989), 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

ethnic nation among ethnic nations,⁴⁸ while the black communities were divided primarily between primitivists who supported the apartheid idea of separate “homeland”,⁴⁹ and nationalists who stood firmly against ethnic-particular political organisation.⁵⁰ It could be said that this struggle was not only a material battle over the means of production, but that it was also about framing the contemporary struggle as part of the long history for self-definition - a history of persecution and redemption.⁵¹ As postcolonial nations demonstrate their ability to re-inscribe the markers of ethnicity through which their members experience new cultural signifiers, religion represents a space through which identities are increasingly contested and values are increasingly relative.

In the postcolonial context with its proliferation of struggles, ethnic communities are limited to drawing on sources that legitimate their claims on sacred and political grounds. Colonial theories of ethnic origin provide one such source of legitimation, but these colonial conceptions of African ethnicity rely heavily on the supposed absence of both religion and Western definitions of what constituted humanness. The supposed lack of religion and other forms of human civility was taken as sufficient justification that indigenous people were to be civilised through rule, and therefore be denied citizen

⁴⁸ Isabel Hofmyer, “Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity”, in *The Politics of Race, Class & Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, eds. Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (London: Longmann, 1987), 109-110.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 3-4.

⁵⁰ James Leatt, Theo Kneifel and Klaus Nurnberger, eds., *Contending Ideologies in South Africa*. (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1986), 92-95.

⁵¹ Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study of Black Theology and Black Power*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 20.

rights, land and other productive powers. At the same time, colonists needed to recognise the public institutions of native peoples (both sacred and profane) as a means to mediate indigenous participation in the emerging labour market in the colonies. This situation created the space into which anthropologists were able to proceed with, what Peter Rigby refers to as, “backward narration” – the reconstruction of an African past to serve the contemporary interests of colonists.⁵² He reminds his readers how scholars such as Malinowski often invoked invented ideas of a “pre-European situation [of] absolute sovereignty [of chiefs] – complete and undivided power, the right to carry on war and slave raids and to control the wealth of the tribe”.⁵³ I wish to argue that it is in this context of re-inscribing ethnicity or native institutions that the gradual segregation of political and sacred authorities was introduced, either consciously or unconsciously. Thus I conclude, that this period is not so much characterised by the emergence of ethnicity as a construct, but by the redefinition of its political and sacred content for the consumption in native, colonist and nationalist interests.

African Nationalism’s Postcolonial Paradox

In the final section of this chapter I argue that the contest over the meaning of both the “Other” and ethnicity persist to disrupt nativism and nationalism in the postcolonial context. I will argue that nationalist and nativist discourses draw on more than colonially invented categories of description as legitimation. It is my view that in struggles for self-

⁵² Peter Rigby, *African Images: Racism and the End of Anthropology*. (Oxford: Berg, 1996), 77.

⁵³ Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Dynamics of Cultural Change: An Inquiry into Race Relations in Africa*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1945), 29.

determination, nativists and nationalists draw upon colonial strategies of exclusion and containment to maintain control over the sacred and all that it warrants. I will begin with a consideration of the way in which various indigenous responses to colonial representations have been treated in postcolonial writing. Postcolonialism generally refers to the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period. In practice, however, the term is used much more loosely. Not only does it refer to the period after the departure of the imperial administration and formal recognition of independence from Europe, but it also encompasses the mechanisms of knowledge production that occurred before independence. Some have suggested that the postcolonial comes into existence at the very moment of colonial encounter, since it marks moment(s) when power-relations become constituted and reconstituted through resistance, negotiation, conversion and violence:

Even more generically, the "postcolonial" is used to signify a position against imperialism and Eurocentrism. Western ways of knowledge production and dissemination in the past and present then become objects of study for those seeking alternative means of expression.⁵⁴

It has been argued that, in this age of globalization, the over-hasty celebration of national independence masks the residues of colonialism in the guise of modernization and development.⁵⁵ Such celebrations often provoke urgent calls for the recovery of indigenous traditions, a response frequently labelled as essentialist and reactionary. The Western academy has demonstrated itself to be predisposed to forms of postcolonial

⁵⁴ Deepikha Bahri, "Postcolonial Studies", <http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/intro.html>

⁵⁵ Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in an Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1994): 331.

theory that are compatible with those hybrid postmodern formations that continue to classify, analyse and produce the exotic margins⁵⁶. Furthermore, it betrays its cynicism towards the critical realism of native nationalist writers' interest in the specifics of social and racial oppression. The privileging of postcolonialism as an essentially trans-national discourse is limited in that migrant sensibilities takes precedence over, and at the expense of more local struggles in the post-colony. Commenting on African scholarship's distance from local struggles Kwame Appiah's offers helpful remarks on the tension produced by the possible disparity between local aspirations and transnational theory:

in the West they are known through the Africa that they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, each other and for Africa.⁵⁷

Critics have often argued that colonially produced representations of Africa and its people are perpetuated by privileging supposedly global perspectives about former colonies that are produced by "native elites" and other migrants over the local struggles that are deemed urgent by native communities.⁵⁸ Thus even in this self-critical discourse of postcolonialism we have to guard against the ways in which some apolitical perspectives are privileged over the more political, whether overt or subversive. As such, these practices maintain the muted, passive subject position of the indigenous community through commodification of exotic and palatable representations about the aspirations and beliefs of natives. It could be argued, that the incompatibility rests within the

⁵⁶ Gijatri Spivak, *Outside the Teaching Machine*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 56.

⁵⁷ A. Appiah, "Is the Post in Postmodern the Post in Postcolonial," *Critical Inquiry*, 17.2 (1991): 62-63.

⁵⁸ Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference", 207.

assumption of secularisation that has accompanied nationalism in former colonies, and nativist struggles for self-determination have been articulated through rights discourses concerned with the sacred. This leads me to a position where we interrogate the position of religion in postcolonial discourses of ethnic and nationalist self-determination.

Commentators on colonial religion and the politics of identity have tended to view religion as either sanctioning the native nationalist struggle against colonialism, or as legitimating the oppression of the natives.⁵⁹ Obviously, these relations are more complex than they appear at first, since religion, whether Christian, Muslim or indigenous traditions are deployed in the practices of resistance or struggles against colonialism. As such, the themes of power and representation tend to dominate this enquiry of the relationship between religion and colonisation to produce a sacred civil history.⁶⁰ While it has also been widely recognised that the study of the symbiotic and mutually exploitative relationship between Christianity and state power has largely been exhausted, a treatment of the religio-ethnic implications are absolutely necessary for a postcolonial analysis of religious relations in South Africa. Such a treatment of colonial relations must begin from the moment of colonial encounter through to the organisation of the sacred in the postcolonial nation state. I believe that it is within the construction and appropriation of the sacred that imperial relations are infected well beyond the control of the church and indigenous authorities. A postcolonial reading of religious relations in South Africa must

⁵⁹ Editors note, *Interventions*, 1.1 (1999): 1.

⁶⁰ T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 35.

commit to more than a naïve preoccupation with giving audience to muffled native voices. Such a reading of postcolonial religion as simply an essentialist coming-to-voice will obscure the material strategies used by both the coloniser and the colonised as they sought mastery over the production of particular knowledge regimes and subsequent resistance to it. It is interesting that religion continues to be viewed as either complicit in the production of oppressive regimes, or an imperative in the development of anti-establishment sentiments under the rubric of socio-political equality and human rights. Other approaches to the study of religion are concerned primarily with the religious and social virtues that informed the worldview and practices of the colonisers. This conception of religion tends to obscure the fact that the manufacturing of ethnic institutions under colonial rule produced a schism between the sacred and political roles of indigenous authorities. This segregation of the religio-ethnic from the public and commercial relations of the colonies produced a social fracture that required a reconfiguring of the traditional institutions. Here, in the context of this fracture, is where the infective potential of religion is released to act either in a manner that is vital or volatile. It could be argued that such movements as the Zionists of South Africa might be regarded as vital or volatile in its hybridisation of indigenous and colonial Christian practices, although this hybridisation does not necessarily translate directly with regard to the belief system. Zionism, like other similar movements, can be viewed as vital in that it sought to establish public practices (i.e. replicating colonial church hierarchies) that were regarded as civil by colonists but it enabled natives to give performative expression to their political and cultural concerns. Similarly, the movement can be seen to be volatile in

that it operated, in part, as an outright rejection of missionary advances which were fast encroaching on indigenous forms of life.⁶¹ I wish to argue that like the Zionist movement, indigenous public institutions like indigenous sacred specialists and traditional leaders had to reconfigure their roles to demonstrate some liberative potential against imperial administrators. Yet they had to submit to the authority of local colonial magistrates and acts as enforcers of imperial ordinances, and in doing so, they retained legislative and ritual authority over their “ancestral” land.

In the context of the post-apartheid South African state, the legislative and ritual significance of several traditional institutions remain unresolved, leaving the postcolonial production of the sacred largely un-theorised. Thus I want to turn to the continuing conceptual policing that has emerged as a result of the ways in which both nativist and nationalist expressions of religion have sought to find their own voice in a postcolonial world. Religion in Africa continues to be represented in relation to the evolving self-representation of the imperial centre as dominant, modern, and literate. While postcolonial theory seeks to problematise colonial notions that a vacant Africa is inhabited by the savage, the hunter, the cannibal, the storyteller, the superstitious and the internally ambivalent, nativist and nationalist alike invoke these colonial categories of description. They draw upon these categories of description to position their own projects of recovering a lost African past or nationalist self-determination. Thus indigenous struggles are fashioned in terms of cultural resources in Africa with art and ritual tending

⁶¹ Switzer, *Resistance and Power in an African Society: The Ciskei Xhosa and the Making of Modern South Africa*, 182-184.

to be the focus insofar as it meets the demands of global commodity markets and consumption. It is therefore not surprising that in situations of overt, and more often, subversive indigenous resistance to European imperialism Africa(ns) came to be represented as stubbornly pre-modern.

Colonial policies to contain native aggression frequently followed representations of the natives as driven by primal desire rather than rationality. These representations produced a discourse of exclusion and containment that was to remain a material legacy in the colonies as well as in the European imagination. As such, apartheid responses to the mobility of Africans were accompanied by the rhetoric of segregation and confinement. Barbara Browning argues that such responses to African agency and struggles for self-determination was partly “constructed in the West in an effort (largely unconscious) to contain and control diasporic flows, whether migrational or cultural”.⁶² Similarly, postcolonial studies are often implicated in the representation of African peoples as primarily concerned with recovering pre-modern traditions through fetish worship and seeking to secure their legitimacy in context of a global commodity market.⁶³ South Africa's history of colonialism has been marked and scarred by various invented categories of description that sought to manage the social and political relations between people. The anti (and post)-colonial project is inhabited by a multiplicity of imperially invented identities. These identities are in circulation in colonial relations and accessible

⁶² Barbara Browning, *Infectious Rhythms: Metaphors of Contagion*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 54.

⁶³ William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish II: Origin of the Fetish”, *RES: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics*. Res 13 (1987): 23-45

for re-inscription by, and for, consumption to all the actors in the colonial context, oppressive and subversive, nativist and nationalist. The religious and material expression of such identities has become active not only in relation to a coherent center, but to a series of fragmented and ambivalent axes of self-representations within subject communities. I believe it is at the intersection of these social fractures, and from the salient fragments of indigenous institutions that strategies to contain and control emerge. Thus nativist pursuit of a coherent parochial tradition makes them prisoners of imperial cultural hegemony, as nativists tend to draw on performances of resistance and description that have come into circulation as a result of colonialism. Colonists, nativists and nationalists alike have produced notions of the sacred that have emerged from the abrasions of colonial contact and the residues of parochialism, and will continue to do so in the post-colony. Finally, the failure of nativism and nationalism to contain the effects of the sacred in colonial South Africa points to the possibility that religion will continue to operate within the postcolonial context through subversion and re-inscription. I suggest that as with the categories of the “Other” and ethnicity discussed above, the persistently infectious character of religion is particularly active in responses of resistance to strategies intended to domesticate, contain or exclude.

CHAPTER FOUR

COLONIAL PRODUCTIONS OF THE SACRED

So far, I have argued that colonial relations have been mediated through description and performance as strategies of denial and exclusion of native interests. I have also suggested that the terms of exclusion and containment have significantly framed the contest between both coloniser and the colonised. In this chapter, I will outline the persistence of religion in the colonial and anti-colonial struggles in Africa. As indicated in previous chapters, in colonial Africa the history of religion was presented largely in terms of denial and discovery, of legitimation and subversion. I suggest that in South Africa the sacred was expressed through institutions of settler and native religion and that it was generally invoked to legitimise the oppression of native peoples, or to legitimise nationalist struggles against colonialism. Therefore, on the whole, religion in Africa has been regarded as an indication of the pre-modern status of indigenous societies or as something that has alienated Africans from their humanness, materially and mentally. It is therefore not at all surprising that African nationalist intellectuals and activists promote a thoroughly secular polity in postcolonial Africa. However, the diverse identities and social relations in postcolonial Africa continue to be cohered through notions of the sacred that are embedded in the anti-colonial and postcolonial narratives of nationalism. I hope that the two case studies, one in this chapter and one in chapter five, will demonstrate the various ways in which religion persists in both the, supposedly secular African nationalist narratives of Fanon's anti-colonialism, and in the postcolonial South

Africa of Thabo Mbeki. Both Frantz Fanon's notes "On National Culture" and South Africa's post-apartheid narratives on traditional authorities rely on the production of the sacred as they seek to exorcise discourses of nationalism of the legitimating authority of religion. I will argue that that such exorcism is not possible without the practices of containment and exclusion that will facilitate the production of new discourses of the sacred, expanding the ways in which we read about and speak of religion in postcolonial Africa.

At this point in the study I make a deliberate departure from the colonial relation in South Africa to focus on the work of Frantz Fanon who is concerned with the question of national culture in the Algerian struggle for independence. I argue that while he is regarded as an anti-colonial humanist, as well as a postcolonial scholar, his work is saturated with the production of the sacred. His work offers a particularly useful perspective on the African nationalism that informed much of postcolonial Africa, and South Africa in particular. Further, in his proposing the humanist foundations of his work he alienates his work from the "religious" subject communities it is meant to liberate. While asserting the thorough humanism of his notion of national culture, Fanon evades the challenge of explaining the place of religion in the Algerian struggle and the necessity for the production of the sacred. In this chapter I will argue for the persistence of the sacred in the work of Frantz Fanon. As part of the development of his ideas in *National Culture*, Fanon re-inscribes secular institutions with sacred authority to capture the hearts and minds of the people in their struggle for freedom. Finally, this case study will

demonstrate how in the nationalist rhetoric of the anti-colonial struggle, religion persists by asserting its authority through vital or volatile infection of social relations. A postcolonial critique of Fanon's anti-colonial *On National Culture* enables us to view religion as more than just legitimation, more than rationalism and coherence, more than nativist claims and nationalist counter claims and, ultimately, free from Enlightenment notions of what constitutes religion.

On National Culture: Frantz Fanon and the Production of the Sacred

This case study is the result of an investigation into the work of Frantz Fanon and his rise to prominence in the field of postcolonial studies. My primary interest is the persistence of religion and tradition in the struggle for self-determination under colonial and postcolonial conditions. Fanon is intriguing in that his work has been appropriated by a wide range of groups, including radical nationalists, the anti-colonial pan-Africanists, and U.S.-based civil rights activists as part of their "oppositional rhetoric of black 'mass' vernacularism".¹ 'Fanonism' appears to resonate with such material struggles, and at the same time, fits quite comfortably within the discourse of postcolonial theory that is largely resident within the Western academy and far removed from the material conditions of the colonial periphery.² The epistemic battle for the soul of Fanonism has as much to do with the politics of cultural studies, as it does with the complexities of the

¹ Houston Baker Jr, Manthia Diawara and Ruth H Lindeborg eds., *Black British Cultural Studies*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 14.

² Henry. L. Gates Jr. "Critical Fanonism," *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1991): 357-370.

colonial condition. His two definitive texts, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth* are, to an extent, an indication of the conceptual turns in the life of Fanon. In his article, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition", Homi Bhabha suggests that the two texts can be articulated as concerned with, respectively, the politics of narcissism and the politics of nationalism.³ Published in 1952, *Black Skin, White Masks* appeared well before Fanon had ever been to Algeria. In this work, he addresses dysfunctions of oppression and a range of complex responses that are largely derived from the impact of colonialism on the psyche of the native, and is concerned with making sense of the ambivalent material interests of the national bourgeoisie. *Wretched of the Earth*, on the other hand, published posthumously but containing work produced immediately prior to his death, concerns itself with the project of decolonisation - looking beyond the Algerian struggle, to include the push for national independence within the Third World. It is noteworthy that in his concluding remarks on the question of national solidarity and resistance to colonialism, Fanon reminds the reader of the necessity of the "new man" of *Black Skin, White Masks*. In translating some of his earlier reflections of the personal transformation of the "new man" in relation to the development of a national consciousness in *Wretched of the Earth*, he argues that a total revision of worldview is required when he says: "For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man".⁴

³ Homi Bhabha "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition", in *Remaking History*, eds. B Kruger and P Mariani (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), 146.

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1968), 316.

Fanon understands the “new man” as representing the transformation of the ways in which people position themselves in relation to the “Other”. In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon clarifies the conception of the “new man” when he notes that, “man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation... Man is a *yes* that vibrates cosmic harmonies”.⁵ As such the “new man” thesis is not simply concerned with the liberation of a singular community or individual but with the complete transformation of social relations globally. Fanon’s texts appear to straddle the anxieties raised by the attempts to integrate his detailed investigation of individual and collective psyches. Whilst it is impossible to entirely segregate these two phenomenal texts from one another, I propose to focus on one of his essays included in *Wretched of the Earth*, “On National Culture”.⁶ With its urgent tone, this essay explicitly announces Fanon’s reflections on the question of cultural tradition and its place in the struggle for liberation. First produced as a speech given to *Presence Africaine*’s Rome Conference during the Easter of 1959, “On National Culture” was expanded for inclusion in *Wretched of the Earth* thus locating it firmly within a broader narrative of postcolonial visions and parochial identities. Frantz Fanon, a champion of the anti-colonial struggle in Africa, and the colonised world more generally, is drawn upon in the field of postcolonial studies as a theorist of Africa. Yet, we have to ask why the use of Fanon has been so patently limited within the field of cultural studies, except for the relative excitement generated by Homi Bhabha, thus inventing a one-sided Fanon limited in its ability to challenge hegemonic knowledge structures as they relate to

⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*. Trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), 8.

⁶ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 166 – 199.

emancipatory discourses. Recent works in the field of Fanonism have begun to recognise the invention of a range of Fanons informed by “end of struggle” narratives.⁷ Elsewhere, in his “Fanon and the Pitfalls of Cultural Studies”, Nigel Gibson suggests that the new Fanon of postcoloniality is one which “emphasises uncertainty and fragmentation, almost replacing social analysis with psychoanalysis”.⁸ I do not intend to invent, or reinvent, Fanon but rather to focus more generally on his work in relationship to the production of the sacred and expose the lingering but unacknowledged residue of the sacred in the field of postcolonial studies.

The sacred can be understood as moments of privileging that which is ordinarily stifled, and the ways in which the ordinary becomes elevated to powerful and compelling icons of change. My interest is in the way Fanon, and postcolonial critics more generally, articulate conceptions of the sacred in the post-colony as at once parochial and national. In his reflection on the sacred, Veikko Anttonen suggests that “setting specific times and places apart as sacred is a fundamental structure of human cultures, without which no religion, nation-state or political ideology can insure the continuity of its power, hierarchy and authority”.⁹ I therefore want to do a close reading of Frantz Fanon’s essay, “On National Culture”, where I believe he attempts to engage a conversation between the notion of nation, cultural tradition, and the persistence of the sacred among Algerian

⁷ Nigel Gibson, “Thoughts about doing Fanonism in the 1990’s”, *College Literature*, 26, 2 (1999): 96.

⁸ Nigel Gibson, “Fanon and the Pitfalls of Cultural Studies”, in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anthony Alessandrini, (London: Routledge, 1999), 101.

⁹ Veikko Anttonen, “Sacred”, in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russel T. McCutcheon (New York: Cassel, 2000), 272.

communities.¹⁰ What sets this text apart is the inscription of the problematics of culture as it relates to the question of nation and national identity. Eric San Juan argues that “On National Culture” represents an attempt by Fanon to propose ways to “reconfigure the value and function of tradition and all the properties of indigenous life forms in a Manichean environment”.¹¹ To demonstrate this set of rather complex relations in the colonial or postcolonial context, Achille Mbembe aptly illustrates the characteristics of the post-colony that obscure the production and persistence of the sacred:

the notion of the ‘postcolony’ identifies specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization... the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic; it has nonetheless coherence. It is a specific system of signs, a particular way of fabricating simulacra or reforming stereotypes. It is not, however, an economy of signs in which power is mirrored or *imagined* self-reflectively.¹²

The persistence of the sacred is embedded in the work of Fanon, although it is not given explicit expression in his reflections on theories about individual or collective psyches. Clearly Fanon maintained an ambivalent attitude in relation to the sacred. Traditionally the sacred has been described as “a class of objects of belief, ritual and experience. The sacred is other than the ordinary and mundane... the sacred may in a manner be private and unique... bound up with dimensions of belief, behaviour, experience and social

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture”, in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 37-52.

¹¹ Eric San Juan, “An Intervention into Cultural Studies”, in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anthony Alessandrini (London: Routledge, 1999), 132.

¹² Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 102.

organisation that define a human, cultural phenomenon".¹³ This understanding of the sacred, developed initially by Rudolph Otto in his *Idea of the Holy*, assumes that it is the ineffable character of the sacred that makes for religion. More recently, Mircea Eliade argued that "sacred" be treated as a *sui generis* ontological category because he believed that "whatever the historical context in which (man) is placed... there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real".¹⁴ Departing from this ahistorical notion of the sacred, Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss suggest that the sacred be treated as a symbolic representation of collectivity,¹⁵ through which a social or political group may produce cognitive boundaries that set them apart from others. George Bataille noted that the "nature of the sacred, in which we recognise the burning existence of religion, is perhaps the most ungraspable thing that has been produced between men".¹⁶ The relation between the manufactured nature of sacred and national liberation, as expressed through parochial tradition, caused Fanon a great degree of anxiety. He sought to make sense of the paradoxical relation of "the people" to religion, recognising that the relation was at once rooted and marked by acts of negation and resistance. The ambivalence of this relationship, expressed through acts of resistance and negation, means that religion can be

¹³ Peter Byrne, "Religion and Religions", in *The Study of Religion, Traditional and New Religion*, eds. Stewart Sutherland and Peter Clarke (London: Routledge, 1991), 24.

¹⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. by William R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 202.

¹⁵ Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification*. Ed. and trans. by Rodney Needham (London: Cohen and West, 1963), 84.

¹⁶ George Bataille, "Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939", in *Theory and History of Literature, Volume 14*. Ed. and trans. by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 242.

an opiate but that it also possesses the characteristics that allows people to draw on it as an analytical category and social resource.

Fanon's Ambivalent Humanism

Acknowledging Fanon's anxiety towards indigenous culture and tradition, the study of Fanonism has recently seen a significant amount of attention dedicated to the question of culture. In his biography of Frantz Fanon, David Macey explores, at length, the ambivalence in Fanon's universalist struggle against oppression and the integration of local Algerian Arabic interests in revitalising national culture.¹⁷ Influenced by the Pan-Africanism of the negritude movement's Leopold Senghor, Fanon did not consider the possibility of re-introducing indigenous culture and traditions in a postcolonial nation. He appeared suspicious of such acts of recovery of the dignity and glory of a past generation,¹⁸ seeing it as no different to the colonial approaches to local traditions as a means to domesticate political aspirations. For Fanon, the recovery of dignity and culture cannot be divorced from the struggle for liberation, because once this enlightenment has occurred the activist throws "himself body and soul into the national struggle... [and that] ...there is no other fight for culture which can develop apart from the popular struggle".¹⁹

In his *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*, Christopher Miller argues that Fanon's weakness is seen to consist not in an

¹⁷ David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life*. (London: Granta Books, 2000), 484.

¹⁸ Halford H. Fairchild, "Fanon's Wretched of the Earth in Contemporary Perspective", *Journal of Black Studies*, 25.2 (1994), 195.

¹⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 232-233.

underestimation of the *persistence* of the “traditional” political practices and forms of thought in the colonial era, but in a contempt for tradition which leads him to cite that: “Fanon leaves no room for local knowledge”.²⁰ Similarly, in his critique of Fanon’s humanism, Richard Onwuanibe suggests that in the development of his “revolutionary humanism” and the emergence of the “new man”, Fanon was positively dismissive of indigenous religion and traditions.²¹ This general lack of attention to the “sacred” in both Fanon’s work, and postcolonial studies more generally, has significantly inhibited more comprehensive theory making about native agency.

Without labouring the point, I suggest that the silencing of the sacred is not peculiar to Fanon but characteristic of the field of postcolonial studies in general. I find it perhaps more ironic than surprising that such acts of silencing continue to plague even this radically self-reflective field. Notions of religion as a belief in supernatural beings continues to find expression in nationalist rhetoric, whereas more recent conceptions of religion seek to define it as “a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with these ultimate problems of human life”.²² Recognising the tension between religion as personal belief and religion as social category in the anti-colonial struggles, I want to reiterate my preference for a Durkheimian definition of religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things”.²³ In his treatment of the

²⁰ Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 50.

²¹ Richard Onwuanibe, *A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon*. (St Louis: Warren H. Green Inc., 1983), 116.

²² J. M. Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion*. (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 7.

²³ Durkheim, 47.

relationship between the development of the study of religion and socio-political discourses, Russell McCutcheon, in *Manufacturing Religion*, explores the imperial dynamic in the history of religion. He suggests that the development of the relationship between the study of religion and the imperial condition is mediated through “rhetorical and ideological strategies to control the production of knowledge through the representation of people and events”.²⁴ Similarly, Chidester’s *Savage Systems* explores the ways in which religion is denied, discovered and produced, in the colonial context, as part of a process of knowledge production as it relates to the humanity of indigenous communities. For Chidester the denial of religion among indigenous colonised communities and the contested representations of the “Other”, expose the struggle for the mechanisms of knowledge production in which the native is an “active” agent. In exploring a range of representations, Chidester’s description of the history of religion in southern Africa exposes the range of strategies and interests that inform the struggle over the terms of what constitutes humanness. He argues that, consequently, conceptions of religion in the colonial context were “expanded, thought out, worked out, fought out in local colonial situations and global imperial relations”.²⁵ Thus I suggest that, since these practices of description and definition framed the parameters of Fanon’s critique of indigenous traditions, it would have been quite impossible for him not to draw on them as ideological and rhetorical strategies of struggle.

²⁴ Russel McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 158-191

²⁵ David Chidester, “Situating the Programmatic Interests of the History of Religion in South Africa”, (unpublished manuscript, 2000), 14.

It is the persistence of the sacred in the (post)colonial context, whether settler or indigenous, that requires attention. More particularly, I am concerned with new configurations through which the problem of the sacred becomes expressed in the postcolonial situation. Located in a political context where tradition is largely described and organised around ethnicity, Fanon seeks to develop a totalising humanism, calling for the “liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism”...*suggesting that such...* “liquidation is the preliminary for the unification of the people”.²⁶ In his aggressive critique of Fanon, Miller introduces a definition of ethnicity as “a sense of identity and difference among peoples, founded on a fiction of origin and descent and subject to forces of politics, commerce, language and religious culture”.²⁷ Thus Miller considers Fanon’s imposition of the “nation” on African traditions as an act of epistemic violence. For Fanon, human life must be seen as isolated, as having dignity and value without reference to the transcendent or supernatural, thus extending humanist values to all. It is precisely this *revolutionary* humanism that lies at the heart of Fanon’s conception of the transformed and no longer alienated “new man”:

NO to the butchery of what is most human to man: freedom... To educate man is to be actional, preserving in all his relation his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, it is the prime task of him who, haven taken thought, prepares to act.²⁸

Onwuanibe reminds us that the emergence of Fanon’s “new man” does in fact have a slightly longer and rather eclectic history. He reminds us of the “new man” of the

²⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 94.

²⁷ Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*, 35.

²⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 222.

Christian tradition articulated in terms of the redemptive grace of Christ, and points to the Marxist vision of the “new man” as a condition of redemption from the alienation brought about by capitalist exploitation, concluding that “Fanon’s vision of the new man shares in this powerfully messianic vision”.²⁹ Fanon’s conception of alienation refers to the processes whereby acts of oppression create conditions that divorce the subject from her humanness. It is in inhabiting the mundane that Fanon’s treatment of the question of the sacred can be distilled. Fanon considers every act of domination as contributing to the development of the colonised mind, pacified through multiple strategies including force, which “produces as its residue a debilitating self-doubt”.³⁰ Fanon views alienation as intrinsic to the colonial condition, primarily defined as loss of self, desire, rootedness, beliefs and values. Drawing on Hegel and Marx, he develops an understanding of alienation or rupture as occurring both at the level of spirit, as well as at the level of socio-political condition. Religion, therefore, is viewed as exacerbating this condition of alienation. Throughout *Wretched of the Earth* one is struck by the intimate relationship between the psychiatric institution and the social world of colonialism. Alienation occurs essentially as simultaneously spiritual and material exploitation. In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon argues that the native is over-determined by myth and representations largely derived from the contemporary European imagination.³¹ He suggests that this alienation is reversed through a pro-active acceptance of the self. Drawing on George Sorel’s helpful conception of myth as “not descriptions of things, but expressions of a

²⁹ Onwuanibe, *A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon*, 29.

³⁰ Jock McCulloch, *Black Soul White Artifacts: Fanon’s Critical Psychology and Social Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 128-129.

³¹ Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 116.

determination to act”, Robyn Dane suggests that it is this character of myth that “offers a respite where sanity and a sense of the inviolable sacred can be rejuvenated”.³² While some scholars have argued that myth must be understood as the theoretical expression of the religious experience, it is essentially a medium through which sentiments of the sacred are expressed and made public. As we are reminded by Jonathan Z. Smith, “there is no primordium... it is all history”.³³

On cultural imposition, Fanon develops his argument largely in terms of language, devoting the opening chapter in *Black Skin White Masks* to it, and its impact on native articulations of self-understanding and definition. He concludes that language serves as the primary marker of tradition, which incidentally must here be understood as referring to practices of transfer. To assume an interchange-ability between tradition and traditional would be limiting, because the term “traditional” is concerned primarily with positioning particular practices in the broader socio-political context and giving them meaning. These terms have often been used to denote appeals to essentialist continuities, transmitting imagined representations into the present. Notions of traditionality have been used both to legitimate and contest socio-legal categorisation, and they invariably appeal to static and monadic representations of the past to legitimate their particular types of visions for the future.³⁴ Fanon’s emphasis on language still raises critical questions as to

³² Robyn Dane, “When Mirror Turns Lamp: Frantz Fanon as Cultural Visionary”, *Africa Today*, 41.2 (1994): 77.

³³ Jonathan Z Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xiii

³⁴ Andrew Spiegel, “Struggling With Tradition in South Africa”, in *Social Constructions of the Past: Representation and Power*, eds. George C. Bond and Angela Gilliam (London: Routledge, 1994), 186-187.

the range of other markers of tradition (not traditionality) that need to be considered in the process of overcoming alienation. Houston Smith reminds us that the term “traditional” historically referred to “an entire category of people whose behaviour and thinking are portrayed negatively... seen as conservative, backward and pre-literate,... It is therefore important to realize that when practices are termed ‘traditional’ this is never simply a statement of objective fact.”³⁵ On economic exploitation Fanon describes the dialectic of opposition simply in terms of class, exposing his arguably underdeveloped critique of Marxist analysis. In his revision of Marx, Fanon writes in *Wretched of the Earth*: “In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure... Everything up to and including the very nature of pre-capitalist society, so well explored by Marx, must here be thought out again.”³⁶ Whilst class in the context of the colonies must be considered a legitimate category, an over-reliance on class-analysis does appear to dismiss the nuances of the exchanges between the native and the colonist at the colonial frontier. Fanon’s overriding anxiety was that the peasantry, through lack of participation in the struggle for liberation, would remain a passive class.³⁷ To Fanon, the black problem can only be understood and solved as a facet of the human problem, exposing his understanding of native societies as understandable only in terms of class disparity, envisioning liberation as a classless national culture.³⁸ The unresolved intersection of class and race in Fanon’s work is, in part, reflected by the unsurprising turn in the very

³⁵ Houston Smith, *The World’s Religions*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 56.

³⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 31.

³⁷ McCulloch, *Black Soul White Artifacts: Fanon’s Critical Psychology and Social Theory*, 153.

³⁸ Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life*, 483.

last lines of Onwuanibe's *Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon*,³⁹ which he devotes to raising questions about the reluctance of Fanon to attend to material conditions and indigenous values in Africa. One is able to sense in these few lines at the end of this text that Onwuanibe tentatively appeals for a serious treatment of the native traditions. In his dismissal of indigenous cultural traditions, Fanon might be interpreted as at once an Orientalist and revolutionary. Orientalist, in so far as he is dismissive of local traditions but is equally able to propose the reinvention of national culture in the interest of the struggle for liberation. Neil Lazarus draws our attention to the fact that in "On National Culture", Fanon recognises the registers of various precolonial cultural practices when he refers to the "wonderful Songhai civilisation"⁴⁰ but that he also saw such pre-colonial registers as a primitive stage that needed to be transcended because "today the Songhais are underfed and illiterate, thrown between sky and water with empty heads and empty eyes".⁴¹ Onwuanibe calls for a recognition of the persistence of traditions and argues that the sacred is not so much an ethno-centric appeal for originary authority as it is an observation of the resilience of the indigenous in the face of homogenising nationalist projects, whether of the European modernist, or pan-Africanist variety. It is in "On National Culture" that the theme of cultural metamorphosis is refined, and we come up against the extent to which Fanon's thoughts replicate the "West's civilising mission" in so far as his passion for a transformed world led him to set aside parochial interests.⁴²

³⁹ Onwuanibe, *A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon*, 116.

⁴⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 210.

⁴¹ *ibid*, 210.

⁴² Eric San Juan, "An Intervention into Cultural Studies," 132.

Homi Bhabha expresses similar sentiments but reduces this to being largely a result of the nationalitarian character of Fanon's discourse, although he does acknowledge that this nonetheless renders Fanon both historicist and representationalist.⁴³ In her essay *Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism*, Francoise Verges argues that Fanon uncritically believed in the reconstitution of the "social and cultural organisation of Muslim society".⁴⁴ This refashioning of the native is exactly what Gayatri Spivak calls for when she warns the postcolonial theorist to "watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern" by cautioning the theorist to note that representations of the native inhabit not only the texts of empire, but also narratives of nationalism.⁴⁵

Representations of the Sacred

Frantz Fanon being termed an *Orientalist* requires more explanation and whilst the above section begins to address some of the issues, I wish to briefly return to Edward Said's notion of Orientalism.⁴⁶ Among other conceptions of "Orientalism", Said argues that every time we speak of the native in a manner that dismisses the interests of the subject, we are engaged in acts of "Othering" or "Orientalising". This is sometimes referred to as "a style in which such tropes are conceived and presented... something deeper than surface rhetoric or convention – invoking more, perhaps, questions of political

⁴³ Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in *Nation and Narration*, ed. H.K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 302.

⁴⁴ Francoise Verges, "Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism: Fanon and Freedom", in *The Facts of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 59.

⁴⁵ Gayatri Spivak, "Can The Subaltern Speak", in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 295.

⁴⁶ Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", in *Europe and its Others Vol.1*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen, Diana Loxley. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985), 17.

positionality and moral attitude”.⁴⁷ We may wish, therefore, to consider Fanon as an Orientalist because he also frequently speaks about the native condition, through inventing and re-inventing an Africa that is divorced from the material reality, except in the interest of the nationalist struggle. But what of the persistence of the sacred in postcolonial contexts? Frantz Fanon, in “On National Culture”, reminds us that “colonialism has not ceased to maintain the Negro as savage”,⁴⁸ as if to focus our attention on European representations of the native. But then he himself closely follows this statement with references to indigenous traditions as superstition, and fanatical in frenzied ritual, denoting conceptions of indigenous religion as primitive and non-rational. In seeking to articulate his conception of cultural alienation in *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon writes that the “Negro’s behaviour makes him akin to an obsessive neurotic type”.⁴⁹ In “On National Culture” he distances himself from such essentialist notions by couching his argument in terms of European “parentism” and reminds his reader that “the effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the native’s head the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality”.⁵⁰ He argues that European representations are developed out of a conception of humanness that equates being human with having rational religion. Thus the native, lacking religion, is base and animal-like, which is quite the opposite of the vision of the “new man”. Whilst he recognises the role of religion in the production of representations of the native, Fanon remains dismissive of local knowledge forms, leaving them no room

⁴⁷ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*. (London: Verso, 1997), 40.

⁴⁸ Fanon, “On National Culture”, 38.

⁴⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 60.

⁵⁰ Fanon, “On National Culture” 37.

to consciously inform the nationalist project. In “On National Culture” Fanon develops an elaborate attempt to reconfigure the sacred in his production of a nationalist narrative. He critically revises any attempt to indulge in the development of native traditions when he suggest that: “At the very moment the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work, he fails to realise that he is utilizing techniques and languages that are borrowed from the stranger in the country.”⁵¹ This argument allows Fanon to, at once, dismiss any project concerned with native culture and the production of the sacred, and he is able to suggest that such strategies detract from the struggle for national liberation and pan-African solidarity. These acts of production, subversion, and resistance are primarily contests over the means and mechanism of representation of the “Other”, whether oriental, native or domestic. A broad definition of representation is offered by Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker in *Framing Feminism*, which makes the point that the term “representations” secures its meaning from the relationships between a single image and its total cultural environment of images and social belief systems. Such productions acquire power when particular connotations prevail as preferred meaning, which form the dominant order of sense, a regime of truth for a particular culture or social group. Finally, Pollock and Parker suggest that representations occur when “notions of images whose meanings derive from conscious intentions of their maker give way to an understanding of the social and ideological networks within which meanings are socially produced and secured”.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., 41.

⁵² Griselda Pollock and Rizsika Parker, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement*. (London: Pandora Books, 1987)

The relationship between Fanon's transformation and subject agency is echoed by Maud Eduards' idea of agency as a "transformative and transcending capacity".⁵³ Arguing that by nature all human beings have agency, Eduards focuses on a person's ability to initiate change and to commit to a certain set of actions regardless of circumstances. She goes on to suggest that people are, in most cases, inclined to utilise this capacity to influence their circumstance rather than be the passive recipients of another's will and interests. Fanon seems not to accept that whilst within a particular social hierarchy people are differently resourced in terms of the kind of agency they are able to generate, they nonetheless devise acts of agency and self-determination within wider social relations. This tension is illustrated by the suggestion that agency is concerned with mediating material motives and unexpected outcomes that are transformed when everyday practices assume a sacred significance. For Fanon it is only in the "armed struggle" that the native finds integration from the alienation of the self, introduced by colonialism. The political reality is seen to be the "first truth"⁵⁴ of the nation and thus the artist, performer and the poet must give voice to the people's revolution, evident in Fanon's belief that "[it] is not enough to try and free oneself by repeating proclamations and denials".⁵⁵ He then moves quickly from such calls to an armed struggle to a more apocalyptic call for a turn to the highly charged "zone of occult/ value instability", revealing an apparent recognition of the evocative potential of mobilizing the nation around parochial values – the production of the sacred.

⁵³ Maud Eduards, "Women's Agency and Collective Action", *Women's Studies International Forum* 7.2 (1994): 181.

⁵⁴ Fanon, "On National Culture", 42.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 43.

Fanon battles to integrate various aspects of the local material reality with his universal humanism and thus, in seeking to respond to the persistence of local traditions, he suggests that “to fight for national culture... is to fight for the liberation of the nation”.⁵⁶ He later argues that to seek cultural coherence from delving into the past in order to expose the false representations produced by colonialism is a futile exercise, unless it is directly related to the national armed struggle. Fanon views the discourse on national culture produced by colonialism and indigenous appeals to a glorious past as the primary threat to liberation. He argues that through the interventions of native intellectuals, a reinvented national culture may become an organising category in the interest of the struggle for liberation. He suggests that, “when a people undertake an armed struggle or even a political struggle against a relentless colonialism, the significance of tradition changes”.⁵⁷ The intellectual’s participation in the nationalist project, according to Fanon, will simultaneously reduce the potential for being seduced by power because in his view, “the desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned tradition to life does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one’s own people”.⁵⁸ For Fanon, this proposed revision of national culture offers the only possible relationship between indigenous culture and the nationalist struggle against alienation.

One such critical term comes in his proposal for the transformation of the term “savage”. He is acutely conscious of the prevailing representation of the native as savagely illiterate

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 42.

and violent, and is determined to assert the humanness of the native. His proposal follows the movement of the native from an uncritical location in the colonial system, towards a reclaiming of culture with self-determined integrity and finally, participation in the struggle for liberation. The paradoxical nature of the term is illustrated by references to the savage as primitive with a pre-logical mentality, as proposed by Bernard de Fontenelle (1657-1757), and yet at the same time by others such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) who regarded the savage state as more spontaneous and alive. The aggressive proliferation of evolutionary theories during the nineteenth century uncritically reinforced the representation of the natives as savage. In her treatment of early anthropology, Margaret Hodgen reminds us of the conceptions of Africans as “rude and beastly” and certainly “more brutish than the beast they hunt”, that Fanon was seeking to invert.⁵⁹ Fanon knew that current knowledge forms were captive to certain representations, such as the conviction expressed by J. C. Prichard that the savage races cannot be saved, and that the primary objective of engagement with the native must be a concern with physical and moral characteristics.⁶⁰ In *Savage Childhood*, Dudley Kidd says of the native that, other than being uneducated, aggressively self-assertive, vain and indolent, a more primordial characteristic causes the native to be so “sociable and unreflective that it never occurs to him that he might possibly be an unpleasant object to any other human being”.⁶¹ Understanding the brutality validated by such fixed representations, Frantz Fanon remarks that “in the colonized country the most

⁵⁹ Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 410.

⁶⁰ J. C. Prichard, “On the Extinction of Human Races”, *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, 28 (1839): 166-170.

⁶¹ Dudley Kidd, *Savage Childhood*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906), 5.

elementary, most *savage*, and the most undifferentiated nationalism is the most fervent and efficient means of defending the national culture".⁶² Fanon appears to have understood this paradox because he recognised that the revision of the nation's preferences, taboos and values is simultaneously informed by the struggle for national liberation and the renaissance of the state. Elsewhere in his essay "On National Culture" Fanon makes reference to the development of pottery and cultural artefacts as possibly being produced as savage in style, such that savage behaviour comes to denote progressive acts of resistance to oppression. Fanon reinvents markers of difference as ways of manufacturing a sacred character that inhabits the nationalist project without conceding to conservative demands for indigenism. Thus the sacred is produced as the mobilisation of individual subjectivities through themes of collectivity. This highlights not only the religious character of the nationalist project but draws attention to the persistence of sacred markers. The varying degrees of connectedness of such sacred markers to local conditions are what produce the desired material and political consequences.

Religion, understood as those elements of human aspiration that, in an immediate fashion, motivate and focus our attention on imagined landscapes that transcend material conditions is part of those forces that bring national liberation and integration. This conception of the sacred demonstrates continuity between ritual and material reality producing a critique of those very socio-political conditions, without reducing the sacred

⁶² Fanon, "On National Culture", 42.

to emotional and material forces, and thus avoiding equating religion with its institutions or faith in general. Religion can then be understood as “a set of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motives in men, by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality, that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”.⁶³ In a postcolonial context traditional conceptions of the sacred have become problematic because while social institutions remain important, it is a material world of commodities, objects and bodies that prevails. This offers new conceptions of subject agency and, ultimately, the production of representations that define, mediate and produce a multiplicity of social relations.

Finally, for Fanon, poets and artists and performers can be seen as ritual specialists of the nation because they produce words, images and performances - *texts, icons, and rituals* - through which imagined collectivities are articulated.⁶⁴ Talal Asad suggests that the manufacture of the sacred is a prerequisite of secular nationalism.⁶⁵ Nationalism has been said to be a form of religion by virtue of its potential to organise individual subjectivities and so I hope, in part, to expose the residue of the sacred contained in Fanon’s development of nationalism and pan-Africanism. Religion in its various permutations - present or absent - has historically been an integrated part of the production of representations of native peoples, whether organised around colonist or indigenous

⁶³ Clifford Geertz, *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. (London: Tavistock, 1966), 4.

⁶⁴ Fanon, “On National Culture” 47-49.

⁶⁵ Talal Asad, “Religion, State and Nationalism”, in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, eds. Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 187.

religious traditions. This account of the persistence of the sacred in the development of postcolonial identities has unintentionally, and even with resistance, been demonstrated by Mahmood Mamdani in his recent works on the bifurcated state. Like Fanon, he finds that it is necessary to take full account of parochial agency of the indigenous in the production of the sacred, even in the postcolonial state.⁶⁶ These questions are critical in that they ask about the ways in which we theorise about Africa, and allude to the institutionalised relations of power that continue to reside in post-(after)-colonial societies, and perhaps more importantly, in the residue of the sacred in African nationalism. The tension between consolidating political development concerned with the end of colonial rule, and the recognition of indigenous traditions is mirrored in the unresolved tensions in Fanon's reflections on the Algerian national question. The persistence of the sacred has been obscured by the nationalist anxiety that a treatment of the indigenous desire that exoticizes Africa or represents religion as part of European colonial history, would thus dismiss African agency. The postcolonial focus on plural subjects does not reinvent the sacred but produces traces, residues, sentiments and sediments of the sacred to open possibilities for the participation of indigenous institutions.⁶⁷ It acknowledges the persistence of the sacred in the context within which new forms and strategies of inclusion and exclusion will emerge to characterise the social and political landscape.

⁶⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Becomes Killers*. (Cape Town: David Phillip, 2001), 8.

⁶⁷ Martina Michel, "Positioning the Subject: Locating Postcolonial Studies", *Ariel*, 26.1 (1995): 89.

Fanon's anxieties suggest that the binaries of citizen and subject will continue to be a dominant force in a postcolonial context, where subject interest will constantly seek to assert itself in new and unexpected ways. The relations of power and formations of resistance require a critique of generic inventories of description and performance in the post-colony, where expressions of the sacred persist and strategies to domesticate the sacred are constantly reproduced. Whilst not articulated as religion, Fanon's nationalism acquired a sacred character, demonstrating that some residue of the sacred is produced in the collective imagination that compels actions to alter material conditions. The sacred primordialism of national culture in African, informed by parochial interests, is persistently used by the postcolonial state to motivate and compel citizens on occasions where the secular nationalist discourse fails. Notwithstanding the supposed scarcity of explicit references to the sacred in Fanon's *On National Culture*, the persistence of the sacred in these anti-colonial discourses offers indicators that explain the proliferation of indigenous collectivities or local struggles in the post-colony, as well as a possible revision of the way we speak and theorise about Africa(ns).

CHAPTER FIVE

POSTCOLONIAL REPRODUCTIONS OF THE SACRED

With the introduction of the African Union, confidence in Africa's renaissance is running high but a number of state-civil society anxieties continue to challenge stable social relations. One such anxiety is the tension that exists around the issue of post-independence African governments and the incorporation of traditional authorities into largely secular democracies. A characteristic feature of early and late African nationalism has been its very ambivalent relationship towards indigenous traditions and religions. South Africa, in its very symbolic early leadership of the Union, has inherited various assumptions and strategies about the consolidation of liberation and the introduction of democracy, particularly with regard to addressing the indigenous-secular dichotomy. While African nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century drew upon indigenous authorities for political leadership and support, the introduction of homeland legislation by South Africa's apartheid government meant, that by the fifties, the African National Congress had significantly distanced itself from traditional leaders. As such, it was not uncommon for traditional leaders to be referred to as the stooges of the apartheid government. Because these institutions have been a significant part of South Africa's colonial/apartheid history - in resistance and in collaboration - it is widely agreed that they will be part of the country's political culture for the foreseeable future and require the attention of the post-apartheid government.

Previously, I argued the case of the persistence of religion in Frantz Fanon's African nationalism and, following on from this, chapter five will consider South Africa's approaches to the treatment of indigenous-secular dichotomy. While Fanon inaugurated the renaissance of (Pan)-African Nationalism in the context of the Algerian struggle for liberation, Thabo Mbeki's *African Renaissance* seeks to resuscitate earlier ambitions about integrating indigenous sentiments with a secular nationalist government. In the same way as Fanon's inauguration of African nationalism demonstrated the persistence of religion embedded in anti-colonial rhetoric, the ambitious revisionist renaissance of Mbeki offers a lens through which we may read the promises and problematics of the sacred in a postcolonial South Africa. During the intervening period after Fanon's participation in the Algerian struggle, and before South Africa's transition to majority rule, African nationalist politicians, scholars and activists sought to make sense of the indigenisation of public institutions, on the one hand, and to introduce a secular and democratic character into those very institutions, on the other. Thabo Mbeki inherited these indigenous institutions whose relationship with the state has always been politically ambivalent, therefore any serious renaissance of Africa needed to attend to this unreformed indigenous-secular relationship. The place of traditional authorities is significant because it appear to be the only institutional structure through which the ANC-government could administer rural areas and facilitate their development. Further, the dismissal of traditional leaders is not possible because they are protected under the national constitution of 1996 and perhaps, more significantly, such an act would be in direct contradiction to the movements 75 year struggle for African self-determination.

Thabo Mbeki's revision of the indigenous-secular dichotomy under a post-apartheid nationalism proposes (1) a formal regulation of the indigenous (or religious) authorities that segregate them from the archives of Africa's glorious past so frequently invoked by nativists. The second element of Mbeki's revision involves (2) the integration and protection of indigenous institutions (traditional leaders) into a secular democracy without adjusting the provisions of South Africa's secular constitutionalism. In the post-apartheid context this previously under-managed institution found itself being granted a space for self-definition but, at the same time, was restricted into Councils and Houses of Traditional Leaders under the authority of the state. Thus in the context of the *African Renaissance* the indigenous-secular dichotomy is managed through the legislative provisions that protect indigenous traditions from the forces of state making and, simultaneously, protect the state from the forces of indigenous traditions.

Such careful management of the religion-secular dichotomy in a post-apartheid South Africa promises to produce discourses of religion that give expression to the country's postcolonial condition. I contend that these discourses of the sacred assume meaning through the organisation of local struggles but draw on transnational resources of exchange for their articulation and expression. In doing so, many communities faced with the secularising effects of a post-apartheid democracy prefer to situate their struggles for cultural and religious self-determination in the context of collective rights discourses. Whilst the state provides protection for indigenous authorities, its over-regulation of these institutions emerges not so much as the protection and promotion of the indigenous but

the domestication and disinfection of the sacred. As native authorities face the force of these strategies of containment they seek to draw on colonially invented notions of the indigenous to frame their resistance to the accumulation of power within the state. This resistance to the secularising forces of the nationalist state is made possible through strategies that commodify traditional authorities in terms of transnational discourses of indigenous rights to self-determination. Finally, the contest of power, produced due to the opposition between strategies that seek to domesticate the indigenous and the nativist commodification of traditional authorities (religion), only serves to obscure the production of the sacred. I argue that it is in these contests over meaning and of knowledge production that the sacred emerges and persists regardless of colonial, nationalist or postcolonial interests.

Indigenous Authority in a Postcolonial South Africa

“if the anticolonial struggle was about deracializing the state, the postcolonial debate was about deracializing civil society.”¹

Although both settlers and natives are citizens within the post-apartheid order, Mahmood Mamdani argues that it does not mean that this citizenship is equal and common. He says of a post-apartheid South Africa that, “while civic citizenship is deracialised; ethnic citizenship has remained unreformed”.² South Africa’s history of repression and

¹ Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 31.

² Mahmood Mamdani, “When Does a Settler Become a Native? Reflections on the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa” (Inaugural Lecture as A. C. Jordan Professor of African Studies, (University of Cape Town, 1998), 9.

domination is all too familiar, and it is therefore necessary that we revisit the ways in which we read and write about ethnic relations in this context. South Africa is often looked upon as a unique case in the history of colonialism, denial and racism. Many have suggested that South African history is characterized by a notion of exceptionalism which contends that South Africa has been so significantly shaped by the initiative and actions of the settlers who colonised the region, that it cannot any longer be considered to be part of Africa, in any meaningful way. These sentiments are reflected, in part, by the conclusion drawn by notable South African author J. M. Coetzee when he writes about himself as “no longer European and not yet African”.³ This notion of exceptionalism allows for all manner of socio-political liberties both at the level of policy and practice. Amongst these is the tendency to suggest that the recent apartheid past was so hideous that any form of departure from it would be an improvement. At the same time, South Africans are encouraged to think of their experience of the “transition to democracy” as so unique that we are unable to learn from the rest of the world, and certainly not from other African countries. The world is looking at South Africa as the place where a people have supposedly worked through the impossible, although some might say, the inevitable.⁴ This manner of reading South Africa’s recent history appears to allow for a narrative of ethnic difference to become firmly embedded in post-apartheid discourses. Barney Pityana in his discussion of minority or group rights in a global context, reminds his reader that both apartheid and anti-apartheid rhetoric sought to argue for the sanitising of

³ J. M. Coetzee, “Diversity”, *Leadership Magazine*, Vol. 18, No.3 (1999)

⁴ Shun Govender, “Life in Between the Times: The South African Renaissance”, in *Many Cultures, One Nation*, eds. Charles Villa-Vacencio and Carl Hiehaus (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1995), 132.

public spaces of cultural, religious and other differences.⁵ The apartheid architects thought it possible through a spatial segregation of people into distinctly cultural groups, while on the other hand, African nationalists suspended race, religious and cultural differences under the notion of non-racialism. These contradictions highlight the tensions of the “sameness and difference debate” that confronts a post-apartheid government. It raises concerns that extend well beyond the question of race, notably: to what extent do we affirm the indigenous or the secular?

It has been suggested that the history of South Africa can be recast as a case of colonialism gone wrong, because where colonialism was concerned with racial segregation, apartheid sought only territorial segregation.⁶ Thus Jan Smuts in his 1929 Rhodes Lecture suggests that, “it is when segregation breaks down, when the whole family migrates from the tribal home and out of tribal jurisdiction... that the tribal bond is snapped and the traditional system falls into decay.”⁷ The belief in apartheid as a social and economic development strategy to protect indigenous polities, and the conviction that the South African experience, is so exceptional that it cannot be regarded as African continue to prevail as powerful forces that obscure much thinking about and within South Africa. The question of formal recognition and protection of traditional authorities is not peculiar to the apartheid period, because the first formal legislation, the Black Administration Act was passed in 1927. Although the first shift of power from chiefs to

⁵ Barney Pityana, “Minorities in Global Society”, in *Many Cultures One Nation*, eds. Charles Villa-Vacencio and Carl Hiehaus (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1995), 171.

⁶ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 6.

⁷ Jan C. Smuts, *Africa and Some World Problems, Including the Rhodes Memorial Lectures Delivered in the Michaelmas Term 1929* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 76-78.

government-appointed headmen occurred as early as during the administration of Governor Grey during the 1850s, the Black Administration Act was essentially crafted to grant the president power to appoint traditional leaders. During subsequent years, this act was used as a way of deposing those traditional authorities that opposed the national government or various homeland leaders. Although this Act included local government and development functions, the exercise of power by traditional leaders tended to be limited to judicial concerns as well as the administration of land. The period for the enactment of the Black Administration Act is not unrelated to the broader political environment since this act effectively debarred traditional leaders from participating in African nationalist politics, thus segregating hereditary leaders from elected leaders. This produced a point of development within the African nationalist movements insofar as it forced them to assume a position on traditional leadership. When the South African Native National Congress was formed, the policy focus was on unity between the native chiefs as the movement sought to broker with the state on behalf of the indigenous people.⁸ By the 1943 congress, with the revision of the constitution, the movement's emphasis had shifted from unity to claims for full citizenship and land rights with the chiefs losing special privileges previously afforded.⁹ The nationalist movement drew its support from the native bourgeoisie that consisted of mostly educationists, clergy and leaders of various unions. This sideways movement of traditional authorities was something internal to the African nationalist movement because traditional leaders

⁸ Les Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993). 175-176.

⁹ *ibid.*, 288.

continued to enjoy privileged positions under the Afrikaner governments. A position that was given expression at the 1945 Native Affairs Department's Commissioners' Conference when a delegate noted:

We are agreed that we cannot do without our Native Chiefs. If we take the Chiefs away we destroy the last link holding the Natives together and we lay the way open to communism or any other reform....¹⁰

Solway and Lambek reminds us that in the colonial and apartheid contexts, "cultural recognition was sacrificed for the sake of the nationalist project, a project claiming ideological descent from the missionary forebearers with its premise and promise of universal rights".¹¹ We may assume therefore that, in this context, religio-political ideas of state making informed the apartheid government's conception of traditional authorities as these ideas emerged out of a loaded and ambivalent colonial context. The stratification of social relations is thus not only an indication of the internal ambivalence of colonialism or the denial and discovery of religion, but also indicates the attempts by both settlers and natives to mediate or submerge religion, as locus of power, into the development of socio-political discourses. James Kellas argues that religion is regarded as of "less political significance as a national identifier" except in parts of Africa where Islam and Christianity meet other religions.¹² This is expressed in those elements of public performative rituals and institutions that might be described as the *religious residue* of the bifurcated state. Mamdani echoes the anxieties expressed elsewhere by Said who regarded the secularisation of the postcolonial state "as the transformation of

¹⁰ Republic of South Africa, Native Affairs Department Correspondence Files, Vol. 13-37, 1, cited in Jason Myers, "The Spontaneous Ideology in Post-Apartheid South Africa", *Politikon*, 26.1 (1999): 33.

¹¹ Jacqueline Solway and Michael Lambek, "Weber in South Africa", *Interventions*, 3.1 (2001): 98.

¹² James G. Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*. (London: Macmillan, 1991), 123.

religious culture, the distillation of a secular kernel from a religious husk".¹³ This anxiety about religion obscures the ways in which narratives of the sacred shaped strategies of control over native productive powers through definition and practices of religion by the apartheid state.

Whilst the socio-political changes in South Africa are undeniably evident, the questions of equity, tolerance and redistribution remain outstanding as values and ideals that divide family, and nation. In understanding the social changes in South Africa I have looked at apartheid history and the impact of religion in general, but now I want to focus attention on the postcolonial productions of the sacred in South African nation-making discourses. Mahmood Mamdani argues for a conception of the political landscape of apartheid-colonialism as a context within which people are determined to be either citizens or subjects. He suggests that three critical factors contributed to this configuration of power within South Africa. These are (1) the structure of power inherited from colonialism, (2) the role of local ethnic *power* (in resistance and compliance), and (3) the failure of African states to transcend ethnic difference in a post-independence context. The idea of the bifurcated state is one that continues to inhibit democratisation as it is expressed through social relations in cities, towns, and villages. Because native/ tribal authorities continue to function as a powerful force within a postcolonial civil society, Mamdani argues that one can observe that with deracialisation came an increasing tribalisation.

¹³ William D Hart, *Edward said and the Religious Effect of Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). 13.

Historically, we have viewed native authorities as part of the system of domination yet dismissed the fact that a great deal of early resistance to colonialism/apartheid drew its values from native custom and traditions,¹⁴ even though the notion of tribal as we know it is widely regarded as colonially invented.¹⁵ Thus in order to fully democratise civil society in a postcolonial context, we have to reform all remnants of indigenous parochial administration or customary authority as forms of indirect rule – as well as those ways in which undemocratic elements of the customary reside within progressive movements. But in the postcolonial state, the possibility of dislodging the indigenous is quite difficult because, “massive resources, media campaigns, technical expertise, and political influence on powerful states can now be easily mounted in support of co-believers around the world, whether in support of their rights and efforts to proselytise, or to protect them”.¹⁶

This tension between consolidating modern democracy and the celebration/recognition of indigenous traditions is reflected in much of what has been said about the development of a critical civil society in South Africa. Democratic citizenship is viewed as the historical result of a specific struggle over freedom of speech, expression, belief, and information.¹⁷ Some argue that these values tend to be consistent with the development of capitalism, thus suggesting that citizenship can only be considered to be the historical result of the

¹⁴ Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society*, 137-138.

¹⁵ Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 34-37.

¹⁶ Abdullahi An-Na'im, ed. "Introduction", in *Competing Claims to Religious Freedom and Communal Self-Determination in Africa*. (New York: Orbis, 1999)

¹⁷ Michael Ignatieff, "Citizenship and Moral Narcissism", in *Citizenship*, ed. G. Andrews (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), 29.

rise of capitalism and modernity.¹⁸ Whilst there is formal agreement in South African law that all rights, traditions and beliefs will be respected, the formal regulation of practices are rather difficult because of (1) a history of protracted colonialism, and (2) the resurgent ethno-nationalism. To this end, An-Na'im argues that the religious neutrality of the state should be enshrined within the constitution as would be expected within the context of the human rights paradigm of African nationalism.¹⁹

Traditional Authorities After Apartheid

It is widely agreed that the separation of the power of traditional authorities is critical for the maturity of democracy in a post-apartheid South Africa.²⁰ The anxiety around this lies in the conviction that the colonial conflation of executive, administrative and judicial powers to one person fundamentally undermined the development of democracy during the colonial period and under apartheid. Further, those following Mamdani's argument about the persistence of tribalisation reflect not only concern with undoing the institutions of colonial rule but are also concerned with its unintended consequences in the postcolonial state. Berman reminds his reader of Samora Machel's position on this question citing the exclamation that, 'for the nation to live the tribe must die'. Berman then goes on to argue that "the stubborn persistence of indigenous culture, their ability to create 'new identities and orders of difference' out of eclectic and often contradictory

¹⁸ T. H. Marshall, *The Right to Welfare and Other Essays*. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 141.

¹⁹ An-Na'im, "Introduction", 6.

²⁰ Henry Bernstein, "Social Change in the South African Countryside? Land and Production, Poverty and Power", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 25.4 (1998), 3-5, 18.

elements” ultimately undermine paradigms of development.²¹ While the ANC has positioned itself as accommodating traditional authorities until 1988, just three years before the liberation movement was unbanned their position was quite different. The ANC’s 1988 guidelines for a post-apartheid constitutions argued that the institutions of hereditary rulers and chiefs should be transformed to serve the interest of the people as a whole. In the South African context, a great deal of the material relating to traditional authorities concerns itself with the question of land in rural areas, its allocation and administration. This is of course not surprising as the system of apartheid was about the spatial separation of people to different parts of the country. It is also an indicator that in these debates, traditional authorities continue to be viewed in terms of their authority over small rural settlements. In his article “Democratisation and Traditional Authorities”, Ntsebenza demonstrates the various ways in which the post-apartheid government’s ambivalence towards traditional authorities is reflected in its policies on land tenure.²² While he provides substantial detail on the development of legislation on land tenure, his attention to the strategic position in which traditional authorities place themselves within the broader political arena, is very thin. Further, to simply dismiss these institutions as undemocratic and illegitimate due to their lack of support within the electoral system is to fail to understand the strategies used to secure legitimacy within the social system. Scholars have attributed the persistence of traditional authorities to the African National Congress’ (ANC) desire for support in rural constituencies immediately prior to the 1994

²¹ Bruce J. Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage and the Africa State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism”, *African Affairs*, 97 (1998): 306.

²² Lungisile Ntsebeza, “Democratization and Traditional Authorities in the New South Africa”, *Journal of Comparative Studies for South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 19.1 (1999): 83-84.

election. Others have suggested that it is due to some unresolved element within the state's policy on traditional leaders – partly a hangover from the period of negotiation - and the desire to include the Inkhata Freedom Party in the post-apartheid government of national unity. Nevertheless, proponents and critics have agreed that in the case of South Africa's "accommodation", it offered the most peaceful transition to democracy.²³ Ntsebeza argues that the apartheid government reduced the powers of the chiefs and that the post-apartheid state is threatening a further revision of the authority of traditional leaders which leads him to suggest of tribal leaders that, "their response clearly indicates that they will resist any effort that threatens to dismantle tribal authorities as they exist[ed]".²⁴ Jason Myers raises a critical question when he critiques the widespread endorsement of the legitimacy of traditional leaders as basis of the institution being granted authority. He argues that, in South Africa, traditional leaders are regarded as legitimate political authorities by virtue of their cultural status and suggests that:

The sheer existence of chieftancy, the fact that it 'plays a role', is taken as evidence of its legitimacy. Thus, the external signs of authority – command and compliance – are offered as proof of its internal workings – common experience and agreement.²⁵

Prior to 1990, the ANC criticized the institution of traditional leaders but later they too endorsed their legitimacy, even if this legitimacy simply rested on the appearance of indigeneity and primordialism. Berman argues that the colonial and apartheid state

²³ John McGarry and Sid Noel "The Prospects of Consociational Democracy in South Africa", *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 27 (1989): 19.

²⁴ Ntsebeza, "Democratisation and Traditional Authorities in the Now South Africa," 90.

²⁵ Myers, "The Spontaneous Ideology in Post-Apartheid South Africa", 39.

allowed traditional leaders to define what may be regarded as customary and, in so doing, was able to assert their power over junior chiefs, the bourgeoisie, women and migrants.²⁶ Throughout the nineties the post-apartheid state's quest for a national culture of human rights was faced with the question of what was to be regarded as customary and who was to be considered a traditional leader. Charmaine French offers a provisional conception of traditional authorities as indigenous institutions that "symbolize order and protection against injustice, evil and calamity. Tribal authorities may be established through inherited leadership, tribal warfare or democratic procedures...."²⁷ This vagueness allowed the post-apartheid government to constantly defer the question of political power held by traditional authorities. Similarly, their position finds equally unclear expression in legislation such as the Land Tenure Act of 1996, which indicated a revision of the notion of a tribal solution as what "to a tribe, means a resolution passed democratically and in accordance with indigenous law or custom of the tribe".²⁸ The state's provisions for the protection of traditional authorities and customs are provided under the constitution and subsequent acts, although it is only until very recently that legislation concerned with the promotion of indigenous traditions was passed by the Mbeki-government.

²⁶ Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the Africa State"

²⁷ Charmaine French, "Functions and Power of Traditional Leaders", *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Occasional Paper* (1994): 21.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 86-87.

Legislation for Regulating Traditional Leaders

The post apartheid constitution was anticipated as a reflection of the government's commitment towards harnessing a culture of democracy. The evolution of the legislation on traditional authorities/traditional leaders highlights the persistence of the sacred in this postcolonial state. Under the general provisions of Schedule 4 of the 1993 interim constitution of the Republic of South Africa, two provisions proved critical in this regard. These were provisions xii and xiii dealing with the protection of cultural and religious groups and recognition of traditional authorities:

- XII Collective rights of self-determination in forming, joining and maintaining organs of civil society, including linguistic, cultural and religious associations, shall, on the basis of non-discrimination and free association, be recognised and protected.
- XIII The institution, status and role of traditional leadership, according to indigenous law, shall be recognised and protected in the Constitution. Indigenous law, like common law, shall be recognised and applied by the courts, subject to the fundamental rights contained in the Constitution and to legislation dealing specifically therewith.²⁹

These provisions were amended after the Inkatha Freedom Party argued that the Zulu King Goodwill Zwelitini, like other monarchs, needed specific recognition within the constitution and to reflect these institutions as more than simply cultural conventions that are particular to Africa. The amendment made a specific distinction between traditional authorities in general and traditional monarchs specifically. Thus the general provisions

²⁹ Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993, Articles 181-183.

of Schedule 4 was extended to include a further section that gave expression to these concerns:

XIII Provisions in a provincial constitution relating to the institution, role, authority and status of a traditional monarch shall be recognised and protected in the constitution.³⁰

The recognition of traditional authorities provided in the constitution not only allowed time for these provisions to become regulated in law, but it ensured a permanent place for traditional institutions on the South African political landscape. The state's anxiety about this uneasy marriage is, in part, reflected in its apparent feet-dragging on developing legislation that attends to these provisions. With the pressure for clarity on the status of indigenous institutions, the post-apartheid state began to regulate these institutions of tribalism by organising them into provincial houses of traditional leaders and a national council of traditional leaders. With South Africa's history of ethno-nationalism, it is not surprising that the ANC generally fears the disruptive effects of ethnic divisions within the state. So all-inclusive was the notion of what might be viewed as "traditional" or "customary", that for a brief period the debate might have included the Afrikaner separatists or other proponents of cultural and ethnic determinism. I believe that the post-apartheid state's development of the legislation from spontaneous traditional authorities into regional houses of traditional leaders served only to further domesticate and regulate these traditional institutions, a practice not very unlike their apartheid and colonial predecessors. Except where apartheid sought a spatial separation of powers, the post-

³⁰ Ibid., Amendment of Act 200 of 1993, Schedule 4.

apartheid state is seeking to regulate the indigenous, in terms of the temporal, by extending patronage through colonially invented networks as a means to mediate order and control in areas historically under the power of traditional leaders. This trend is reflected in the relevant provisions of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa as well as the legislation relating to land tenure and local government. Together, these pieces of legislation began the gradual removal of the executive, judicial and administrative powers from traditional leaders. Traditional leaders thus found themselves defined largely in terms of performing the function of guardians of all matters customary. On the role of traditional leaders, the 1996 Constitution simply states that:

212. (1) National legislation may provide for a role for traditional leaders as an institution at local level on matters affecting local communities
- (2) To deal with matters relating to traditional leadership, the role of traditional leaders, customary law and the customs of communities observing a system of customary law.³¹

By 1997, these provisions were fully enacted under the Council of Traditional Leaders Act and this gave further expression to the role of traditional leaders as a body that “may advise government and make recommendations” on matters of traditional leadership and customary law. A distinguishing feature of the Act is the fact that this institution was also referred to as a “traditional authority” or “chieftancy”, but in the drafting of it settled on the encompassing term “traditional leaders”. This enabled the government to determine traditional leaders as those classified as chiefs, paramount chiefs, or kings. Furthermore, this devolution of power is made possible because of the “protection” clauses that are

³¹ Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996.

provided within these general provisions of the constitution, and yet, the political status of these institutions have to date remained unclear and ambivalent. Clearly, the general provisions pertaining to traditional leaders within the constitutional framework appears to be concerned with the protection of indigenous collective rights. These provisions provide no explicit expression that the state acknowledges any link between the Council of Traditional Leaders Act and collective rights. In fact, the legislation that specifically deals with the council and houses of traditional leaders was clearly crafted to regulate traditional institutions into one manageable framework. It also served to isolate the legitimacy of traditional leadership to the realm of the cultural and the customary but with only the possibility of political power at the local level. It is only some years later that legislation giving expression to collective rights was drafted and then only with the most cursory reference to traditional leaders. Clearly, the state continues to be quite anxious about maintaining the distinction between legislation dealing with traditional leaders and the legislation dealing with collective rights.

Promotion and Protection of the Indigenous

Collective rights in South Africa are given expression in Act 19 of 2000 in the Commission For The Promotion And Protection Of The Rights Of Cultural, Religious And Linguistic Communities Act. Although a statutory body, the commission has the power to not only protect but also to promote indigenous and other cultural traditions. Evidently, more power was afforded to the commission as protectors of the indigenous unlike the legislation dealing with roles and powers of traditional authorities under which

they are limited to providing comment on matters that are considered customary. In section two of the Commission For The Promotion And Protection Of The Rights Of Cultural, Religious And Linguistic Communities Act, and under its “objectives”, the commission is specifically tasked “To promote the rights of communities to establish their historically diminished heritage”. This provision reflects the fact that the commission now performs the function that, previously, was considered the prerogative of traditional leaders. And under “powers and functions”, the commission is tasked to:

bring any relevant matter to the attention of the appropriate authority or organ of state, and, where appropriate, make recommendations to such authority or organ of state in dealing with such a matter.³²

Immediately one is struck by the state’s preference of statutory over indigenous bodies for dealing with matters of cultural, religious and, linguistic heritage and, in particular, the dependence of the Council of Traditional Leaders on this body for its protection. Act 19 of 2000 provides the Council of Traditional Leaders with a degree of visibility through the Act’s provisions dealing with biannual National Consultative Conferences, where the Council of Traditional Leaders is regarded as a key participating body. We can assume that the commission is also tasked with the promotion and recovery of indigenous and customary traditions, in consultation with the Council of Traditional Leaders as guardians of all matters customary. This legislative configuration must also be read as the state’s apparent attempt to confine the powers of traditional leaders and to domesticate indigenous institutions in terms of a political culture of secular democracy. The

³² Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities Act, Republic of South Africa, Act 19 of 2000.

Commission For The Promotion And Protection Of The Rights Of Cultural, Religious And Linguistic Communities is afforded greater power than the Council of Traditional Leaders and could possibly proceed to make recommendations that may further erode the power of traditional leaders where they are considered not to be in the interests of their constituency. The provision of legislation set to protect indigenous institutions allows the state a significant degree of control over the mobility and the recovery of indigenous authorities/leaders and thus leaves very few alternative avenues for the communal “self-determination” within the national legal framework.

The restrictions that emerged with the passage of legislation for the promotion and protection of traditional institutions has forced traditional authorities to find new discourses of the indigenous in the post-colony. As a result, we have witnessed increasing claims for land distribution invoking rhetoric of the ancestral, intellectual property rights of indigenous knowledge and collective rights for the protection of indigenous communities. These claims mark a shift in the focus of the struggle and the roles of traditional leaders as they locate their claims within the context of transnational civil society or indigenous movements, and in some cases, the United Nations. Through the resolution of rural land administration traditional leaders in South Africa resolved, in part some, of the potential for the abuse of power, with land allocation having historically been considered among the primary roles of this traditional institution. With these developments in legislation we see the gradual separation of power: the administrative and executive from the judicial. Clearly, the state’s approach to traditional authorities

reflects its desire to retain control over aspects of government in rural areas. This means that by suspending the judicial power of traditional authorities their primary functions are performed within the domain of indigenous laws and customs only. It could be argued that like the colonial construction of power during the mid-Victorian period, recent interventions in relation to traditional authorities in South Africa depended on the “separation of coercion and force”.³³ The Communal Land Rights Bill of 2002 appears to present positions of the state and traditional leaders on land tenure rights in terms of a distinction between coercion and force. The use of coercion rests with central government (like the colonial metropole) who enshrine discourses of rights and order, while the use of force and domination is suggested as indicative of native authorities mediated through the rhetoric of the indigenous and traditional.³⁴

I wish to argue that this indigenous-secular dichotomy is not only the result of domesticating state interventions but also because traditional authorities sought to assert their authority primarily in terms of the indigenous/sacred. This claim of legitimacy further rests upon the assumption of a primordial guardianship of tribal custom. Thus while scholars widely agree that the collapse of sacred and secular functions of traditional authorities was a colonial invention to contain local resistance, the people who have lived under this form of rule have exhibited greater tolerance of traditional authorities as the sacred guardians of local custom.³⁵ Moreover, many have argued that the post-apartheid

³³ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*. (New York: Verso, 1993), 140.

³⁴ Carol Paton, “New Law Loosens Tribal Leaders Hold on Land”, *Sunday Times*, 25 August 2002.

³⁵ J. C. Bekker, “Tribal Government at the Crossroads”, *Africa Insights*, 21.2 (1991): 131.

state cannot abolish traditional authorities because it (1) offers a structure of governance that would be nearly impossible to replace in areas where no other form of rule is known, and more importantly, (2) the survival of traditional authorities in the post-apartheid state is symbolic of a pre-colonial form of governance particular to Africa. This enables the post-apartheid state to suspend the explicit expressions of Africanism within its narratives of nationalism because traditional authorities provide the state with a sacred link to the primordially African. Although it expresses no overt sentiments of the legitimacy of traditional authorities, the state does indulge the sacred primordialism of the institution. This position is reflected in Nelson Mandela's speech at the inauguration of the National Council of Traditional Leaders when he remarked that:

this Council will succeed both to define its role and to assert the Africaness of our new democracy.... Traditional leaders can promote and assist continuing research so that we know who we truly are.³⁶

Domesticating Traditional Authorities

The ambivalence of the African nationalist state towards traditional authorities is undeniable and has produced a myriad of problems for the current government, particularly with regard to the ongoing lack of clarity about the role and functions of traditional authorities. The current situation can be regarded as the classical separation of matters of state making from those relating to national cohesion. This separation is mediated through legislation that secures protection to colonially-produced traditional authorities that otherwise may not have a home in a post-apartheid democracy; but this

³⁶ Nelson Mandela, Inauguration of National Council of Traditional Leader, Cape Town, 18 April 1997.

invention provides the post-apartheid government with sacred resources that are regarded as indigenous and allows the government to produce its own brand of African nationalism. While most scholars agree that traditional leaders are largely the invention of colonial/apartheid administrators, few challenge its legitimacy and the ways that these institutions of collaboration have contributed to continuing oppression of women and rural people.³⁷ Unlike the mythology of Afrikaner ethnicity that lost its authority in shaping the nations' character after the end of apartheid, traditional authorities appear to have been granted a new lease on life. It is, of course, curious to observe the continuities between the narratives of domination and resistance when considering ways in which traditional authorities as an invented and imposed colonial administrative system - based on the idea of savage religion - came to be regarded as indigenous and primordial during the apartheid era, and now appear to persist in the postcolonial state.³⁸

It appears that after a long history of opposition to traditional authorities as incompatible with African nationalism, the tensions produced by the post-apartheid context saw the ANC-government courting the idea that these traditional institutions might be a legitimate link to a primordial Africa. It is the possibility of this claim and the post-apartheid state's inability/unwillingness to challenge the legitimacy of traditional leaders that exposes the fact that while regarded as invented, traditional authorities are able to reconfigure themselves as a sacred resource. In reconfiguring their positions, traditional

³⁷ Andrew Spiegel, "Struggling With Tradition in South Africa", in *Social Constructions of the Past: Representation and Power*, eds. George C. Bond and Angela Gilliam (London: Routledge, 1994), 185-200.

³⁸ Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7.

authorities/leaders embed themselves firmly within the socio-political landscape of South Africa by infecting post-apartheid narratives of nationalism, which points to the persistence of religion in the post-colony. In postcolonial South Africa the status of indigenous authorities is no longer addressed as a question of legitimacy, nor whether religion should be at the heart of the social order, but it is certainly concerned with the role of indigenous institutions in producing symbolic narratives of the sacred within African nationalism. Commenting on the relation between invented communities and religious traditions in the Balkans, Anthony Smith concludes that in this context the sacred did not simply wither away but that the latter “drew upon the myths, symbols, and traditions of the former”, marking a crucial stage in the evolution of nationalism (in the postcolonial state).³⁹ The case of traditional authorities in South Africa demonstrates how in the production of the sacred within the post-colony, both the state and native communities have drawn resources of legitimation from manufactured notions of Africa(ns), be it colonial, apartheid, indigenous or primordial. These notions of the sacred find expression on the periphery of the postcolonial state where the indigenous is reconfigured to enable traditional authorities to infect nationalist narratives and embed themselves firmly within South Africa’s post-apartheid democracy.

Smith argues that it is through recurrence, continuity and appropriation that nations mediate between past and present to produce powerful ethnoscaples – memories of ancestry. In the context of postcolonial South Africa, traditional authorities draw on an

³⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000). 59.

inversion of elements of savage religion to fashion remnants of an indigenous ethnic identity which allows notions of the savage, or the child-like characteristics of the natives, to assume a new legitimating meaning. Drawing simultaneously on the colonially produced criteria by which native peoples were regarded as simply superstitious, or possessing savage religion, indigenous authorities (in the postcolonial state) appear to conflate the two sets of criteria to legitimate their institution as both indigenous, and primordially African. A postcolonial reading of religion allows us to proceed beyond such simple inversions – reminiscent of the colonial strategies of denial and exclusion – towards a narrative of religion as contagious and infectious which is produced outside the discourse of legitimation but embedded in local struggles for self-determination. A postcolonial emphasis on the plural subjects appears open to the possibility of a de-centred form of civil society, based on a democracy of fractured identities. African nationalism's anxiety about civil society being mobilised around resurgent indigenous, as ethnic, and religious traditions, however remote – leaves little room for any discussion of African identities as fractured and plural.⁴⁰ Further, a postcolonial reading allows for an acknowledgement of the conditions in which citizens have to engage with new forms of inclusion and exclusion in the context of 'the endemic contingency of belonging' – a condition which increasingly characterises the social and political relations of post-apartheid South Africa.

⁴⁰ Pal Ahluwalia, *Politics and Postcolonial Theory: African Inflections*. (London: Routledge 2001), 106-107.

I have a strange sense of reluctance about all too easily juxtaposing indigenous authorities and the state. This is born out of recognition of the extent to which social identities in South Africa are taking shape both out of a (1) reaction to the simultaneous denial and domestication of traditional authorities, as well as to (2) a state's desire to forge secular African identities. Each in its own way fails to acknowledge the infectious persistence of the sacred by their denial of the material conditions that activate indigenous and sacred traditions, which are always part invented.⁴¹ The post-apartheid condition of *citizen* and *subject* requires that we recognise that the persistence of religion is mediated through postcolonial discourses of collective rights. While there are various dynamic and creative ways in which the national political landscape has assumed a more religious character, the fetishizing and patriarchally dominating character of such projects leaves the relations between formal and traditional authorities constantly ambivalent.⁴² The restricting nature of the notion of South African exceptionalism is indicative of a great deal of the politics of identity-production that appears to be concerned with the unleashing or containment of the terrifying "Other" within.⁴³ It is therefore easy to presume that we may proceed with the development of local methodologies, or in fact, that these may be desirable and necessary in the process of forging a national identity. Such methodologies, whilst essentialist, are always political and socially produced. The development of an all-permeating indigenous character, and the associated refusal of

⁴¹ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*. (London: Routledge, 1999), 216.

⁴² Annie Coombes, "The Recalcitrant Object: Cultural Contact and the Question of Hybridity", in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret and Diana Loxley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 105.

⁴³ Ali Rattansi, "Postcolonialism and its Discontents", *Economy and Society*, 26.4 (1999): 481

traditional authorities to acknowledge or accept the fractured nature of postcolonial identities, too often results in the development of strategies of exclusion.

Finally, the post-apartheid state's reluctance to clarify the roles and functions of native authorities points to the more significant struggle about the persistence of religion in South Africa's postcolonial discourses of state-making.⁴⁴ The challenge lies in the way these complex relations of religion, civil society and state-making are integrated in the postcolonial state and the need to remain astutely focussed on: (1) the recognition and acceptance of diverse religions and traditions; (2) the integrity of local traditions; (3) recognising the religious residue of the bifurcated state. Religion, civil society and state-making in postcolonial South Africa points to discourses within which conceptions of self, tribe and nation are being infected by the sacred whilst, at once reinforced and exchanged for more inclusive social institutions. This tension between the universal-secular, and the parochial-religious will continue to be situated in terms of the persistence of traditional authorities in post-apartheid South Africa for a while to come. The postcolonial residues of the sacred produce discourses about sameness and difference that are more easily mediated through a context in which social identities are allowed to proceed as fractured and ambivalent. However in postcolonial South Africa social identities are, ultimately, regulated by the ANC government through state-making mechanisms of exclusion and containment that are intended to domesticate both the volatile and the vital that inhabit indigenous institutions.

⁴⁴ Jason Myers, "The Spontaneous Ideology in Post-Apartheid South Africa", *Politikon*, 26.1 (1999): 36.

CONCLUSION

What I have sought to map in the preceding five chapters is the active nature of the sacred in the context of postcolonial Africa. I put forward an argument that suggests that practices of suppression during the colonial period relied on the expulsion of the savage and the production of the sacred to cohere the nation. I sought to evidence that similar practices of expulsion and domestication emerged in the context of colonial/apartheid South Africa, in Fanon's development of the idea of 'national culture' and finally in terms of postcolonial/ post-apartheid South Africa.

My argument turns on the use of postcolonial theory as a resource that enables a subaltern or revisionist reading of colonial and postcolonial relations as they were represented between the colonised and the metropolitan, the native and the nationalist. I outline how, like the anti-colonial Fanon, the post-apartheid State draws on essentially colonial strategies of domestication, be it through exclusion or confinement, to master control over the sacred in the nation.

Patricia Davison reminds her reader that such strategies to domesticate the subaltern are a futile exercise when she concludes that, "museums hold and shape memories but they cannot contain them".¹ I further sought to illustrate how the idea of the savage repelled and terrified the African nationalist and colonist alike because it was one such category that was indigenous, unruly and outside the control of the administration.

¹ Patricia Davison, "Museums and the Reshaping of Memory" in Sarah Nuttal and Carli Coetzee eds. *Negotiating the Past* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), 160.

With this interrogation of the sacred in the context of colonial and postcolonial Africa I sought to reveal/ expose how the production of social relations relied significantly on the ideas of the sacred to inform aspirations of power or mobility. The ambivalence of the sacred makes it possible for both oppressor and oppressed to draw upon the sacred to rally its constituency.

I have also sought to show that the sacred as "...moods and motivations" is active and ambivalent, offering resources that can motivate in support of nationalist narratives whilst always offering room for the subversive. Girard refers to the sacred as:

"that inexhaustible reservoir from which all differences flow and into which they all converge. ...the sacred reigns supreme when cultural order has not yet taken hold, has only begun to take hold, or has lost its hold entirely. The sacred also reigns over structure: engenders, organizes, observes and perpetuates it or, on the contrary, mishandles, dissolves, transforms, and on a whim destroys it."²

Postcolonial theory highlights the active reception and ownership of culture and language, largely through practices wherein colonial convention is transformed by parochial or native interests.³ Thus postcolonialism seeks to give expression to a fuller variety of responses, as well as outcomes, of the colonial encounters between colonisers and natives. This conception of postcolonial relations led me to propose a reading of the active content of the sacred as 'infectious'. I outlined how practices of confinement and

² Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* transl. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 242.

³ Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 83.

domestication served not simply to exclude native people from metropolitan privilege and franchise but also sought to contain the infection and contagion of the very ideologies that brought Europeans to Africa, as well as the ideologies that privilege African nationalism.

Because the sacred is so open to re-inscription, it cannot be claimed as the sole resource of the underdog. I outline how, even though Fanon criticizes the colonial administration for its use of the ideas of the sacred in the oppression of native resistance, he too seeks to manufacture the idea of the sacred in his desire to cohere dispirit aspirations of the nation (of African nationalism). Byrne speaks of the sacred as,

“a class of objects of belief, ritual and experience. The sacred is other than the ordinary and mundane... the sacred may in a manner be private and unique... bound up with dimensions of belief, behaviour, experience and social organisation that define a human, cultural phenomenon”.⁴

I couple such an understanding of the sacred with the conclusions of Achille Mbembe that the national culture that Fanon seeks must be understood as, “the notion of the ‘postcolony’ identifies specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization... (although) the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic; it has nonetheless coherence” .⁵

⁴ Peter Byrne, “Religion and Religions”, in *The Study of Religion, Traditional and New Religion*, eds. Stewart Sutherland and Peter Clarke (London: Routledge, 1991), 24.

⁵ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 102.

Because Fanon was plagued by an overriding anxiety that the peasantry, through lack of participation in the struggle for liberation, would remain a passive class⁶ he was compelled to draw on resources other than political rhetoric. He ultimately sought to gain control over the moods and motivations of the nation by producing sentiments of the sacred in “national culture”. This point is aptly captured by Hart when he concludes that “if ideology is a form of collective illusion. Mass self-alienation, or a make-believe world, then religion is its root metaphor. *Nationalism, class race and a host of other reifications... become the new idols of veneration*”.⁷

Likewise, the post-apartheid South African administration’s attempt to contain the ground-swell of unruly indigenism, harbours striking similarities to domesticating practices of the Afrikaner nationalist government of less than a generation ago. In the introduction to his edited volume *Memory and the Postcolony*, Richard Webner argues that attempts to contain and silence the popular (indigenous commemoration) ... the state does so at very real and lingering cost and concludes that it ultimately produces “unfinished narratives.”⁸

In my chapter on the administration of indigenous authorities under the post-apartheid state, I refer to Pityana’s contention that both apartheid and anti-apartheid rhetoric sought to argue for the sanitising of public spaces of cultural, religious and other differences.⁹

⁶ Jock McCulloch, *Black Soul White Artifacts: Fanon’s Critical Psychology and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 153.

⁷ William D Hart, *Edward Said and the Religious Effect of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 97.

⁸ Richard Webner ed. *Memory and the Postcolony* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 9.

⁹ Barney Pityana, “Minorities in Global Society”, in *Many Cultures One Nation*, eds. Charles Villa-Vacencio and Carl Hiehaus (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1995), 171.

This response to indigenous forces emerges initially out of an apparent inability to adequately deal with the idea that because a tradition is regarded as naturalized (whether invented or not) it may claim something of the primordial. This focus detracts from the matter at hand, which is that these indigenous traditions are live and active within the post-apartheid state where they are not so much expressions of indigeneity or primordialism but rather expressions of the sacred aspirations of divergent groups that find themselves socially or politically excluded.

I draw on Mamdani's idea of the bifurcated African state to illustrate the unfinished narratives of South Africa's nationalisms and the continuing contestation of power between the state and indigenous authorities. I conclude with the argument that while the post-apartheid, African Nationalist State offers some administration for the legitimation of traditional authorities, it serves only to contain and domesticate these indigenous forces. What is evident and perhaps offers a resource for further investigation at another time is how the relations between State and the indigenous in the postcolonial state, appears to be a replication of the colonial administration of natives during the previous two centuries.

I wish to echo the understanding of religion so well articulated by Richard King in *Orientalism and Religion* when he argues that when we abstract 'the religious' from the wider cultural dynamic... (religion) it is a theoretical construction useful for the purposes

of examining one particular aspect of the human experience but should not be reified, as if it could exist apart from that context".¹⁰

It is thus with this conception of religion that I have sought to consider the production of the sacred in the colonial and postcolonial African contexts – to demonstrate how the sacred, or at least the power over its production, offers a framework to consider the ambivalence, mutuality and infection that characterize the relation between colonized, and colonizer, between native and nationalist. No ideological constituency can claim authority over the production of the sacred – understood in terms of motivations and moods – because assertion by a colonial/ nationalist administration to domesticate the indigenous generally marks the expression of its subversive content. To attempt to contain the sacred is to dislodge it.

Central to my treatment of the relations of power is the failure of colonial administrators and postcolonial nationalists to locate the production of the sacred in its historical context. Further I sought to use the figure of infection to demonstrate how the production of the sacred “surreptitiously ascribes agency to discourse, disciplines and techniques” of social administration and resistance.¹¹

Postcolonial theory offers a conception of not only the context as postcolonial but also the very ways of relating in that context, as mutually infectious. Many have argued that the ‘post’ in postcolonial is inaugurated at the very moment of contact between the

¹⁰ Richard King *Orientalism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1999) 210.

¹¹ Cornel West. *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989). 225.

colonizer and the colonized. Postcolonial theory, in my estimation, makes possible a particular consideration of the role of the sacred in the understanding of social relations – whether in a colonial or postcolonial context. Thus, as colonial administrators sought to define natives in terms of ‘metropolitan’ religious ideas, the very conception of the idea of religion was also redefined. Further I sought to demonstrate some of the various ways in which religion – as the production of the sacred – constitutes a necessary dynamic that renders hegemonic and cultural practices always open to challenge, amendment, revision and, possibly, radical change.¹²

The context produced a range of practices and administrative systems by which power relation in the colonies were to be mediated – relations that I conclude are always the result of both oppression and resistance. These relations of power were not only defined by the coloniser’s definition or representation of the Other. The interest and passion of the colonizers significantly shaped the social relations of the colony. While these relations were defined in terms of the savage or sanitation, superstition or sanity, they always sought to situate the Other as less human, less legitimate and that which needed to be domesticated, be this through suppression, coercive administration or violence.

The formal relation of the colonies allowed little room for public acts of resistance and this long history of repression and violence gave birth to acts of subversion, and the reinscription of the sacred. The colonial attempts to define indigenous social relations, and to politically situate the native through explanation of the sacred, as understood by the colonizer, served to justify colonial dominance. However these narratives of the

¹² Peter Scott, *Theology, Ideology and Liberation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 49.

sacred offered the native a means and a method to assert resistance and to express their political aspirations. Thus acts of apparent compliance grew significantly because of the ambivalent, but always active nature of the sacred.

My treatment of the indigenous – the production of the sacred – in relation to both Frantz Fanon and post-apartheid State's administration of traditional authorities points to the very peculiar history and politics of religion in postcolonial Africa. I reiterate my contention outlined in my introduction which is that practices of exclusion – including anti-colonial (Fanon) and postcolonial / post-apartheid State - became increasingly robust as practices of confinement or domestication failed to contain the sacred – those powerful and pervasive forces that cohere and mobilise people. Through the lens of postcolonial theory we see the peripheral voices become audible and we witness prevailing nationalist assumptions becoming de-centred so as to produce new struggles for power over knowledge.

Ultimately, as colonists, nativists and African nationalists sought to gain mastery over the production of the sacred in their respective narratives of oppression, resistance and nationalism. Practices of confinement and domestication served not simply to exclude native people from metropolitan privilege and franchise but they also sought to contain the infection and subversion of the very ideologies that brought the Europeans to Africa, as well as the ideologies that privilege Africa's postcolonial nationalism. The post-colony offers itself as an open landscape of knowledge production, and likewise the

production of the sacred affords people endless resources for the positioning of self, community and nation.

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