LOOSE YOUR WARTS, BECOME SUBLIME:

South African paper currency as instruction in the making of nation

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'Bank notes are the window to the nation' (Pierre Steyn, Head of Currency Management at the South African Reserve Bank, in an interview with Kenneth Chikanga 2002).

At the time of the introduction of the euro, Eric Helleiner (2002:3) – a political economist – voiced the growing realisation amongst policymakers that forms of money are 'invested with social meaning intricately connected to the intensely political project of constructing unique and distinct national identities.' Responding to Helleiner's further observation that a gap exists in contemporary scholarship with regard to the relationship between national currencies and national identities, the present article examines the expression of national identity manifest in the 1992 South African banknote series that was commissioned in 1989 by the Reserve Bank of South Africa under the auspices of the then ruling National Party (Moneymaking 1991:41).[1] The 1992 series served as national currency for more than a decade after the first democratic elections in 1994, and the subsequent coming to power of the African National Congress (ANC). As such, the banknotes offer a rich opportunity for the theoretical analysis of an artefact of graphic design as it intersects with notions of

identity and nationalism in a post-colonial paradigm.[2] In order to contemplate the contribution that the 1992 series made (and, arguably, continues to make) to 'the intensely political project' of constructing the South African nation, the present text sets out to

- provide a historical context for the design of the notes,
- outline a theoretical framework within which the imagery on the banknotes may be usefully examined, and
- present thought-provoking, if speculative, interpretations of the narratives embedded in the 1992 series as they suggest the cultural, political and social identity of the South African nation.

The 1992 South African banknote series: a context for the designs

During the first 70 years of its existence, the South African Reserve Bank, without interruption, placed the likeness of one Jan van Riebeeck – a seventeenth century official of the Dutch East India Company – on the obverse of the South African *rand* (Engelbrecht 1987).[3] In addition, from its very first issue in 1921, seventeenth century sailing vessels graced various denominations released by the Reserve Bank, still dominating the reverse of the largest denomination, the R20, on the eve of the release of the 1992 series.

In the face of an auspicious change in government in 1948 when the National Party came to power, the revolutionary socio-economic move to decimalisation and the Union becoming the Republic of South Africa in 1961, surprisingly little change took place on South African banknotes between 1921 and 1991. This visual inertia presented itself despite the fact that, during this period, South African paper currency was redesigned four times: the first two issues are known by the names of the designers, namely the Pilkington series (1921) and the Gooden series (1948). The third and fourth series were redesigned by established South African graphic designers George Duby and Kobus Esterhuysen respectively (Arthur & Hern 1986:6).[4]

In 1989, at a time when the beleaguered National Party ruled in an atmosphere of growing crisis (Oakes 1994:492), the South African Reserve Bank commissioned the renowned South African graphic designer Ernst de Jong to coordinate the redesign of the country's existing paper currency (De Jong 2002). When the notes appeared as the 1992 series, the new banknotes stood in marked contrast to all previous issues: Van Riebeeck and the sea were gone, replaced by 'distinctive South African animals' (List of changes 2002). Together these animals are known as the Big Five – the most dangerous and most coveted hunting trophies in Africa.[5] Thus the obverse of the R10 depicts the rhinoceros, the R20 the elephant, the R50 the lion, the R100 the African buffalo and the R200 the leopard. On the reverse of the series, five themes of national interest are elaborated, namely agriculture (R10), mining (R20), petrochemical industries (R50), tourism (R100) and communications (R200).[6] Decorative diagrammatic devices, which echo the national themes, run along both the top and bottom of the notes.

In 1994, the National Party was ousted by the ANC in South Africa's first democratic election; subsequently, official signifiers of an *apartheid* South Africa – such as its flag and coat of arms – were redesigned, but not its banknotes. In 2005, when an 'updated' series depicting the redesigned coat of arms and boasting enhanced security features (Hooper-Box 2005:3) was released, the animal imagery and landscapes were retained unaltered. Since paper currency is acknowledged as one of the key symbolic processes of national identity (Hearn 2006:177), the remarkable staying power of this national symbol invites examination.

The present article consequently seeks to bring to light the vividness of a mundane artefact and reveal it as a rich and layered signifier of opposing narratives inherent in the imagined identity of the South African nation.[7] This argument for complexity is not, however, to deny the intended neutrality

of the banknotes as envisioned by their designers (De Jong 2002; Cunningham 2005) and as applauded by commentators on South African currency design (Witz 2005; Putter 2006).[8] Clearly the *perceived* flatness of meaning of animal signifiers played a pivotal role in the retention of the 1992 imagery on the 'updated' series eventually issued by the South African Reserve Bank in 2005. Notwithstanding this condition, it can be demonstrated that the apparently neutral, non-human signifiers on the 1992 South African banknote series are able to project meaningful identity for the South African nation.

Paper money: national identity as utopian desire

No discussion on national identity can stand outside the discourse of nationalism; concomitantly, it can be argued, nationalism relies for its rhetorical strategy upon the principles of utopian thought. Philip Wegner (2002:xvi) claims that utopia plays a 'crucial role in the constitution of the nation-state as an original spatial, social, and cultural form.' The idea of utopia – an imagined, perfectible and longed-for society – is as ancient as the first agrarian societies (Rushby 2007:xii). In its forceful figuration of a *peaceable kingdom*, presented within a binary argument that juxtaposes unspoilt nature with technological prowess, the 1992 South African banknote series evinces the gamut of utopian desires iterated in diverse cultures for more than three thousand years. Since this fiscal utopia is also an accepted expression of national identity (Unwin & Hewitt 2001:1005), it follows that South African national identity (as imagined on the 1992 series) is utopian in nature. An unravelling of the possible meanings of the 1992 series is therefore enabled by briefly considering both the principles of nationalism and those of utopia.

Close examination of the recurring concerns of utopia and nationalism reveal remarkably yet hitherto ignored parallel goals and strategies of argumentation (see Groenewald 2006).[9] Although there has been 'an enormous expansion' (Spencer & Wollman 2005:1) in the literature on nationalism in recent years a detailed overview of the subject is beyond the scope of this article; consequently, a consideration of *the national map* must serve to identify core principles of the phenomenon. Both Benedict Anderson (1993) and Denis Wood (1993) argue for the remarkable rhetorical qualities of the map with regard to the nation-state: masquerading as a *natural* function of the state, the map is in reality a powerful 'instrument of polity' (Wood 1993:43). Denis Wood and John Fels's (1986:56-95) deconstruction of myth and meaning in maps readily reveals six main ideological tenets of nationalism (Table 1), which can be summarised as follows:

The map is a visual analogue of a geographic reality; *landscape* thus emerges as pivotal to the self-awareness of the nation. Pressed upon this landscape is the map's delineation of boundaries that signals the prerequisite of *division* for nationhood. Maps are about relationships and the horizontal comradeship of communities; maps thus evoke the metaphor of *family* in the function of nation. National maps are always issued at visitor centres; here *tourism* becomes critical in the construction of the nation. Although maps embody space, they are 'something with time evaporated out of it' (Wood & Fels 1986:82); concomitantly, the notion of the *unchanging nation* is a core principle of nationalism. Finally, maps use metaphors that proclaim the territory as ideal: trees are always green, water pristinely blue. The map as hyperbole argues for the *perfectibility* of the nation.

In order to grasp the parallel concerns of utopia, one may usefully turn to John Carey's (1999) history of utopias in which he examines a hundred utopian texts and identifies, in his introduction, five main *loci* – or 'storehouses for arguments' (Perelman & Ohlbrechts-Tyteca 1971:83) of utopia – *namely division, family, perfectibility, stasis,* and *nature*. Drawing on Chris Ferns's (1999) detailed analysis of utopian narratives, one may add the additional concern of the obligatory *tourist* in utopia. These themes are briefly examined in order to more powerfully suggest the link between utopia, nationalism and the 1992 series.

Inherent in any representation of utopia is the compelling message that utopia is divided from the rest of the world: paradise, writes Evan Eisenberg (1998:170), is a walled garden. However, underpinning physical divisions are the ideological divisions between, and within, utopias. Wegner (2002:29) argues that the fundamental undecidability of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is its rhetorical strength. As with nationalisms, utopias evince a particular concern with the role of the family in an ideal society: Ferns (1999:46) posits that the fundamental organisational unit of utopian society is the patriarchal family. But families also present a threat to the universalising objectives of utopia; an overarching concern is thus the difficulty of the human race. As a result, disaster scenarios abound – the unfit must be eradicated (Manuel 1966b:77; Carey 1999:xviii-xxiv; Rushby 2007: 164) or replaced by an alternative species. However, once perfection is attained, nothing much happens in paradise: Ferns (1999:64-65) emphasises this stasis of utopia, observing that its essential character is the paradisiacal dream of free feeding and idleness. As in the argument for nationalism, beliefs surrounding nature are frequently at the core of utopian constructs, but are as often ambivalent in character. Thus Daniel Defoe's desert island idyll reveals an intense distaste for humans' natural state (Carey 1999:112). Finally, no matter how inaccessible utopia might be, it always finds room for at least one visitor, a traveller who can observe and later testify to the wonders of the more perfect society (De Jouvenal 1966:220-221; Ferns 1999:2).

Loci of utopia	Principles of nationalism
Nature	Landscape and nature
Division	Division
Family	The nation as family
Tourism	Tourism
Stasis	The unchanging nation
Perfectibility	Perfectibility of the nation

Table 1. The *loci* of utopia and the principles of nationalism. Utopian themes — what Chaim Perelman and Lucie Ohlbrechts-Tyteca (1971:83) refer to as *loci* or 'storehouses for arguments' — are shown to correspond to the 'places of reflection' (Buchanan 2001:75) identified in nationalist rhetoric.

If, as Ferns (1999:66) argues, the function of utopia is primarily to persuade, the burden of gaining the adherence of an audience weighs equally heavily on nationalisms that many believe are deliberate exercises in social engineering (Smith 2003:81; Hearn 2006:171). However, while proffering utopia as an appropriate vehicle for elucidating national identity, it is important to acknowledge that the usefulness of this phenomenon as a tool of either philosophical or political imagining is not universally applauded. Fredric Jameson (2004:7), commenting from a neo-Marxist point of view, claims that the function of utopia lies not in helping communities imagine a future but rather demonstrates their utter incapacity to do so. This implied impotence and its import for the 1992 South African banknote series must, then, be briefly considered.

The 'window to the nation': a glass darkly?

The universal appeal of the images on the 1992 series is arguably the result of an indeterminacy of meaning. Openness of signification – a typical utopian trait – is useful, but, if one follows the argument of Jameson (2004), only in as far as it is able to reveal the ideological *closure* of the system in which, prior to 1990, the South African community had become trapped and confined.

This function of closure is manifested in several ways in the imagery on the banknotes. Most markedly, if one compares the 1992 series to its predecessors, the disappearance of the portrait of Van Riebeeck signifies the bankruptcy of an existing ideological system. In addition, the sea (an umbilical cord linking the nation to Europe) is removed, heralding an

end to First World alignments. However, the consequences of these ideological closures are not concretised; the notes do not attempt to answer the obvious question: what next?

In typical utopian style, the 1992 series defines the nation in negatives – there is no (apparent) European hegemony, there is no human being, no real place or event, no forward movement. As in its literary precursors, this fiscal utopia depicts a static tableau, a nation 'frozen in time' (Ferns 1999: 65). Within Jameson's interpretative framework, the 1992 series can be read as a postmodern heterotopia, which interpretation may indicate a defeatist position (Jameson 2004: 8).[10] However, Ralph Pordzik (2001:9) argues that *heterotopias* make available perceptual alternatives to many post-colonial societies; Homi Bhabha (2002:240-243) provides further support for the idea of an enabling period of stasis (what he refers to as a 'temporal caesura') in the social and psychic identification of post-colonial communities. These theoretical positions admit a second, parallel, reading of the utopian narratives on South African currency: while undeniably an instrument of closure, it can be argued that the 1992 series also opens a window onto the possibility of identity of the emerging nation.

PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: UTOPIA & NATIONALISM		
A. Context of the argument	**B. Starting point of argumentation**	**C. Techniques of argumentation**
1. The aim of the argument 2. The role of audience in shaping belief	Loci (or themes): 1. Division 2. Family 3. Nature 4. Perfectibility 5. Stasis 6. Tourism 7. Use of the perfect being as model	Presentation of data: 1. Use of repetition 2.Use of hierarchy 3.Use of detail 4. Use of indeterminacy 5. Use of symbols 6. Use of metaphor

Table 2. Organising elements of utopian and nationalist rhetoric

The window with a view: scrutinising the nation

Although time may be empty of content, Ferns (1999:65) points out that the space of utopia is full. While devoid of humans, the territory depicted on the 1992 series is populated by an abundance of both natural and scientific phenomena that, in their minute detail, press upon the viewer arguments of multiplicity, idealism, hierarchy and transformation. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Ohlbrechts-Tyteca (1971), in their seminal text on the new rhetoric, point out that all argumentation embraces three broad conditions that mould an argument and its effectiveness. These are

- the context of the argument,
- the starting point of the argument, and
- techniques of argumentation used during the argument itself.

It is therefore possible to examine figurations of national identity as an expression of utopian desire within the framework of the *process* of argumentation as set out in Table 2. When applied to the 1992 South African banknote series, this

instrument of analysis allows a multitude of narratives to rise to the surface of apparently innocent imagery. While acknowledging the sometimes-blurred boundaries between different aspects of collective identity, three broad themes are identified that emerge to potentially illuminate the separate, but linked, conditions of imagined identity in the South African nation, namely

- an ambivalence with regard to the *Africanness* of the nation,
- an ambivalence towards the nation as *peaceable kingdom*, and
- an ambivalence towards the *ideal citizen* of the nation.

The remainder of the article considers these themes within the context of the rhetoric narratives of the 1992 series.

Out of Africa – the 1992 series as signifier of cultural identity

Three fundamental issues within the broad ambit of cultural analysis are the routines of everyday life, the matter of ideas and the ways in which persons are lodged in and related to ongoing tradition (Preston 1997:28). The 1992 South African banknote series is a national symbol, but it is also paper currency, which – as an expression of cultural tradition – is arguably foreign to Africa. As the printing press enabled European ideas to penetrate the rest of the globe, imperial powers used currency to affirm their cultural dominance over colonised territories (Hewitt 2003). Complete control of its currency, only attained in 1963 (Arthur & Hern 1986:7), should thus have confirmed the sovereignty of the South African state. However, in its very essence, the 1992 series reveals the nation's dependence upon its imperial ancestry: hidden beneath the signifiers of Africa is a powerful desire to maintain an European cultural identity.

In her overview of colonial currency design, Wambui Mwangi (2002) observes that the depiction of topography and wildlife to the exclusion of any human presence is a trait peculiar to British colonial currency design. Mwangi (2002:40) demonstrates that this apparent commitment to neutrality, in Kenya, becomes 'vulnerable' to more uncertain readings when currency depicts lions in an African landscape. It is of interest that on the South African notes the lion – depicted on the obverse of the R50 – is the most clearly defined figure of majesty; the R50 was also the first denomination to be issued in the 1992 series. Mwangi (2002:41) points out that the lion is an accepted representation of 'Britishness' and when depicted on African currency it 'evokes the simple fact of British colonialism and dominance.' Echoing this sentiment is Wainaina (2006:5) who remarks that in fictional representations of Africa, lions always have public school accents. Tresidder's (2000:58) overview of world symbols confirms this perception that the lion became a dominant symbol of British imperial power in the nineteenth century.

Merely by issuing and using paper money, the South African nation reveals a desire to be considered European; by emulating the conventions of the currency of its erstwhile coloniser the nation covertly strengthens its adherence to the ideals of the dominant British classes. However, the 1992 series also absorbs meaning from another characteristic of utopia: it is Janus-faced. Having demonstrated the nation's attachment to Europe, the present text posits that the 1992 series expresses the concomitant desire of the nation to imagine itself as African. To this purpose the image of the sea, a transparent sign for patriotic identification with the British nation (Quilley 1998:136), makes way for the exclusive depiction of the interior of Africa, and the portrait – a visual device 'most capable of encapsulating "national character"' (Pointon 1998:233) – of a seventeenth century Dutch citizen is replaced with the likenesses of African mammals.

Although the animals and their environments on the banknotes repeatedly evoke a wilderness tamed by Europeans, 'a sort of theme park playground' (Mwangi 2002:41), it is unmistakably an African theme park, which, as a place of fantasy, fulfils a fundamental function of identification (Hall 1996:3). The lion, admittedly a powerful symbol of imperial Britain, is neither the only animal used in the series, nor is

it depicted on the highest denomination. It is precisely its association with its companion animals that transforms the lion into a signifier that is unique to South Africa, since the latter is the only country where one can hunt *all* members of the Big Five ('Big Five' 2006).

By presenting a pantheon of animal gods as the collective messiahs of the nation, the designers also appear to unseat the European cultural hegemony of Christianity. Notably, the stringently secular language of the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996), if not overtly pagan, clearly denies the tenets of Christian Nationalism enforced by pre-1994 governments: organised Western religious practice and its attendant cultural codes are exorcised from the imagination of the nation. Arguably the strongest signifier of the nation's rejection of European cultural values, this apparent pantheism – the 'immanence of God in the creatures' (Long 1960:223) – suggests a mystical bond with the fabric of Africa, and not a Christian Saviour.[11] However, Ivor Chipkin (2007:9), in his groundbreaking analysis of nationalism in a *post*-1994 South Africa, suggests that the ANC government demands precisely the opposite condition of citizens, namely Christian religious conviction. This observation is borne out by an increasing use – in public – by president Thabo Mbeki of the Bible as rhetorical tool (Hogarth 2007; Malefane 2007). The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose task was to provide a principle of commonality that would ground South Africans as a people (Chipkin 2007: 173), took its cue from the South African Constitution but equally from Christian theology: in the final report, archbishop Desmond Tutu (in Chipkin 2007:185) declares: 'We are sisters and brothers in one family – God's family'.[12]

While it can be demonstrated that animal symbolism features prominently in Judaeo-Christian mythology – the medieval bestiary being a case in point – the exact nature of the gods that command the devotion of the South African 'family' remains open to question. Nationalism frequently draws on the Bible as a framework for its ideology (Hastings 1997:4; Smith 2003:98; Chipkin 2007:48), the Biblical parallel of a chosen people finding its expression in the quasi-messianic fervour which attends to a nation's leaders. However, Anthony Smith (2003:35) points out that nationalism finally emerges as a *replacement* for Christianity. Utopia, notably, follows suit (Carey 1999): Northrop Frye (1966:36) states quite categorically that 'a Christian utopia ... is impossible'. On the other hand, Kevin Rushby (2007:xi-xii) suggests that notions of paradise first arrived in Africa with the Christian missionaries: any subsequent secular utopia thus remains 'the child of Christian mythology' (Rushby 2007:141). But, warns Rushby (2007:xiv), while paradise has become 'the unacknowledged faith of our times', the driving myth is no longer God but 'progress and consumer capitalism'. By rejecting overt Christian beliefs on its paper currency, the South African nation arguably aligns itself with a substitute opiate that, ironically, can only be accessed through the 'civilising' rhetoric of the Christian Bible.

Whatever one may take as their spiritual denotation, the landscapes and creatures depicted on the 1992 series are clearly offered as an object lesson. Jonathan Hearn (2006: 171) emphasises the prescriptive aspect of cultural symbols and their role as models for guiding appropriate social action. In this, the 1992 series is not unlike the medieval bestiary where depictions of animals serve as a factual record but also as a moral injunctive (Mann 2006).[13] The notion of animals as the subject of hero-worship is adumbrated in Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*. Plutarch (in Klingender 1971: 91) argues that nature breeds noble emotions in animals, because 'she ... may by these means make us ashamed': animals are clearly *for our example*. Art historian Kenneth Clark (1977:14) claims 'that the animals in cave paintings are records of admiration. "This is what we want to be like," they say, in unmistakeable accents: "these are the most admirable of our kinsmen"'. Undeterred by technological advances that imbue them with super-natural powers, and scientific observation that utterly denies the 'nobility' of animal natures (e.g. Joubert 1997), humans continue to pay homage to their

'admirable kinsmen' in the early twenty-first century by naming national sports teams – in themselves figurations of a nation's identity (Bairner 2001) – for powerful and ferocious animals.[14]

What then are the object lessons presented to citizens aspiring to nationhood? Two possible instructions inherent in the animal portraits and their settings are selected and examined. One 'lesson' presents *the perfect being as model* (Perlman & Ohlbrechts-Tyteca 1971:368) and is examined later in this article. Another 'lesson' offered in the 1992 series is the co-existence of individual and collective identities in South Africa: in the wake of the inequalities of apartheid, political groups and commentators continue to grapple with a desire for non-racialism and the concomitant condition of the 'splitting of the people' (Bhabha 1990:298) that constitute the nation. The matter of how the 1992 banknote series functions as a discursive tool in the construction of an alternative political identity for South Africa is taken up below.

After the flood – the 1992 series as signifier of political identity

Contemporary debates surrounding polities primarily interrogate the notion of democracy and key concerns are therefore states and ideologies. Polities, states Preston (1997:23), are 'rationally ordered groups of persons ... that have established structures of securing order ... [and] ... mechanisms for resolving conflicts.' Within this context, it is noteworthy that the most overt signification of the 1992 series is the depiction of several separate animal groups, none of which encroach upon the physical territory of the other, yet all inhabit a single utopian space. This arrangement serves as a powerful mechanism for securing order and reducing conflict, demonstrating Bhabha's (1990:301) notion of community where 'the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of "other" people ... [but] a question of the otherness of the people-as-one.' Although a popular concept, Smith (2003:128) argues warmly for the 'plural and heterogeneous' nation, the 1992 series is remarkable in that it imagines a reversal of the universalising tendency of 1980s liberation rhetoric in South Africa. Through some fantastic process, the discredited ideology of 'separate development' is here sublimated in an optimistic celebration of the nation as 'fragmented into its constituent cultural parts' (Smith 2003: 126).

It is notable that the by now ubiquitous phrase *the rainbow nation* as a descriptor for the South African political community came into use during the period immediately preceding the release of the 1992 series (Kassner 2006:78).[15] Appropriate to the vision of national unity within an environment of fragmentation, the rainbow rapidly became a metaphor for the political ambitions of a nation that elected its first democratic government in 1994, the year when the last of the denominations of the 1992 series was released. Gary Baines (1998:1) and Brenda Schmahmann (2006:[sp]) note that a ritual celebration of *the rainbow nation* was characteristic of the rhetoric of the ANC-led government throughout Mandela's presidency, but the epithet was also appropriated by politicians outside ANC ranks. Within this context Baines (1998:2) dismisses the cultural signification of the metaphor: its rhetorical power is derived from political imperatives, namely 'to promote national reconciliation through mutual respect of differences'. Thus the valorisation of 'difference' on a cohesive series of banknotes, where each denomination evinces a separate animal and colour, anticipates – and subsequently supports – the imagining of a plural and heterogeneous nation as a rainbow. As such, the 1992 series contributes to the erosion of white hegemonic slogans that emphasised 'unity': the *one* (Van Riebeeck) is replaced with the *many* (the Big Five).

If the separate, yet enclosed and bordered, animal groups project a shared South Africanness, the broader narratives of the 1992 series also suggest that the shared experience is one of political stability. In the late 1980s, South Africa was analogous with ruthless violence, *necklaces*, a state of emergency and militarism (Oakes 1994:487-489).[16] Nelson Mandela (in

Oakes 1994:529), in his speech at the ANC's victory celebration after the 1994 election, thus expresses desire rather than fact when he thanks the community that realised this event: '[T]his is a joyous night for the human spirit ... You have shown such a calm, patient determination ...'. The 1992 South African banknote series anticipates the singular moment – 27 April 1994 – when the nation appears to a watching world as a figuration of the Biblical Eden: the violence preceding the election is replaced by 'a calm, patient determination' as South Africans stand passively waiting to cast their votes.[17] Evoking popular depictions of paradise, the animals on the banknotes are similarly peaceful and docile creatures.

A critical observation here is that the Big Five depicted on the notes *are by nature* violent, but are imagined as, and have therefore by some force of will, become, peaceable. While acknowledging that the nation, as a political entity, evinces extreme aggression and when provoked is deadly, the depiction of the Big Five as gentle and wise also say about the nation, 'This is what we *should* be like'. In its ability to prefigure, even precipitate, this astonishing condition, the 1992 series emerges at its most optimistically utopian; it parallels Edward Bellamy's (1888) fictional utopia in which the audience is offered 'freedom from the spectacle of squalor, brutishness, and ignorance' (Ferns 1999:83). However, Bellamy's utopia is a middle-class fantasy of a classless society, whereas the 1992 series imposes Linnaean classifications and a clear hierarchy of values upon the social fabric of the nation. As Rushby (2007:199) darkly notes: 'Clear scientific identification of the individual is a prerequisite for the orderly and precise segregation and persecution of the unwanted.' If the 1992 South African banknote series argues for a shared South Africanness, it also highlights the crisis of values that it purports to resolve. The following section speculates upon selected prescribed values suggested by the imagined societal hierarchy of the ideal South African nation as expressed on the 1992 series.

Spoilt for choice – the 1992 series as signifier of social identity

A primary characteristic of sociological debate is the understanding that persons are lodged within networks of relationships with others; more to the point, these networks are relationships of power. Fundamental aspects of social identity are therefore matters of structuring systematic patterns of relationships, and matters of learning – both ways in which 'societies progress or become more civilized' (Preston 1997:27).

High bourgeois optimism, as signified by the leonine patriarch and his genuflecting family on the R50, occupies a central – if not pivotal – position in the systematically patterned fantasy of an ideal South African society. But middle-class structures of stability and education contend with configurations of identity that challenge from below and press down from above. Baines (1998:8) states that social identities are 'especially fluid' in the new South Africa and argues for the freedom of individuals to identify with groups other than their own. To this purpose, the 1992 series offers a range of social personae and networks of power from which citizens can pick and choose in order to renegotiate their position in an altered South African society.

Networks of gender may be regarded as critical *commitments* (Preston 1997:25) in the identity of nation. The animals depicted on the notes, with the exception of the lion, remain enigmatically sexless and are therefore able to signify a rich set of gendered alternatives. Ranging from the lion pride, a typical patriarchal system, to an ascetic androgyne on the R200, the gender identity of the nation is a remarkably imaginative construct. Within this fluidity, women are seemingly offered choices ranging from dedicated caregivers on the R10 to sublime fashion statements on the R200; however, these choices are – potentially – also available to men. It should be borne in mind, however, that not all *personae*

are equal; the employment of a hierarchy in the narrative of the 1992 series is a critical factor in the interpretation of its meaning for the *authenticity* of the national citizen: it follows that while all five animals are 'for our example', some are more exemplary than others and one represents the most perfect, the most sublime condition of all.

As an expression of the sublime – that which is astoundingly beautiful, extreme or exalted (Allen 2000:1402) – the ideal citizen of the imagined nation, as depicted on the R200, pays scant attention to the networks and relationships of society; leopards shun companionship (Hare & Lambert 1993:8) and do not tolerate intrusion into their range. Often referred to as the 'Prince of Darkness' this exalted being has a reputation for wanton killing and elicits fear and dread. Yet, despite their fierceness, leopards are considered symbols of wisdom (Big Five [sa]; Leopard [sa]a), thus providing a ready metaphor for the ascetic and self-absorbed intellectual. Tellingly, Paul Johnson (1989:342) regards the latter as sinister and dangerous because intellectuals generate 'irrational and destructive courses of action' for the communities in which they find favour.[18]

If the South African nation selects the intellectual as its most perfect social construct, the choice is not unique in the history of nations. Johnson (1989) examines the phenomenon in France, Germany, Britain and the United States of America. It is of interest that the secular intellectual emerged in Europe during the eighteenth century when 'men arose to assert that they could diagnose the ills of society and cure them with their own unaided intellects ... [T]hey were not servants and interpreters of the gods but substitutes' (Johnson 1989: 1-2). This profile of *the perfect being as model* finds a notable parallel in Chipkin's iteration of the metaphysical beliefs surrounding South Africa's current president, Thabo Mbeki. The latter, states Chipkin (2007:9), has acquired 'a mysterious and sublime quality'; the result is that the presidency and the government have been transformed 'into quasi-religious objects that endure all torments and survive with *immaculate beauty*' (emphasis added).[19]

As pointed out previously, the god-like status of a nation's leader is not an exceptional condition (Smith 2003:35); however, what is specific to the 1992 series is the placement of this perfect being in a prescriptive hierarchy. The lowest and therefore the most widely circulated denomination at the time of its release, the R10 offers a social *persona* – the rhinoceros – that embodies sexual and maternal love, but has 'the reputation of being dim of vision as well of wit' (Hare & Redmond 1994:248). The leopard and the rhinoceros thus stand at opposite poles, and in more than just their intellect. The leopard, in contrast to the rhinoceros, has excellent vision. The rhinoceros hovers on the brink of extinction (Rhinoceros [sa]), while the leopard has shown a remarkable ability to survive, and even thrive, in an increasingly urban environment (Hare & Lambert 1993:10). The rhinoceros is described as 'massive, heavily muscled ... almost prehistoric' and covered in 'wartlike bumps' (Hare & Redmond 1994:235, 241); conversely, popular texts on leopards employ descriptors such as 'soft', 'beautiful' (Leopard [sa]a), 'elegant', 'lithe' and 'sleek' (Hare & Lambert 1993:1). While the rhinoceros doggedly grinds its way through coarse grasses, the leopard – a skilled, omnivorous hunter – enacts a complex ritual in the disembowelling, skinning, eating and storage of its prey. To emphasise their disparate values the R10 depicts a rural and technologically impoverished African scene on its reverse, whilst the R200 proffers global communications and spectacular feats of science and engineering.

Thus, in their overt positioning of these opposing qualities, the banknotes serve a didactic function in the matter of how to 'progress' and become a more 'civilised' nation. Prehistoric, rural peasants are barely tolerated in the community, and must be elevated (if not eradicated) through a process of transformation signified by the graded social constructs of the series: the exalted example of the leopard highlights the inferiority and possible extinction of other groups.[20] Both William Bloom (1993:124) and Jonathan Hearn (2006:

171) point out that, because members of the Third World metropolitan elite are culturally and socially alienated from their proletarian fellow countrypeople, action in these nation-states is more likely to be determined by international behaviour patterns and ideology than by an indigenous identity, which it replaces. Elucidating this trend in a South African context, Chipkin posits forcefully that being an *authentic* member of the South African nation is about being comfortable in the world of commodities (in Krouse 2007:[sp]). Whereas India idealised its peasants in order to stimulate economic growth, the peasant farmer in South Africa (like the hapless rhinoceros) is simply, in Chipkin's words, 'uncool' (in Krouse 2007:[sp]).

The prescriptive narrative – that *immaculate beauty* is a prerequisite for becoming an 'authentic national subject' (Chipkin 2007:14) – is further elaborated by the solitary and self-interested nature of the leopard. This latter condition, aptly captured on the R200, anticipates Chipkin's (2007:109) assertion that, in the current national democratic revolution in South Africa, there is 'no role ... for communal figures [such as] clans, tribes, extended families'. The rhinoceros, depicted as a member of a family group on the R10 and evincing one of the strongest bonds between mother and child in the animal world (Hare & Redmond 1994:252), represents the value that will be (or already has been) sacrificed.

Figure 1. Detail, R200 (obverse) and R10 (obverse). The graphic device of a flower links the highest and lowest denomination.

The notion of eradication and culling – reducing 'whole masses of population [that] are ... inferior in their claim upon the future' (Wells in Carey 1999:368) – is implicit in the principle of the game park, 'that very modern idea of an untouched and pristine Eden' (Rushby 2007:206) and a grounding theme of the 1992 series.

Although genocide is not is made visible, it is implied in the inverse relationship between increasing denominations and the amount of offspring depicted on the notes.[21] Progeny, when depicted on the 1992 South African banknote series, never number more than one per group and dwindle as the denominations increase. On the highest end of the fiscal scale the R200 parades the schizophrenia of the leopard's world, where all relationships that engender life have ceased. This latter narrative can be interpreted as an injunction to the nation to practice birth control (a standard habit in utopia, and, until recently, an almost obsessive concern with regard to less industrialised countries (see Smith 1966:166).

On the other hand, Johnson's criticism of intellectuals stems, in large part, from utopian thinkers' cruel dismissal of their own children. Conceivably, the intellectuals' 'tyranny of ideas' (Johnson 1989:342) urges the nation towards inevitable destruction. But alternatively, within the ever-present Janus-faced context of utopias and banknotes, the allusion to death on the highest denomination of the 1992 series may signify not the tragic demise of the nation but its continual and optimistic regeneration.

Full circle: the birth of a new world

The emphasis of the present discussion has been the examination of the 1992 series in terms of a hierarchal structure, resulting in a linear interpretation of value and meaning. It is important to point out, however, that the series is designed to lead the eye from the R10 to R200 *and then back again* to the R10. Running across the lower right-hand corner of

the R200 is the diagrammatic representation of a flower, a signifier that traditionally denotes optimism, love, fertility and growth; it is identical to the device introducing the theme of agriculture on the R10 (Figure 1).

This deliberate (if covert) circular link between the highest denomination and the lowest, between death and virility, recalls the figure of the *uroboros* – the serpent eating its own tail (Paglia 1990:88; De Rola 1973:14). At once creating and devouring itself, the uroboros is central to the teachings of alchemy in which female and male are combined 'into a unified spiral ... about to produce the seed of mineral and vegetable bodies' (Zolla 1981:43). By repeatedly employing multiple circular devices in its visual arguments (see Groenewald 2006:62-65), the 1992 series strongly suggests that the female principle of gestation supersedes male linearity, focus, aim and directedness (Paglia 1990:19) in South African society. Concerned to offer its audience 'freedom from the spectacle of squalor', the utopian vision of the banknotes can be read as a promise of guilt-free oedipal gratification (Ferns 1999:86). The nation arguably imagines itself as being nurtured in the womb, 'in the process of being made' (Bhabha 1990:3). Supporting this notion is Antony Altbeker (in Jacobsen 2006:16) who repeatedly refers to the South African community as 'a half-made society.'[22] Although Altbeker expresses reservations about the ability of the nation to evince the social, cultural and political integrity necessary for the process of *making* the nation, disciples of alchemy might point out that there is '[n]o generation without corruption' (De Rola 1973:11). The apparent stasis evinced in the narrative of the notes can therefore be read as indicative of a metamorphosis, an invisible period of change, before the 'the birth of a new world' (Mandela in Oakes 1994:529).

Inevitably, as its utopian nature dictates, the overarching signification of the figuration of the 1992 South African banknote series is its ambivalence. Although a remarkable national symbol – a ceasefire of sorts between nature and technology, Europe and Africa, pantheism and Christianity, male and female, violence and tolerance – the narratives on South African banknotes remain trapped in the stasis of Bhabha's time-lag, a caesura that has, at the time of writing, reached the end of its useful life for some.[23] Others, encouraged by what they perceive to be the supreme neutrality of the series – a parallel to the anodyne euro – are inclined to support tenure for the 'animal notes' as a tool to engender nation*ness*.[24]

Notes

1 The technical name for the 1992 series is 'C.L. Stals — Second Issue' after the governor of the Reserve Bank whose signature appears on the notes. For reasons of clarity, this text refers to this issue as the '1992 South African banknote series' since the first note of this series was issued in 1992. For the purposes of this discussion, *banknote* is spelt thus, except where the term appears as *bank note* in a direct quote.

2 Bill Ashcroft (2001:7-13) points out that *post-colonial* is a 'hotly contested term.' While acknowledging the discredited 'spectre of linearity' suggested by the hyphen, I accept that 'post-colonialism' refers to the situation in a society 'after colonialism' and use this spelling, except where the word *postcolonial* appears in a direct quote.

3 In the 1980s, a dispute broke out as to the identity of the man portrayed on South African currency (Engelbrecht 1987:115; He is genuine 1986:5). The likelihood exists that the portrait is not of Van Riebeeck but of one Bartlomeus Vermuyden-Kettingh. *Obverse* refers to the so-called 'front' of a banknote that carries the signature of the Governor of the Reserve Bank.

4 It is beyond the scope of the article to address the appearance and signification of South African paper currency prior to 1992 in any detail. It can be briefly noted

that, as early as the 1920s, themes such as industry, engineering and agriculture are in evidence on the obverse of notes issued by the South African Reserve Bank. From the 1950s onwards these areas of national endeavour appear with greater regularity on the reverse of denominations. Wildlife is depicted on the obverse of Gooden's ten pound note in 1958, but the theme is discarded after decimalisation. Esterhuysen's deliberately modernist designs in the early 1980s consolidate the binary pattern of a historical Van Riebeeck *versus* technological 'progress.' See Van Rensburg (2002).

5 While it may appear that the Reserve Bank decided to jettison Van Riebeeck, it is of interest that his removal was not part of the brief issued to de Jong; on the contrary, the client made it a non-negotiable condition of the tender that Van Riebeeck remain. According to de Jong (2002), the graphic design team felt unable to comply with this injunction. In an imaginative act of persuasive rhetoric, de Jong responded to the tender by presenting the client with *two* sets of designs: the first dutifully featured Van Riebeeck's portrait; the second, unsolicited, proffered animals as signifiers of nation. The directive to retain Van Riebeeck was issued by the Executive State President PW Botha; Van Riebeeck's removal was agreed to by a government led by Botha's successor, FW de Klerk. In his account of the design presentation to cabinet, de Jong (2002) relates that de Klerk, sensing that he was being given sharp political advice, made it clear that graphic designers should restrict their arguments to the creative sphere. No enthusiasm was displayed for the animal notes during the presentation itself, and the Reserve Bank subsequently underplayed (if not entirely obscured) the role of any graphic designer in the origination of the 1992 series. De Jong (2002) does not deny the potentially problematic narrative of big game hunting inherent in the 1992 series, but points out that, in 1989, wildlife was preferable to Van Riebeeck, and had the additional advantage of helping to persuade a hostile government – that counted many big game hunters amongst its members – to relinquish a symbol that was not only inappropriate, but inflammatory. Despite the designers' fears of protests from animal rights activists, the notes were received by South Africans with apparent equanimity.

6 See footnote 4.

7 The notion of the 'imagined nation' famously owes its origins to Benedict Anderson's (1993) seminal text, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*.

8 De Jong, as well as his fellow designers, believes that the value of the animal designs remains their perceived neutrality (Cunningham 2005). The Deputy Director of Currency at the Reserve Bank, Dirk Putter (2006), when asked why the notes had been retained for so long, gave as the main reason the social, cultural and political neutrality of the designs. Although this article sets out to counter these perceptions, the author concedes that the apathy of South Africans with regard to the visual figurations on their paper money provides support for Putter's premise. That neutrality in itself is politically expedient, and possibly not even desirable in the project of nation, is a point of debate beyond the scope of this article.

9 Advocates of utopia and those of nationalism tend to regard themselves as standing on opposite sides of an ideological fence; the former find it difficult to concede, for example, the utopian nature of the writings of Adolf Hitler (Goodwin & Taylor 1982:235-237), while the latter seek to avoid an association with 'projects for social change that are considered impossible' (Marcuse 1970: 63).

10 The concept of *heterotopia* is perhaps most readily associated with the writings of Michel Foucault who sets out his six principles of heterotopia in *Of other spaces* (1967).

11 The latent Christian symbolism on South African currency designs preceding the 1992 series deserves attention, for example Van Riebeeck's more than passing resem-

blance to popular depictions of Christ.

12 See footnote 11.

13 Allan Mann (2006) argues that medieval bestiary methodology can be applied in a contemporary context as a descriptor of a nation's identity.

14 A review of totemism (including its ambivalent status in anthropology) is beyond the scope of the present discussion, which would, however, be amiss were it not to acknowledge the relevance of the concept for the 1992 series. See Paul (1992:10-30) and Mitchell (1998:77-85). Studies of animal symbolism remain vulnerable to accusations of anthropomorphism despite overwhelming evidence that Aristotle's beliefs, however spurious, remain an essential ingredient of popular – and not so popular – human culture. Mawkish sentimentalism is also only one aspect of this phenomenon; animals are regularly called upon to represent less than 'noble' human qualities, and not only by sports teams. The trademark for the newly established University of Johannesburg features a small bird species deliberately chosen for its perceived qualities of self-serving tenacity and fierce aggression (the bird is not unique to the region or even the continent of Africa). The design links two quasi-heraldic birds and an open book – an apt example of the device of the medieval bestiary carried into a twenty-first century, scholarly paradigm.

15 Archbishop Desmond Tutu is usually credited with coining the phrase, presumably drawing on the Old Testament story of the flood where the rainbow symbolises God's promise not to pass further judgement on humankind (Baines 1998:1). The metaphor is used in an expanded version by Tutu in a 1999 publication, *The rainbow people of God: a spiritual journey from apartheid to freedom*. This 'divine spark' inherent in the rainbow metaphor, mostly ignored by commentators, concerns Chipkin (2007:185) who points out that by defining them as members of a world religious community, South Africans are denied a unique identity: they are 'merely instances of humanity, indistinguishable from anyone else.'

16 A *necklace* is a rubber tyre filled with petrol and forced over the victim's head and shoulders; the tyre is then set alight (Oakes 1994:487).

17 Tellingly, the *Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa* refers to the event as 'a day of peace' (Oakes 1994: 529), underscoring an exceptional rather than ongoing condition of nation.

18 It is of interest that *The new Penguin English dictionary* (Allan 2000:729) equates intellectuals with sexual promiscuity. Smith (1991:94) notes that critics have seized on the seminal role of the intellectuals to explain the errors of nationalism. For an unrelenting condemnation of intellectuals from Rousseau to Chomsky, see Johnson (1989).

19 The R200, virtually unseen and unused by ordinary citizens during the first ten years following its release, has become increasingly familiar to the general public in recent years.

20 Dr Heinz Witz (2005) speculates that the R10 note might disappear at the issue of a future series and that a new super-note – a R500 – may emerge.

21 Chipkin (2007:59) reminds the reader that the first democratic election in South Africa took place in the same year as the Rwandan genocide; this latter incident led to concerns regarding the wisdom of a *rainbow nation* and the limits of tolerance and cultural diversity in South Africa.

22 Altbeker was short-listed for the Alan Paton award for his study on crime and policing in South Africa (Jacobsen 2006:16).

23 Heinz Witz (2005), for example, strongly advocates change; he has been active in launching design competitions to stimulate awareness of the necessity for, as well as the possible nature of, this change.

24 Dirk Putter (2006/02/12) hints strongly at the possibility that South African paper currency may follow the route of the American dollar on which security features are updated but where the iconography remains the same.

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