

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## The Politics of Evil

In *The Politics of Evil*, Clifton Crais provides a new interpretation of South African history, and a fresh approach to the study of power, culture, and resistance in the modern world. Encompassing all of South Africa's history in his analysis, Crais examines the formation of an authoritarian political order and the complex ways people understood and resisted the colonial state. He explores state formation as a cultural and political process as well as a moral problem, and he looks at indigenous concepts of power, authority, and evil, analyzing how they shaped cross-cultural encounters and the making of a colonial order. Apartheid represented one of the great evils of the twentieth century. This book reveals how the victims of apartheid understood the triumph of this evil in their lives as they elaborated rich and at times violent visions of a world free of colonial oppression and white supremacy. Professor Crais concludes by looking at the contemporary political transition, the challenges to creating a durable democracy, and the persistence of evil in South Africa.

CLIFTON CRAIS is Professor of History at Kenyon College, Ohio. He is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Social History* and the *International Journal of African Historical Studies* and the author of *White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (Cambridge, 1992), co-editor with Nigel Worden of *Breaking the Chains*, and editor of *The Culture of Power in Southern Africa*. He is also the author of a forthcoming book on the history of poverty, *A Century of Sadness: Power and Poverty in South Africa*.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in  
South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*African Studies Series 103*

Editorial Board

Professor Naomi Chazan, *The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

Professor Christopher Clapham, *Department of Politics and International Relations, Lancaster University*

Professor Peter Ekeh, *Department of African American Studies, State University of New York, Buffalo*

Dr John Lonsdale, *Trinity College, Cambridge*

Professor Patrick Manning, *Department of History, Northeastern University, Boston*

Published in collaboration with

THE AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE, CAMBRIDGE

*A list of books in this series will be found at the end of this volume*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in  
South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# The Politics of Evil

*Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa*

---

Clifton Crais

*Kenyon College, Ohio*



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521817219](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521817219)

© Clifton Crais 2002

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2002

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Crais, Clifton C.

The politics of evil: magic, state power, and the political imagination in South Africa / by Clifton Crais.

p. cm. – (African studies series; 103)

Includes bibliographical references (p. 280) and index.

ISBN 0 521 81721 8

1. South Africa – Politics and government. 2. Political culture – South Africa – History. I. Title. II. Series.

DT1798 .C73 2002

968 – dc21 2002017402

ISBN 978-0-521-81721-9 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-10482-1 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in  
South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

For Benjamin and Christine

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

It is worth listening to those who scorn all human things in comparison with wealth and do not think there is any place for great honor and virtue except where riches flow lavishly.

Titus Livy, quoted in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago, 1996), 271



Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>List of maps</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
<i>Chronology</i>	xvi
Introduction	1
<b>Part 1: Cultures of conquest</b>	
1. The death of Hope	35
2. Ethnographies of state	68
3. Rationalities and rule	96
<b>Part 2: States of emergency</b>	
4. Prophecies of nation	115
5. Government acts	145
6. Conflict in Qumbu	165
7. The men of the mountain	178
8. Flights of the lightning bird	209
Conclusion	220
<i>Notes</i>	231
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	280
<i>Index</i>	294

Illustrations

---

1. Chief with leopard skin	<i>page</i> 43
2. Xhosa homestead	46
3. Griqua, Basuto, and Pondo Treaty States	72
4. Trigonometrical survey and universal instrument	75
5. 1880 location map	77
6. Twentieth-century pass	82
7. Resettlement site	106
8. The devil	126
9. Men praying in the rain during the Pondoland Revolt	192
10. March on Bizana during the Pondoland Revolt	200

Maps

---

1. Southern Africa	<i>page</i> 14
2. The Eastern Cape region	16
3. The Transkei	54

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

---

Books have a way of not getting written. This one is no different. During a sabbatical year in 1995 at the Stanford Humanities Center I began writing a project on poverty and the political imagination. That project proved to be far too lengthy and now has grown into two books, of which the present volume is one. The administrative duties that beset the newly tenured created further postponements although, in a way, they provided some perspective on power and how modern bureaucracies function and fail.

More gloriously, the births of Benjamin and Christine redirected energies away from writing and towards fatherhood and the miracle of watching children grow. In elusive yet powerful ways they have helped me see the world more complexly and more wondrously. Parenthood creates its own hustling and bustling, the madness of rushing to and fro, but it also creates pauses and possibility and moments of exquisite silence and sensibility. Reading and discussing *Alice and her Adventures in Wonderland*, especially the monstrous delights of the Queen of Hearts, and the adventures and perils that Harry Potter has faced, helped me consider more carefully the problem of good and evil and magic. Most of all Benjamin and Christine reminded me of the relationship between history and wonderment.

The academic world is one so filled with gifts. I have certainly received my fair share, for which I am very thankful. Fellowships from the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, and the Institute for Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, helped support some of my preliminary research. Generous funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities and the American Council for Learned Societies permitted additional research. From the beginning to the end institutional support from Kenyon College has been invaluable. A fellowship from the Stanford Humanities Center financed a year of writing and reflection among a group of remarkable and generous scholars. Richard Roberts made my stay at Stanford all the more enjoyable. I thank him for his support and friendship.

I am forever indebted to librarians and archivists working and living on three continents. In South Africa I conducted research at the following institutions: Cape Archives; South African Library; South African Museum; African

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

xiii

Studies Library, University of Cape Town; Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape; Stellenbosch University; Cory Library, Rhodes University; Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg; University of Natal Library, Pietermaritzburg; Central Archives, Pretoria; Transkei Archives, Umtata; Barlow Rand Archives; Supreme Court, Bloemfontein; Supreme Court, Grahamstown; and the African Studies Library, University of the Witwatersrand. In England librarians and archivists were most helpful at the British Museum; the School of Oriental and African Studies; the Public Records Office; and Rhodes House, Oxford University. Librarians at Stanford and at Kenyon College have been exceptionally helpful and patient. Graham Goddard of the University of the Western Cape Robben Island Mayibuye Archives and Celia Blight at the Cory Library helped me track down photographs. I am also very thankful for the assistance I was afforded by clerks at the Supreme Court, Grahamstown, who very kindly photocopied crucial legal documents concerning the early years of the armed struggle. Mrs. Elaine Heath kindly responded to my queries and provided me with a copy of documents relating to the death of Hamilton Hope.

I have had the opportunity of presenting my thoughts to various seminars around the world: Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, at a conference on religion and colonialism; Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town; Institute for Historical Research, University of the Western Cape; Institute for Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University; a conference entitled "Ethnicity, Identity, and Nationalism in South Africa: Comparative Perspectives," Grahamstown; Stanford Humanities Center and the Symposium on Law, Colonialism and Property in Africa, Stanford University; the Kenyon Seminar, Kenyon College; Canterbury University, New Zealand; University of Nairobi; the Global Studies Seminar, Denison University; at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, at a conference on reimagining South Africa; and meetings of the African Studies Association and the Northeast Workshop for Southern African Studies. I am thankful for the opportunity to present my work in many places and for the helpful comments of colleagues. I am especially indebted to the History Department at the University of Natal, Durban, for inviting me to share my work with them and with their colleagues at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

I cannot begin to thank all the people who have helped me these past few years. Here is but a partial list: Richard Abel, Michael Adas, William Beinart, Colin Bundy, Keith Breckenridge, Cathy Burns, Alison Drew, Bob Edgar, George Fredrickson, Gail Gerhart, Donald Goldberg, Jeff Guy, Lewis Hyde, Allen Isaacman, Stephanie Jedd, Jim Lance, Tim Lane, Phyllis Mack, Govan Mbeki, Pat McAllister, Thom McClendon, Meredith McKittrick, Laura Mitchell, Don Moore, Vivek Narayanan, Thembeke Orie, Colin Palmer, Ciraj Rasool, Sean Redding, Richard Roberts, Christopher Saunders, Andre du Toit, Robert Thornton, Leslie Witz, Kerry Ward, Diana Wylie, Nigel Worden,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

## Acknowledgments

Dan Younger, and, inspiringly, Davis' "Flamenco Sketches." Jeff Bowman, Reed Browning, Joan Cadden, Ellen Furlough, and Roy Wortman have been most supportive colleagues at Kenyon College. Benjamin Schumacher provided astronomical data. I am also indebted to the administrative assistance of Jean Demaree. Larry and Christine Scully provided a home away from home, one filled with love and art and food and good drink. Special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Mali, the Pickering family, the congregation of the Church of the Prophetess Nonhetha, and W. M. and the other men who spoke to me in Qumbu in the context of great violence and personal insecurity. I have provided only the initials of interviewees, many of whom requested anonymity. Interviews were conducted in two separate trips, in 1992 and 1993.

I am very indebted to Jessica Kuper, who expertly steered this project through the publication process. Jessica has helped make the African Studies series what it is today. I hope she is proud of this book, one of her final projects before retiring from the Press. Two anonymous readers for the Press offered clear and wise criticisms and suggestions. Their reports helped me clarify many of my arguments. Mary Starkey, copy-editor par excellence, went through the manuscript with a fine-toothed comb, correcting mistakes and suggesting more felicitous phrasing. Elizabeth Gutting also helped with the copy-editing. Jean Demaree was always there to lend a helping hand. The University of Wisconsin Cartographic Laboratory prepared the maps.

Conversations with Govan Mbeki helped me think through many of the issues explored here, especially the rural political struggles he knew so intimately. Govan passed away as this book neared completion. In the middle of my research I was able to speak with Chris Hani, who was born and raised in the Eastern Cape. Our discussion ranged over a number of topics, from Shakespeare to state formation. Mainly we spoke of the historical drama of the Eastern Cape, the lessons its history offered, the many challenges that would face a democratic South Africa. Six months later Chris Hani died at the hands of white extremists.

Over the past fifteen years I have been blessed with teaching some remarkable undergraduate students at Kenyon College. Students in my seminars on cross-cultural encounters and on South African history endured my fascinations, helped me refine many of my ideas, and took some chances. Many helpful comments and recommendations were made by students at a seminar in Spring 2002, who read the entire manuscript. I am very grateful to them. A seminar on the consequences of modernity helped me explore in greater detail the character of global processes and how they have unfolded locally over the past two centuries. An honors seminar on history and theory encouraged me to look beyond the narrow confines of so much historical writing and to remember anew the responsibilities when studying the past, particularly the problems of inequality, sadness, and evil. A number of my Kenyon students are now pursuing advanced degrees. I am especially indebted to Grace Davie, once a student,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81721-9 - The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa

Clifton Crais

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Acknowledgments

xv

now friend, and soon to be colleague, who made helpful comments on this project.

Pamela Scully read many of the chapters and made numerous suggestions for revision. More than anyone Pam has helped me write this book, by just being who she is. Together we have raised our two children, negotiated our way through the inevitable challenges facing a dual-career academic couple, and shared ideas and readings in between diapers and the utterly exhilarating exhaustion of parenthood. These have been the best delays of one's life.

## Chronology

---

1780s–1880s	The hundred years of colonial war
1853	Cape Colony receives representative rule
1865	Discovery of diamonds in Griqualand West Annexation of British Kaffraria (later Ciskei homeland)
1870s	Series of colonial wars and raids in the Transkei
1872	Cape Colony receives responsible government Creation of the Department of Native Affairs
1878	Peace Preservation Act
1880–1	Widespread rebellion and conflict in Transkei and Basutoland
1886	Discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand
1894	Annexation of Pondoland, completion of the colonial conquest of the Transkei, Glen Grey Act
1899–1902	South African War
1910	Act of Union
1913	Natives Land Act
1920s	Increasing segregation
1920	Native Affairs Act
1927	Native Administration Act
1939	Betterment Act
1948	National Party victory
1950s	Beginning of apartheid
1951	Bantu Authorities Act, introduced into Transkei in 1956
1952	Native Laws Amendment Act
1960s	Triumph of apartheid
1960	Pondoland Revolt, widespread resistance and repression
1994	First democratic elections