Afterword: Orania as Settler Self-Transfer

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This commentary discusses the photographic evidence presented in the Photo Feature, in this issue's cover, and an article on Orania published in 2006 in *Anthropology South Africa*.[1] F. C. de Beer's piece constitutes an extended apology of Orania and is here discussed as a settler colonial document.

The fall of Apartheid was not unexpected; indeed, the possibility of losing control had haunted for decades the imagination of Afrikanerdom. By the end of the 1980s Afrikaner concerns over the possibility of preserving political autonomy in a future multiracial South Africa had prompted increased reflection on the possibility and advisability of establishing an Afrikaner separate sovereign entity: a *volkstaat*. In the context of a growing debate, a private company (*Orania Bestuursdienste*) was set up as a means to acquire real estate for the purpose of establishing a segregated community of Afrikaners. When *Orania Bestuursdienste* purchased it in 1991, Orania was a semi-abandoned settlement: during the 1960s it had been part of a Department of Water Affairs irrigation project but work had been discontinued in 1979 and many residents had subsequently left. Shortly after the original purchase by *Orania Bestuursdienste*, the remaining inhabitants were relocated elsewhere. Their claims would be eventually settled in 2005. Now, de Beer notes, only 'white people live in Orania'.[2]

Nearby properties were added in later years; perhaps one day, de Beer fantasises, this inland Northern Cape Province settlement will extend westward to the Atlantic Ocean. Orania has a flag and issues a local currency. However, as Orania seeks autonomy within

the context of the South African institutional framework, the attitude is ostensibly non-confrontational. Likewise, the authorities of post-apartheid South Africa have developed a non-interference policy towards Orania.

At first, de Beer sets out to contextualise the Orania enterprise in the context of minority and even indigenous struggles elsewhere (he refers, for example, to the International Labour Organization Convention 169, which promotes 'the right of indigenous or aboriginal groups').[3] He then performs a similar discursive move in relation to South African realities:

> funding for the Forum of the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC) and the *Volkstaatraad* by the newly-elected ANC government, gave rise to expectations of some measure of self-determination [for Afrikaners]. However, these expectations are increasingly being countered by provisions in the Constitution and by policy and statutory measures to enforce equality and to prohibit discrimination. Because of this dualistic approach to policy by the government and the uncertainty that the application of its policy has created among minority groups in South Africa, people such as those in Orania and Kleinfontein near Pretoria in Gauteng Province of South Africa see no alternative but to establish their own form of autonomy, however rudimentary, in an area which they purchased themselves.[4]

References to indigeneity and minority status, however, are only accessory to de Beer's primary claim: Orania can only be understood if it is placed in the wider context of Afrikaner history. Seen in this light, Orania is, de Beer argues, an inherently Afrikaner response. An identification with Afrikaner history is ubiquitous in Orania, as conveyed, for example, by the narrative that underpins Orania's monumental park (see this issue's cover): on the one hand, the *veld* is personified as the heterotopic locale from which the inhabitants of Orania are coming, on the other, a collection of founding ideological

fathers appear in chronological order. In front of all this, the kid symbolising Orania is a youngster about to start his work, while Orania itself lies below, the final outcome of a narrative sequence.

However, if Orania is to be contextualised in Afrikaner history, the whole enterprise is premised on a very specific conception of it. Two elements are prominent in de Beer's reconstruction. On the one hand, the post-Apartheid dispensation is perceived to be nothing new, and Afrikaner attempts to rationalise a multiracial political order have repeatedly stressed that, *again*, Afrikaners were under 'foreign' domination. On the other, an identification with a specific narrative of Afrikaner history is accompanied by a fundamental critique: it is the incapacity to free itself from reliance on 'foreign' labour that has doomed Afrikanerdom to foreign domination. As authority, de Beer quotes a Freedom Front publication's summation of Afrikaner history and predicament:

> The most critical issue is Afrikaners' historical inability, since 1658, to do things on their own, without predominance of foreign labour. That resulted in foreign political domination. As long as dependence in economic and other spheres continues, the degree of self-determination that can be achieved will be too limited to be of any significance [...] State formation depends on the will of Afrikaners to free themselves from entwinement through sacrifice, not by moving to another country, but by moving to their own land where development has to be brought about through their own labour.[5]

Thus, Orania is simultaneously about similarity *and* difference: it is similar to previous Afrikaner responses to foreign domination (i.e., it is the result of a renewed decision to move to the frontier), and it constitutes a radical departure from previous experience (i.e., Afrikaner reliance on 'foreign' labour must come to an end). These two registers comprehensively shape Orania's existence.

They especially shape its governance, which is structured around two fundamental organising principles. Firstly, the awareness

that the successful staging of a settler pioneer re-enactment can only be organised through a closely supervised effort.[6] Management can confer or withdraw the right to reside. De Beer describes how *Vluytjeskraal Aandeleblok Beperk*, *Orania Bestuursdienste*'s subsidiary, enforces a comprehensive system of corporate governance:

> All residential property in Orania is shared and no title deeds are available. Full title, however, is available on agricultural land. One becomes a shareholder through the selection process. Any dispute between shareholders or between a shareholder and the company is referred to mediation, and ultimately to arbitration if the dispute is not solved during the mediation process.[7]

Moreover, *Vluytjeskraal Aandeleblok*'s constitution clearly states that once a person and his or her family have been approved by a selection committee, they become subject 'to the jurisdiction of the Board of Directors of *Vluytjeskraal Aandeleblok* or its authorised representatives'.[8] It is a centralised operation; management is in charge.

Secondly, the consciousness that a fundamental departure from Afrikaner history can only be secured through a rigid observation of the '"people's own labour" principle' (*volkseie arbeid*). According to de Beer's definition, *volkseie arbeid* 'requires that people should do their own work or should only make use of fellow Afrikaners as workers'. It is 'not only recommended', he notes; it 'is applied in practice without exception'. Thus, while local residents must perform all labour, *volkseie arbeid* can also confer or withdraw the right to reside: 'Anyone who applies for citizenship in Orania must observe the "people's own" labour rule. Non-compliance means disqualification to stay in Orania'.[9] In other words, an Afrikaner sovereign entity must be premised on enacting a localised 'conquest of labour'. If, as recently demonstrated by Gabriel Piterberg in *Returns of Zionism*, important sectors of the Zionist movement had looked at South Africa for inspiration and guidance in carrying out their localised conquest of labour in pre-Israel Palestine, Orania is premised on a conscious or unwitting attempt to learn from Zionist

practice (Orania also imports advanced irrigation techniques from Israel, not only an exclusionary labour ideology).[10]

In the end, an inflexible system of corporate governance and the 'rigid and consistent application of the labour rule', which means that poorer Orania residents are being systematically exploited by richer ones, have prompted accusations of 'monopolistic' control and unfair treatment. As there is no avenue for recourse and the only way out is to move out (again), 'even staunch believers in a *volkstaat* have left Orania' (de Beer thus mentions the absolute need to 'recruit a higher quality of labourer').[11]

And yet, I would like to suggest that, as well as a reflex steeped in Afrikaner history, Orania is also an inherently settler colonial response. In *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (2010), I argued that settler colonialism and transfer are intimately connected and that if colonialism can be defined as exogenous domination for the purpose of exploitation, settler colonialism can be defined as exogenous domination for the purpose of transfer.[12] Orania fits in with this interpretative framework. This enterprise is especially premised on transfer: the prerequisite transfer of prior inhabitants, for example, and the transfer of settlers to a specific locale. More generally, references of Afrikaners as being indigenous to the land, a claim that opens de Beer's account, are also an instance of a type of transfer that I have called 'settler indigenisation' (relatedly, the very perception of post-Apartheid South Africa as a reiteration of 'foreign' domination is premised on yet another transfer: according to this characterisation Black South Africans are "foreigners", and therefore not indigenous to southern Africa). Crucially, if it is a vision of post-Apartheid South Africa as subject to 'foreign' domination that prompts the transfer of settlers into a 'demarcated area', the fundamental critique of Afrikaner history that underpins the whole Orania enterprise also ends in transfer. It is the need to be free from 'entwinement' between settler and indigenous person that prompts the establishment of a self-segregated community. Orania is a settlement.

Most importantly, the very dynamic underpinning the origins and development of the Orania project constitutes a characteristically settler colonial progression. De Beer refers to founder of Orania Carel Boshoff's 'prophetic vision to lead a group of

Afrikaners away from a stressful situation', and that stress, prophecy, and displacement are recurrent and typical settler colonial refrains should be emphasised.[13] At the same time, Orania should not be seen as a throwback or an aberration. It is not in the global context of minority struggles for self-determination that it should be understood. On the contrary, Orania should be seen as a settler colonial response and part of a global movement towards segregated sovereign enclaves supervised by communities' acceptance committees.[14] Of course, there remains one crucial difference: if the golden age of 'settlerism' was characterised by people deciding to 'move out' and establishing themselves on a variety of frontiers, the current dispensation is characterised by people 'moving in'.[15]

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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NOTES

[1] F. C. de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility or Dawn of Afrikaner Self-Determination: An Exploratory Ethno-Historical investigation of Orania', *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 29, 3-4 (2006), pp. 105-114.
[2] de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 110.
[3] de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 105.
[4] de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 106.
[5] J. C. Jooste, *Afrikaner Claims to Self-Determination: Reasons, Validity and Feasibility* (Pretoria: Freedom Front, 2002), pp. 72-73; quoted by de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 110.
[6] On re-enactment as an important manifestation of a settler colonial consciousness, see Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb (eds), *Settler and Creole Re-Enactment* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[7] de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 111.
[8] Quoted in de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 111.
[9] de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 110.
[10] See Gabriel Piterberg, The *Returns of Zionism* (London: Verso, 2008), especially pp. 76-77, and an article by Zachary Lockman forthcoming in the next issue of *settler colonial studies*.
[11] de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 110.
[12] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[13] de Beer, 'Exercise in Futility', p. 113.
[14] See, for example, Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk (eds), *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism* (New York: The New Press, 2007). On South African gated communities, see D. Hook, M. Vrdoljak, 'Gated Communities, Heterotopia

and a "Rights" of Privilege: A "Heterotopology" of the South African Security-Park', *Geoforum*, 33, 2002, pp. 195–219.

[15] On 'settlerism', see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), especially pp. 153-165.