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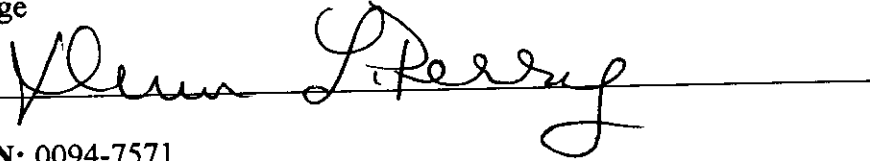
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Who's the Killer? Popular Justice and Human Rights in a South African Squatter Camp

Nancy Scheper-Hughes

Writing Violence

A CRITICAL MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGIST, MY TERRAIN IS THE "BODY," WHICH, LIKE the vexed designation "coloured,"¹ requires a standing set of quotation marks to indicate the body's contested status as both bio-existentially "given" (the source of all certitude, as Wittgenstein [1969] saw it) and just as surely "made up" (and the source of all doubt). My specific set of concerns, derived from an early and indelible reading of Foucault, is the "everyday violence," the little routines and enactments of violence practiced normatively on vulnerable bodies in families, schools, hospitals, medical clinics, in various administrative and bureaucratic settings (from mayor's office and public registry office to the public morgue and the graveyard) — all of which, in Franco Basaglia's (1986) sense of the term, are "institutions of violence."

While studying the madness of everyday life in the mid-1970s in a small, quiet (but nonetheless psychologically "violent") peasant community in western Ireland, I was largely concerned with *interior* spaces, with the small, dark psychodramas of scapegoating and labeling within traditional farm households that seemed to be driving so many young bachelors to drink and to bouts of psychotic depression and schizophrenia (see Scheper-Hughes, 1979; 1982). I paid scant attention to the activities of little Matty Dowd, from whom we rented our cottage in the remote mountain hamlet of Ballynalacken, and who used our attic (with our silent consent) to store a small arsenal of guns, rifles, and explosives that he and a few of his Sinn Féin buddies were running to Northern Ireland. Consequently, I left unexamined the possible links between the political violence in Northern Ireland and the tortured family dramas in West Kerry that I carefully documented.

Since then, I have studied other forms of what I call routine or "everyday" violence: the abuses of medicine and psychiatry when they are practiced in bad faith

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against the weak, the mad, and the hungry, as well as the social indifference to child death in Northeast Brazil that allows political leaders, priests, coffin makers, and shantytown mothers to rather casually dispatch a multitude of hungry "angel-babies" to the afterlife (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). Yet even in Brazil, I did not begin to study the structure and meaning of political violence itself until (beginning in the late 1980s) the spouses and half-grown children of my *comrades*,² friends, and neighbors in the shantytown of Alto do Cruzeiro began to "disappear," their mutilated bodies turning up later, the handiwork of police-infiltrated local death squads (see Scheper-Hughes, 1992: Chapter 6; 1994b).

Until then, I had believed that a running analysis of the political violence occurring within the context of military dictatorships, police states, or in times of transition during and after civil wars and wars of liberation was best handled by political journalists. For one, anthropologists were too slow, too hesitant, too reflective, and our knowledge was too local, too embedded, while political events were altogether too fast, too volatile, too unstable, so that by the time anthropologists had something to say, it was usually irrelevant or obsolete. Since the Brazilian had something to say, it was usually irrelevant or obsolete. Since the Brazilian newspapers insisted on running stories about the "dangerousness" and "violence" of shantytown dwellers (especially poor young Black men and boys), a perceived threat that made the work of the death squads seem to be a necessary defense against the anarchy of the *favela*, I saw that anthropological interventions were necessary to correct the manipulative (even exploitative) half-truths of the media. Despite our relentless self-critique of anthropology, the greater danger resided in leaving the analysis of violence to the journalists. With shades of Levi-Strauss' (1963) comment on Quasaid, the Native American shaman, our anthropological truths might be false (or at best partial), but they were certainly less false than those of the media.

Here I will briefly contrast two well-publicized incidents of township violence attributed to "wild" asocial youth with a contrasting backstage "incident" of an averted triple necklacing that occurred in the "Chris Hami" squatter camp. These events transpired in the course of my exploratory fieldwork on the political transition in Franschoek, the *verkramp* (right-wing, conservative) farm community known to some as "Wynndahl," the site of Vincent Crapanzano's (1985) study of the "whites of South Africa" in his controversial book, *Waiting*.

Dry White Season

At a special showing of the once-banned anti-apartheid film, *A Dry White Season*, at the Baxter Theater at UCT (University of Cape Town) last August, I was unprepared for a spontaneous audience reaction: some muted but audible boos and hisses accompanied the scene of the 1976 Soweto school children's uprising against forced instruction in Afrikans. "Why would a liberal audience of Capetonians react so negatively to the scene of Black township youth defending their rights?" I asked a new colleague the next day. I had just recently arrived in South Africa and, still suffering from the dislocation, I desperately needed a running interpretation of the

subtexts of everyday life. "I suppose some people are sick and tired of violent school children on rampage," she replied in her elliptical way. The answer surprised me and I tucked it away in a field note.

Before the month was out, I too had seen my fill of newspaper and TV media images of local township school children burning textbooks, *toy-toting*³ while chanting for death to the "settlers," and "torching" the cars of suspected government "agents"—meaning almost any non-Blacks to enter the townships during the ANC-initiated teachers' strike called "Operation Barcelona." The strike took its name from the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona and the torches carried by the lead runners. In the townships, torches were also a symbol of liberty. However, they were used more ominously to keep out suspected "settlers," whose cars could be overturned, and to "burn out" suspected collaborators and other "bad eggs" in the township by torching their shacks or setting their bodies on fire with "necklaces" of gasoline-filled tires wrapped around their necks. At least that is what we read, almost daily.

One of those "bad eggs" was 15-year-old Ernest Mphahlele from Tembisa township near Johannesburg, who apparently made the mistake of running with the wrong crowd, one of several street gangs that terrorized the township. Ernest dressed smartly and, until rival gangsters shot him in the legs and put him on crutches, he was a notorious run around. This was so much the case that when local teenage vigilantes came around looking for him, Ernest's mother gave her son up for as good as dead. Dolly Mphahlele understood the harsh "codes of discipline" that governed township life and when the young thugs warned Dolly that her son would be "disciplined," she demurred. Her only comment was: "The one thing I won't stand for is I don't want fire on my son. *You can kill him, but do not burn him.*" Her maternal request was ignored, however, and the day after, Mrs. Mphahlele buried the charred remains of young Ernest, and his handsome, smiling face was on the front page of the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* under the headline, "Horror Necklacing of a Teenage Boy."

Immediately, the story was picked up by Bill Keller (1993: A-3) for the *New York Times* and by other U.S. newspapers across the country (*San Francisco Chronicle*, November 25, 1993: C-3). Along with disturbing reports from the early phases of the Amy Biehl trial, the necklacing story was one of two news reports on South Africa that virtually all my colleagues in the U.S. had read and that framed our discussions about South Africa during the gathering of the tribe at the annual anthropology meetings in Washington, D.C., in November 1993.

Body Counts

By this time I was carefully documenting the "everyday violence" of township life, especially for young people. What was extraordinary in this instance was the personal recognition given to the "senseless life and brutal death" of young Ernest Mphahlele, since most violent deaths in the Black townships are recorded only as body counts. White deaths "count" (in news reports of the victims of the St. James and Heidelberg pub "massacres," the victims have names, personalities, histories,

and grieving family members), the Black victims of township violence are merely counted. The following minor headlines from Cape Town newspapers are illustrative: "Another 40 bodies found on the East Rand"; "Dozen Bodies Removed from Guguletu in Weekend Casualties"; "The charred bodies of seven people, including a 50-year-old woman and her teenage daughter, were found in Thokoza hostel and Kaitliphong on Friday.... The burned bodies of two young men were found at the Mandela squatter camp in Thokoza and another body at Kaitliphong railway station" (*Cape Times*, September, 1993). Finally, "Charred bodies of two witches found in Nyanga" (*Argus*, January 21, 1994). The women accused of witchcraft had been bound together with rope and were "badly burnt." In the above article, Police Colonel Dowd strongly condemned black-on-black violence and the operation of kangaroo courts. "We hope," he is quoted as saying sanctimoniously, "that this is not the beginning of a resurgence of this horrific practice."

Stop the Senseless Violence

Though horrible, these remained 'distant' images, for nearby Black townships turned into increasingly hostile "no-go zones" for non-Blacks, comrades or not in the struggle. (We learned our own lesson when our car was angrily chased away by trash pickers at a muddy entrance to New Crossroads squatter camp in a failed attempt to attend an Ecumenical peace service announced at St. George's Cathedral.) Yet the circle closed when on August 25, 1993, Fulbright scholar Amy Biehl was dragged from her car in Guguletu township and, like St. Stephen, was stoned to death by angry youth who were shouting "Death to the Settler!" I began to internalize the sensation-alist media images describing a "lost generation" of destructive, deranged, and demonized African youth. While stones continued to shower down on her car, the already wounded Amy crawled out and, still smiling, approached the angry youth and identified herself as a friend, a comrade. The crowd of about 20 youth nonetheless ran after her and threw more stones. Then one of them came forward to stab her in the back, head, and face until she fell to the ground. Another boy then stole her purse. Biehl's death represented a journalistic watershed and South African political leaders of all stripes began to worry that township youth were totally out of control. At the memorial service held the next day at the University of the Western Cape, Amy's mentor and feminist activist, Rhoda Kadafie, spoke tearfully of Amy's death at the hands of the "young monsters" created and set loose by the apartheid machine: "Now they are afoot in the land and no one can stop them. They are eating us and eating each other...." Following the memorial service, representatives of the ANC Women's League called for "white" and "coloured" women to join a spontaneous march into Guguletu to "take back the township" from the young "criminal elements" who were holding people hostage to chaotic violence and to make the community safe for people of all colors.

I hurriedly (and without thinking) picked up an ANC poster reading "STOP THE SENSELESS VIOLENCE" and joined the march, which moved from the Shoprite super-

market, over the bridge, and through the squatter camp across the highway leading into "Gugs." Less than 24 hours after Amy was "extrajudicially executed," I anxiously *toyed-toyed* past hostile young men, all the while trying to second guess people's reactions to the thoughtless, senseless words for which I was now a poster girl. Did "senseless violence" imply that the police were "sensible" in their attacks and raids on Black townships? Was "senseless violence" a racist code for irrational Black violence, as opposed to rational, sensible white violence? What could "take back the township" mean in this beleaguered place? "Gugs" was not a friendly place and not one person from the township joined our pathetic little protest march. It was only half a kilometer from the main road to the ENGEN gas station, where in full view of a row of neat cement block houses, Amy had been attacked in broad daylight for the error of carrying her comrades home. Why didn't anyone stop the attack? Did this section of the township "belong" to the Pan African Congress (PAC) and was Amy's murder a declaration of war against the ANC? Was the attack less than senseless and apolitical after all? Is this what political resistance looks like when it is up in your face? Or was it just Amy's big, smiling white "settler" face that got in the way? I left the march determined to find out more about Amy's alleged attackers.

"The Coming of the Barbarians"

A significant concern about South African township youth expressed in the white South African press and also circulated among social scientists (e.g., du Toit, 1994; Kleinman and Desjarlais, 1993) relates to the emergence of acts of violence in which overtly criminal acts are disguised as political or even revolutionary acts. These reports argue that recent township violence — including the anonymous "charred bodies," the more publicized deaths of Amy Biehl, the St. James Massacre in July 1993, and the Heidelberg Pub Massacre on New Year's Eve — is perpetrated by gangs of youth who may have once participated in political struggle, but have since become involved in, or addicted to, violence for the sake of violence alone. Thus, the "new wave" of township violence is referred to as "senseless," "wild," "asocial," and "apolitical." With instrumental and political motives broadly discounted (see Arendt [1970] for an alternative perspective), we are left in the dark staring at an autonomous, self-perpetuating, sociobiological violence "machine," fueled by a primordial "will to destroy" (Kleinman and Desjarlais, 1993).

A related perception was articulated by some white middle-class "survivors" (collectively, the members of the congregation) of the St. James' Massacre of July 1993, whom I interviewed shortly after the church attack attributed to PAC youth. The St. James survivors tended to discount any possible political motives on the part of their attackers. They insisted that their church and its almost completely white and suburban congregation were *nonpolitical* and *nonracial*, making any selective "political" attack on them seem all the more random, chaotic, and "senseless." A few of those interviewed referred to the people who exploded into their Sunday service as "savages." The more forgiving among them said that their attackers were

misguided township youth who were "bought" or otherwise "used," or who "did not know what they were doing," had been "duped" by malicious (white) outsiders (the "Third Force") using them for their own nefarious, but motivated and instrumental political ends. (White people have political goals; Black youth have expressive needs?)

The media images are particularly brutal and archetypal: the play of shadows on the wall as "witches" and suspected "collaborators" are burned alive; the brutality of people's courts ("kangaroo courts") that demand floggings and amputations — an eye for an eye, a hand for a hand, or in one story, even a breast for a breast; and the grossly racist police identity-kit portrait of the alleged "Station Strangler" that was repeatedly published on the front pages of the Cape Town newspapers and that preyed on "coloured" people's fears of young Black men. Delirium, dance, death, and rebellion are the images and representations that describe one sector of South African society as utterly "lost," a perception once even echoed by President Mandela, who in a recent speech lamented the transformation of the proud "Young Lions" of previous decades into the young anarchists of today:

The youth in the townships have had over the decades a visible enemy, the government. Now that enemy is no longer visible because of the [political] transformation that is taking place. Their enemy is now you and me — people who drive a car and have a house.

White Justice: The Amy Biehl Trial

Of the seven youths originally identified and detained for questioning in the Biehl murder case, three young men finally stood trial in the municipal Supreme Court of Cape Town: Mongezi Manguna, "Easy" Nofemela, and Vusunzi Nlamo. For Amy's single death, there was a "royal" dispensation: three judges — a "President Judge" flanked by two assessors, one white, one Black. Judge Friedman was addressed reverently as "My Lord" by defense and state lawyers. The robes were red and the court room was rich in polished hardwood benches and pews. The lawyers for the state were white Afrikaners; the lawyers for the defense were Black and of radical political backgrounds. The trial moved at a snail's pace, focusing on the defense accusations of forced confessions.

As my adult daughter Sarah (a dead ringer for Amy Biehl) and I climbed the steps of the Supreme Court for the first of many days observing the courtroom proceedings, we were accosted by a few dozen APLA and PAC-affiliated youth chanting and *loying*. They marched in formation, aimed imaginary firearms at the courthouse, and jumped in front of cars. A sizable contingent of police in camouflage uniforms, arrayed for urban battle, did nothing to check the provocative behavior of the "wild" youth, some of whom were as young as nine or 10 years. In between revolutionary marches and dances, the younger boys knocked about a slightly deflated soccer ball.

During the first stages of the trial as witnesses came forward to describe in horrible detail Amy Biehl's final agony, her pleadings and moans while being stoned and stabbed, the young PAC supporters who packed the court's upper gallery laughed and cheered. Judge Friedman, revolted by their outburst, cleared the courtroom. "Why did the boys laugh?" I was asked repeatedly on a return visit to the U.S. in November of 1993. I was more impressed by what was left out of the reports, the reaction of Nofemela (defendant #2), who whipped around to correct the festive spirit in the gallery: "*What's wrong with you?*" Nofemela said in disgust. "Why don't you all get out of here!"

"But why *did* the youth laugh?" I asked Nona Gosso, the elegant and soft-spoken lawyer for the defense.

"The laughter was not acceptable to me, nor to anyone else, but it did not shock me. I live in a township and I know the extent to which apartheid has murdered human feelings.... Their own people have been killed so often that it has the effect of reducing killing to nothing."

"What can you tell me about the defendants?"

"In every sense, they are children...in fact, lovely children, like any other. Under normal circumstances, they would have had a wonderful, normal life. But they are children of apartheid. Most come from broken homes and from deprived families where no one is working. Education is out of the question.... They have experienced *everything*, been exposed to *everything*."

I knew what she meant, thinking of the way some of the children of the Chris Hani squatter camp play games like "funeral," "shack burning," and "shoot-out." Few South African squatter camp children have escaped the scenes of everyday violence: the burnings of shacks, public whippings, premature death, and even the discovery of corpses where garbage should be. In short, they are scenes of war. A vast literature now documents the situation of older youth — their premature recruitment as foot soldiers in a war of liberation that spanned decades and cost them their childhoods, innocence, health, and education, and therefore (and ironically) their freedom. Denied schooling, manipulated by political slogans, arrested and tortured by police, as well as pursued by local death squads, township youth are unfairly referred to as a "lost generation." Rather, they are children who have been violated, whose childhood was not so much "lost" as taken from them.

The violent eruptions of township life are no more "expressive," senseless, irrational, or chaotic than the routinized and strategic violence of the apartheid state against which the youth were and remain mobilized. The death of so many comrades and warriors in the struggle has turned the roar of the Young Lions into Rachel's lament. However, as Renato Rosaldo (1984) observed in his anthropological work with Ilongot headhunters (and through his own process of mourning the tragic death of his first wife), grief can readily turn into murderous, *even gleeful*, rage, the "headhunter's rage" (in reference to both himself and the Ilongot). I think again of the chaotic emotions expressed at the Amy Biehl trial.

As for the three boys accused of killing Amy, the history of apartheid is etched on their very bodies, their *social* skin. In defending the confessions taken from Nofemela (defendant #2), Major Lester testified that he had personally examined the lad immediately after his confession and found only "old" wounds on his young body, no signs of recent torture. Yet each of Nofemela's nine "old" scars, painstakingly described by the policeman, tells a vivid story of township violence: stab wounds, brick bashing, machete chops, second-degree burns, scars from untreated infections and botched, discriminatory medical care. While Nofemela was an active participant in the trial, defendant #1 (Mongezi Manguina) occasionally sucked his thumb and defendant #3 (Vusunzi Samuel Ntamo) dozed off and on throughout the painfully boring proceedings. Both boys (#1 and #3) were sick with chronic respiratory infections; in Ntamo's case, the "infection" was tuberculosis, the recurrent plague of urban township life. When it was his turn to testify, Ntamo was unable to answer even the most basic questions and was confused about minor biographic details; thus, he was sent away for psychiatric evaluation to see if he was capable of understanding the court proceedings.

An air of sullen mockery and suspicion permeated the high court as each group — Afrikaner police, district surgeons (humiliated by the "spoiled history" of their past court performances), skittish witnesses, the defense (who were actually on the *offense vis-à-vis* an increasingly discredited "state"), the hamstringed prosecution lawyers, and the accused (who might as well have been the damned) — eyed each other with mistrust and loathing. The defense strategy was to put South African justice (and its police and doctor interrogator-torturers) on trial in place of the suspects. With the comic disappearances of key witnesses for both sides, the brief and troubling presence of Linda Biehl (Amy Biehl's politically confused and grieving mother), and the inverse Greek chorus of laughing PAC youth "acting up" both in the gallery and on the courthouse steps, the Amy Biehl trial was a drama of mockery, defiance, and refusal. It was a burlesque court that revealed the fissures and the illegitimacy of the apartheid state and the near impossibility of justice or a fair trial. During the liminal transitional period, consent seemed to have been withdrawn from all sides, so that for all practical purposes the Supreme Court had the appearance of a "Kangaroo court," by definition "a court...operated by any improperly constituted body. A tribunal before which a fair trial is impossible; a comic or burlesque court" (see *Chambers Dictionary*).

No wonder the PAC and APLA boys laughed.

As for the necklacing death of 15-year-old Ernest Mphahlele, what justice will the state provide? In the "informal" settlements and squatter camps of South Africa, both abandoned and misrepresented by the formal justice system, popular forms of justice in the form of local security and discipline committees and "people's courts" substitute state courts and the rule of the lash and the necklacing for the "rule of law." Without wishing to defend a form of justice that grew up in the homelands and squatter camps as an offspring of apartheid, I seek to show (through a single instance)

how local justice is argued and contested in one small squatter camp that is desperately trying to establish order, harmony, and dignity among some 650 Black squatters, who are forced to live like dogs in the local community where they labor.

Popular Justice

Here is not the place for a review of the history of people's courts, which is available elsewhere (see, especially, Hund and Kotu-Rannmopo, 1983; Schärf and Ngcokoto, 1990; also Cole, 1987). Schärf and Ngcokoto (1990), document the emergence of people's courts and local forms of community surveillance, discipline, and punishment in South African townships and informal settlements after 1984, when the struggle against white domination and the tricameral constitution was expressed in the form of alternative grass-roots structures aligned with radical political movements (the United Democratic Front, PAC, or ANC-affiliated groups) to enforce political morality and to enhance community autonomy.

The antecedents of these newly politicized people's courts were the informal institutions created in the homelands as alternatives to the "independent" homeland Bantu Commissioners' Courts, which had administered many of the apartheid laws and were seen as illegitimate by the Black population. The informal structures included private police forces (sometimes called peace keepers, vigilantes, or security committees), community rules and discipline codes, and autonomous forms of punishment, including public apologies, fines, community service, brief imprisonment in informally constructed local prisons, up through whippings and floggings, mutilation, and even death (the most publicized of which, of course, was death by necklacing). The latter was reserved for the most heinous of crimes: collaboration with the state and its functionaries, which could be interpreted very broadly.

In light of the political turmoil of the times, the emergent street committees, security and discipline committees, and popular courts mediated between the illegitimate state (the army and the SAP) and comrades — the young Black resistance fighters in the townships. Popular justice was designed to produce a South African version of the "new socialist man," the good comrade who was upright, disciplined, respectful of communal norms and the new social and political values, who was accountable, and, above all, who recognized the true "enemy," the apartheid state and its *collaborators*. The range of infractions judged and punished in the popular courts included drunkenness and disorderly conduct, domestic and extra-domestic fights and conflict, theft, housebreaking, assaults and stabbings, and collaboration with the police or the courts.

In discussing the evolution of people's courts in Cape Town, Schärf and Ngcokoto comment on the dangers of informal justice when these loose structures become detached from disciplined and organized political organizations. They are cautiously pessimistic about the attempts of township people to create and manage alternative systems of justice and punishment. Although viewing these as the

inevitable outcome of the apartheid state, they remain critical of the punitive excesses to which these informal institutions are sometimes prey.

Media representations of the activities of people's courts are even less charitable, as the "necklacing stories" of young Ernest Mphahlele and of the two witches burned in Nyanga in January 1994 illustrate. The effect of the "negative press" is such that most educated people of the Western Cape across all political parties tend to view people's courts and discipline codes as aberrations and as inevitably tending toward the beastly and horrific. Discussions of popular justice with local civil rights lawyers and members of the regional ANC offices invariably provoked strong, negative reactions and references to mob rule and "kangaroo courts." The origin of the term "kangaroo court"⁴ is difficult to ascertain, but dictionaries refer to informal codes of self-policing and discipline among prisoners as permitted and manipulated by prison warders. In all, "kangaroo court" is perhaps an appropriate metaphor for the situation of Black South Africans, disenfranchised by the years of apartheid and virtually imprisoned in homelands, townships, and squatter camps, where they are left alone to police and discipline themselves.

The Necklace

Among the discredited forms of punishment practiced within the context of South African "people's courts," the necklace is the most contentious. Its ability to mobilize panic and horror made references to the necklace an effective strategy in the NP (National Party) campaign against the ANC in the Western Cape. The NP had plenty of "excellent copy" to draw on, such as the following contributed by a British observer and former Labour Party Member of Parliament:

Here is a description I have received of necklace executions which have been imposed on 172 Blacks between 1 March and 5 June this year: "The terrified victim is captured by his (her) executioners. Frequently, his hands are hacked off as a first deterrent to resistance. Barbed wire is used to tie the hapless victim's wrists together. The tyre is placed over the shoulders and filled with petrol or diesel (the latter has been found to stick to the skin when it burns. It is therefore in greater demand). The fuel is ignited with a match (exhibiting boxes of matches is one way the Comrades [Black militants] earn the respect of fear in the townships). The victim (if his hands have not been hacked off) is usually forced to light his own necklace. The fuel ignites the tyre, which rapidly attains a temperature of 400C to 500C. As the tyre burns great black clouds of smoke spiral upwards. Various short-chain hydrocarbon fumes are released, which reach a temperature of 300C. They are inhaled and destroy the lining of the throat and lungs. The rubber melts and the molten rubber runs down neck and torso, burning, as it goes, deeper into the flesh and tissue. (The tyre cannot be removed by others [e.g., the family] at this stage, nor can the fire be doused with water.) The victim is

now a living corpse. He may take up to twenty minutes to die. Whilst he endures this agony, the Comrades stand about laughing and ridiculing him" (Wyatt, 1986: 63-64).

The "necklacing scandal" was invoked by Hennis Kriel in the National Party rally at the Good Hope Center in Cape Town the weekend before the presidential elections. It was readily picked up and repeated by many "coloured" voters I spoke with on April 27 and 28th near polling stations in Franschoek, Mowbray, and Mitchell's Plain. I was told repeatedly: "We can't have a necklacer for President"; "Wherever the Blacks go, there's violence, blood, and burning tires"; "The ANC necklaces its own people.... What do you think they will do with us?" and so on. The image of necklacing feeds a kind of moral panic and today functions, as witchcraft used to, as a kind of collective racial nightmare in South Africa. It forms the primary process substratum of the collective unconscious, the "social imaginary" out of which deep racism emerges. When it is used strategically, as it was in the NP campaign — here I refer in particular to the NP "comic book" pamphlet campaign, replete with its racist photo images of Black youth waiting in the bushes to ambush Black and coloured comrades with match books ready in their hands — it is a form of collective racial calumny.

Obviously, reliable statistics on necklacings are hard to come by. Most reports are based on newspaper stories and should be held suspect. In 1986, F. W. de Klerk reported to Parliament that more than 200 "moderate" Blacks had been killed by the necklace that year. However, a review of all burn cases admitted to Cape Town's Salt River State Mortuary between 1991 and 1992 (see Leter, n.d.) found only 35 of 358 burn-related township deaths in that part of the municipality to be associated with malicious intent. In all but five of the homicidal burnings, the bodies were set afire *after* murder by fatal shooting or stabbing. The postmortem necklace was most likely used in these cases to dispose of incriminating evidence, to cremate an abandoned body, or to humiliate the relatives of the murdered individual. In any event, the "classic" description (above) of burning the victim alive can only be inferred as probable in *five* cases in this key region of the western Cape at a time when news stories circulated the rumor of an "epidemic" of homicidal "necklacings."

The necklacing rumor, with its implication of uncontrolled "black-on-black" violence, has had a devastating effect on the self-perceptions of squatter camp residents. Working closely with the "security committee" of Chris Hani squatter camp, I began to see the extent to which poor Black South Africans are terrorized and (as one resident put it) afraid of their own "shadows." By "shadow" I mean the violent "double" that is foist upon Black South Africans in relentless media images and representations projecting their *barbarity* and *dangerousness*, so that squatter camp people are actually overtly mobilized *against* themselves.

The Problem of the Incident

The case study I will now present concerns a "triple necklacing" that was averted, largely through the intercessions of ANC and PAC-politicized youth. I will argue that "undue restraint" — rather than "senseless violence" — is more characteristic of those South Africans who have been geographically and socially excluded in homelands, townships, and grotesque squatter camps. The notions of "mob rule" and "kangaroo court" are unfortunate and unfair descriptions of the difficult negotiations of crime and punishment in the absence of a legitimate state and, therefore, of fair and representative formal institutions of policing and criminal justice.

The incident on January 24, 1994, involved the theft of 400 rands (about \$125) from a *shebeen* (a small, Black-owned pub) owner by three teenage boys of the Chris Hani squatter camp, followed by a collective demand for their punishment — initially their death by necklacing. As the boys sat trembling and awaiting their fate, a few youth leaders, invoking the ANC Bill of Rights, dangerously raised their voices in protest and successfully argued for public whippings over the death penalty. Further debate ensued and the demand for 100 strokes with a *stamboek* (a bull whip very similar to the slave whips kept on display at the Sugar Museum in Recife, Brazil) was skillfully negotiated down to 50 lashes for each boy caught "red handed." The floggings were laid on "collectively" by several designated older men of the community.

FROM FIELD NOTES TAKEN ON JANUARY 27, 1994:

"We all deserve a *lashing*," I had recently written in a despairing letter to friends during a particularly low point in a year of turbulent transitions. "*The sadism of human society demands it.*" Now, visiting three young thieves, their raw and bleeding backsides etched forever in my memory, makes me want to eat those words. It brings to mind the mob and Foucault's image of "the spectacle," with which he opens *Discipline and Punish*—chaos, irrationality, barbarism: all the old racist tropes came marching out like so many gargoyles.

The three boys lived together in shack #12 and they had helped me out more than once by pointing out camp leaders and indicating who spoke some English. In all, there was enough interaction for me to sense hearts beating (now in terror) behind those makeshift, newspaper-covered shack walls with headlines displaying stories and photos of Chris Hani, General Holomisa, and Winnie Mandela. My field assistant, 18-year-old Sidney Kumalo, had recently returned (and was still "red") from his month of initiation, isolation, and disciplined hunger in the bushes near Khayelitsha. Circumcised, Sidney is now a man and he steps out to the world fairly bearing in his new suit of clothes, which announces his new status. Post-initiation rules forbid him from going out for 30 days without his derby, and he brushes the dust off carefully before placing it jauntily on his nearly shaved head.

"There is something you need to know," Sidney proposed hesitantly, "about our codes of discipline." He asked me to visit the boys, and I went to their shack with

repidation. Within minutes, word would spread that the "white woman" was in the camp again, this time nosing around the "prisoners." Taking notes. Taking pictures. Recording for whom?

The boys were not a pretty sight, though some in the community thought they had gotten off easy with just 50 lashes. The penal whip lay limp and tired against the wall. Kept in isolation and denied food, water, and human company as a continuation of the punishment, the three prisoners lay on dirty rags on the dirt floor. Their eyes were dull and glassy with fever. They could not bend their legs, sit down, or walk without wincing; three days later they still had trouble urinating. The smallest, Michael B., carried the mark of the lash across his neck and face. He scowled with pain and with revenge. "I'll kill them," he kept repeating of his tormentors.

The community did not want anyone (and certainly not me) to see the boys (fear of police involvement was awesome) and so they had refused the boys medical attention. The boys' parents and other relatives were nowhere in sight, fearful that *their* shacks might be burned were they to show any concern, care, or sympathy toward their children.

Sidney urged me to take photos ("for evidence") and to tape record an interview with the boys that might be useful later (he said) at a community meeting. Mindful that this was something of a trap, I nonetheless complied.

THE FOLLOWING IS FROM THE TAPED TRANSCRIPTION OF THE ENCOUNTER:

S.K.: You see they stole 400 rands from one of the people's houses here. And with it they bought brandy and weapons. When they were caught, the *pangas* (machetes) were in their hands and they still had 200 rand between them. Due to our codes of conduct they were punished this way. At first the community called for burnings, the people were waving *pangas* and sticks and they said that the boys must be burned because they are thieves. So they were just waiting to get killed.

N.S.H.: They couldn't escape?

S.K.: They couldn't run away because they were surrounded by the whole community.

N.S.H.: Do the people ever wait until things are more calm to take action?

S.K.: No, no, no! If they catch them now, within five minutes the whole place is filled with people. It's very quick. But this is not our traditional way. In Transkei where I come from, you or I don't have the right to judge. Only a very old man with a lot of experience can stand up and speak out and give the punishment. But here it is too simple. If I don't like someone, I can just say, "Give him 80 lashes." Other people who like him better may come up with a smaller number. It is very harsh.

N.S.H.::: Would they really kill them for stealing 400 rands?

S.K.: Let me ask the boys.... Yes, they say the punishment was that they must get burned...but some people had sympathy for them and said, "No, no, just give them the lashes."

N.S.H.::: Who wanted to save them?

S.K.: Some of their friends. And a lot of the young people here are in the PAC and the ANC youth committees and they are against these discipline codes. The ANC is opposed. We shouldn't use the lash on ourselves the way the Boer [an Afrikaner farmer] did.

N.S.H.: What about their relatives?

S.K.: If their relatives speak out, the people here think, "Oh, so you put them up to this, you set them up to steal." So the parents can't defend their children. If a mother speaks out for her son, the people have the right to burn down her shack. The people are very strict in this discipline. They say we cannot afford to be soft.

N.S.H.: Has anyone ever been burned [necklaced] here?

S.K.: No, not yet. And that's what makes it a little bit difficult for them to kill. And we in the youth committee are afraid of what will happen here after they take that step once.

N.S.H.: Have there been any other murders here?

S.K.: Yeah, one guy was murdered and the killer was never found. That's why they are so strict, so that the criminals will be found right away and punished, so that others won't try to do the same thing. But people are people and I think they will keep on taking chances, they will keep on doing bad things, and keep on being punished in this way. So some of us here want there to be a new system based on human rights.

N.S.H.: Could you ask Michael what he has learned from this?

S.K.: (translating for M.B.): At this moment he don't think he will steal again, but the only thing that's going through his mind over and over is *revenge*. But I told him that if he takes revenge, he'll just be punished all over again. Right now he wants revenge, only he doesn't have the power to do it.

N.S.H.: Since the whole community made the decision to whip him, whom would he take revenge on?

S.K.: He knows who were the people who did this to him, the ones who whipped him, because they don't even cover their faces. He remembers all the faces of those who did this to him.

N.S.H.: Could you ask him why they decided to steal?

S.K.: They say it was because they have no real work, they are just "casual" workers on the farms. The guys say they were hungry and they were sick and tired of having no money and no work....

N.S.H.: Have they been initiated?

S.K.: No, and that is another problem. Here in the camp there are even grown men who have not been initiated! They build their own house, have a child, but they still don't have any rights. If I, as an initiated man, walk into the door of an older man who is not initiated, I can say, "Listen, my man, please step outside because I want to have a word with your wife." And the old man has to do it. Those who are not initiated don't have any rights.

N.S.H.: Why don't they all go through the initiation?

S.K.: In the old days you would just get a goat or a sheep, but today you must spend

a lot of money. There is a feast and everyone must be invited. Another thing, the clothes you wore before initiation you must give away, because now you are starting a new life. Even the room you stay in, the newspapers on the wall, must be taken down and new ones put up. Everything goes back to money and these guys don't have any.

The next day I returned with Rose, a medical student intern with considerable courage and stamina (two other male doctors from Cape Town, one white and one Black, declined my invitation, an offer, it seems, they just *could* refuse). After a careful examination and wound-dressing, she said young Michael's wounds required more extensive treatment and antibiotics to prevent a generalized infection.

Sidney and I brought Michael by combi-taxi to the "white" hospital in Paarl, where he was attended by a young Afrikaner, Dr. McK., who agreed not to ask any questions, though he could not refrain from whistling his disapproval on seeing Michael's wounds and commenting loudly while he set up an intravenous antibiotic. "And these are the people who are going to be ruling us soon.... Shame! They'll send us all back into the Stone Age." In contrast to the "brutal" and "unsanitary" squatter camp floggings, the doctor explained the "proper procedure" used by local white police, who brought their prisoners to the clinic for a medical examination and approval before administering the lash. The attending doctor decided how many lashes the prisoner could "safely" sustain. "But this," Dr. McK. said, gesturing to Michael's exposed buttocks, "this is totally barbaric." He diagnosed an infection-related fever and recommended that Michael be kept in the hospital for a few days for observation and treatment. The boy's general health was poor: he was severely anemic, malnourished, and dehydrated.

Later that night at "The Anchor" Bed & Breakfast, my safe little ship's cabin of a room in rural Franschoek, I received an anonymous phone call warning me to stay away from Chris Hani squatter camp. "This is a friend calling," the heavily accented brown Afrikaner voice said. "Don't return to Chris Hani squatter camp. Your safety cannot be assured." Two days later, I cautiously dropped Michael B. off at the bottom of the hill leading into Chris Hani, not knowing whether *his* safety could be assured. If Michael was frightened, he certainly wasn't going to tell me.

Who's the Killer? The Funeral of a Comrade

I returned to Chris Hani the following Saturday to attend the political funeral of a young ANC "comrade" who (less fortunate than Michael) had died on the way to the emergency room of Paarl hospital a few days earlier. His wife's relatives said he had a heart spasm and died because the combi-taxi had run out of gas. Anonymous residents said the young man died of a drug "overdose." Neighbors noted that the young father of four children had been sick for a very long time with recurrent and resistant tuberculosis. His young widow was mule with grief and uninterested in the cause of her husband's death.

Sidney's little sister shyly led me to the back of the camp, where a "chapel" was hastily constructed of zinc and plywood and covered by a large tarpaulin that was

painted red, green, and black, the ANC colors. A fierce "Cape Doctor" wind blew into the lean-to and rocked its walls while the tent roof waved about like the flag it was meant to be. As the long service drew to an end, the congregation was invited to dance in a single-file line around the coffin, which was raised on its bier, each person holding onto the waist of the one in front. I felt a heavy weight dragging at me as the woman behind me fell into a dead faint, limp as a rag doll. After various desperate attempts to revive her, several women came to my rescue. I took the opportunity to dance out the tent door for air. Just then, the procession to the graveyard began. Sidney fussed with a static-filled ancient sound system that blared the M.K. (*Umkhonto we Sizwe*) military anthem, complete with the sound of rifle and cannon shots. At the grave site, all the adult men were called on to take up shovels and collectively bury their comrade. Just as we were turning to leave, Duncan, a Rasafarian and close friend of the deceased, came alive and lead the uniformed ANC-PAC youth in a high-stepping and militant *toyitoyi*, stamping their feet on the earth and chanting, this time in English, while staring fixedly in my direction: "*Who's the Killer? Who's the Killer? Who's the Killer?*" (Who, indeed?)

Civic Association Meetings

On the following day, Sunday, February 6, 1994, a community-wide civic association meeting was held to discuss the question of justice and security at Chris Hani. As people arrived, they took their seats on the ground or on folding chairs positioned in a semicircle under a large tree. The "incident," as it came to be called, had provoked a crisis. The security guards had quit their posts outright in a fit of pique and there had been disorder in the camp with no one to call on for help. People were frightened. Leaders of the local civic association solicited the opinions of everyone present. Should the security guard be reconstituted, or should regular (mostly white and coloured, but no Black) village police be invited to patrol and "discipline" the community?

One by one, the people of Chris Hani stepped forward to express their views. Everyone wanted the local security system, but they wanted the rules and regulations to be more clear.

"Who are the security guards anyway? We don't always know their faces."

"People give us orders and we do not know if they are really our security or not. They ought to wear identity badges."

"What about the rights of the security themselves? They don't feel they have the full support of the community. Everyone wants protection, everyone in the heat of the moment calls for punishment, but afterwards everyone wants to criticize them."

"We need to consider the punishments. It shouldn't happen that older people with 'strong' families in the camp get off easier than young people or single people, but that often happens. Justice for one should be justice for all."

"What does the ANC say about discipline?"

"The ANC says no more than five lashes should be given!"

"Nonsense! The ANC says there should be no lashes...and Madiba [Mandela] is opposed to the necklace."

"Who can resolve this?"

"In Khayelishha (township), they don't whip people anymore. They have built a small jail for thieves and drunkards."

"Do we want to build a jail here in Chris Hani?"

"No, we need toilets, water pumps, and a school first."

"But we still have to take care of disorder when it happens."

"Can't we just wait until April 27th, and after the elections everything will be better?"

"You are like those who think the elections will be a miracle! We still have to figure out how to live with each other, even after elections. Do you think Madiba [Mandela] is going to come here and help us discipline our thieves?" [laughter]

Finally, I was called up to make an accounting of myself, to explain why I had intervened. As I walked up to the microphone, my knees shook. My friend Temba (a member of the striking security committee) translated, and his presence bolstered me up, although I knew well that he was one of the floggers and he personally believed that the boys should have been necklaced. I apologized to the community, saying I was a stranger and had no right to speak, let alone to meddle in community affairs.

"Um, Um..." people assented angrily.

I said that I understood why people rejected the police and why they needed to have their own justice. I interfered, I said, not to give aid to three boys who had wronged the community. People were right when they said that stealing from poor people who have no locks on their doors or windows is also a human rights violation, one that even the ANC Bill of Rights failed to recognize. Yet I still felt bad for the mothers of the boys who were ashamed of what their sons had done, but who were afraid to feed them or to visit them after the whippings. (Here the row of older women nodded their heads in approval.) I noted that many people in the camp wanted to talk about alternatives to whippings and burnings. Most of the young people and many of the women thought it might be better to put the thieves to work for the community digging ditches, cleaning up garbage, sewage, or fetching water. Some said that thieves should be sent away, losing their right to live in Chris Hani, while others thought that young people needed to have a second chance, maybe even two chances, because it was so easy for young people without money to get into trouble in a squatter camp.

During the meeting, it was decided to form a committee with representatives from all groups in the camp — old and young, men and women, sports groups, political groups and parties, and the security committee members themselves — to draw up alternative proposals for policing and protecting the community and for punishing violators. In the interim, there would be no more whippings. Civic leaders asked for help from the Community Peace Foundation located at the University of the Western Cape and two representatives attended subsequent meetings to help the community

draftless punitive community rules. One of the representatives, a charismatic Puerto Rican lawyer and community organizer, used humor and improvised skits to help residents address common fears and to question the tendency to "over-police" and "over-discipline" themselves. The self-imposed nighttime curfew was relaxed and, for the time being, floggings were suspended.

What happened to the three young thieves? Michael B. could not get over his anger and his hot-headed desire for revenge. He was advised to leave the squatter camp and was given help in locating a new home. The other two boys accepted their punishment and they were reintegrated into the camp. Nothing more was said about their crime. Several more youth, following Sidney's lead, entered Xhosa initiation in the bush outside Franschhoek. Among them was one of the former thieves. The last time I saw the boy, he was slathered with white clay and smiling broadly, though he told me (through Sidney) that his circumcision "cut" hurt very badly, even worse, he maintained, than his whipping.

Discipline and Punish

South Africa has been and remains a violent state. The elections have come and gone, but the legacy of apartheid remains and it includes the many defensive and "renegade" social institutions created by African people who tried to survive as best they could *outside* and *in spite* of the apartheid state. The temptation is great today, even among ANC officials and leaders, to dismiss the alternative systems of policing and popular justice that govern everyday life in South Africa's townships and squatter camps and to view them as anachronisms and obstacles to the building of a democratic civil society. To the contrary, however, civil society in the new South Africa will depend on using the local democratic structures that are already in place, including the popular tribunals, civic associations, and security and discipline committees that have been struggling with questions of law and order, justice and fairness, discipline and punishment over the past 20 years as poor and marginalized people struggled on their own to create some semblance of dignified and orderly social life under inhumane conditions. In any event, these institutions cannot simply be abolished by fiat or by a new constitution and a universal Bill of Rights.

A common charge against grass-roots legal systems is that "legitimate" institutions of *popular* justice can all too readily become deformed and degenerate into *populist* justice, the latter referring both to spontaneous outbreaks of "mob rule" (the "lynching mentality") and to private and decidedly undemocratic "vigilante" justice (control by self-appointed mafia or township "tozists"). However, as the "incident" at Chris Hani camp is meant to illustrate, the boundaries between what may be considered legitimate, formal, and orderly popular justice and its supposed polar opposite, "populist" justice, are fluid, especially in the newer urban settlements and squatter camps, where self-government is often invented on the spot and in response to specific crises. In the absence of clear and well-established leadership roles, regular tribunals, legal precedents, written laws and textbooks, and local prisons or jail

houses, the only way for serious offenses to be handled at all is through fairly immediate, graphic, and physical means. That is to say, through the mob, the spectacle, and the whip, or worse yet, the "necklace." These means — often the only ones available — consistently convey to outsiders and "educated people" the impression — and sometimes the fact — of miscarriages of justice and the abuse of power.

The strength of popular justice, exemplified by the incident at Chris Hani, is that justice is meted out collectively and, even in the heat of the moment, what may initially appear to be unreflexive and reactive mob rule (i.e., the initial demand for necklacing) may well be open, as it was in this case, to negotiation based on argument and appeals to reason, mercy, and human "rights." What made the initial scene look like an angry, irrational, and undifferentiated "mob" is, in part, a function of the lack of any communal structure or public house large enough to contain the adult members of the new camp. All civic association meetings and popular tribunals in Chris Hani camp take place outdoors and under the tree. So, too, were the events recorded here. Moreover, the apparent "mob" scene that formed around the thieves contained individuals and factions who expressed differences of opinion. Men and women, older adults and youth, Zionist Christians and atheists Marxists, ANC and PAC, residents from Transkei and residents from Natal, those speaking Afrikaans as a second language and those who spoke English as a second language took different positions during the incident and/or in the endless community discussions that followed it.

Popular justice and people's courts are vulnerable on many counts, of course. They are dependent on volunteers and have a high turnover following criticism of their activities. Many concerned residents of good will are afraid to serve, fearing intimidation by relatives of the accused and the punished, paving the way for "strong men" with connections to usurp these roles. These grass-roots institutions are not very good at fact-finding and they rely heavily on the rhetoric of accusations and counter-accusations as well as on confessions of guilt.

Even more problematic, perhaps, are the means of discipline and punishment especially for serious crimes: the tire, the whip, and the imposition of physical discomforts — hunger, heat, and thirst. The use of the body as the primary site of social control is rejected by all "modern" codes of individual rights, including the draft Bill of Rights of the ANC. The necklace and the lash have particularly loathsome connotations. The necklace (as discussed above) is depicted as barbaric and as a particular perversion of "Black" people in Southern Africa and in the Caribbean. (Haiti is mentioned most frequently in news reports, and Aristide, like Mandela, has been accused of promoting the necklace among his supporters.)

Representations and images of the lash are more ambiguous, for its use has been and remains more universal. Floggings were part of African colonial history, associated with slavery and later with the culture of public and church-linked schools. In fact, wherever the British colonial system went — the American South, the

Caribbean, Ireland, or Africa — it arrived with the cane or the whip in hand. (For Ireland, see the autobiographies of Thomas O'Crohan and Maurice O'Sullivan.) Internalization of the rule of the lash can be seen in the defense of "cannings" or floggings by school headmasters and Catholic priests in County Kerry, Ireland (see Schepher-Hughes, 1979), by white farm owners in the Western Cape, prison warders and district surgeons in Cape Town, and headmasters in African schools. The men and women of Chris Hani squatter camp likewise defend the practice of whipping and were perplexed and angry about attempts to question or interfere with their system of discipline and punishment.

In 1992, 36,000 young people under the age of 21 were sentenced to be whipped in South African courts (Pinnock, 1995: 8). Insofar as flogging is still meted out as a legitimate sentence by the official courts, the heavy censure of its use in popular courts is open to question. As with the infamous case in Botswana in 1933 concerning the flogging of a white man, Phineas McIntosh, living in a Black community by the young local Chief Tsekedi, who was in charge of the jurisdiction (see Crowder, 1988; Comaroff, 1990), the real issue seems to be the "bodily politics of colonialism." This refers to the unquestioned right of whites to act upon Black bodies, but not the reverse. The concern of even well-meaning outsiders about the "abuse of power" and cruel and unusual punishments in people's courts could also be seen and criticized as an extension of this colonial bodily politics — as questioning the right of Black people to act on Black bodies. Yet in the context of the nonracial politics of the ANC and its commitment to individual rights, including conventional post-Enlightenment notions of the individual subject and rights to bodily sovereignty, children's, women's, and prisoners' rights, and the rejection of capital and most corporal punishment, the real dilemma today is how to balance the extension of these fairly universal, democratic ideas against traditional mores and the practice of popular and revolutionary justice, especially now that the immediate revolution is over. Cultural relativism, of the sort generally practiced by anthropologists in the past, is less appropriate in the vexed and contested pluralistic world in which we and our "subjects" live.

In the glow of the first democratic elections, amid the terrible beauty of South Africa, there is still much to be hopeful for. In the necessary "settling of accounts" that lies ahead, the wounded Young Lions of South Africa deserve special consideration. Their heroism needs to be recognized, their losses mourned, and their bodies mended. Above all, their wandering souls need to be captured and firmly anchored in a new moral economy where the roar of the young lions is an assertion of life and not a cry of danger.

NOTES

1. The term "coloured," under the perverse apartheid laws (and in common usage) refers to all people of mixed (mostly white and Black) "race." Indians in Durban and Malays in the Cape are also referred to as "coloured," although they contest the designation.

2. *Comrade*, a term similar to *comrade*, implies political solidarity through membership in the ANC (African National Congress), the more radical and Black separatist PAC (Pan African Congress), or other affiliated youth groups such as APLA (African Peoples Liberation Army) and PASO (Pan African Student Association).
3. The *toy-toy* is a spirited dance of defiance and rebellion that is found throughout Southern Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia.
4. "A court operated by a mob; by prisoners in jail; by any improperly constituted body. A tribunal before which a fair trial is impossible; a comic or burlesque court" (*Chambers Dictionary*). "Improperly constituted, illegal court held by strikers; a mock court" "...most jails have a court run by prisoners in which every new prisoner is assessed and tobacco and other property divided.... [I]nfractions [are] punished by spankings... [and] while not legal as such, its operation is passively accepted by the jailers" (*Oxford Concise Dictionary*).

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The Emergence of Oromo Nationalism and Ethiopian Reaction

Asafa Jalata

THE OROMO NATIONAL MOVEMENT HAS EVOLVED FROM SCATTERED, LOCALIZED, AND cultural resistances of Oromos to Ethiopian colonial domination and its supporters.¹ The emergence of a few nationalist and revolutionary Oromo intellectual and professional groups played a decisive role in transforming the Oromo struggle and providing it with an organized and centralized leadership. Oromo nationalist discourse has challenged both academic and Ethiopian nationalist discourses that have reduced Oromos to an object of history by portraying them as a people with neither a history nor civilization. Focusing on the main features of Oromo democratic traditions and culture, Oromo nationalists have celebrated an Oromo identity and mobilized their cultural resources as an ideological tool. Ethiopians have been very resistant to the emergence of Oromo nationalism because Oromos are the numerical majority, and Ethiopia mainly depends on Oromo economic and labor resources. Therefore, rather than deal democratically with the Oromo national movement, Ethiopians have tried their best to totally destroy it. After finding the destruction of this movement to be impossible, various Ethiopian organizations and the Ethiopian state have recently struggled to shape it according to their respective interests via the creation of puppet organizations. Despite these obstacles, the Oromo national movement has blossomed and become a formidable political force that Ethiopians must deal with, either militarily or democratically. This essay discusses the origin and essence of Oromo nationalism and the possible consequences of the military approach; it also suggests the prospects for peaceful, democratic conflict resolution between Oromos and Ethiopians.

The emergence of Oromo nationalism has raised fears and partisan battles in different political corners in Ethiopia. The Ethiopians or Habashas fear that once the Oromo gain access to political power, they could play a decisive role due to their numerical strength and abundant economic resources. Currently, Oromo nationalism

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