# Introduction

Voters waited patiently in queues that circled around city blocks or twisted a mile or more across the countryside. People who had never before been allowed to vote entered the polling stations and marked their ballots. "Now I am a human being," a black man said, as South Africa held its first democratic elections in 1994. Nelson Mandela declared that "never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again suffer the oppression of one by another." So ended one of the great disgraces of the twentieth century, the collapse of apartheid and the withering of white supremacy at the southern tip of Africa.[1]

A decade earlier, at the beginning of a wave of protest and violent repression that led to apartheid's dissolution, few people had believed that democracy would arrive without a violent and prolonged revolution. Massive popular resistance and horrible state violence did occur. The security forces arrested some 30,000 people in the ten years between the outbreak of widespread resistance in 1984 and the elections. Tens of thousands of people died in political violence, far more than the bloody conflicts in Northern Ireland or Israel. By the late 1980s many areas of the country had fallen to military occupation. In the final years of apartheid torture had become a ubiquitous feature of police interrogation. So also had clandestine "third force" operations that carried out numerous murders and massacres. In the famous Boipatong massacre of July 1992 some thirty-eight people died while, quite literally on the other side of town, politicians struggled to design a democratic future for the country.[2]

But the armies of the liberation movements never marched triumphantly down the streets of Pretoria. By the early 1990s Nelson Mandela had been released from his many years in prison and the apartheid government had unbanned the African National Congress (ANC) and other political organizations, many of whose leaders languished in prisons or had lived for decades in exile in Africa, Europe and the Americas. Politicians set out on the difficult and all too frequently bloody road from the authoritarianism and racial oppression of apartheid to democracy and the political reconstruction of South Africa. Again in 1999 South Africans went to the polls, cast their ballots, and delivered an overwhelming victory to the ANC.

The challenges the country faces are daunting. Democracy has arrived, at least in terms of formal political institutions, but South Africa remains a place of horrific inequality and chilling violence, the most visible legacies of colonialism, apartheid, and hatred. Measured in terms of the distribution of household income, South Africa has had, and continues to have, among the greatest disparity between wealthy and poor anywhere in the contemporary world.[3] Among black South Africans the unemployment rate averages more than 40 percent; in many rural areas the rate tops 70 percent. The violence and tyranny of everyday poverty remain a pervasive feature of the social landscape: grossly inadequate housing, water, and sanitation; disease, malnutrition, and infant death; alcoholism, broken families, sexual violence, the jealousies and hatreds born of desperation, and the continued bloody persecution of the innocent and the suspected whose bodies are beaten and set alight. Three-quarters of the poor live in rural areas; the Eastern Cape Province alone accounts for approximately 25 percent of South Africa's poor. Most recently South Africa faces one of the world's worst HIV/AIDS crises, with infection rates in parts of Natal and the Eastern Cape reaching as high as 30 percent of the rural population.[4]

At the same time the local state has all but collapsed in parts of the country, especially in the former sham "homeland" of the Transkei in the Eastern Cape, one of the putatively self-governing states created under South Africa's policy of grand apartheid or "separate development." The few, largely inadequate services that once had been available have largely disappeared. Corruption is rife. Illegal weapons have flooded into the area. Since 1993 hundreds of people have met violent deaths in conflicts over livestock and other resources and over the economic largesse of the "new" South Africa. In 1996, to take but one example, seven men massacred thirteen people, burnt their huts and destroyed their property. The violence has been so bad that the ANC government appointed a commission to look into stock theft, violence, and political corruption; there was even talk of calling in the military, a surreal prospect given South Africa's recent history of state violence. According to one reporter "the situation" has "degenerated into endless violence. Men, women and children fled their homes, while others were killed . . . Those who managed to flee went to 'nowhere'." "We want to sleep in our houses," one resident pleaded. "It's a long time that we have been sleeping in the mountains with our children."[5]

During the day struggles arise over access to and control over political power. At night different conflicts unfold. There are battles between thieves and their enemies. Men are shot down. Thieves are captured. In a hidden place men suspend a suspected robber over a fire and demand confession. The man screams, flesh burns, the suspect dies. The night is filled with mysterious, dangerous movement, the motion of witches and the terrible, seemingly relentless violence of men. At the top of a cliff a woman has been accused of witchcraft. The belly of a live horse is slit open. The animal is disemboweled. The witch is

murdered. The men force her warm body into the wet cavity of the horse, the gash is sutured, the horse's anus sewn closed, and horse and witch pushed over the side of the cliff.[6]

Witchcraft is not confined to rural areas, to "backward" peasants, or simply to the poor and the uneducated. In the sprawling suburb of Soweto, for example, "people . . . understand the powers spoken of as 'witchcraft' as palpable realities that are utterly commonplace and yet shrouded in the utmost secrecy." For "every aspect of social life, including politics, is permeated by these powers."[7] In parts of the country witchcraft, and its very often brutal eradication, became intertwined with the transition from apartheid to democracy, including the 1994 elections.[8] As elsewhere in Africa, "political innovation confronts the narrow link between power and the occult."[9] The end of apartheid's authoritarianism created new tensions, jealousies, and hatreds, and revealed historic, if usually whispered, conversations people have had about power, politics, and the location of evil in their lives. This understanding of evil and its relationship to power and the human emotions that can unleash such terrible horror, this politics of evil, has shaped people's actions as it has shaped their understanding of themselves and the dangerous world they inhabit.

## Arguments and predicaments, questions and speculations

It is common to list the many injustices committed in the eras of colonialism and apartheid – particularly among those who may see present-day South Africa as something of a political miracle, a bright spot in a contemporary world of disorder and tragedy, a "rainbow nation," the beginning of an "African renaissance." In less than three decades, for example, the apartheid government forcibly "resettled" over three million people, almost a fifth of its 1960 population, destroying lives and livelihoods in an unrelenting pursuit of a racist political dream.[10] (Put another way, this would be equivalent to 57 million people in the United States today.) "I have seen," wrote Desmond in 1969, "the bewilderment of simple rural people when they are told that they must leave their homes where they have lived for generations and go to a strange place . . . their cries of helplessness and resignation . . . the sufferings of whole families," and "children sick with typhoid, or their bodies emaciated with malnutrition and even dying of starvation . . . in the richest, most advanced and most rapidly growing economy on the continent of Africa."[11] In language darkly reminiscent of Nazi Germany, the government quite literally defined such people as "redundant." They were superfluous, unneeded and unwanted in a society in which the color of one's skin quite literally could mean the difference between life and death, poverty and plenty. So-called "resettlement" camps, and in fact the homelands themselves, became places of extraordinary destitution, want, and ever-present death. The United Nations condemned apartheid as a crime against humanity,

a "crime against the conscience and dignity of mankind," one of the great evils of the modern era.[12]

Evil certainly; but traditionally evil has had a different, if ultimately related, meaning among many of those who have been subjected to the everyday violence of the state. Evil is not simply a synonym for injustice, unfairness, or even the oppression committed by individuals acting as "bad" people, as in the Christian Pietist tradition that reminds us of our inherent sinfulness, our banishment from God's bounteous Garden of Eden. Rather, evil is the intentional or instrumental use of occult forces, to use Western parlance, to cause harm and to bring disorder. Evil stands in opposition to life and, especially, to the ways life should be lived. Certainly people are capable of being bad. Evil, however, attacks individuals secretly and mysteriously, hurting or even destroying the innocent who are unblemished by original sin. Moreover, evil attacks the wider community, like some ravenous animal, sowing chaos and discord where there should be order and harmony.[13] Evil is the very opposite of *ubuntu*, of hospitality and sharing and of those virtues that make one human and good and life worth living.

Historically these occult forces could be used to create a life worth living, for example by bringing nourishing rains and ensuring bounteous crops. Magic is still used to ensure or to restore harmony and health. Witches use magic selfishly to hurt, even to destroy. Their perfidy stems in part from the triumph of our baser emotions: jealousy; greed; arrogance; naked ambition; hate. Witches are especially evil because they use some intimate knowledge of their victims to sow tragedy, as if those who know us best are most capable of doing harm.[14] In an 1856 case of witchcraft, for example, the witch-finder discovered small amounts of fat in the hut of the accused witch, perhaps the fat of the *impundulu*, the magical lightning bird that serves witches in their evil work. The fat contained hair thought to be from two of the accursed victims, one of whom, a chief and relative of the alleged witch, was dying from the evil magic. The accused witch also had close connections with whites. He appeared to the magistrate as "courageous and a straightforward man," but also "overly ambitious."[15]

Witchcraft beliefs were, and are, wonderfully malleable, if frighteningly and very often tragically so. They have, for example, fused with Christian ideas of sin and evil and purity and goodness, creating visions of terrible malevolence and nourishing dreams of an apocalypse that would set the world aright and return the downtrodden to a land of harmony and plenty. Belief in occult forces have at times shaped people's perceptions of whites and the state. In the 1970s, for instance, bulldozers destroyed the homes of some ten thousand people near Cape Town as part of the state's program of forced resettlement. As elsewhere in South Africa during this time, the police had conducted surprise night raids, checking passes and subjecting Africans to the state's ever more detailed control, arresting people, dividing families. In the end they attempted to bleach a "black

spot" from white South Africa. The people who suffered the indignities of dispossession "believed that the whites who had pushed them off the land and hunted them in the bush," that is, employees of the state, "were either under evil influences or were possibly witches themselves."[16] Four decades earlier, people in the Eastern Cape called the poll tax, first introduced in 1925, the *impundulu*.[17] More generally some people in this region believed Europeans had access to powerful bewitching substances. Rumor had it that "unscrupulous Europeans" sold "what they claim to be the fat" of witchcraft familiars such as the *impundulu*.[18]

Where there is power and all the emotions it unleashes, there is the occult. "Witchcraft, this terribly diffuse notion so highly current in Africa, continues to be a key element in discourses on power."[19] The moral discourse of magic has been a central and historical feature of the African political imagination, a way of understanding the iniquities of the world, the tyranny of hatred, but also the way the world should be. And yet, paradoxically, witchcraft is at once "an everyday reality" and "an enormous public secret."[20] The pervasiveness of magic in people's daily lives speaks of a world and a past that is rarely disclosed, a history of deadly important whispers that concern the most basic of issues: life and death; jealousy, hatred and selfishness; agriculture and the rains; the persecutions of the state; the exploits of the powerful and the exploitation of the powerless.[21]

South Africa, and especially the Eastern Cape, offers an exemplary, if sad, history of the politics of evil in the colonial and postcolonial world, particularly the ways common people have conceived of, experienced, and shaped their political world in the face of hardship and persecution. Historical developments that unfolded elsewhere in the world over the course of centuries appeared in this distant corner rapidly, and very often violently. States and bureaucracies emerged in the space of just a few decades. Towards the end of the nineteenth century South Africa underwent a breathtakingly fast industrial capitalist revolution. And within this maelstrom of change new ways of apprehending the world surfaced as people struggled to make sense of their lives.

This work is an exploratory venture into this extraordinary and exemplary past; exemplary not only because of its richness, but also because in the tragedy and pathos of this past may lie the imaginative possibilities for exploring how to "experience difference in equality."[22] The book is concerned less with policies and institutions than with an intimate history of the emergence and transformation of power's exercise and of people's experience of subjugation. It is concerned with understanding the play of power and the politics of evil in the everyday lives of people from the nineteenth-century colonial conquests to the collapse of apartheid and the contemporary challenges of building a durable democracy at the southern tip of Africa. Ultimately also, this book is about the creative imagination of people as well as their capacity to hate and to engage in terroristic violence to end a world they see as profoundly evil.

The period covered in this investigation engages with three basic themes in African history and modern world history: cross-cultural contact; the rise of a colonial order, especially the emergence and development of a state; and the ways people understood and fashioned their world. How, for example, do we write of the "contact zone" between African and Western conceptions, perceptions, and practices of power and authority?[23] This is in many respects a practical question. But it also raises the more fundamental issues of communication, translation, and understanding, the possibilities of people speaking across their differences, even in situations of great inequality.[24] For the historian of power and politics this means analyzing the everyday relationships of ruler and ruled, the ways in which colonial rule came to be accomplished and transformed, and how people understood the triumph of authoritarianism in South Africa that confounded the lives of so many people. How did Africans shape the process of state formation, expose it to critique and, at times, organize resistance to it? And, finally, what is the relationship between state formation and the rise of new sensibilities among the colonized, especially the colonized poor, the creation and recreation of political identities within the contact zone of conquest, rule and the white supremacy of an authoritarian state? How, in short, do people construct meaning in the face of power?

"Between conscious and unconscious," two anthropologists have written, "lies the most critical domain of all for historical anthropology and especially for the analysis of colonialism and resistance. It is," they continue, "the realm of partial recognition, of inchoate awareness, of ambiguous perception," where "individuals and groups know that something is happening to them but find it difficult to put their fingers on quite what it is."[25] This ambiguity, this intractable problem of history and understanding, arises not simply from the complexity of cross-cultural encounters, but also because of the *a priori* assumptions that silently yet powerfully shape culture and experience. Cross-cultural encounters are neither simply situations in which two cultures collide, and in their collision are transformed, nor are they situations of perfect translation in which historical actors share a universal practical rationality.[26] There is speech and communication and translation across culture, but there is also, and very often simultaneously, misapprehension and misunderstanding.

Herein lay a predicament. Historical evidence rarely speaks directly to the ways people conceptualize their world, particularly in the early colonial context where the scholar largely relies on records produced by Europeans who were translating the African world according to their own culturally bound ways of understanding themselves and others. The very fact that colonial authorities declared witchcraft illegal, for example, drove it from archival record, so that state policies and practices powerfully shaped the production of written evidence. One analyzes actions, particularly those that shed light on perception, and draw on linguistic, ethnographic, and comparative data, to reconstruct the conceptual

world of people and the ways in which those concepts shaped their perceptions and actions. Those concepts were of great importance in the colonial encounter and yet they remained largely unspoken. For example, magic was, and continues to be, a ubiquitous feature of the way many Africans understood and understand the world, reaffirming the everyday assumption of the importance of people's connectedness to others and, indeed, to the natural world around them. Ideas about occult forces shaped African understandings of Europeans and their relations with them, yet these ideas for the most part remained implicit in people's actions. As such they remain mostly hidden in the historical evidence, especially since European rulers with their ideas of the truthfulness of the empirical world had trouble empathizing with, let alone understanding, a social reality not their own. We are left reconstructing the past along a border between reasonable likeliness and "probable truths" and mere plausibility and unwarranted speculation.[27]

Scholars for the most part have been unaccustomed to seeing conquest and rule as forms of cross-cultural contact, a contact zone involving an astoundingly complex interplay of African and European modes and models of power and political practice. Recent work on cross-cultural encounters has evinced surprisingly little interest in the state, though this literature has significantly called attention to the importance of explaining "the politically constructed dichotomy of colonizer and colonized . . . as a historical shifting pair of social categories."[28] In general the state enters later, after the colonization of consciousness, after the damage has been done, a political *deus ex machina* to order the African world in the name of commerce, civilization, and, ultimately, white supremacy.[29]

A number of writers have raised new questions about state formation and rule. For Abrams, whose work was influenced by Africanist political anthropology, the central issue is how the state "comes into being."[30] Other scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding the "profoundly cultural content of state institutions and activities" as well as "the nature and extent of state regulation of cultural forms."[31] "States," after all, "*state*; the arcane rituals of a court of law . . . visits of school inspectors, are all statements. They define, in great detail, acceptable forms and images of social activity; they regulate, in empirically specifiable ways, much – very much, by the twentieth century – of social life."[32] Colonial state formation represented part of a more global, and today with advances in cybernetics and in genetic knowledge a continuing, historical process. As Minogue has argued more generally, state formation "has been one of continuous growth, both in their claim to regulate the lives and property of their subjects, and in their physical capacity to enforce such claims."[33]

In the Eastern Cape, and indeed elsewhere in South Africa, this process of growing state power began with colonial conquest and culminated in the authoritarian order that was apartheid, especially state controls over labor and

the tribalism of separate development. State formation and rule thus began in the context of the "dialogue of cultures"[34] that is cross-cultural contact. Even at its most violent conquest was quintessentially a cross-cultural encounter because it involved peoples with often radically different ways of conceiving the world coming together and struggling to make sense of what was happening to themselves and to others. The Transkei was conquered largely by employees of a bureaucratic agency of a modern state, the Department of Native Affairs (DNA, later NAD). An important charge of those employees was the transformation of African society in such a way as to render the African world the object of bureaucratic rule. This required, among other things, the existence of clear and stable categories, jurisdictional boundaries, and, indeed, an ethnographic model of colonized society. Put another way, an integral feature of state formation was a "desire to know,"[35] to attempt to define in greater and greater detail the subjects of state control, in short to create a taxonomy through which rule could be accomplished.

Viewed this way conquest entailed the attempts by bureaucrats and others to render African territory and society legible to the modern state. This involved increasing simplification and standardization. The Eastern Cape, for example, would become perhaps the best-mapped "native area" in South Africa, perhaps in all of Southern Africa. In the 1920s and 1930s alone the state passed more laws relating to Africans than in the previous century of colonial rule. Between 1910 and 1961 the state appointed no less than forty-two commissions concerned with "native affairs." Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the state's vision narrowed considerably, bureaucrats focusing increasingly on issues of land, labor, and "tribal" political structures. These developments centered on the definition of the African as the subject of a colonial political order, not in the case of whites as citizens participating in the political process.[36] Bureaucrats, moreover, did not necessarily know their colonial subjects any better, nor were they interested in knowledge for its own sake. The opposite was more likely to be the case. Information and understanding could be very distant cousins, at times seemingly not on speaking terms. Very often the more officials looked the less they saw.

Legibility, "a central problem in statecraft," and the narrowing of vision that inevitably accompanies it, "provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering."[37] At the same time "the political capacity to generate consent through the institutional spaces of civil society," which was afforded to whites in South Africa, was "notably absent"[38] in the colonial context. South Africa in the twentieth century saw an extraordinary growth in the state: in the complexity of its institutions; in the rising prominence of social science; and, importantly, in its coercive capacity, including the taking of life. Legislation passed in this era was preoccupied with rendering the colonized a simplified category ever more legible to state rule. At the same time legislation introduced policies that

reworked the rural economy and the structures of colonial rule and provided the mandated force to help ensure their implementation. The years between 1910 and 1956 especially – between the Act of Union and the introduction into the Transkei of the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act – saw not simply the rise of segregation and then of apartheid but also the emergence of an increasingly authoritarian and racially oppressive state that was willing to deploy its coercive might in pursuit of social engineering on a population that was increasingly denied the capacity to confront it.[39]

The South African state was thus a modern state, informed by the most advanced technologies of the day. Its modernist roots lay deep in European history. Modernity, and in many respects apartheid was modernity gone mad, has been the subject of a voluminous literature.[40] Beginning in the nineteenth century, the industrialization of the state permitted the ascendency, both conceptually and practically, of a new kind of power. The intellectual revolution of Enlightenment rationality came to reside at the center of statecraft, specifically the importance of empirical information to the formation of bureaucracies. These agencies of government were often staffed by officials imbued with an optimism that social problems could be solved using the appropriate political technologies and human history thereby advanced. There emerged an administrative perfectionism that had an insatiable appetite for information on and about the population it managed, a "governmental state" limited only by its dreams for changing the world.[41]

There were always critics of rhapsodic political optimism, such as Edmund Burke and Thomas Malthus. And in the twentieth century Nietzsche and Weber advanced powerful if different critiques of the Enlightenment and its legacy. Weber, for example, believed that bureaucratic rationality would end in instrumental rationality, that is in a rationality unencumbered by moral or ethical considerations. Rationality, and its drive for greater and greater empirical and seemingly value-free information, would thus create an "iron cage" from which there would be no escape, ultimately producing the very opposite of human freedom. The very technical and seemingly neutral language of apartheid ("redundant" people who were "endorsed" out of areas, "resettlement" sites, and so on) demonstrates precisely Weber's dread of the possible terrors of rationality. Later writers such as Adorno and Horkheimer continued this theme, most famously arguing that the European Holocaust was a consequence of, and not a deviation from, the Enlightenment.[42] More recently Foucault argued that "for the first time in history . . . biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time . . . part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention." "Power," he continued, "would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects . . . but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of

life itself," thus giving "power its access even to the body."[43] This new form of power, what Foucault termed "biopower," helped create disciplines such as demography and shaped issues relating to labor power, and led to redefinition of political subjects and the focus of various disciplinary practices on them.[44]

"Biopower may have been a uniquely bourgeois form of modern power," a recent observer has noted, "but it was also an inherently imperial one."[45] Apartheid represented the authoritarian culmination of the modernity of the colonial state, the endpoint of its social engineering that began with the violence of conquest and the making of colonial rule.[46] A distinctive feature of the apartheid state lay not simply in its authoritarianism, the triumph of instrumental rationality in which the ends increasingly justified the means. Rather, officials within the apartheid state became obsessed with controlling labor and bodies, part of a complex "linking of bureaucracy to surveillance"[47] most obviously seen in the pass system and "influx control." Between 1952 and 1962 – the decisive decade in the creation of apartheid – over three million Africans were convicted under the pass laws; "an enormous proportion of the urban African population had been caught by the courts in the net of the influx control laws."[48] These arrests formed part of a web of laws whereby the state redefined human beings as mere objects of state policy, forcibly resettled "redundant" people, refined the migrant labor system, and reorganized the entire system of rule in the homelands to solve, once and for all, the "native question."

The story of state formation is thus the story of the rise of authoritarianism in South Africa, the colonial realization of the fears evinced by scholars such as Weber who warned of the dark side of rationality once it had become untethered from ethics and morality in the pursuit of "technical" problems. This process of rising instrumental rationality became especially pronounced in the 1920s and culminated in the advent of apartheid some three decades later. It entailed not simply the promulgation of laws and a considerable expansion in the state's coercive might but, also, the increasing bureaucraticization of rule as the state's social engineering penetrated ever more deeply into the lives of its subjects.

Yet both state formation and colonial rule unfolded in ways that were frequently disorderly, fragmented, at times even inchoate. This is especially so in the colonial context, in the cacophonies of translation that comprise cross-cultural encounters. For Africans translated into indigenous concepts – and in so doing blurred and complicated – the colonial state. And at times Europeans wittingly and unwittingly donned the political masks of the people they were busily subjugating and, ostensibly at least, bringing into the clear light of Western civilization and its battery of political technologies. Colonial rule emerged out of the complex interplay of structures, practices, discourses, violence, identification and indistinction, that together created, very often confused, and always complicated the lived categories of ruler and subject, colonizer and colonized.[49]