

# Of Shorelines, Borderlines and Shipwrecks in Justin Fox's *The Marginal Safari: Scouting the Edge of South Africa*

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## Abstract

Justin Fox's *The Marginal Safari: Scouting the Edge of South Africa* (2010) is a travelogue which takes the entire South African borderline as its setting. The book relates a six week long one man trip around South Africa's border which Fox embarks on during the winter of 2004. His 'journey was along that confusing strip where South Africa surrendered to the biological Other and became ocean' (2010:27). Fox's exploration of South Africa's turbulent maritime history which first opened her up for trade and eventually colonisation shows that the sea and land exist in a complex symbiotic-parasitic relation. Shorelines for Fox are 'permeable zones where inter-tidal critters, animals, plants and birds of both realms reside' (2010:27). I argue that although Fox's travelogue is one man's search for identity along South Africa's margins, especially the shorelines, the narrative also rehearses the fluidity of the national project for new identities in the post-apartheid environment. I also argue that Fox's obsession with the stories of salvaging wrecked ships is a metaphor for his quest for what it means to be white in the post-apartheid state. Fox's narrative demonstrates that South Africa's margins, be they land borders or shore lines, mimic the ocean in that they are in 'flux and contested' (2010:69), and as Margaret Cohen has observed, to 'survive in such spaces of dynamic, incomplete, expanding knowledge requires consummate skill in the arts of action' (2010:660). Since Fox himself calls his circumnavigation a 'record of an evolving relationship with the land' (2010:49), this enables me to point out that the transitional South

Africa that Fox depicts in his narrative, like Cohen's sea, can be seen as a space of vibrancy, incompleteness and knowledge expansion requiring a continuous search for new ways of being.

**Keywords:** Justin Fox, Shorelines, borderlines, travelogue, identity, whiteness, post-apartheid literature, ecology.

Justin Fox's *The Marginal Safari: Scouting the Edge of South Africa* (2010) which is divided into three sections titled, 'East Coast', 'The Border Run' and 'West Coast', relates a six-week long one-man trip around South Africa's shoreline and border which the author embarked on during the winter of 2004. Starting from Cape Town where he lives beside a lighthouse when not travelling, Fox heads northeast 'hugging the east coast as far as Mozambique' (2010: 14). He stays very close to the coast and avoids the well-trodden national and regional roads as much as he can. The coastline is interesting to Fox because he thinks of it largely in metaphorical terms. He calls it a frontier whose boundary is 'never fixed and [where] border disputes over territory and taxes continue forever: the sea getting the upper hand at high tide, the land making its point at low water' (2010:27). Reaching Kosi Bay where South Africa shares a border with Mozambique, Fox then grudgingly heads inland as the South African coastline ends. He however sticks to South Africa's borderline as much as roads will allow.

Interestingly, for Fox, borderlines resemble the shoreline because '[f]rontiers are seldom distinct boundary lines but rather territories, often in flux and contested. It's where rival societies interpenetrate and compete, sometimes peacefully, often violently' (2010:69). For him, borderlands are 'fundamentally places of change', spaces where 'one's culture is confronted with alternative ideas, where one is forced into the imagination, picturing other possibilities' (2010: 128). Moving along South Africa's borders with Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia allows Fox to think of conservational efforts through national parks and the recent establishment of transnational frontier parks. He travels along the South African-Botswana and the South Africa-Namibia borders until he reaches the Atlantic coast at Alexander Bay. Filled with trepidation at meeting his ailing father, he sticks to the shipwreck littered South African west coast as he heads back for Cape

Town. The imminent death of his architect father, who has just been diagnosed with terminal cancer, casts a long shadow on the expedition, but also provides Fox with a theme which he expertly threads into the existential concerns of his travelogue. His father is also seen in terms of the shoreline or borderline. Fox feels that, literally and metaphorically speaking, his father largely determines who he is. He writes: 'My dad and his *patria* were always one, even in bad years' (2010:70). Unlike his father's unwavering patriotism to both the old and new imagined South African nation, Fox sees himself as belonging to a white generation that is 'more questioning, unsure about where to fit in' (2010:70). Using what I have called, after Blumenberg (1997), the metaphors of the perilous sea voyage, I argue that in *The Marginal Safari*, Fox grapples with questions of belonging and alienation that afflict him as a privileged white South African. While Fox's entire narrative may be seen as structured by the metaphors of seafaring and the littoral, it is especially in the travelogue's two sections titled, 'East Coast' and 'West Coast', that Fox seems to think more intensely about his identity and the future of South Africa in relation to shipwrecks and ship salvaging, surfing the sea waves, conservation of the littoral flora and fauna and other broader ecological concerns.

Fox's travelogue is part of an emerging post-1994 South African subgenre which in Pratt's terms can be called 'an anti-conquest narrative' (2008:38). Similarly, William Dicey's *Borderline* (2004) is another travelogue which seems to fit into this category. Starting from the whites only South African town of Orania, Dicey and his two friends canoe all the way to the mouth of the Orange River in the Atlantic Ocean. While clearly mimicking Robert Gordon's 1779 journey of discovery, Dicey's narrative tries to subvert the discredited patronising colonial travellers' gaze by jettisoning its totalising tendencies. Dicey's travelogue attempts to recover the marginalised histories of the indigenous populations as they encountered the coloniser around the Orange River. Mary Campbell (1988:7) argues that in the case of the Americas, European journeys of discovery were dangerously allied with the extermination of the indigenous populations. Dicey's and Fox's narratives also acknowledge the same about the history of South Africa as they self-consciously set out to debunk the 'overtly imperial articulations of conquest, conversion, territorial appropriation, and enslavement' (Pratt 2008:38) that were eulogised in most of the nineteenth century

Europeans' travelogues about Southern Africa. Among other things, in *The Marginal Safari*, Fox addresses South Africa's apartheid past through the lens of a rapidly globalising post-apartheid environment. By its focus on littoral ecology and the conservation of South Africa's flora and fauna, Fox's narrative suggests that post-1994 South Africa has to confront the political legacies of apartheid in the complex context of global concerns about conservation and sustainable use of earth's natural resources. The book attempts to offer what Debbie Lisle has called a 'cosmopolitan vision' (2006:4) because Fox tries to dispense with apartheid and colonial stereotypes in his encounters with what he views as strange. The travelogue explores the disquieting legacies of the apartheid past and in many ways offers a criticism of the colonial travelogues which participated in the process of conquest through their claims of exploration and 'discoveries'. By doing this, Fox seems to acknowledge the fact that 'no work on travel can exclude the important matter of subject formation, ideology, and imperialism [for doing that would be to] reiterate imperial gestures of unreflexive objective, anthropological, and scientific representation' (Grewal 1996: 2).

Lisle suggests that despite the self-conscious effort of the travel writer to be apolitical, travelogues are always subtle political acts. She argues that 'travelogues express political commitments that are barely visible beyond their received status as minor literary genre' (2006:1). In this light, my essay explores how Fox reflects on the epistemologies and power systems embedded in the very practice of the kind of journey that he undertakes and the practice of travel writing. I argue that in a number of ways Fox can be seen as smuggling in 'judgemental accounts of otherness *under the guise* of equality, tolerance and respect for difference' (Lisle 2006:10; emphasis in the original) just like his colonial predecessors. Utilising Tabish Khair's keen observation that definitions of both travel and travel writing emphasise the notion of exploration and that this idea itself is 'embedded in a distinctive cultural and historical experience: that of the European age of expansion and colonization stretching from the fifteenth century to the twentieth' (2006: 5), I point out that Fox's book inscribes itself in the colonial travelogues' representational problematics in subtle but disturbing ways. Grewal argues that 'travel is a metaphor that ... became an ontological discourse central to the relations between Self and Other,

between different forms of alterity [and] between nationalisms ... races, and classes' (1996: 2). Fox claims that his travelogue is 'almost the opposite of traditional travel writing' (2010:71) because he is writing about his own land or his father's land. He observes that in traditional travel writing that concerns foreign lands the task is simple because '[s]tereotypes congeal readily, national traits reveal themselves unbidden, the narrative writes itself' (2010:71). This suggests a tenuous awareness that by embarking on his circumnavigation of South Africa and the very act of writing a travelogue in a way positions Fox as an outsider to the land he claims as his own. Despite its overt disclaimers, Fox's narrative is plagued by the kind of problematic depiction that in nineteenth century travelogues sought to present a natural history of Southern Africa devoid of indigenous people and structured communities. Debbie Lisle argues that 'travel writing is profoundly *uncritical* literary formation' (2006: 261, emphasis in the original). As we will see, most problems in Fox's narrative are not a result of an 'uncritical' writer but rather of a writer who uses an 'uncritical literary formation'.

Although Fox's journey is on dry land, his whole narrative is structured by what Fox sees as the inextricable link of the sea to the land. Fox seems to utilise what Margaret Cohen has called 'terraqueous geographies' (2010: 658) as existential metaphors for his privileged white self's 'sea voyage' in a seemingly uncertain and perilous democratic South Africa. Fox seems to suggest that the identity crises that he experiences in post-1994 are both racialised and gendered, stemming from his peculiar status as a male, privileged white South African. In reading *The Marginal Safari* we confront what Hans Blumenberg calls the use of the sea as a paradigm of a metaphor for existence. Blumenberg observes: 'Humans live their lives and build their institutions on dry land. Nevertheless, they seek to grasp the movement of their existence above all through a metaphoric of the perilous sea voyage' (1997:7). Fox's book is propelled, both consciously and unconsciously, by what Blumenberg calls the two prior assumptions that determine the burden of meaning carried by 'the metaphoric of seafaring and shipwreck: first, the sea as a naturally given boundary of the realm of human activities, second, its demonization as the sphere of the unreckonable and lawless, in which it is difficult to find one's bearing' (1997:8). *The Marginal Safari* employs the sea and seafaring iconography to understand

how Fox as a privileged white South African man fits or relates to the perceived fluidity of post-1994 South African national aspirations. Among other things, in grappling with the seemingly unstable self and its place in the evolving nation, Fox's nautical repertoire includes voyaging the open seas, shipwrecks, salvaging, lighthouses, surfing, and concerns about shoreline ecology.

Fox views the coastline as embodying a hybridity and transnationalism that needs to be celebrated when he writes that his 'journey was along that confusing strip where South Africa surrendered to the biological Other and became ocean' (2010:27). Although Fox's book is a travelogue it appropriates literal travel into a metaphor for mobility in order to suggest 'the particular ways in which knowledge of a self, society, and nation was, and is, within [South African] culture, to be understood and obtained' (Grewal 1996: 4). It is the coastline more than the borderline which preoccupies Fox's meditation of his relationship with the past, present and future South Africa. He writes: 'Explorers, hunters, map-makers and missionaries, all headed east, more or less following the coastline' (2010:48). This is a fact acknowledged by Pratt who reports that from 'the beginning of their presence, Europeans in the Cape mounted expeditions to explore the interior' (2010:40). Fox is conscious and uncomfortable with the fact that his narrative seem to rehearse the imperial actions and travelogues of European explorers of bygone eras which are now politically incorrect in the evolving multiracial and democratic South Africa. He therefore tries to dissociate himself from such 'imperial eyes'. As he embarks on his journey in what he views as the still unfolding political and social South African landscape of 2004, Fox evidently wants to align himself to various social groups which may allow his project to be in tune with popular aspirations. That is why he writes that his 'journey also traced the routes of castaways and renegades, slaves and desperados who hugged the shore in search of rescue or freedom' (2010:49). But Fox also wants to be viewed as a cosmopolitan figure hence his identification with the trekboers who fled the Cape 'trying to break the shackles of the colony and find a life beyond the pale' (2010:49). By aligning his eastward journey with these mottled narratives and diverse group, Fox signals a confused relationship with what he calls his 'fatherland, my father's land' (2010:28). But this is a confusion that also purportedly afflicts the post-1994 South African nation as a whole.

Fox is fascinated by maritime history, the shoreline and borderline, assuming that a lot of South Africa's past, present and possibly the future can be better understood from this vantage point. He writes: 'I'll run my tongue along its edge, testing it, probing its crevices. I'll lasso the land, encircle it, kraal it' (2010:56). In embarking on his journey, Fox says that his intention was 'to stick close to the coastline or borderline', 'skimming' the edge 'hoping to meet as many people as possible; taking South Africa's pulse, getting inside its head' (2010:13). In the context in which Fox uses it, the phrase 'South Africa's pulse' suggests not just the constant throbbing of the arteries as blood is sent through them, but also captures the regularity of the sea waves seen from the vantage point of the shore. Fox imagines that the shoreline allows him to stay on the edge, or outside while getting into the centre or inside of things, as it were. His intention is to 'sing the song of marginals, those who aren't embraced by it, the refugees, migrants, outlaws, non-conformist, buitelanders' (2010:56). This allows him to be both spectator and participant in the evolving South Africa which, in Fox's view, was and is being wrought both on the coastline and borderline. Blumenberg points out that there is some pleasure associated with watching the perilous events at sea while standing on the shoreline: '[T]he pleasantness that is said to characterize this sight is not a result of seeing someone suffer but of enjoying the safety of one's standpoint' (1997:26). As we will see, for Fox being on the shoreline and borderline allows him to be a spectator as he is not simply safe from the dangers of the sea but those of the vast inland. His spectatorship derives from his recognition that he is a white South African who has to simultaneously embrace his privilege and also bear witness to conditions of extreme poverty that still afflict a huge segment of his fellow South Africans. This suggests that Fox's position on the figurative shoreline and borderline of largely apartheid facilitated material disadvantage merely offers relative safety because he is implicated and affected by events both at sea and on land. In this regard his position as a spectator is perilous and impure. He is a participant-spectator.

Fox's thinking is clearly structured by the actor-spectator and sea-shore duality. This, in turn, becomes a metaphor for his besieged white self in contemporary South Africa's politics, a politics which was partly wrought by Europe's 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century seafaring explorations leading to the first landing of the Dutch on South Africa's shores and their subsequent inland

trek. For example, as he drives from Cape Town Central Business District onto Settlers Way, the N2, which he would follow ‘hugging the east coast as far as Mozambique’ he mentions that this ‘route symbolises the first steps of the Dutch advance more than three centuries ago’ (2010:14). The name Settlers Way is of course commemorative of the settling of the early white colonialists near the South African shores of modern day Cape Town. Since these settlers came via the sea, the name itself is loaded with metaphors of the sea. The unsettledness of the Europeans was a direct result of being on the turbulent seas which denied them any sense of stability despite the fact that their embarkation seemingly signified Europe’s victory over the seas. Iain Chambers argues that ‘the sea: its liquidity, its seemingly anonymous materiality, resonates with a postrepresentational understanding, an anchorless image loaded with time’ (2010:679). It was only on dry land that the seafaring Europeans thought that they had escaped the perilous instability of the sea. But the Settlers Way stands as an ambivalent figure of stability and the hazards of dry land as well. This paradox is dramatised by the existence of another alternate route to the interior, Voortrekker Road, roughly parallel to Settlers Way. In this sense, these routes simultaneously mark rootedness and rootlessness. The equation of rootedness to stagnation was a dominant and important way of conceptualising human progress during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Blumenberg writes that ‘it would be one of the fundamental ideas of the Enlightenment that shipwreck is the price that must be paid in order to avoid that complete calming of the sea winds that would make all worldly commerce impossible ... pure reason would mean the absence of winds and the motionless of human beings who possess complete presence of mind’ (1997:29). By embarking on his adventure of circumnavigating South Africa, Fox seems to be operating within this Enlightenment paradigm of existence which according to Margaret Cohen views man as *Homo viator* or ‘man the traveller’ (2010:661).

In Fox’s narrative, the rootedness/rootlessness ambivalence of existence is captured by his feeling at home in Cape Town living beside a lighthouse, yet always wanting to be on the road. James Clifford helps us to make sense of Fox’s seemingly paradoxical situation. He observes: ‘“Home” is a crucial category within European travel because it is the space of return and of consolidation of the Self enabled by the encounter with the “Other”’ (1989:178). Fox writes: ‘I left my apartment beside the lighthouse ...



[r]estless, anxious about an uneventful slide into my late thirties, hungry for adventure – or colourful change at least – I have been craving for the road ... Cape Town, for me, has grown predictable. I, too, have grown predictable' (2010:13). It is interesting that the lighthouse did not warn seafarers of the dangers of the treacherous open seas but rather those of coming too close to the dry land. As long as the ship remained voyaging in the open seas it would not run the risk of running aground in shallow waters or being tossed against menacing cliffs. Similarly, Fox's restlessness paradoxically derives from his rootedness. It is movement, embarking on an adventurous journey that he assumes will give him rest. Fox's narrative indicates that although driving on stable land, his journey is haunted by land's connectedness to the unstable sea. But there is yet another metaphorical linkage. Fox's narrative suggests that this sea-land binary is not merely an external phenomenon but it is also an internal state of existence. Tellingly, Fox calls himself a 'nautical type' (2010:78).

Fox's restlessness and his anxiety about living an uneventful existence does not only lead him to his circumnavigation of South Africa but also suggests that he is already embarked. Blumenberg points out that the 'metaphorics of embarkation includes the suggestion that living means already being on high seas, where there is no outcome other than being saved or going down, and no possibility of abstention' (1997:19). That Fox imagines himself to be in the metaphoric high seas is suggested by his avoidance of familiar places in his journey. For example, about Gansbaai where he had spent many holidays with his parents and where some of his relatives still lived, he writes: 'This place was too full of family, too claustrophobic. I needed to trace my own border lines, make my own plot, strike further east' (2010:17). This notion of comparing or contrasting himself with pioneer explorers of earlier centuries attains the level of a motif in Fox's narrative. He writes: 'Unlike many of my predecessors, who traversed an uncharted land, often making discoveries for science, mine was a circumnavigation that would claim no firsts, no discoveries, no acts of bravery' (2010:49). The term 'circumnavigation' is important here since it does not only refer to Fox's journey around South Africa but is also specifically a nautical term which means to sail completely around.

In 1988, as part of his national service, Fox had been a crew member on board a replica caravel, 're-enacting the fifteenth-century voyage of

Bartolomeu Dias from Lisbon to Mossel Bay' (2010:45)<sup>1</sup>. During this coastal trip around South Africa, Fox visits the Mossel Bay maritime museum that commemorates Dias and houses the caravel of their 1988 voyage. Upon seeing the caravel he reports that it took his breath away seeing the vessel up close again. He writes: 'My feelings were conflicted' (2010:46). Interestingly, he is not conflicted because of having participated in a replay of events that do not quite have a narrative space in the post-1994 South Africa, but because on one hand he is 'flooded with happy memories', and on the other hand he mourns the fact that the caravel is 'high and dry, out of her element' (2010:46). It would appear that Fox's whiteness in the post-apartheid South Africa makes him feel out of his element, thus occupying a space very similar to the replica of Bartolomeu Dias' caravel which seems to be out of its element on high and dry land. This is made clear in Fox's subsequent words when he writes: 'Mine was simply a record of an evolving relationship with the land, noting its gifts and perplexities' (2010:49). The irony is that in the new South Africa, Fox is unsettled by what he perceives to be stagnation within an unstimulating environment. Like the replica of Dias' caravel, Fox seems to feel that his white self is 'out of its element'. His journey is therefore a search for a coherent narrative that defines the place and role of a privileged white male South African in post-1994. It is a quest for a new identity. For example, towards the end of his journey Fox imagines himself as having been transformed into the land itself. He writes: 'I am the land .... My sturdy frame is the end and beginning of Africa. I am contained,

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<sup>1</sup> Caravels were much used by the Portuguese for the oceanic exploration voyages during the 15th and 16th centuries during the so-called age of discovery. Commanding a fleet of three caravels, the Portuguese sailor Bartolomeu Dias is reckoned to be the first European to round the tip of Southern Africa in 1488. However, as a result of a threat of mutiny among his crew he had to turn back for Portugal before reaching India. Ironically, Bartolomeu was to perish in the stormy seas in the year 1500 on another expedition to India (See Malcom Turner's *Shipwrecks and Salvage in South Africa* (1987: 12-15). Fox's disclaimer that his circumnavigation would not achieve much is undercut by the fact that by invoking the Bartolomeu legend, he clearly intends to gain some cultural capital for his narrative by juxtaposing his own journey with these 'great journeys of discovery'.

happy. I am South. I could ask for no better home' (2010:247). Kristi Siegel warns us that '[c]onstructing identity ... is also a means of establishing authority' (2002:3). Siegel's observations suggest that Fox's claim to innocence by saying that his journey would simply allow him to note South Africa's gifts and perplexities devoid of any claim to power is an unreflexive statement.

Fox's narrative suggests that his own entanglement and identification with quasi-European colonisers runs deeper than the colour of his skin. As a crew member on board a replica caravel, re-enacting the fifteenth-century voyage of Bartolomeu Dias from Lisbon to Mossel Bay, Fox was unknowingly taking the role of a participant-spectator to events that had a significant bearing to the founding of modern South Africa. There is no indication that Fox had any qualms about being part of this voyage then. Similarly, now as he re-boards the caravel that sits in the maritime Museum, he also does not seem to think seriously about the dissonance caused by the European narrative of great discoveries in the contemporary South Africa he is circumnavigating. Instead, Fox is full of nostalgia when he recalls the hero's welcome his crew received upon successfully completing its voyage. He writes about how they chanted '*O mar, o mar, o mar*', invoking the romance of the sea as [they] rounded St Blaize at the end of [their] voyage, intoxicated by the thrill of homecoming, parents and friends waiting on the beach, and [their] own self importance' (2010:48). Fox mentions that when Bartolomeu stepped ashore he was not aware that 'he had rounded the southern tip of Africa and opened the Indian Ocean to European exploitation' (2010:46). Although Fox may not have known it as a youth taking part in the replay of Bartolomeu's expedition, now, sixteen years later, and ten years after the demise of apartheid rule, he is forced to rethink Dias' expedition and cast it in a way that reflects his evolving relationship with the new South Africa. He observes that not only did Dias take fresh water, barter for provisions but he also skirmished with locals. By so doing, Dias 'forged a link between Europe and what would one day be South Africa' (2010:46). R. Melanie Hunter argues that 'when one is considering the subject of travel and travel writing, one must also consider the matter of perspective, location, of circumstance, of privilege' (2002: 30). Although Fox seems to be conscious of the fact that his expedition is enabled by being privileged, he

seems unaware or chooses not to emphasise how the Dias centenary voyage is mirrored in his one-man's journey around South Africa.

Another issue with Fox's journeying along South Africa's coast is that it does not only allow him to enthuse about what he considers to be the delicate littoral ecology but he seems to unquestioningly buy into conservation projects which are characterised by patronising and essentialist ideologies. For example, driving along the R44 after Gordon's Bay, Fox writes about the coastline in passionate terms saying it is 'green and wild and beautiful' (2010:16). He writes: 'On the left were towering cliffs, the fynbos was green and I rolled the window to let in the fragrance. Far below, waves crashed against granite boulders, their booming sound reaching me moments after each detonation' (2010:16). There are many moments like these where Fox treats his journey as an apolitical 'noting [of the land's] gifts and perplexities'. Fox's strong concerns regarding the threat to littoral ecosystem and the delicate flora of Namaqualand which is threatened by mining ventures is itself a political position. His concerns for the coastline ecology are articulated through Henki le Roux and Maarten Groos, residents of Baartskeerdersbos, who are passionate about the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative they are involved in seeking to protect their environment. Groos speaks of 'the need for a combination of conservation, empowerment and commercial use of the land' (2010:24) and Henki riles 'against the kind of coastal development that wiped out fynbos' (2010:27). About mining in Namaqualand, he writes: 'Certainly, an ecological hell. You couldn't help feeling the region's flora was worth infinitely more than the chips of glorified quartz it was being sacrificed for' (2010:271). While the wanton destruction of the environment has become a global concern, Fox shares an overly judgemental attitude with some of his characters such as Henki. This tends to position Fox as an innocent observer to the environmental problems that he so meticulously chronicles.

When Fox politicises his descriptions of what he sees, he tends to ascribe unexamined positivism to what he considers to be hybridised and creolised spaces of the coastline and the borderline. Fox views especially the coastline as a fertile metaphorical space for the symbiotic integration of multiple races envisioned by the evolving post-apartheid political process. He observes that shorelines are 'permeable zones where inter-tidal critters, animals, plants and birds of both realms reside' (2010: 27). When it comes to

the human species Fox suggests that this permeability and cosmopolitan nature of South African shoreline was dramatised by victims of some early shipwrecks. About South Africa's east coast, he writes: 'I had found throughout my journey so far, the coastline here is rich in shipwrecks tales. Thousands of castaways – Portuguese, English, Dutch, Indian – have left their mark and their blood among the Xhosa clans' (2010:99). Implying that the post-1994 project of racial integration is possible, Fox cites the example of some shipwrecked white women on the Eastern Cape shoreline and eventually lived all their lives as Xhosa *gogos*.

*The Marginal Safari* is generally characterised by ecological romanticisations. For example, Fox's concern for environment is evident when he condemns the engineers of the N2, the national road which starts in Cape Town and more or less sticks to the coastline all the way to Durban and finally into Johannesburg, for allowing the clearing of 'a wide swathe of forest' before it. He writes: 'Engineers love the ruler line, forgetting that life is all about winding byways' (2010:55). This is something that clearly preoccupied and disturbed Fox as he drove many hours on the country's roads during his trip. In fact, the front cover of his book is dominated by presumably a picture of the N2 which stretches in a straight line for as far as the eye can see, to demonstrate what he calls 'the ruler' mentality when it comes to road making. By contrast, Fox pours unreserved praise to Thomas Bain, the engineer credited with designing of the R102. He calls him 'South Africa's great nineteenth-century road maker at the top of his game' (2010:55). About the road itself, Fox writes: 'The R102 was how a road should look, a sympathetic meander, two lanes humbled by trees, twisting to reveal a new delight at each bend, never allowing the car to become a projectile. Pioneer-like and intimate, the R102 was disturbed by crumbling shale and fallen trees, the earth's small assertions' (2010:55). Fox's love for nature and his concern for ecological issues are prominent in the above words. But his condemnation of everything that is contemporary and his praise for all that is quaint and colonial is also evident.

To his credit though, Fox acknowledges that he is a privileged spectator in the safety and comfort of his 4x4 vehicle which is fitted with all modern conveniences of travel. That is why he is delighted by 'the range of hues, the scents, the diversity' that he sees and smells all around him. That is why he is content with not seeing 'more than a few metres into the mesh of

leaves and bark on either side [of the road]' (2010:55). He ecstatically declares that this 'was how the N2 should look' (2010:55). Debbie Lisle suggests that travel writing cannot protest innocence since 'the act of writing about travel *itself* engenders contemporary power formations that are as unequal, unjust and exploitative as those forged during the Empire' (2006: 10, e.i.o.). In the above descriptions, Fox seems deaf to the clamour of thousands of less privileged travellers who get packed in taxis on Friday evenings bound for their Eastern Cape destinations and want this ruler line road so as to arrive quickly since they neither have a view nor comfort to enjoy nature's panoramic beauty. For them travelling is a means to an end and not an end in itself as is the case with Fox.

The picture of privileged South Africans as comfortable bystanders or amused sightseers not seriously disturbed by the exigencies of a country afflicted by economic and social inequalities is fore-grounded by Fox's narrative. For example, as he drives towards the town of Mthatha he is ecstatic about each hilltop which 'wore a cluster of rondavels like a crown' (2010:82). He calls these circular structures 'delightful architecture ... functional and elegant, timeless even' (2010:82). Highlighting his role as a non-involved watcher, he writes: 'Driving up coast as a child, I used to long for the first rondavel sighting' (2010:82). Judging from the tone of his narrative, it would appear that this anthropological eye that Fox had as a child has etched itself deeper than he is aware of. While engaging in some self-reflection on whether the replacement of thatch with corrugated iron can be seen as the litmus test for change, 'measuring the march of progress' (2010:82), Fox seems to largely bemoan what he sees as the gradual disappearance of the rondavel. For him, this 'process seemed to signify a break with a former unity with the land, symbolised by the sphere' (2010:82). When he finally catches sight of the township of Cuba comprised of 'rows of ugly apartment blocks and thousands of multicoloured, matchbox houses in neat lines' (2010:82) he is flabbergasted. He exclaims: 'If this was what replaced the rondavel village when rural congealed to urbanity, then cry the beloved countryside' (2010:83). Fox considers Mthatha and its Cuba Township to be an anomaly in an otherwise successful story of South Africa's transition to democratic rule. He writes: 'Mthatha seemed like a vision of the urban Africa we may have inherited had 1994 not been such a successful transition' (2010:83).

While Fox clearly attempts to identify with the black urban poor and what he perceives as the ‘unity with the land’ of the rondavel dwellers, he does so without establishing their views and feelings about their matchbox homes. Just as the rural rondavels are a source of anthropological fascination, the urban poverty that is exemplified by the Cuba township RDP houses is posited as the evidence of the failure of post-apartheid government to create attractive and comfortable urban dwellings. Unfortunately, Fox seems distant from the practical and feasible in favour of an opaque idealism and indefinable architectural aesthetic. Fox does not apply the same scrupulous standards of architectural aesthetic when it comes to those urban spaces that he identifies with. For example, despite acknowledging that Jeffreys Bay is ‘a bit of hotchpotch dorp’ he describes it as having ‘a special energy’, ‘young, international and edgy, like a university town’ (2010:57). He says that the youth came to Jeffreys Bay to study only one thing: ‘the perfect wave’ (2010:57) and as a surfer himself he admits that is why he himself had gone there. Similarly, one cannot miss the sense of emotional attachment in the way Fox describes the coastline view near De Hoop Nature Reserve. He writes of ‘windswept dunes, limestone cliffs, flowering fynbos, pale green shallows lined with shipwrecks and whales’, and exclaims: ‘It’s sights like these that always draw me back to the southern Cape’ (2010:38).

Fox’s claim that his narrative was to be a song for ‘land and its people’ (2010:56) is clearly skewed towards the land and is against what he sees as the new government’s emphasis ‘almost entirely on tourism, not preservation’ (2010:39). Towards the end of the narrative he writes: ‘The horror of the new was everywhere, usually masked behind the guise of progress, or creating job opportunities, or development’ (2010:307). He is especially at complete loss for words<sup>2</sup> when it comes to spaces inhabited by

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<sup>2</sup> In this regard, Fox’s book comes very close to John Barrow’s *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798* (1801) a travelogue that narrates a sequence of sights or settings and ‘seems to do everything possible to minimize the human presence’ (Pratt 2008: 58). Other critics have argued that travelogues have not always played a negative role, e.g. Behdad (1994) argues that the late 19<sup>th</sup> century travelogues were important in eroding some of the most repugnant stereotypes that propelled colonialism.

the poor and underprivileged. For example, at Cove Rock near East London, Fox missed the opportunity of talking to a ‘couple of Xhosa women’ when one of them approached him miming ‘sucking a lolly’ (2010:74). Fox is puzzled for a moment before he understands that they are prostitutes. He then ‘brusquely’ declines talking to her as if she were a leper. Are these women not part of the ‘colours, tastes [and] textures’ of his ‘father’s land, this [his] land’ (2010:56) which he set out to sing?

As we have seen, there is a marked contrast between Fox’s description of natural spaces, usually devoid of human beings, and the spaces of poverty and corruption such as Mthatha’s Cuba township, the Pafuri Mozambican border crossing and the Musina-Beitbridge border post. Fox fails to interrogate the epistemological ‘assumptions about power, culture and difference’ (Lisle 2006: 10) when it comes to issues relating to manning borders and border crossings. For example about Pafuri border post he writes: ‘In contrast to the smart South African post, the Mozambican side was rundown. No-one wanted to see my passport, let alone stamp it .... A guard was asleep in a sentry box, three others sat around a fire cooking a meal’ (2010:175). The rundown Mozambican side of the border is presented as a threatening space, a vision of Africa that South Africans ‘may well have inherited had 1994 not been such a successful transition’ (2010:83). The ease with which Fox crosses into Mozambique is simply symptomatic of the carelessness and corrupt tendencies that grips everything to the north of South Africa. Fox never stops to consider whether what he calls ‘a simple official border crossing in [his] life’ (2010:175) is not represented from the point of view of a recognisably privileged traveller.

Near Beitbridge we are told that driving ‘was like squeezing toothpaste along a razor blade’ because trucks ‘with red number plates spilled out of Zimbabwe, crabbing along a patchy piece of N1 tar’ (2010:188). This is a place where South African soldiers stand guard with their R4 rifles expecting ‘an invasion of refugees’ (2010:188). The refugees who are said to be coming ‘not only from Zimbabwe [but] from all over Africa’ are merely talked about in phantom-like terms. According to Pratt, the dramas of death and despair of migrant workers and refugees flocking into the so-called developed economies which Fox’s narrative seems to hint at here, ‘are not just an expression of anti-migrant paranoia’ but they may also serve to ‘remind those inside how lucky they are, and how threatened



[they are]’ (2008:241). Pursuing his tone of depicting everything to the north of South African border as threatening, the bridge across the Limpopo river that links Zimbabwe and South Africa is described as looking ‘like something out of Second World War movie needing to be blown up’ (2010:189). What began as a ‘song of marginals ... the refugees [and] migrants’ (2010:56) turns out to be a reinforcement of stereotypes.

Fox depicts his journey as participating in the opening up of the emerging South Africa to other privileged white people who, like him, carry ‘doubt and whiteness’ (2010:57), and are sceptical about displaying fervent patriotism for the emerging inclusive society. For example he relates the story of Willie Labuschagne, a white South African who gives up his prospering computer business in Gauteng to run horse safaris in Maputaland near Kosi Bay. Fox adopts an almost quixotic tone when he describes what he thinks the Labuschagnes represent. He writes: ‘An Afrikaner arrives with wife and child in a latter-day wagon, negotiates grazing rights from a chief, settles in, but there the story changes: he integrates. What an appropriate antidote to the history of exploitation and land grabbing’ (2010:121). Pursuing this exuberant mood, Fox writes: ‘Only if there were more people like Willie, Isobel, and their white Zulu son’ (121). According to Fox, the Labuschagnes’ willingness to integrate into the local community is apparent from the fact that their little son plays freely with the local black children and speaks ‘fluent Zulu’ (2010:117), and in Willie’s passion about the conservation of the natural flora and fauna of Maputaland.

However, they may be problems with the kind of future South Africa that the Labuschagnes represent. Like Fox’s circumnavigation journey which carefully avoids the heart of the country, but rather prefers to take its pulse from the margin, the Labuschagnes seem to be retreating from what they perceive to be the perils of the post-1994 South African city. When describing their reasons for leaving, Willie positions himself as a spectator standing on the safety of the shore, gleefully watching the sinking ship of the post-1994 South African chaotic urbanisation. He confides to Fox: ‘Neither of us wanted to stay in the city. People going at it like ants .... I mean, even the nice suburbs all look the same. New townhouse developments, the latest cars. Like a rich squatter camp’ (2010:117). Fox’s narrative does not make it clear how retreating into rural South Africa will solve this process of rapid urbanisation. Furthermore, Willie’s relationship with Maputaland is very

patronising. He views it as a 'piece of wilderness' that he and his wife have gradually been taming. He tells Fox that when they first settled in the area it was 'almost inaccessible ... they were hardly any tracks and river crossing saw water coming perilously over the bonnet' (2010:118). But since their arrival, 'a bridge [has] been built and things [are] changing fast' (2010:118). Nevertheless this opening up of the 'wilderness' that Willie and his wife have contributed towards, worries them. Willie says: 'We're hanging onto paradise here. Children are still not used to cars and white people' (2010:118). When one considers that the place suffers from lack of basic services such as a well-equipped school and trained teachers, one starts to wonder about this 'paradise', as viewed through Willie's and Fox's eyes. Although Willie declares that they 'are free of crime' in Maputaland, there are other dangers lurking in the shadows which Willie chooses to ignore. For example, Fox meets a woman who is leading a group of AIDS researchers in the area. The woman declares that the AIDS tests that they are carrying out at schools indicate that in 'five years, there won't be any teachers', all would have been wiped out by AIDS.

Another fault line with Willie's paradise which Fox is uncritical of, is the fact that none of the black locals are interviewed about how they feel about Maputaland. Instead, he completely relies on the views and feelings of Willie and his wife; two individuals who are still relatively new in this community. Similarly, about the AIDS scourge he simply relies on what he considers to be the expert information of the researcher and makes no effort to talk to the local people about the problem. Even Fox's acknowledgement that the integration that he thinks the Labuschagnes represent is not an easy project is also problematic. The idea of a white family 'merging' with the 'native' culture has condescending residues of imperial discourse. This idea of merging with black South Africans is metaphorically dramatised by Fox's completely losing his sense of direction when he takes a walk after supper around the cottage where he lodges for the night at Kosi Bay. Instead of being fearful or trying to fight his loss of orientation, he embraces it. He writes: 'I stand contentedly inside the African blackness, comfortable in my disorientation' (2010:123). This seems to sum up Fox's philosophy of what he calls his evolving relationship with the land. Of course, Fox is South African and not a visitor from Europe. However, the narrative positions him, and other privileged South Africans that he encounters in his journey as

being outside the mainstream South African culture. Although Fox clearly sees his travelogue as being outside colonial and apartheid discourse, the narrative inscribes Fox as a metropolitan figure who peripherises 'others within representational practices marked by inequalities' (Grewal 1996:1). Fox positions his journey as an attempt to merge with the new South Africa and be more part of the land, but a careful reading of the narrative shows that this remains a fraught ambition.

Citing Whitman's 'Song of Myself' where the poet patriotically surrenders himself over to the United States of America, by singing, 'My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air', Fox says his own patriotism to the new South Africa is circumspect and faltering. He says that he is not entirely of Whitman's disposition. At the symbolic level his cautious patriotism is dramatised by his borderline journey around the country. He only wants to be part of the country as a spectator. This is ironic when we consider that Fox claims that his circumnavigation is inspired by Chatwin's *Songlines* (1987) where the aboriginals are described as 'singing up the land' 'as they travel, chanting about topographical features as a form of oral mapmaking, navigating vast distances through song' (2010: 56). Unlike in Fox's case, it is never a question of singing 'the perimeter' or beating the 'drum along the boundary line' in order to affirm one's wavering notions of belonging (2010:56). For the aboriginals, it is less a question of patriotism than a way of being, a never contested and incontestable claim to the land. It is a travelling born out of necessity, a quest for existence and not for sightseeing or ephemeral enjoyments of the land's endowments.

My essay has argued that Fox presents his travelogue as one man's search for identity along post-apartheid South Africa's margins, that is, the shoreline and the borderline and that the narrative also rehearses the fluidity of what Fox sees as the national project for identities emerging in the post-apartheid environment. To use Margaret Cohen's words, Fox tries to depict the South African shoreline and borderline 'as high-risk yet potentially productive spaces at the edge of the dynamic present, where knowledge is expanding but incomplete' (2010:660). Using a similar essentialist and celebratory language as that of colonial explorers, Fox hopes that by travelling on the edges he will discover 'truths' through noting South Africa's 'gifts and perplexities' (2010:49). Largely positioning himself as an uninvolved spectator rather than an active participant, Fox presents this as a

significant undertaking, especially in the first decade of South Africa's political transition to black rule since a significant population of white South Africans was fleeing to continents considered to be less precarious. However, Fox is aware that his circumnavigation of South Africa is enabled by what may be perceived as white privilege, and this complicates his relationship with what he calls his 'fatherland or father's land' since his project places him alongside great European explorers who opened up South Africa for trade and eventually for colonisation. Although the journey allows Fox to reflect on the role of earlier European explorers, the narrative also problematically places him alongside this fraught imperial genre that is itself being interrogated.

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