

# Shifting Selves: Post-apartheid Essays On Mass Media, Culture And Identity

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## An appeal for principled symmetry: Anthropologies in South Africa and elsewhere

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*This article summarises and elaborates the author's arguments as presented in the round table on 'Perspectives on "Doing Anthropology" in Contemporary South Africa' that was held during the ASnA conference in Cape Town, on December 5, 2006. It is suggested, by way of personal reflection, that some of the ethical, methodological and theoretical challenges of 'doing anthropology' in post-apartheid South Africa can productively be met by a pre-theoretical commitment to 'principled symmetry'. This commitment is also helpful in addressing the questions 'Is "relevance" still relevant?' and 'How to engage public culture and the postcolonial state?'*

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When preparing for my participation in the round table on 'Perspectives on "Doing Anthropology" in Contemporary South Africa', convened and chaired by Heike Becker during the annual conference of *Anthropology Southern Africa* in December 2006, my attention was arrested by a particular expression in the convenor's suggestions for discussion which had been posted in advance: 'The question I suggest is how to further the nascent debate about the ethical, epistemological and methodological challenges and opportunities of "doing anthropology" as *citizen anthropologists in southern Africa*' (Becker 2006:57; emphasis added). Being an anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in southern Africa (Zambia and South Africa), but who has a German passport, this sentence was apparently not directed at me. It was, so I assumed, certainly not expected from me to demonstrate a 'sense of possibility' (Carrithers 2005) by putting myself into the shoes of South African anthropologists and starting to talk in *their* tongues.

But while reflecting on the notion of the 'citizen anthropologist' (Cheater 1987; Becker, Boonzaier and Owen 2005), I came across two recent articles in the monthly newsletter of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) which dealt with the *Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security & Intelligence Communities* and which forcefully reminded me that the question of what it means to do anthropology in southern Africa cannot be divorced from what it means to do anthropology in general.

Established in July 2006, the above commission is in charge of advising the AAA on matters pertaining to the 'ethical, methodological and practical political challenges faced by the discipline and the AAA in its current and future engagement in intelligence national security agencies for the increasing numbers of AAA members who are not citizens of the US' (Fleuhr Lobban and Heller 2007:4), and,

most important for my argument in this paper, 'Are we to develop principles and standards that are *as international as they are national*?' (ibid.; emphasis added).

I would not hesitate to answer the latter question in the affirmative because anthropologists commonly act as transnationals: they pursue research and/or publication trajectories across state borders and normally are, in the parlance of migration studies, simultaneously incorporated into a variety of transnational social fields (cf Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Therefore, according to my understanding, anthropological principles and standards with regard to ethics, methodologies and theories should truly be 'as international as they are national'.

How does this reflect back on the question of what it means to do anthropology as a 'citizen anthropologist in southern Africa'? As I see it, the lesson to be learned from the above is that anthropologies in southern Africa should be just like those elsewhere (cf Quinlan 2000). If we agree that it is desirable that there should be no specific principles and standards for American anthropologists when doing 'anthropology abroad', as distinct from doing it 'at home', then the same should hold true for anthropologists of other nationalities: in a nutshell, I find it important that we do not switch ethical codes, methodologies or theories when crossing state borders – for example, from the US or Germany to South Africa, or from South Africa to Zimbabwe and back. To do so would mean (re)introducing asymmetries into the social sciences that have proved ethically, politically and epistemologically questionable: it would imply brushing aside what can be reckoned to be one of the most commendable motions in anthropology, namely the realisation that it is appropriate to blur disciplinary boundaries between anthropology and sociology and therefore to study 'them' like 'us', and vice versa.

My considerations so far can be summarised as an appeal to principled symmetry, which, in a manner of speaking, aims at the academic naturalisation of 'expatriate anthropologists' by placing the same demands on them as on 'citizen anthro-

1. In talking about 'theories' in this paper, I do not mean what Bruce Knauft has recently called the 'Holy Grail of grand Theory' but subscribe to what he calls a 'softer theoreticism' (2006:413) which 'pursues mid level connections by linking in individual facets of large scale theories, topics, and methods to particular but not entirely local objects of study' (ibid.:411).

, English, Book, Illustrated edition: *Shifting selves: post-apartheid essays on mass media, culture, and identity* / edited by Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs. The political and social changes in South Africa since the early nineties have had a profound and unexpected effect on culture and on people's identities. *Mass. Shifting selves: post-apartheid essays on mass media, culture and identity* / edited by Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs. *Ecquid Novi - Shifting Selves. Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs (eds.). *Shifting selves: post-apartheid essays on mass media, culture and identity. Responsibility: edited by Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs. Edition: 1st ed. Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture & Identity (Social Identities South Africa Series) by Stephanie Marlin-Curiel, Jane Battersby. The Paperback of the Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture & Identity by Stephanie Marlin-Curiel, Jane Battersby. to Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity, South African fiction after apartheid, refer to South Africa as 'a society whose. Shifting selves: Post-apartheid essays on mass media, culture, and identity. H Wasserman, S How good is the South African media for democracy? S Jacobs. Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town. Verified 82, Shifting selves: Post-apartheid essays on mass media, culture and identity. Not white enough, not black enough: racial identity in the South African (Eds.), Shifting selves: post-apartheid essays on mass media, culture and identity (pp. Popular Culture as Political Communication An Introduction. Javnost-The Shifting Selves: Postapartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity. Yariv Tsfati, Why Do People Trust Media Pre-Election Polls? Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture, and Identity (Cape Town: Kwela, . Mapping a Youth Culture in Motion Christine Henseler. WORKS Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity. Ed. Herman .*

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