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Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Prefigurative Politics"

‘A Better Life for All’: Prefigurative and Strategic Politics in Southern Africa

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Abstract

Prefigurative politics is a resurgent concept, seeking to explain a diverse array of social phenomena, from Occupy Wall Street to car-sharing cooperatives. The driving force behind these activities is said to be a combination of dashed hopes for a better post-Cold War world and the widespread negative social impacts of neoliberal globalization. Although located in the Global South, Southern Africa is not immune to these pressures and processes. Indeed, the region is rife with a number of activities and organisations demonstrating features of prefigurative politics. Taken together, however, it is unlikely that these activities constitute a ‘prefigurative moment’ in the region’s politics. So ubiquitous in theory and practice is the idea of the modern Western state as locus of ‘a better life for all’ that prefigurative impulses are quickly colonized by state-centered, mainstream actors, forces and factors. At present, significant student movements are underway in South Africa, #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, suggesting possibilities for meaningful change not through disengagement from the state, but by directly confronting it in deliberate and coordinated ways. This demonstration of what A.O. Hirschman calls ‘voice’ is dissimilar to the general trends of ‘exit’ or ‘loyalty’ among individuals, groups and communities across the region. While all of these activities are indicative of a strong desire for a better life for all, transformational change in southern Africa requires strategic political thinking and action. Only the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests suggest movement, albeit nascent, in this direction.

Keywords: strategic politics, prefigurative politics, Southern Africa, #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, religion, migration, diaspora, tradition, modernity

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Prefigurative politics, a conceptual child of the 1960s, has reemerged in both theory and practice in the post-Cold War era, particularly as large-scale social movements and localized community actions and organizations have proliferated in the West (Yates, 2015). Notwithstanding its location in the global South, sub-Saharan Africa is no stranger to prefigurative politics: the region’s long and bitter history may be understood as one strain of prefigurative politics – the struggles of indigenous peoples against colonialism, imperialism, authoritarian rule and other forms of domination and oppression. So, in counterposition to Belgian King Leopold’s 1876 vision of Africa as

‘this magnificent cake’ and Cecil John Rhodes’ 1892 vision of the British Empire stretching ‘from the Cape to Cairo’, a host of strategic and prefigurative indigenous responses can be distilled, particularly during the heady years of the late 1950s and early 1960s as African peoples struggled against colonial rule. Ideas such as Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah’s ‘seek ye first the political kingdom’ and South African Steve Biko’s Black Consciousness Movement constituted clarion calls for a collective pan-African identity. These were deliberately political movements, employing what Hirschman (1970) called ‘voice’, which is very different from most of what we see today, where individuals and collectives are more likely to ‘opt out’ of the formal political system (Hirschman’s ‘exit’) or curry its favour (Hirschman’s ‘loyalty’).

South and southern Africa have played host to a large number of prefigurative political movements. Most recently, a student-led movement in South Africa known as #RhodesMustFall aims to overturn western epistemologies, particularly in tertiary education, and has shown the mobilizing power of alternative ways of thinking about politics – a form of prefigurative politics which is deeply rooted in identity and psychology. In March 2015, students came together to demand the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes from the campus of the University of Cape Town, arguing that such symbols of empire had no place in post-*apartheid* South Africa. In October, 2015, a corollary movement emerged, #FeesMustFall, ostensibly focused on the cost of tertiary education in the country. Many observers, however, believe that the movements, taken together, are emblematic of a youth that is unwilling to accept the failed promises of the state and who are more than willing to contest their marginalized status through direct action, marking a return to ‘voice’ and the utilization of strategic political action.

In the interstices of macro conflicts over national social ordering, there have been countless struggles at localized level, in particular over water and land. At the heart of the discourses they have unleashed are familiar notions such as democracy, equality, justice, community, empowerment and voice. Each is a central mobilizing factor behind prefigurative political thinking and action (Chavez, 2013; Day, 2005; Yates, 2015). However, and as described below, we argue that prefigurative politics – both as concept and as practice – is of limited utility in either helping us understand current social dynamics or, more practically, in shaping a more egalitarian, democratic and sustainable social form irrespective of scale.

In our view, so ubiquitous is the idea of the state as locus of the ‘good life’ in the region that, for a truly democratic, egalitarian and sustainable South(ern) Africa to emerge, strategic political thinking and action, meaning direct engagement with the heart of state power, is the key to successful social transformation processes. This is not to say that there is no room for prefigurative politics. Rather, it is to say that there is little physical or mental room for prefigurative political movements to survive, so quickly do state-centered actors, and those armed with statist ontologies, move in to colonize intellectual and social space.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section we describe the precepts that underpin social formation – authority, legitimacy, actors, space and time – and examine prefigurative politics as it relates to the Southern African region. Section three describes the state-civil society relationship, highlighting several key sites – to paraphrase Holloway (2010) – where cracks have emerged in the fabric of mainstream politics to be occupied by particular social forces. What will be shown, however, is an absence of intellectual and practical space for civil society to operate outside of the purview of the state and how state actors move to co-opt or crush all possibly prefigurative political spaces. Section four discusses three cases emblematic of powerful, non-state focused trends in community-building. These are analysed in terms of the precepts underpinning social order introduced in Section two. In other words, it asks the question, based on these cases, what does this mean for (the old political science

idea of) who gets what, where and when? The fifth and concluding section reflects on the recent student protests as providing possible and meaningful avenues for strategic political action.

Social Forms and Southern Africa

Prefigurative politics presumes an appropriate social form to enable the enactment or realization of 'the good life' for its members. This social formation, being concerned with the fair allocation of resources, presumes five particular features: authority, legitimacy, geography, time and a mobilizing or ordering narrative – let's call it an ideology – of 'the good society'. Facilitating the realization of 'the good society' is politics: who gets what, when, where, how and why. In both theory and practice, the 'political' engages with both *authority* and *legitimacy*; namely, that a social form or 'body politic' has a capacity and a right to act on behalf of its members. It also presumes *form*, namely that the questions of who gets what, when, where, why and how relate to people (or humans and non-humans where nature is conceived as a legitimate 'actor') arrayed across a particular geographical scale. The issue of *time* varies greatly in relation to specific *goals* in the political: immediate needs (for defence, for household/family/clan livelihood security; for resource access), mid-term needs (for resource security; for the predictability of behaviour to emerge to ensure a sense of 'security'), and long term needs (for the perpetuation of the social form and those – like business – who have a stake in its survival) (Ehrenreich, 2011). Rare, indeed, is the political engagement that 'just is' – that emerges spontaneously as an undirected 'anti' type of social movement.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, the search for 'the good society' has revolved around the state as the appropriate social form (Clapham, 1996; Iliffe, 1995). Both history and sociology suggest that the colonial/imperial imprint, followed by the tropes of modernizing, 'new' and 'developing' states made its way deep into the psyche of even the most marginalized groups where even efforts of self-organization are framed as direct responses to failed promises from and/or behavior of the state (Gordon & Gordon, 2007; Zartman, 1997). Former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere's concept of *ujamaa* (a form of African socialism based on family and community; see Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003), and more general political movements such as *Uhuru* (meaning 'freedom'), are representative of the multitude of past and current Marxist, neo-Marxist, socialist and even anarchist social projects across the continent. It is evident that both material and ideational struggles across Africa either engaged with directly or reproduced the myriad struggles for 'blood and belonging' (Ignatieff, 1993) on-going in Europe throughout the post-World War II period (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000).

Embedded within both colonialism and imperialism was the ideology and practice of modernity. Its calling was to craft a new way of being – the 'modern' – out of the old – the 'traditional', even the primitive. In addition to modern and traditional, one would importantly add more of the binaries upon which this thinking flourished: forward and progressive versus backward and retrogressive. Structured understandings, like these, legitimized the 19th century notions of the 'white man's burden' and the '*mission civilatrice*' as Western entry points in the mapping of Africa's future. This engagement was designed to shape the region to serve Western interests and beliefs. But it is most important to note that centuries after its introduction, the modernist project remains perverted (in terms of its original conceptualisation) and unfinished (in terms of its primary goal of delivering 'a better life for all') across sub-Saharan Africa. Put differently, the lofty goals of ujamaa, uhuru and so on went unrealized as African economies faltered and political leaders turned dictatorial (Chazan, Mortimer, Ravenhill, & Rothchild, 1992). Fifty years after the first wave of African nationalism, what we see today is a multi-century 'mash-up' of beliefs and behaviors which revolve around the central pivot of modernity – the sovereign state, what it is, what it might be (Clapham,

1996). In southern Africa, where settler colonialism profoundly altered pre-colonial social relations and imaginations of both the social and the political, and imperialism reconfigured the region to suit the needs and wants of Europeans within southern Africa and in Europe, 'state-building', 'nation-building' and 'development' remain the unfinished business of politics (Mengisteab & Daddieh, 1999).

The late-1980s end of the Cold War released a variety of social forces, at once extending and deepening (finance) capitalist interests around the world (Hardt & Negri, 2000), while raising hopes of a 'new world order' among peoples long oppressed by the decaying order of superpower contestation. An idea, called 'globalization', was said to be a primary marker of an 'end of history' where liberalism was triumphant (Fukuyama, 1992). For those long oppressed by authoritarian regimes, 'the end of history' marked an opening, an era of new possibilities for more just and inclusive forms of social order based on the idea that freedom has triumphed. It was thus regarded as both a closing (of ideological contest) and an opening of a new liberal world order. Across southern Africa it seemed that the time had come for liberation: the end of the Cold War resulted in the end of civil wars of long duration in Namibia, Mozambique and ultimately Angola. In South Africa it facilitated the end of race-based rule. New constitutions heralded the hope for more inclusive forms of social organisation, symbolized in South Africa by the rather poetic phrase, *Simunye: We are One.*

A quarter century on, however, the so-called 'new world order' is in turmoil: from the Occupy movement to the Arab Spring, and from exit-oriented, back-to-the-land millennarial groupings, to political movements systematically deploying violence in hope of securing an Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), northern Nigeria, south-eastern Somalia and elsewhere. This wide variation of activities constitutes 'prefigurative politics'. To prefigure the political means to not simply turn one's mind toward a more desirable future (say, creating 'the good society'), but to actually engage physically and intellectually in shaping its destiny. Prefiguration, according to Yates (2015), has two sides, one procedural and one outcome-oriented. In terms of process, prefigurative politics is the means of doing protest. For Haiven and Khasnabish (2013), this 'implies a continual and messy process of daily implementation, internal struggle and an endless cycle of learning and adaptation'. Fielding and Moss (2011) call this 'permanent provisionality'. While one may not know exactly what 'the good society' looks like, it is crucial to act in a manner consistent with a vision of it, both 'you' the individual and the community of which you are a part – hence, for example, the transition town movement in support of social and environmental sustainability.

As an outcome-oriented exercise, prefigurative politics seeks to construct alternative institutions or modes of social interaction. Put simply, the output of prefigurative politics is 'the good society' as envisioned and enacted by individuals and groups through its practice. According to Leach (2013), this 'good society' does not emerge fully formed through some sort of social 'big bang'; rather, it emerges in Darwinist terms – gradually out of the 'shell of the old'.

Van de Sande (2013) argues that it is both unfair to those directly involved and an ontological conceit to try and understand events such as 'the Arab Spring' and the 'Occupy' movement in terms of linear goal-specified processes. He further argues that *process* itself signifies a prefigurative moment – a kind of interregnum, where the final form of what will emerge is not yet clear, that some sort of bricolage will characterise a future social form still to be described. Lugones (2003) argues that the practice of prefigurative politics must be reflexive. This requires recognition by people that is 'mindful to the tensions, desires, closures, cracks and openings that make up the social' (p. 5). Prefigurative politics as process and outcome reject the very roots of contemporary political economy:

hierarchy, the elite-expert decision-making nexus, (neo-liberal) capitalism, majority-rule, consumption as the basis of social value and the marker of the 'better life for all'.

Several critical thinkers argue that power is badly undertheorized within the conceptualization of prefigurative politics (Farber, 2014). While power relations are revealed within the practice of prefigurative politics, they are most obvious in the violent clashes between protesters and those employed to uphold the present political order. So, while Holloway (2010) views plant occupations and community self-rule as expressions of revolution through 'movement', in occupying the cracks opened up by neoliberal capital's many contradictions, Farber regards these manifestations as only tolerated by state power. We believe that to ignore this fact is to court a quick end to even the most widely supported social movement and to misunderstand what constitutes the political. What Farber calls for is 'strategic politics' – an approach that includes political analysis and tactical/strategic plan development by a freely elected and eminently accountable leadership as prelude to direct engagement with the state. According to him, strategic politics, democratic representation and centralisation are 'indispensible to any effective democratic movement'. Across southern Africa, it is only the student movements in South Africa that demonstrate elements of strategic politics; whereas the multitude of other non-state or extra-state movements, described below, appear to be deliberately apolitical.

The question of power is of particular importance to the practice of politics – prefigurative and otherwise – across southern Africa. In southern Africa, the search for 'the good society' has revolved around the state as the appropriate – indeed, the only – social form. While motivated by prefigurative political elements, social mobilisation has most often involved either direct, often violent, engagement with state power, or passive disengagement from the mainstream of politics. Dominant renderings of regional events have seen the ending of *apartheid*, as the last breath of a particular world order: so, it is argued, it marked a closing, not a new opening in social history. Bur far from delivering an emancipatory moment, it marked the end of the dream of the nation state (in Africa but elsewhere, too) in the service of all. Over the last twenty years, what we have seen then not only in South Africa but across the southern African region is an endless fracturing of society, especially along ethnic and class lines. As the state has transformed from a determiner of (socio-economic) development to a facilitator of corporate investment and finance capital mobility (World Bank, 1997), the idea of 'society' has come under seige. Prefigurative politics and progressive social movements argue that Margaret Thatcher's rejection of the idea of society, which underpins neoliberal economics, must itself be rejected once and for all. Indeed, Speer, Peterson, Armstead, and Allen (2013) show that 'a psychological sense of community' is a key indicator of personal empowerment. Baumeister and Leary (1995) claim that the 'need to belong' is a fundamental human motivation, while Breines (1982) argues that social transformation requires belonging to a 'beloved community'.

But how is a community to be realised? And, who gets to determine the general parameters and specific character of what Benedict Anderson (1983) famously called an 'imagined community'? With its utopian understanding of 'community', prefigurative politics tends to mask the wide variety of power relations – race, class, gender, age – within (and between) movements (Ritchie & Ronald, 2007). Across sub-Saharan Africa, movements have shown themselves to be coherent only as long as they stand in opposition to those in political power. Once in power (as in Zambia, Malawi or Kenya), or once co-opted in power-sharing arrangements, these once-prefigurative movements – such as ujamaa and uhuru – quickly dissipate into fractious mainstream entities scrambling for state-sanctioned power.

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Nevertheless, the general perception of unfinished state-building across southern Africa tends to corral most thinking and practice into the idea that the state is better for all. So, what constitutes the political revolves around a highly contested social form, the state, which constitutes the legitimate authority to allocate resources on behalf of its members through time and within space defined by the idea of sovereignty. It was this idea that helped to steep the entire African continent within the modernist discourse of developmentalism, currently (and persistently) in its neo-liberal form, wherein the state is regarded as the authoritative and legitimate locus of resource mobilization for social/political/economic/environmental 'development'. Persistent deficiencies in performance are explained away through 'failed state' or 'leadership crisis with the state' – notions that epitomize counter-modernist narratives. Beyond the failed states, citizens (of both region and state) are incessantly encouraged to trust the political process which turns upon the progress promised by modernity within the border of the sovereign state. But social movements are rarely plan-rational, at least in the early stages of gestation; rather, as with Occupy and #RhodesMustFall, they emerge spontaneously in reaction to some sort of catalyst, an event precipitating the collective will to act.

Beyond the State, By the State or With the State?

Most readily apparent through a statist lens, are the variations of Hirschman's 'voice' and 'loyalty'. These are forms of engagement with the state in the course of which actors aim to either alter the system or gain control of it in order to realize better outcomes of the political; they might also support the status quo so as to directly benefit from it.

The states of southern Africa, which have undergone liberation struggles, evince an unsettled mix of these two phenomena. There is an extensive literature on how it is that revolutionary parties turn to authoritarianism – in the name of democracy – in the post-revolutionary era (Mengisteab & Daddieh, 1999). The paradox here is that during a revolutionary struggle in the cause of 'freedom', there could be no deviation from hierarchy and doctrine in the name of nationalism. So, in countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, there is a persistent tension between governing on 'behalf' of the people and ruling in the 'interests' of the nation. Consider this illustrative, during an early-2015 whistle-stop tour of South Africa's Western Cape province, the nationally-ruling African National Congress (ANC) made a pitch that it was time to 'give back the Cape' to 'the rightful rulers' who were the ANC. At present, the Western Cape is the only province governed by the opposition Democratic Alliance and where indicators of 'governance' – from accountability to service delivery – are stronger than they are elsewhere in the country (Habib & Naidu, 2006). Nevertheless, the ANC continues to search for inroads through, for example, uneven service delivery in South Africa's over-populated townships (Nleya, Thompson, Tapscott, Piper, & Esau, 2011). So, prefiguring the 'new' – a better life for all – requires hanging on to the old, that is, a government now more than twenty years in power but continually packaged as the only means to overcome race and class based inequalities across the country. Of course, the data reveals that most things have gotten worse for the 'average citizen' across sub-Saharan Africa, even in post-*apartheid* South Africa (UNDP, 2014).

While nascent social movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall are interpreted as reflexive responses to persistent marginalization through direct engagement with the state, the region's peoples generally and historically have demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the status quo more organically though no less deliberately, that is, through their daily practices. The dominant optic of state-centered politics continuously closes off the possibility of prefiguring a different kind of politics. This is because, under the cloak of nationalism, the state invades all the political space that opens with the idea of promoting 'a better life for all'. Unlike the current student

movements in South Africa, the vast majority of the region's peoples historically have pursued a mix of loyalty and exit: engaging the state where it is to their benefit; avoiding it where it is most likely to harm them. If and where there are prefigurative aspects to their practices, the state is quick to occupy that space. To help illustrate this, we turn to three short case studies.

Religion: 'A Better Life' Through God

The separation of church and state is little more than a Westphalian conceit across sub-Saharan Africa. Religion – at home crossing the public and private spheres; abroad as missionaries – was used to both pave the way and legitimize colonial/imperial domination. This was to have an enduring impact, in Africa, where religiosity remains at the centre of many African social formations (Benham Rennick, 2013; Dalton, 2013; Donnelly, 2013).

Although Hendriks and Erasmus (2005) chronicle the marked decline since 1994 in Dutch Reformed, Catholic and English-speaking Protestant religious traditions in South Africa, this has occurred alongside the rapid increase in the numbers of both African independent Christian churches, particularly of the Pentecostal variety. The size of these congregations run to millions and their reach stretches across the sub-continent. Anecdotal evidence suggests that thirty-five years of economic crisis and poor governance has created space for what Meyer (2004) calls 'prosperity gospel' and what Pfeiffer (2002) labels, in an analysis of Mozambique, as 'healing the afflictions of inequality'. Such phenomena point to enhanced forms and new locations of meaning and identity, outside of the state but – importantly – not beyond its reach.

The ambiguous role played by organised religion as a vehicle for oppositional politics was dramatically illustrated during *apartheid*. Anthony Egan (2014) has shown how Christianity was deployed simultaneously in the service of *apartheid*, particularly through the Dutch Reformed Churches, and against *apartheid*, through various strains of liberal and liberation theology. More (2014) has also demonstrated the link between liberation theology, 'black theology' and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa which, in the words of its great exponent Steve Biko, 'does not want to accept the dilemma of capitalism versus communism. It [BCM] opts for a socialist solution that is an authentic expression of black communalism' (as cited in More, 2014, p. 190). In each example, the locus of emancipation was/is never questioned: the state that must be preserved and strengthened (in support of *apartheid*) or captured and fundamentally altered (in support of African people's liberation). Thus, while the rise of African independent churches suggests people's search for 'a better life through God', it suggests that the material aspects of this life will be realized within the state. Indeed, as is the case with the reemergence of 'tradition', African state leaders ensure the commingling of church and state in the minds of 'their' people through the presence of government and church leaders at any and all public functions, and through the direct participation of religion-based political parties in government.

Tradition: 'A Better Future' Through Reverence for the Past

The many false and failed promises of modernity have driven the region's people to search for new ways and means of realizing their individual/collective life/livelihood goals – in particular, how to secure a life free from poverty and political oppression; put differently, how to take control. A basic tenet of the Enlightenment, this seeks to secure the power to chart the destiny of one's own existence rather than remaining the object of another's (Mamdani, 1997). A sad history suggests that Africans are used to being defined by others. Educators are charged to encourage the young to seek out different ways of seeing and understanding 'being African'. So, as educators we ask, for example, that they question the idea (propagated by the World Bank) that Africa is 'undeveloped' and

that they, as Africa's future, resist the idea that they should be managed in order to be 'developed'. Rather than reinforcing external definitions of the self, the task of education is to teach the young to define what is of value to them and how within ethical frameworks to fight for it. Often this is achieved by symbolism – a point we stressed in an earlier study (Swatuk & Vale, 1999). Here, we reflected on the enormous value of a simple act: Nelson Mandela's donning of the so-called 'Madiba shirt', an African dress shirt (along the lines of revolutionary Cuban formal wear), in place of 'the suit'.

But the routines of power prevail: even Mandela donned a suit when he visited Western Heads of State, so ubiquitous are the messages of power and value in 'our' world. Contemporary southern Africa presents an interesting mix of the 'modern' and the 'traditional' in formal political practice. It is certainly true that the Western suit is back – and with vengeance, too: the portals of a 'liberated' media reinforce images of American success. To be a successful black man in Africa, you must look not like Wole Soyinka but like Denzel Washington (in the 1990s) or LeBron James (in the 2010s). The neo-liberal moment has also reinforced these images of social and political power: 'bling' for both men and women; expensive cars, especially, for the men. With the resulting culture of consumption comes entrapment into the neoliberal rendering of the modernist project, where 'success' is attached to how and what you consume, not what you produce.

At the same time, tradition has crept back in, not in dress, but in social practices. Both Jacob Zuma, South Africa's President, and Julius Malema, the head of the opposition Economic Freedom Front (EFF), use traditional routines around song as a means to send social messages about who is 'in' and who is 'out' and what accepted leaders are fighting for. Zuma has been using the revolutionary chant 'bring my machine gun' as a standard way of inciting feelings of inclusiveness among the party faithful. Malema more recently has been using the song 'one settler one bullet' (rough translations) – which is actually banned as hate speech in South Africa – to the same effect at gatherings of his party. Song, dance, vocalized praise poetry, traditional healers have all found new places and spaces in post-*apartheid* South and southern Africa. Along with the flourishing of the independent churches, those at the margins of modernity are most readily drawn into these networks of historical meaning – party songs harking back to rural settings where people sang and danced in honour of the harvest, of weddings, and so on; these being reminders of the individual's place in community and a community as a valued and secure social space; but today this space is mediated by those, like Zuma and Malema, who wield formal political power.

Religion and tradition often encourage us to return to a previous moment in history, one often mythologized as more egalitarian and just and peaceful. Chavez (2013) warns against prefigurative political movements wishing for a return to the past, counselling instead that 'a new prefigurative politics must be committed to a kind of "presentism"'. While one understands the impulse to return to past practices 'before' colonialism, present day Swaziland offers a cautionary tale regarding the 'value' of adherence to tradition. The conservative – almost reactionary – Swazi monarchy stands firm as an unflinching anachronism of 'traditional governance' and, indeed, arrogance, in the region. How is one to understand the persistence of absolute rule in the age of democracy? Granted, 'democracy' plays out in highly differentiated and often fractious and contested ways – and southern Africa is no exception to this rule. Nevertheless, there is widespread acceptance that the 'people must govern', and that the leader is chosen by the people. Generally-speaking, despots are poorly tolerated, and therefore must rule with an iron fist. But the Swazi King – Mswati III – who has been in power since the mid-1980s, rules charismatically, partly tied to the incessant invocation of traditions. To be sure, his rule is challenged in the cities and he has used his power to oppress political opposition. But in the rural areas, he remains revered: how does one explain this? What value is derived by Swazis, who are among the region's poorest people, in continuing to support

their monarch? While there are no clear answers, what is plain is that leadership across southern Africa, as best exemplified by the Swazi King, use the card of tradition as a means of heading off opposition, and as a way of suffusing social practices and public gatherings with an image of someone in support of 'a better future' through defense of the (pre-colonial) past.

Diasporic Communities: 'A Better Life' Through Networks

There is no more telling evidence of the failure of the modernist, state-building project in sub-Saharan Africa than the large-scale migration that continues to criss-cross the face of the region. As groups and individuals move and settle, and move and settle again, they reinforce a network of connections that resemble Holloway's (2010) 'cracks' in the fabric of the whole. One of Southern Africa's most enduring political disappointments is Lesotho, a country that erupts into violence with increasing frequency. Coups d'état, foiled coups d'état, politically-motivated murder, and widespread violence against 'foreigners' characterize the life of a micro-country which is entirely surrounded by South Africa (Weisfelder, 2014). Following the characterization of African states above, the 'honey pot' in Lesotho is limited to rents derived from export-processing zones, from the sale of water, and from a revived but tiny diamond mining industry (Weisfelder, 2014). To put this idiomatically, there is very little honey in this particular pot – this makes its politics that much more vicious since access to state power is the sole key to personal, familial and communal economic wealth.

The Basotho themselves have long been entwined in the political economy of neighboring South Africa and, through this, into the wider region. Indeed, it is estimated that the number of Basotho living in South Africa is twice the number of those living within the sovereign boundaries of Lesotho. Remittances sent home by migrant laborers, who work on the mines and on the farms of South Africa, have constituted an important support for household economic security for many Basotho for over a century. In the post-*apartheid* era, however, jobs at the mines have dried up, leading to the purported repatriation of many citizens to Lesotho. Unsurprisingly, gender-based violence has increased dramatically as returning miners turned to the use of alcohol (Braun & Dreiling, 2010; Olowu, 2011).

While the Basotho still turn out in very high numbers to vote in national elections, there seems little belief in their state (as opposed to the idea of Basotho nation) as a locus for either identity or security. Basotho hold dearly to their nationalism, regarding Lesotho as the physical space that gives meaning to their individual and collective identity. But, if truth be told, most able-bodied Basotho lead double-lives, seeking to be citizens of South Africa while retaining their Lesotho citizenship. A recent study (Marais & Ntema, 2013) of an informal settlement – ironically called Freedom Square – in the South African city of Bloemfontein revealed that many Basotho citizens use the high density settlements as a launching point not just for work, but for the pursuit of South African citizenship. Their stated intention is not to stay in South Africa, nor is it to 'be' a South African: rather, it is to seek a citizenship which confers upon its recipient the right to stay and seek employment in a particular sovereign space, namely South Africa. As a result, the South African state, interestingly, becomes the source of a promise of a better life but it is not the locus of individual identity.

Understanding diasporic communities is central to the future of prefigurative politics not only in southern Africa but across the world. To visualize such communities as a fixed space where the goals of members are shared and whose joint participation is essential for their realization, one might see – in relation to Basotho – a hub-and-spoke form with the capital city of Lesotho, Maseru, acting as the hub, or dispatch point, with spokes radiating outward to all parts of South Africa. In relation to the Somali diaspora, one may envision an archipelago that

stretches from Mogadishu in Somalia, to Kenya and Ethiopia, and from East Africa all the way to South Africa. It doesn't necessarily end there, however. It is as easy to visualize 'greater Somalia' as a thin ribbon of people extending outward from Mogadishu to all points of the compass, a sort of 'pinwheel social form' organized anarchically, deliberately anti-hierarchical in the modernist sense, but profoundly inter-generational, clan-centred and hierarchical in the traditional Somali sense with a class of 'untouchables' (Steinberg, 2015). As with the Somalis, so with Zimbabweans across the British Commonwealth, and also with the wide numbers of West Africans who are scattered across the globe.

What do these extended networks of kinship and support mean in practice? For one thing, they aim to ensure security for those within the network. But the provision of security is a key element of state performance which is not available to its 'non-members' who are the undocumented (and therefore 'illegal') immigrants who have flooded the world as they flee so-called 'trouble spots'. A hard truth of modernist politics is that organization of the social world into sovereign-centered compartments has no category for those who are dislodged in a world preoccupied with the idea of sovereignty. But the hub-and-spoke, archipelago and pinwheel forms of social organisation are facilitated through technology, in particular inexpensive cellphone technology which puts both security of the person and individual within their reach, while simultaneously allowing them to step beyond the boundaries of the state, avoiding surveillance and resisting categorization.

Ironically, however, diasporas have recreated the world a thousand times over: little Somalia, little Italy, little China, little India. Cities throughout the world are replete with these 'arrival communities' (Saunders, 2011) who tend to stick to themselves, failing to become part of a 'melting pot' – to envoke Nathan Glaser's famous metaphor – re-creating the bounded spaces typical of the states they fled. What do states make of these de-centred social forms, and what do these groups make of themselves? In terms of the latter, it seems unlikely that these are deliberately prefigurative political entities. More reactive in nature, and dependent upon state actors for their continued presence in particular places, these groups are particularly vulnerable to displacement and abuse. Receiving states tolerate their presence, often using them as political tools when necessary by, for example, repatriating them in the name of 'jobs for citizens', or defending them in the name of fulfilling their duties as actors in good global governance. The diasporic presence is often the pivot point for reinforcing central state power, and drawing together a fragmented citizenry in the mythical enterprise of nation-building. Put differently, the manipulation of the 'foreign' presence helps undermine local prefigurative political movements by demonstrating positive state action in the interests of all citizens (Steinberg, 2008).

Discussion: Ex Africa Semper Aquivid Novi

These three cases suggest where Holloway's (2010) 'cracks' have opened up across Southern Africa, and where different groups for different reasons have occupied these interstitial spaces:

- Religion: a better life through God
- Tradition: a better future through reverence for the past
- Diasporas: a better life through networks

We can draw several observations out of the case studies in relation to existing and emerging forms of social order:

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Forms of Authority and Legitimacy Are Changing

In response to pressures for 'a better life for all', state actors are being forced to reconsider the ways and means of determining who gets what, when and where. The region's people have increasingly turned toward religious and traditional leaders to secure their future. Even in cases where such a traditional leader – the Swazi King is a good example – may be a primary cause of enduring problems, people hold fast to authority figures who have less influence over their material well-being and more over their spiritual well-being. And seemingly at every turn, state actors re-colonize these spaces in order to retain their roles as 'legitimate' authority figures.

The Geography of Social Action Is Simultaneously Expanding and Contracting

Modernity holds that the modern state form, devised in Europe and delivered to Africa, is the optimum – indeed, the only – social form for achieving social goods such as justice, equality and sustainability. Indeed, the study of politics – through the notion of political science and its *doppelganger*, international relations – is founded on the same precept. However, as we have seen, who gets what, where and when, is a landscape of social action that is at once global and local – and often this lies way beyond a compass chartered by Westphalian-style sovereignty. As we have noted, the citizens of Lesotho consciously aim to occupy two sovereign places at the same time. Those of Somali descent traverse physical and virtual spaces that are both hyper-local (e.g. the space around your small shop) and global (e.g. throughout the global diaspora which uses cell phone technology).

Time and Space Are Increasingly Compressed Particularly Through Technological Innovation

In important ways, the cell phone and internet technology make all actions local. In this way, there is little time lag between a local event (say, an attack on a Somali shopkeeper on a South African township) and its global consequences (such as a Tweet and a hashtag that brings it immediately into the global public eye). Such technologies not only compress time and space, but also close the gap between state and citizens/residents. Put differently, the world is watching, sometimes forcing state actors to see things they would rather ignore. At the same time, the same compression of time and space reduces the physical, spiritual and mental room for non-state actors to devise alternative forms of social ordering. Just as the world is watching, so is the state.

'A Better State for All' Remains the Dominant Ideology

Religion, tradition and diasporas, like water, all flow beyond formal state boundaries. To put the point prosaically, they do not require a passport to cross a border. These are the stuff of fugitive practice, networks and resources, always on the move, but ever pursued by state actors who seek to articulate the terms and parameters of political engagement so as to bring them to social order. Moreover, the ubiquitous ontology of the state stakes out the discursive boundaries of understanding 'the political' and therefore the means to achieving 'a better life for all'.

Conclusion

Southern Africa may be ending one moment of its modernist life, and beginning another. In an obvious way, the region and its historical unfolding show the veracity of Karl Polanyi's truism that we all live in several centuries at the same time. But in a curious way, Southern Africa and its people may well begin the next phase of their history with the same, or strikingly similar, set of actors, institutions and forces that the nascent recent region faced when

its formal sovereign-based history began in the 1880s. These include incomplete and unfulfilled state-structures, highly differentiated income between its various peoples, an international interest in its riches, a strain on its limited resources, a resurgence of Christian movements and traditional practices, improved technology and an improvement in communications; and, with increasing passion, a demand by the young to turn towards new epistemologies, and so to seek out new understandings of politics.

Will this simply end in the old *cul de sac* that history is destined to repeat itself? The answer seems unlikely, of course. But the politics of the region – prefigurative, strategic and mainstream – enjoy the instruction of lessons that are learnt from the region's sovereign-structured archive. And, if there is one lesson to be learnt from the proverbial take-away message, it is this: there are many ways to structure social relationships. So while the state may crowd out, discipline, co-opt and oppress all forms of prefigurative politics, those interested in creating a better life for all will need to reconsider the value of strategic politics, and to plan accordingly.

While much of what constitutes 'prefiguration' in our view is evolutionary, instrumental and deliberately apolitical (in the sense that it attempts to avoid direct engagement with the state), the student-led movements suggest something else: direct engagement with the established centres of power for specific ends. Like those who seek community through religion, tradition and networks, the student movement brings the youth of South Africa together in a concrete way for specific ends. Unlike the other movements, however, it seems to us that #RhodesMustFall, and its recent corollary #FeesMustFall, is structured around a deliberate attempt to challenge the accepted sources of authority as well as their legitimacy. Perhaps a 'better state for all' is their long-term target – not enough is known about their political motivations yet – but in the short-term amidst the clamour for better state practice in the service of all, there can be discerned an inkling of a more far-reaching agenda. In the words of one observer, South Africa's 'born-frees' (i.e. those born after the end of *apartheid* rule in 1994) 'carry no burdens of history … [T]he message was clear. They have lost hope and confidence in the government' (Ramoupi, 2015). In relation to #FeesMustFall, an editorial in South Africa's online daily, The Mail and Guardian (23 October 2015), stated that the protests are about more than just fees: They are 'about the diminishing hope of South Africa's youth … At every step of these protests, the students have eloquently articulated the sentiment, shared by many outside their ranks, that the decolonization project is not finished and the time has come for a new kind of politics'.

The ruling ANC very clearly has attempted to capture and tame this movement. It has cleverly positioned one of its youth leaders in the media spotlight so that, adorned with a party head wrap, she appears to be at the forefront of the struggle for fairer fees for students. In the words of Lerato Lephatsa (2015), this has made it appear that the student struggle is against 'an abstract system', rather than the government itself. How this will all play out is unclear. What is clear is that the student movements seem to be fueled by strategic politics, informed by an ideology of 'transformation', and increasingly articulate, though protests on several campuses are both violent and undirected. Either way, this is neither exit nor loyalty, but voice. In our view, there may be yet something new out of Africa, and, if so, it will be led by the youth who are a self-identified community with little to lose and everything to gain.

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