Privatizing the Millennium: New Protestant Ethics and Spirits of Capitalism in Africa, and Elsewhere

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If we are to understand the spirits of our age, the place to begin, as Marx noted for another historical juncture, is with epochal shifts in the constitutive relationship of production to consumption. Millennial Capitalism marks a new moment in the history of capitalism, its Second Coming, this time in neoliberal guise, on an even more global scale than before. This moment is attended by a new religious spirit, a spirit which, as we shall see, is rampant in Africa, but not only in Africa. In speaking of Millennial Capitalism we intend not merely capitalism at the millennium—capitalism, that is, in its current form—but also capitalism in its messianic, salvific, even magical manifestations; capitalism as a cultural and moral economy with the capacity, if harnessed properly, to enrich the poor (and further enrich the wealthy), to solve social problems, to heal the sick, to elicit divine favor, to add material value to the commonwealth. Why has capitalism taken on these features? What is new about them? And how, exactly, have they reconfigured the religious world in their wake? The essay tracks features of Millennial Capitalism that pose conundrums for our understanding of economy and society, culture and history, faith and identity at the start of the new century.

Introduction*

Herewith three glimpses into the new religious world order.

The first is from post-apartheid South Africa.

> The New Life Church is to be found in Mafikeng, in the North West Province. Founded just before the fall of apartheid, it typifies a brand of upbeat, technically-hyped Pentecostalism that is aspiring to fill the moral void left by a withering of revolutionary ideals and civic norms in the postcolony. While New Life is the creation of a talented pair of pastors, a husband and wife who have shaped it independently of denominational oversight, their community belongs to the International Federation of Christian Churches; this is a global network of congregations, all of which combine a lively charismatic realism with a frank materiality, the latter embodied in a subject not embarrassed by this-worldly desire. Congregants pay a tithe, and are encouraged to expect that their investment, both spiritual and monetary, will yield tangible empowerment. They are offered a range of services, from marriage guidance to financial counseling, that recast the pastoral in a distinctly service-oriented therapeutic key. As in many such movements, the stress on divine manifestation is accompanied by a preoccupation with cutting-edge media: "It might sound heretical," notes the founding pastor, "but we strive above all to make our services exciting, affecting. Our competition, after all, is the video arcade, the movie house, and the casino." (Remember the casino. We shall return to it as well.) In New Life's sparkling suburban sanctuary a sophisticated sound stage replaces the altar. Services are punctuated by lilting hymns and love songs to Jesus, crooned by a modishly-dressed, youthful band—or "worship team"—equipped with electronic instruments. Overhead, a large karaoke screen flashes the lyrics; in a booth to the rear, a technician monitors the acoustics. Meetings draw large crowds that span a wide spectrum of race, age, and class. They center on stylized personal testimonies that narrate, in psychologically inflected terms, a self reborn into a individualized world of transparency, purpose, and prosperity.

The second comes from post-Soviet Russia.

> The messiah has arrived. He is to be found, by his own account, in East Siberia, wherein lies "the Promised Land of

the Future." More prosaically, he lives in a compound near Minusinsk. Sergei Torop by name, he prefers to be called Vissarion. He has his own webpage,[1] of course, on which he explains that Vissarion—also the name of Stalin's father—means "giving the life" in "the language of the Universe." In the event that that language is not understood by ordinary mortals, seven more conventional vernaculars convey his cyber-message, which promises that his Word will soon spread across the World. The 38 year-old, ethereal-looking savior established the Last Testament Church in 1991, after the repressed memory of two millennia flooded back to him, after he came to realize that he was not the child of Siberian construction workers but the Son of God, after he learned that "all religions are inserted in him"; the origin myth of the movement, significantly, dates these revelations roughly to the fall of the USSR. Vissarion has acquired a substantial following, the Vissariontsi, composed largely of "disenchanted [former] Soviet intellectuals and idealists." While their exact number is uncertain, they have attracted the attention of the Orthodox Church, which is monitoring them carefully; also of the state, which has ignored them thus far, largely because the arrival of the church has breathed life into a dying local economy. The movement, which is rooted in agribusiness, has a strong green orientation, seeing itself as "A Siberian Global Experiment targeting Human Survival under Circumstances of Social and Natural Cataclysm." Vissarion himself was a traffic warden until he turned messiah, persuaded his disciples to hand over their earthly wealth to him, and established the City of Sun, which is what he calls his rural dominion. His dominion is reminiscent of a Soviet collective—although it has formed a joint stock company, Tabrat Ltd., to bankroll its material existence. In short, the Second Coming here envisages a future in the past, a hereafter (or there-before?) that revivifies the glories of a socialist commune by lodging it securely in the global capitalist economy. Vissarion has not escaped skepticism: he has been portrayed as an enchanted entrepreneur who earns a lucrative income from service delivery in the God business, a business flourishing anew in these turbulent times,[2] a business, suggests Tom Whitehouse, that often yields high profits to its High Priests: Torop, he goes on to note, lives in *very* lavish circumstances. No won-

> der that Orthodox clergy see him as an "evil pyramid schemer," an image which we shall have cause to revisit. Whether or not he is a charlatan, a con man with a Christ-like appearance and a creative line in income redistribution, is beside our present point. The various features of his religious movement—its corporate scaffolding, its entry into the world of the joint stock venture, its presence on the web, its global outreach, its appeal to technical solutions for planetary problems, its promise of instant redemption at a price in hard currency, its well-requited head of operations—are all of a piece. They tell a story at once very old and very new.

The third is from "post-Christendom" America.

> In Columbus, Indiana, a small town some four hours drive from Chicago on Highway 64, there is an extraordinary array of churches. Columbus is known for its public architecture; this because the local captains of industry came to a decision, at some point in the past, to make their town into a shrine to the built form. As a result, many internationally famous "names" erected buildings across the flatlands of this otherwise unprepossessing corner of the midwest. One of them is a profoundly beautiful, profoundly spiritual edifice. Designed by Eero Saarinen, the North Christian Church houses a congregation of Disciples of Christ, whose journal, *Cutting Edge*, is indeed incisive. Volume 29 no.2 of 2000 is dedicated to the topic of "Buildings for the Post-Christendom Church" (Blankenship 2000: 1-2). "Christendom," it declares, "is dying" (p.1). What began in the fourth century of the common era is over, a new reformation is under way. But what, precisely, are its signs? Among other things, "the adoption of market driven planning to replace tradition...," thus to appeal to a generation that wants "choices, convenience, quality, and specialized services" in religion as in everything else (p.2; after Schaller 1999). By extension, church facilities, like prayer itself, require "above all [to be] useful, adaptable, and marketable." And so, in the most conservative crannies of Christian America, the church enters the new millennium by making common cause not with a capitalist ethos grounded in virtuous work, not in the production of the self through the production of value, but

> with a world of convenience and consumption, a world of free choice and flexibility. A world in which the provision of services, religious services like other customer services, is paramount.

Each of these vignettes evokes the ghost of Max Weber. Each speaks of a new moment in the history of capitalism, of its Second Coming, this time in neoliberal guise, this time on an even more global scale than before. They also speak of a new religious spirit to go with that moment, a spirit which, as we shall see, is rampant in Africa. But not only in Africa. Note that our three instances come from what used to be called, respectively, the third, second, and first worlds.

All of which raises a number of conundrums for our understanding of economy and society, culture and history, faith and identity at the start of the new century. Some of the corollaries of the Second Coming of which we speak—"plagues of the 'new world order'," Derrida (1994: 91) calls them—have occasioned heated debate. Thus, for example, populist polemics have dwelt on the planetary conjuncture, for good or ill, of "homogenization and difference" (e.g. Barber 1992); on the simultaneous, synergistic spiraling of wealth and poverty; on the rise, like a disfigured phoenix, of a "new medievalism" (Brownlee et al 1991; cf. Connelly and Kennedy 1994). For its part, scholarly debate has focused on the confounding effects of rampant liberalization: on whether it engenders truly transnational flows of capital or drains it off to a few major sites (Hirst and Thompson 1996); on whether it weakens, sustains, or reinvents the nation-state (Sassen 1996); on whether it frees up, curbs, or compartmentalizes the movement of labor; on whether the current fixation with democracy, its resurrection in so many places, betokens a measure of mass empowerment or an "emptying out of [its] meaning" (Negri 1999: 9; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). Equally in question is why the present infatuation with civil society has been accompanied by alarming increases in civil strife; why, in like vein, the politics of consumerism, human rights, and entitlement has coincided with puzzling new patterns of exclusion, patterns that refract long-established lines of gender, sexuality, race, and class (Gal 1997; Yudice 1995); why, also, there has been a palpable rise in many countries of domestic violence, rape, child abuse, prison populations and, most dramatically of all, criminal "phantom-states" (Derrida 1994: 83; Blaney and Pashsa 1993), forms of organized crime, that is, which mimic the state, arrogating its powers and providing some of its services for a fee.

Other features of our present predicament are less remarked. Among them are the odd coupling of the legalistic with the libertarian, constitutionality with deregulation, and—at the core of our concerns here—hyper-rationalization with the exuberant spread of innovative occult practices and money magic, pyramid schemes and prosperity gospels; the enchantments, that is, of a decidedly *neo*liberal economy, whose ever more inscrutable speculations seem to call up fresh

specters in their wake. Note that, unlike others who have discussed the "new spectrality" of that economy (Negri 1999: 9; Sprinker 1999), we do not talk here in metaphorical terms. We seek, instead, to draw attention to the distinctly pragmatic qualities of the messianic and the millennial; not merely in the tenor of organized religion, of which we shall have a lot to say, but of capitalism itself as a gospel of salvation. As this suggests, in speaking of Millennial Capitalism we intend not merely capitalism at the millennium—capitalism, that is, in its current form—but also capitalism in its messianic, salvific, even magical manifestations; capitalism as a cultural and moral economy with the capacity, if harnessed properly, to enrich the poor (and further enrich the wealthy), to solve social problems, to heal the sick, to elicit divine favor, to add material value to the commonweal.

The question, patently, is why? Why has capitalism taken on these features? What is new about them? And how, exactly, have they reconfigured the religious world in their wake? It is on this last issue that we focus here.

Let us, then, cut to the heart of the matter. If we are to understand the spirits of our age, the place to begin, as Marx noted for another historical juncture, is with epochal shifts in the constitutive relationship of production to consumption. This is *not* to say that the essence of neoliberal capitalism is reducible purely to that relationship. Quite the opposite: there is now a large literature on the various dimensions of the new global economy—from the workings of the electronic commons and transnational corporations; through the changing, labile character of work and labor, its mobility and its transience, its gendered and generational inflections; to the impact of space-time compression, of flexible accumulation, and of the planetary flow of signs, styles, and commodities upon old sovereignties, old loyalties, old identities. All of these things are crucially important in understanding the shape of the world we live in (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). For now, however, we have perforce to take them for granted. In any case, we would suggest, it is specifically by interrogating the shifting articulation of production to consumption, of the *pro* to the *con* in capitalist economics, that we might make sense of the emergence of new forms of enchantment—and of the kinds of Neoprotestantism to which they appear to be giving rise in postcolonial Africa. And elsewhere.

Capitalism at the Millennium, Millennial Capitalism

Consumption, recall, was the hallmark disease of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of the First Coming of Industrial Capitalism. Of a time when the ecological conditions of production, its consuming passions, ate up the bodies of producers. Now, at the end of the twentieth, semiotically transposed, it is often said to be the "hallmark of modernity," the measure of its wealth, health, and vitality. An over-generalization? Maybe. Yet the claim *does* capture popular ima-

ginings. It also resonates with the growing Eurocultural truism that the (post)modern person is a subject made with objects. Nor is this surprising. Consumption, in its ideological guise—as "consumer*ism*"—refers to a material sensibility actively cultivated, for the common good, by Western states and commercial interests, particularly since World War II. Also by some noncapitalist regimes: in the early 1990s, even Deng Xiaoping advocated "consumption as a motor force of production" (Dirlik 1996: 194).

In social theory, as well, consumption has become a Prime Mover (van Binsbergen and Geschiere n.d.: 3). Increasingly, it is *the* factor, *the* principle, held to determine definitions of value and the construction of identities. As such, tellingly, it is the invisible hand that animates the political and material imperatives, and the social forms, of the Second Coming of Capitalism. Note the image. The invisible hand. Gone is the *deus ex machina*, a figure altogether too concrete, too industrial for the so-called "post-industrial" era.

As consumption has become the moving spirit of the late twentieth century, so there has been a concomitant eclipse of production; an eclipse, at least, of its *perceived* salience for the wealth of nations. This has heralded a shift, across the world, in ordinary understandings of the nature of capitalism. The workplace and labor, especially work-and-place securely rooted in a stable local context, are no longer prime sites for the creation of value or identity (Sennett 1998). The factory and the shop, far from secure centers of fabrication and family income, are increasingly experienced by virtue of their replacement at the hands of nonhuman or "nonstandard" means of manufacture. Or by their removal to an elsewhere—where labor is cheaper, less assertive, less taxed, more feminized, less protected by states and unions; in South Africa, for example, 80% of employers prefer to hire "nonstandard" workers. Hence the paradox, in many economies, of high official employment rates amidst stark deindustrialization and joblessness. In the upshot, production appears to have been superseded, as the *ur*-source of wealth, by less tangible ways of generating of value: by control over intellectual property, copyrights, franchises, and licences; by owning the means of communication and the conveyancing of people and things; by the provision of services; and, above all, by the capacity to direct the flow of finance capital.

Symptomatic in this respect, we argue in another essay (2000b), are the changing historical fortunes of gambling. Risk has always been crucial to the growth of "modern" economies. But, removed from the dignifying nexus of the market, it was, until recently, treated, alike by Protestant ethics and populist morality, as a morally dubious practice. Casinos were set apart from the workaday world—in liminal places of leisure rather than sites of honest toil. Living off the proceeds of this form of speculation was, normatively-speaking, the epitome of immoral accumulation: the wager stood to the wage as sin to virtue. Over a generation, betting, in its marked form, has changed moral valence and invaded everyday existence almost everywhere, being routinized in high risk dealings in

stocks, bonds, and funds whose fortunes are governed largely by chance. It also expresses itself in a fascination with "futures" and their populist counterpart, the lottery. Here the mundane meets the millennial: "Not a lotto tomaro," proclaims an ironic, inner-city mural in Chicago, large hands grasping a pile of casino chips, beside which nestles a motherless baby.[3] This at a moment when "gambling [is] the fastest growing industry in the US," when it is "tightly woven into the national fabric," when it is increasingly "operated and promoted" by government.[4] Indeed, life itself has become the object of bookmaking; it is no longer the sole preserve of the "respectable" insurance industry. Take, by way of example that has always fascinated us, a report in *Newsweek* from 1999:[5]

> In America's...casino culture, no wager is *outre*. So how about betting on how long a stranger is likely to live? You can buy part or all of his or her insurance policy, becoming a beneficiary. Your gamble: that death will come soon enough to yield a high return on the money you put up. The Viatical Association[6] of America says that $1 billion worth of coverage went into play last year.

In the era of what some have called "casino capitalism" (Strange 1986), securing instant returns *is* often a matter of life and death. Also in 1999, the *India Tribune*[7] reported that one of the Indian states, Madya Pradesh, was "caught in the vortex of lottery mania," which had led to several suicides; it described "extreme enthusiasm among the jobless youth towards trying their luck to make a fast buck," precisely the kind of fatal ecstasy classically associated with chiliastic movements. More mundanely, efforts to enlist divine help in tipping the odds, from the Taiwanese countryside to the Kalahari fringe, have become a regular feature of what Robert Weller (2000: 482) terms "fee for service" religions. These are locally-nuanced fantasies of beating capitalism at its own game by drawing a winning number at the behest of unseen forces. Once again that invisible hand.

The change in the moral valence of gambling also has a public dimension. In many countries, lotteries have become a favored means of filling national coffers and generating cultural capital. The defunct machinery of a growing number of welfare states, to be sure, is being turned by the wheel of fortune. With more and more governments depending on this source for quick revenue fixes, says George Will, a well-known conservative commentator in the U.S., betting has "been transformed from a social disease"—subjected, not so long ago, to scrutiny at the hands of Harvard Medical School[8]—"into social policy."[9] Once a dangerous sign of moral turpitude, "it is now marketed almost as a 'patriotic duty'."[10]

And yet crisis after crisis in the global economy, and growing income disparities on a planetary scale, make it painfully plain that there is no such thing as

capitalism without production. Apart from all else, Fordist manufacture has *not* disappeared. It has been transformed, melded with other kinds of productive arrangement, dispersed and reorganized—with the effect that sites of fabrication have been removed from sites of consumption in such a way as to give the appearance, in some parts of the world, that proletariats, *sensu stricto*, are a thing of the past. This displacement, this rendering absent of visible production, has convinced the likes of Derrida (n.d.; after Rifkin 1995) that we have reached the end of "the world of work" as we know it; the end of the epoch of *homo faber*, of class consciousness, of the modernist idea of self-construction through virtuous labor. All identities seem to be contrived through self-fashioning, all wealth by means of the entrepreneurial. All of which affirms the putative primacy of consumption. And makes the operations of capital appear arcane, quixotic, magical. If Western scholars have been somewhat slow to reflect on why this is so, their "others" have not; especially those others who live in places where there has been a sudden infusion of commodities, an explosion of new forms of wealth, and a simultaneous shrinking of the labor market. Like South Africa. Many, to be sure, have been quick to give voice to their perplexity at the secret of this wealth: of its sources and the capriciousness of its distribution, of the mysterious forms it takes, of its slipperiness, of the opaque relations between means and ends embodied in it. Our concern here grows directly out of these perplexities: out of world-wide speculation, in both senses of the term, provoked by the shifting conditions of material existence at the end of the twentieth century.

The growing legitimacy of speculation, we have also argued before, is itself an integral aspect of the *experiential* paradox, the doubling, at the core of neoliberal capitalism, of capitalism in its millennial manifestation: the fact that it appears to produce desire on a global scale yet to decrease the certainty of work or the security of persons; that it appears to magnify class differences but to undercut class consciousness; above all, that it appears to offer up vast, almost instantaneous riches to those who master its spectral technologies—and, simultaneously, to threaten the very being of those who do not. This doubling is most visible in postcolonies; especially in those like South Africa—set free by the events of 1989 and their aftermath—that entered the global arena with distinct structural disadvantages. A good deal is to be learned about the historical implications of the current moment by eavesdropping on the popular anxieties to be heard in such places: on the mounting disenchantment with "liberty" under libertarian conditions; on the nostalgia for past regimes, some of them immeasurably repressive; on moral panics occasioned by rapidly rising suicide rates; on the upsurge of assertions of identity and autochthony; on the widespread fears, in many parts of Africa, Asia, and Central Europe alike, concerning the apparently preternatural production of wealth.

The close of the Cold War—and, in its wake, the death of *apartheid* in South Africa and democratization movements elsewhere on the continent—fired uto-

pian imaginations. But liberation under neoliberal conditions has been marred by a disconcerting upsurge of violence, crime, and disorder. The quest for democracy, for the rule of law, prosperity, and civility threatens to dissolve into strife and recrimination, even political chaos. Everywhere there is evidence of an uneasy fusion of enfranchisement and exclusion; of xenophobia at the prospect of world citizenship without the old protectionisms of nationhood; of the effort to realize modern utopias by decidedly postmodern means; of the waxing, in many places, of conspiracy theories; of the fetishization of human rights and civil society, a construct whose populist appeal seems everywhere to rise in rough proportion to its imprecision as a principle of praxis. Gone is any official-speak of egalitarian futures, work-for-all, or the paternal government envisioned by the freedom movements of yore. Gone, too, is the modernist nation-state as we once knew it; radically transformed, its hyphenation is being ruptured under the impact of global economic and electronic integration, amidst unprecedented flows of people, commodities, currencies, amidst changes in the very nature of citizenship and the construction of identity. These transformations have expressed themselves increasingly in a spirit of deregulation, with its taunting mix of emancipation and limitation. As those citizens not fortunate enough to win the lottery of life try to find salvation in enterprise, they find themselves battling the eccentric currents of the "new" world order, which short-circuit received sovereignties, received means and ends, received connections between personhood and place. And as the great containers of modern social order have been fractured, so have the cultural, ethical, and spiritual coordinates on which they were founded; coordinates that charted a conceptual and institutional terrain long taken for granted in classic Western (for which read Judaeo-Protestant) ideology and its civil extensions: among them, the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the transcendant and the temporal, the moral and the material, the pious and the pecuniary—and, most of all, modernity and enchantment. Which, by turn, focuses our gaze on occult economies and new religious movements.

Occult Economies and New Religious Movements

A striking corollary of the dawning Age of Millennial Capitalism has been the global proliferation of "occult economies." These economies have two dimensions: a material aspect founded on the sustained effort to conjure wealth—or to account for its accumulation—by appeal to techniques that defy practical reason; and an ethical aspect, grounded in the condemnation of wealth manufactured by arcane, "magical" means. It is difficult, of course, to quantify the presence of the occult—and, therefore, to make any claim to its increase. As we have already noted, finance capital has always had its spectral enchantments, its modes of speculation based on less than honest toil, less than rational connections between means and ends. Both its underside (the pariah forms of gambling of

which we spoke a moment ago) and its upper side (a fiscal industry, embracing everything from insurance to stock markets) have been rooted, from the first, in two inscrutables: a faith in probability, itself a notoriously poor way of predicting the future from the past, and a monetary system which depends for its existence on "confidence," a chimera knowable, tautologically, only by its effects. Wherein, then, lies the claim that occult economies are presently on the rise?

In the specific context of South Africa, we have demonstrated (1999a) that there has been an explosion of occult-related activity—arising out of accusations of ritual killing, witchcraft, and zombie conjuring—since the late *apartheid* years; also of fantastic Ponzi schemes, of the sale of body parts for "magical" purposes, of allegations of satanic practice, of tourism based on the sighting of fabulous monsters, and the like. Here popular magazines run "dial-a-diviner" advertisements, national papers carry headline articles on medicine murders, television broadcasts dramas of sorcery, and more than one "witchcraft summit" has been held. Whether or not the brute quantum of occult activity exceeds that of times past, what *is* clear is that their reported incidence, written about by the mainstream press in more prosaic terms than ever before (Fordred 1999), has forced itself upon the public sphere, rupturing the flow of mediated "news." It is this rupture—this focus of popular attention on the place of the arcane in everyday production—to which we refer when we speak of a global proliferation of occult economies.

It is not difficult to catalogue the presence of these economies in different parts of the planet. In West Africa, for example, Geschiere (1997) has shown how zombie-making is an endemic feature of everyday life, how sorcery and witchcraft have entered into the postcolonial political economy as an integral element of a thriving alternative modernity, how magic has become as much an acknowledged aspect of mundane survival strategies as it is indispensable to the ambitions and machinations of the powerful. Nor is all of this based in rural situations or among poor people. In Nigeria's lively national press, Bastian (1993: 133f) shows, witchcraft is a frequent topic, both in quality broadsheets and in tabloids. Far from falling into the domain of the "customary" or the "exotic," it is a vital idiom for understanding the mysteries of contemporary life—urban and rural, political and personal. One might add, parenthetically, that accounts of Nigerian supernaturalism are frequently recycled in the popular American press, where they have an avid readership, both black and white. The video films which Nigerian sociologist Asonzeh Ukah (n.d.: 6) refers to as "perhaps the most vibrant media phenomena" on the continent, and which draw heavily from Pentecostal communicative styles, center on "issues of melodrama and excess, accumulation...witchcraft."

Occult economies thrive in various parts of Asia, too, as Rosalind Morris (2000) has shown. In Thailand—where fortune telling has been transformed by global technology and email divination has taken off—one "traditional" seer,

auspiciously named Madam Luk, reports that her clients nowadays ask three questions to the exclusion of all others: "'Is my company going broke?' 'Am I going to lose my job?' and 'Will I find other employment?'"[11] Here, as well, the fallout of neoliberal capitalism is having a profound impact on magical practice, a process splendidly captured in Morris's account of the career of one of Thailand's most renowned spirit mediums, who recently staged a dramatic, mass-mediated confession: he declared himself a fake. This, no less, so that he might take up a career as a distributor for Amway, a global pyramid scheme run by two Christian patriarchs in a small rural town in Michigan. Such schemes, says Morris, are the economic counterpart of mediumship: they "occult" the production of value with a disarmingly personalized, hyper-real directness. The verb is hers, after Zizek (1997: 10); of the point itself, more in a moment.

Sometimes dealings in the occult take on a more visceral, darker form. Throughout Latin America in the 1990s, as in Africa and Asia, there have been mass panics about the clandestine theft and sale of the organs of young people, usually by unscrupulous expatriates (Scheper-Hughes 1996); violence against children has become metonymic of threats to social reproduction in many ethnic and national contexts, the dead (or missing) child having emerged as the standardized nightmare of a world out of control (J. Comaroff 1997). There, and in other parts of the globe, this commerce—like international adoptions, mail-order marriage, and indentured domestic labor—is seen as a new form of imperialism, the affluent north siphoning off the essence of poorer "others" by mysterious means for nefarious, often ritual ends. All of which gives evidence, to those at the nether end of the global distribution of wealth, of the workings of insidious forces, of potent magical technologies and modes of accumulation.

That evidence reaches into the heart of Europe itself: hence the recent scares, in several countries, about the sexual and satanic abuse of children (La Fontaine 1997);[12] also about the theft and abuse of human tissue and genetic material by an unholy alliance of Godless scientists and corporate vampires. An extreme instance is the urban myth that traversed the internet in 1997 about the secret excision of kidneys, by apparently incredible means, from business travelers waylaid at international airports. Several major police departments, moral commentators, and mass media in the USA took these stories seriously enough to investigate them.[13]

Note a persistent theme in all this: the anxiety that has come to surround transformations in the everyday economic world occasioned by two things: firstly, by the opening up of new *kinds* of translocal markets, of an inscrutable traffic in people, labor, services, and things; and, secondly, by the explosion of new forms of financial speculation and e-investment which are at once seductive and dangerous. If the former is epitomised by the sale of persons and their bodies, part or whole, the latter reaches it apex in the extraordinary intensification, lately, of pyramid schemes, many of them tied to the electronic media. These schemes,

and a host of scams allied with them—a few legal, many illegal, some alegal—are hardly new. But their recent mushrooming across the world has drawn a great deal of attention; this partly because of their sheer scale and partly because, by crossing national borders and registering at addresses far from the site of their local operation, they insinuate themselves into the slipstream of global capital, thereby escaping control. Recall those whose crash sparked the Albanian revolution early in 1997, several of which took on almost miraculous dimensions for poor investors; one pyramid manager in Albania was "a gypsy fortune teller, complete with crystal ball, who claimed to know the future."[14] Even in the tightly regulated stock markets of the USA, there has been a huge rise in illicit operations that owe their logic, if not their precise operation, to Ponzi schemes; this because investors have become ever more "disposed to throw dollars at get-rich-quick schemes." $6 billion, in fact, was lost to scams on the New York Stock Exchange in 1996.[15] Voodoo economics is alive and well at the financial center of the Western World.

These scams also bring to mind others, different yet similar, that arise from a promiscuous mix of scarcity and deregulation. Frequently, the space of speculation is a place of enchantment, mystery, even salvation. This was the case with the Foundation for New Era Philanthropy, a US pyramid created "to change the world for the glory of God." On the basis of a promise to double their money in six months, its founder, John Bennett, persuaded 500 nonprofit organizations, Christian colleges, and Ivy League universities to invest $354 million.[16] Miracle 2000, a South African "empowerment" scheme that promised a 220% return on investments in 42 days, also had a strongly millennial side to it. So popular did it become that it drew crowds from across the land to the East Rand home of its 39-year-old founder, Sibusiso Radebe—crowds that would wait days to make their deposits. When an elite crime-busting unit of the South African Police Services cracked down on the scheme earlier this year, arresting Radebe, hundreds of outraged investors marched on the Directorate of Public Prosecutions in Pretoria, carrying placards that proclaimed him as their "Messiah." He was, they said, "doing more to alleviate poverty than the government."[17] In something akin to a "memorial service," these protestors sung hymns and prayed for the return of both their savior and their savings.[18] When Radebe was eventually released on bail, "ululating investors carried [him] shoulder-high and described him as a biblical Moses, who had delivered the downtrodden Israelites to God's promised land."[19] During his subsequent trial in the Pretoria High Court, faithful followers kept vigil outside, bearing placards that declared, with seemingly deliberate *double entendre*, "Do My Prophet No Harm."

All of these things have a single common denominator: the allure of conjuring wealth from nothing. In this respect, while they recall older magicalities, they are the offspring of the same animating spirit as casino capitalism; indeed, perhaps they *are* casino capitalism for those who lack the fiscal or cultural capi-

tal—or who, for one or another reason, are reluctant—to gamble on more conventional markets. Like the wizardry that made straw into gold in an earlier moment of radical economic transfomation (Schneider 1989), these alchemic techniques defy reason in promising to return unnaturally large profits on small investments, to yield wealth without work, to produce value without effort. Here, again, is the specter, the distinctive spirit, of neoliberalism in its triumphal hour. In its shadowy penumbra, the line between Ponzi schemes and prosperity gospels is very thin indeed.

Which brings us, then, to the spread of new religious movements across the planet. These, we suggest, may be seen as the apotheosis of the occult economies of which we have been speaking; their holy-owned subsidiaries, if we may be forgiven the pun. Such movements take on a wide variety of guises. Some, like the Vissariontsi with which we began, sound perennial themes of apocalypse and utopian communitarianism, albeit tuned to a distinctively local key. But the followers of Vissarion also share a good deal with other Neoprotestant denominations elsewhere, among them the New Life Church in South Africa: the tendency to view congregations as joint stock companies, offering the faithful a tangible return on their investments; a fascination with new technologies and media that seem to condense the numinous magic of global enterprise; an eclipse of the ideal of patient toil and paradise postponed by the promise of prompt reward; the fusing of a millennial spirit with the speculative force of finance capital, so that the instant accumulation of wealth becomes synonymous with the unmediated power of God; a tendency, because of all this, to be viewed by more orthodox believers as being mercenary, Satanic, magic-ridden.

These features are even more palpable in the so-called "fee-for-service" faiths, those consumer cults alluded to above, which are challenging more established Christian denominations in Africa and elsewhere. Typical of them is the Brazilian movement, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (*Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*), which, since 1994, has grown rapidly all over Southern Africa. Controversial in its country of origin, this church is reforming the Protestant Ethic with enterprise and urbanity. It owns a major television network in Brazil, has an elaborate website, and sponsors high-profile religious rock groups and soap operas (Kramer 1999). Above all, it promises swift payback to those who embrace Christ, denounce Satan, and "make their faith practical" by "sacrificing" all they can to the movement.[20] Here Pentecostalism meets neoliberal enterprise head on; here the theological waxes psychotherapeutic. In its Southern African churches, most of them—literally—storefronts in town centers, prayer meetings respond to candidly material motives, offering everything from cures for depression through financial advice to remedies for unemployment; itinerant passers-by, clients and customers really, select the services they require. Even the smallest churches have elaborate electronic sound systems; pounding music, indistinguishable from any other rock music to all but the best trained ear, beats out a

distinctly this-worldly tempo. A collage of advertisements for BMWs and lottery winnings adorns the altar in one such church, beneath the heading: "Delight Yourself in the Lord and He Will Give You The Desires of Your Heart (Psalms 37: 4)." Tabloids stuck to walls and windows carry stories, told in the first person, about those whose rebirth in the fold was rewarded by a rush of wealth or an astonishing recovery of health.

The ability to deliver in the here-and-now, itself a potent form of space-time compression, is offered as the measure of a genuinely global God, just as it is taken to explain the lively power of satanism; both have the instant efficacy of the magical and the millenniary. As Kramer (1999: 35) says of Brazilian Neopentecostals, "inner-worldly asceticism has been replaced with a concern for the pragmatics of material gain and the immediacy of desire ...[T]he return on capital has suddenly become more spiritually compelling and imminent...than the return of Christ." This shift is endemic to many new religious movements at the end of the twentieth century. For them, and for their many millions of members, the Second Coming evokes not a Jesus who saves, but one who pays dividends. Or, more accurately, one who promises a miraculous return on spiritual venture capital.

It might be argued that, as neoliberal forces have eroded the capacity of liberal democratic states to provide education, health and welfare, religious movements—above all, those flexible "prosperity" movements that mimic the workings of business—have expanded their institutional reach into formerly "secular," public domains. In South Africa, as a rising sense of entitlement runs up against the reality of privatization and dwindling state resources, churches have invested ever more heavily in building schools, clinics, and sports centers. They have extended their ministry, offering a host of individualized, special services—from exorcism and electronic entertainment to personal and financial counseling—services often available to members and non-members alike. In all this, religious transactions have been commercialized as never before: in Nigerian Pentecostalism, writes Ukah (n.d.: 1), the dynamic intersection of mass media, religion, and consumerism has generated a new economy in religious material objects. Here, as in comparable Muslim circles (Soares n.d.), videos, cassettes, and posters extend the influence of charismatic leaders over ever larger distances, marking out new diasporas of sacral consumption. As their enterprise takes them ever more into "civil society," these denominations involve themselves actively in politics, both local and national. And in the process, notions of the sacred and profane, of membership and congregation, of the calendar and institutional scope of organized religion, are all being radically reshaped. So, too, are the means of mediating and manifesting divine power.

Why? How—to put the matter more generally—are we to account for the current spread and impact of occult economies and prosperity cults? In framing the problem, of course, we have already pointed in the direction of some answers.

Toward a Privatized Millennium

To the degree that millennial capitalism fuses the modern and the postmodern, hope and hopelessness, utility and futility, the world created in its image presents itself as a mass of contradictions: as a world, simultaneously, of possibility and impossibility. This is precisely the juxtaposition associated with cargo cults and chiliastic movements in other times and places (Worsley 1957; Cohn 1957). But, as the growth of prosperity gospels and fee-for-service movements illustrate, in a neoliberal age, the chiliastic urge emphasizes a privatized millennium, a personalized rather than a communal sense of rebirth. In this, the messianic meets the magical. At the end of the twentieth century, the cargo, glimpsed in large part through globalized TV, takes the form of huge concentrations of wealth accruing, legitimately or otherwise, to the rich of the new planetary economy. It is in large part enigmatic wealth, derived inexplicably, as we said earlier, from financial investment and management, from intellectual property and other rights, from electronics and cyberspace, from transport and its cognate operations, and from the supply of various sorts of post-Fordist services. All of which points to the fact that the covert mechanisms of a changing market, not to mention abstruse technological and informational expertise, hold the key to hitherto unimaginable fortunes; to capital amassed by the ever more rapid flow of value, across time and space, into the fluid coordinates of the local and the global.

Herein, of course, lies the other side of the coin: the sense of impossibility, even despair, that comes from being left out of the promise of prosperity; from having to look in on the global economy of desire from its immiserated exteriors. Whether it be in post-Soviet Central Europe or postcolonial Africa, in post-Thatcherite Britain or the neoliberal USA, in a China edging toward capitalism or in Neopentecostal Latin America, the world-historical process which came to be symbolized by the events of 1989 held out the prospect that everyone would be set free to accumulate and speculate, to consume, and to indulge repressed cravings in a universe of less government, greater privatization, more opulence, infinite enterprise. For the vast majority, however, the millennial moment passed without visible enrichment, and the citadels of power and privilege seem as impregnable as ever.

The implication? That, in these times—the late modernist age when, according to Weber and Marx, enchantment would wither away—more and more ordinary people see arcane forces intervening in the production of value, diverting its flow toward a new elect. They also attribute to these arcane forces their feelings of erasure and loss: an erasure, in many places, of community and family; a loss of human integrity, experienced in the spreading commodification of persons and their bodies, in the unyoking of the market value from the social value of objects and relations, in the substitution of quantities for quality, abstraction for substance. None of these perceptions is new, as we have said. Balzac (1965 [1847]) described them for France in the 1840s, as did Conrad (1957 [1911]) for

prerevolutionary Russia, and neither were alone; Gluckman (1959) spoke of the "magic of despair" which arose in similarly dislocated colonial situations in Africa.

Nonetheless, to reiterate, such disruptions are widely *experienced* throughout the world as intensifying at a frightening rate at present. Which is why the ethical dimensions of occult economies are so prominent; why the mass panics of our times tend to be moral in tone; why they so often express themselves in religious movements, movements that pursue instant material returns and yet condemn those who enrich themselves in unGodly ways; why, more generally, occult economies consist, at one level, in the constant quest for new, magical means for otherwise unattainable ends, and yet, at another, voice a desire to sanction, even eradicate, people held to have accumulated assets by those very means. Satan and salvation, it seems, remain the conditions of each other's imaginings.

In sum, occult economies in general, and Neoprotestant religious movements in particular—in Africa and elsewhere—are a response to the perception of an epochal shift in the constitution of the lived world: a world in which the most promising way to create real wealth seems to lie in forms of power/knowledge that transgress the conventional, the rational, the moral—thus to multiply available techniques of producing value, fair or foul. In their cultural aspect, these economies bespeak a resolute effort to come to terms with that power/knowledge, to account for the inexplicable phenomena to which it gives rise, to plumb its secrets—a byproduct of which is the invention of new realist specters. Thus, for example, the unprecedented manifestation of zombies in some parts of the South African countryside has grown in direct proportion to the shrinking labor market for young men (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999b). For some, the former provide a partial explanation for the latter: the living dead are commonly said to be killed and raised up by older people, by witches of wealth, to toil for them, thereby rendering rural youth jobless. There are, in this era of flexitime employment, even part-time zombies, a virtual working class—of pure, abstract labor power—that slaves away at night for its masters. In this context, moreover, the angry dramas through which ritual murderers are identified often become sites of public divination. As they unfold, the accusers discuss, attribute cause, and speak out their understanding of the forces that make the postcolony such an inhospitable place for them. This is an extreme situation, obviously. But in less stark circumstances, too, changing moral and material economies tend to spawn simultaneous strivings to garner wealth *and* to make transparent the means by which that wealth may be produced.

As all this suggests, appeals to the occult in pursuit of the secrets of capital generally rely on local cultural technologies: on vernacular modes of divination or oracular consultation, on spirit possession or ancestral invocation, on sorcery busting or forensic legal procedures, on witch beliefs or prayer. Whatever. We stress, though, that the use of these technologies does not imply an iteration of, a

retreat into, "tradition." *Per contra*, they are frequently a means of fashioning new techniques to preserve older values, of retooling culturally familiar signs and practices. As in cargo cults of old, this typically involves the mimicking of what appear to be powerful new means of producing wealth (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xvf).

The rise of occult economies—amidst and alongside more conventional modes of economic practice, shading into the murky domains of crime and corruption—seems overdetermined at the start of the twenty-first century. This, after all, is an age in which the extravagant optimism of millennial capitalism runs up against an increasingly nihilistic, thoroughly postmodern pessimism. As the connections between means and ends become more opaque, the occult becomes ever more semantically saturated as a metaphor for our times. Note how commonplace it has become to pepper media-parlance, science-speak, new age psychobabble, and technologese—even the law[21]—with the language of enchantment. But, we insist, occult economies are not reducible to the symbolic, the figurative, or the allegorical alone. Magic is, everywhere, the science of the concrete, aimed at making sense of and acting upon the world—especially, but not only, among those who feel themselves disempowered, emasculated, disadvantaged. The fact that the turn to enchantment is not unprecedented, that it has precursors in earlier times, makes it no less significant to those for whom it has become an integral part of everyday reality. Maybe, too, all this describes a fleeting phase in the long, unfinished history of capitalism. But that makes it no less momentous. Especially in the white heat of the millennial moment.

Towards A Beginning

However we wish to characterize this Uncommon Age—as an epoch of death (the death of ideology, politics, the subject) or as an era of rebirth (of the spirit of Marx, Weber, the Adams, Ferguson and Smith)—ours are perplexing times; times caught uneasily between Derrida's "end of work" (n.d.; see above) and Zizek's (1997) "plague of fantasies"; times in which the conjuncture of the strange and the familiar, of stasis and metamorphosis, plays tricks on our perceptions, our positions, our praxis. This conjuncture appears at once to endorse and to erode our understanding of the lineaments of modernity. And its post-ponements. Here, plainly, we have tried to do no more than offer some preliminary observations about the passage from the apocalyptic perplexities of the present to the mundane realities of the future, interrogating, with due respect to Max Weber, the elective affinity between the spirit of a rising millennial capitalism, the occult economies which are growing up in its penumbra, and those Neoprotestant religious movements that give voice to its ethos.

Of course, the inscription of materiality in moral economy, of the pursuit of this-worldly wealth in other-wordly religious faith, is hardly novel. In the *Protes-*

tant Ethic, Weber (1958: 175) himself italicizes a passage from John Wesley that says: "*we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow rich.*" What, then, *is* new? We have suggested that the answer lies in an historically concrete conjuncture. On one side of that conjuncture is a postmodern, post-industrial, salvific form of capitalism, a capitalism that no longer waits for the messiah—with due respect to Vissarion—but acts like one. It is a form of capitalism that is experienced, to invoke Marx's *camera obscura*, upside down; that appears to have done away with production, and productive labor, as its fundamental source of property, personhood, family, identity, community, moral order, even "society"; that has altered the sovereignty of the nation-state and displaced its traditional public institutions; that has reconstituted space and time, expanding their virtual and global coordinates; that has, conversely, elevated consumption into a prime mover, into the foundation of being in the world, into an epistemic act that makes the legal, psychotherapeutic, self-contracting individual of the "new" world order into a stakeholder, itself a trope that fuses gambling with corporate citizenship.

On the other side of the conjuncture is the religion of the Vissariontsi in Siberia, of the New Life Church in South Africa, of the Disciples of Christ in Indiana, and many others besides. It is a religion of free choice and a flexible architecture, of instant materialities and deal-making with the divine, of radically voluntarist subjects and repressed memories, of mass-mediations, global imaginings, and enchanted investments. Old time religion, it seems, is, at least in its Neoprotestant manifestation, being compressed into space-time religion. Thus it is that, as the past becomes the future, new spiritual movements, especially in African postcolonies, seek to harness the numinous magic of global enterprise, to fuse a messianic spirit with the speculative force of finance capital, thereby "taking the waiting out of wanting," thereby separating salvation from saving and this-wordly ascetism. This is not to say that the Auld Protestantism is dead and gone. Quite the contrary: there are many contexts in which it is putting up animated resistance, where the first incarnation of Max Weber is alive and well. However, a Second Coming seems imminent in more and more places across the planet. It is a Second Coming that heralds a new Protestant Ethic, a new Spirit of Capitalism, and a new historical anthropology to make sense of both.

Notes

* *Authors' Note:* Readers interested in a more detailed account of the kind of approach and methods deployed here might wish to read the Introduction to *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). A version of this essay, under the title "Second Comings: Neoprotestant Ethics and Millennial Capitalism" is to appear in *2000 Years: Faith, Culture, and Identity in the Common Era*, edited by Nigel Rapport. It was first given as a lecture, in a series with the same title, at St.

Andrews University, Scotland, in November 2000. Some of the ideas developed here, along with the empirical examples required to illustrate them, were first aired in other essays, among them "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction" (1999a), "Alien-nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism" (1999b), and "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming" (2000); a few passages included below are also taken from those essays, although they are deployed to rather different ends. We should like to express our appreciation to Nigel Rapport, who invited us to present this lecture—and who extended warm hospitality to us during our visit to Scotland.

1 See http://www.vissarion-unifaith.net. The phrases quoted in this paragraph are to be found in two places: the first, from the home page, by clicking on <English>, then on <A Little Grain of Sand>, then on <Contents>, and finally on <Epilogue>; the second, directly from the home page on to <Information Letter>. Vissarion has other linked sites as well, among them one in the U.S.A. (www.vissarion.com) and another in Russia (www.vissarion.ru).

2 Tom Whitehouse, "Messiah on the make in Sun City", *The Observer World*, 30 May 1999, p.26. A documentary, made by Andrei Zhigalov, was screened by BBC2 as part of its series *Return to Wonderland* in 1999.

3 The mural, *Paid Programming* by Jeffrey Zimmerman, is to be found, at the time of writing, on Honore Street at North Avenue. It has been reproduced in *Public Culture*, 12(2):348-9 (2000).

4 George F. Will, "Hooked on gambling: Other comment", *Herald Tribune*, 26-27 June 1999, p.8.

5 Jane Bryant Quinn, "Capital gains: the lottery on lives", *Newsweek*, 15 March 1999, p.55.

6 "Viaticals" are policies bought from the terminally ill, especially those in the late stages of AIDS.

7 "Lottery mania grips Madya Pradesh, many commit suicide", *India Tribune* (Chicago), 23(1), 2 January 1999, p.8.

8 Brett Pulley, "Compulsion to gamble seen growing", *New York Times*, 7 December 1997, p.22.

9 George F. Will, "Hooked on gambling: Other comment", *Herald Tribune*, 26-27 June 1999, p.8.

10 Michael Tackett and Ted Gregory, "Gambling's lure still a divisive issue", *Chicago Tribune*, 20 May 1998, p.3; the words quoted are those of James Dobson, president of Focus on the Family, a Christian media ministry. They echo observations made by a range of witnesses the US National Gaming Impact Study Commission, set up 1996 to study the effects of gambling.

11 Uli Schmetzer, "Letter from Bangkok: Thai seers dealt reversal of fortune", *Chicago Tribune*, 18 November 1997, p.4.

12 There have been many stories in British tabloids about such matters. For an especially vivid one, see "Satanic ghouls in baby sacrifice horror," Brian Radford, *News of the World*, 24 August 1997, pp.30-1. Its two undertitles—"Cult is cover for pedophile sex monsters," and "They breed tots to use at occult rites"—reflect well the moral panic to which they speak.

13 According to this myth, whose telling is always accompanied by authenticating detail, the victim is offered a drink and, sometime later, awakes in a hotel bath, body

submerged in ice. A note, taped to the wall, warns him not to move, but to call 911. He is asked, by the operator, to feel for a tube protruding from his back. If he finds one, he is instructed to remain still until paramedics arrive: his kidneys have been harvested.

14 See e.g. Celestine Bohlen, "Albanian parties trade charges in the pyramid scandal", and Edmund L. Andrews, "Behind the scams: Desperate People, Easily Duped", *New York Times*, 29 January 1997, p.3. *New York Times*, 27 January 1997, p.3.

15 See Leslie Eaton, "Investment fraud is soaring along with the stock market", *New York Times*, 30 November 1997, pp.1, 24.

16 "Charity pyramid schemer sentenced to 12 years," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 September 1997, p.6.

17 African Press Association; published on the Web by IOL on 7/13/2000 (http: // www.iol.co.za/general/newsprint.php3?art_id=qw963495900872B265).

18 Selby Bokaba and Vivian Warby, "Fury as Cash 'Miracle' Turns to Dust", *The Star* (Johannesburg); published on the Web by IOL on 7/13/00 (http://www. iol.co.za/ general/newsprint. php3?art_id=t20000713214017362L300819).

19 Selby Bokaba, "Hero's Welcome for Miracle 2000 Mastermind", *The Star* (Johannesburg); published on the Web by IOL on 7/31/00 (http://www.iol.co.za /general/newsprint.php3? art_id=ct20000731204009474M624397).

20 The phrases in quotes were uttered by a Universal Church pastor in Mafikeng, South Africa, where the denomination is growing fast: it has two storefront chapels, several rural centers, and a much watched program on the local TV channel.

21 We were struck by one recent instance, since it resonates so obviously with our concerns here: Michael Metelits, speaking of labor legislation in the "new" South Africa, referred to it as a "tricky, not to say occult business." See Michael Metelits, " 'Toiling masses and honest capitalists'", *Work to Rule: A Focus on Labour Legislation*, supplement to *Mail and Guardian*, 15-21 October 1999, p.11.

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