Article

White Aspiration in South Africa: The intersectional Nexus of Ordentlikheid and the Making of Afrikaner Whiteness

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Abstract

Whiteness presents as stable and homogeneous or even natural, but it is a socially and historically constructed status that is never completely won. Intersectional readings of whiteness in context help show the contingency of this racial formation, dependent like all power formations on historical conditions. The concept "ordentlikheid" is applied in this article to expose the inner and outer ordering and hierarchisation of Afrikaner whiteness in South Africa. Ordentlikheid is variably translatable as respectability, dignity, or politeness. It is here used as an ethno-cultural term referencing a historically generated schema of moral worth that captures the aspirational formation of Afrikaner identity in colonial, apartheid and postcolonial South Africa. Gender looms large as co-determining the terms for inclusion and exclusion in Afrikaner whiteness, particularly through the figure of the volksmoeder. The pursuit of ordentlikheid is explored across three historical moments, characterised by shifting emphases in the intersectional deployment of differences: the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th century, the official ending of apartheid and transition to democracy in the 1990s, and the global rise of racial populisms with associated shifts in transnational whiteness in the 2020s. Over these three periods, varying emphases can be discerned on differences in the aspirational pursuit of ordentlikheid as part of the intersectional construction of Afrikaner whiteness. Ordentlikheid as a concept assists in understanding ethnic competition with the British due to their inferiorisation of Afrikaners as "lesser whites." It helps to explain the rise of "purified" Afrikaner nationalism that constructed a white volk by corralling women into the heteropatriarchal volksmoeder regime of "woman/wife-as-mother". With the fall of apartheid, Afrikaner enclave neo-nationalism emerges, marked by inward migration, localisation, and ethnic

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closure. Claiming the moral high ground of ordentlikheid facilitates an unexpected incorporation of white Afrikaners into the Make America Great Again (MAGA) agenda of US President Donald Trump.

Keywords: Afrikaner nationalism; respectability politics; mother of the nation; enclave nationalism; transnational white right; Trumpism

Introduction

The historical fiction of race, in which human value is read off phenotype, is mobilised in intersectional concert with multiple differences towards varying effects of hierarchy and inclusion/exclusion — hence, manufacturing both external and internal others who are organised unequally.[1] Prime among these internal others are women: heterofemininity works similarly in validating or invalidating subjects as measured against prescriptions for womanhood. Femininities are constructed in the plural amid contestations over the terms of womanhood. Similarly, whitenesses as a term captures the internal contestations at intersectional crossings of difference that render whiteness a highly unstable status. The uncertainty of the accomplishment and maintenance of whiteness places subjects under constant pressure. The boundaries of whiteness widen and shrink as subjects deploy race in their navigation of constantly shifting political terrain. Historicisation reveals how intersectionalities within whiteness, including those of gender, can bolster or subvert its hegemonising capacities as racial formation (Kindinger and Schmitt 2019). The gender and sexual corralling of particularly female subjects is foundational to whiteness to ensure the biological and social reproduction of white subjects.

Gender-inflected ethnic and class marking emerges as determinant in creating an intra-white hierarchy (Van der Westhuizen 2017). Consequently, as some whites are positioned as inferior within whiteness, women are positioned as inferior within intra-white hierarchies. Socio-economic realities can cause class to emerge as a recurring intra-white point of friction as well, particularly around acceptable forms of womanhood, but also as a generative category in producing renewed investment in whiteness. Similarly, ethnicity can be mobilised in particularist ways by constructing multiple whitenesses *within* whiteness to claim power, again with gendering integral to intra-white formations.

Continuously forming and reforming, opening and closing, refusing and admitting: the conditions of, and for, whiteness are demonstrated by the expansions and contractions of the boundaries of Afrikaner whiteness[2] in South Africa. As argued, struggles to claim

1 An earlier version of this article was delivered as a keynote address at the 8th Colloquium on Afrikaans and South African Studies at Ghent University, Belgium, organised by the Ghent Centre for Afrikaans and the Study of South Africa (20–21 November 2024). The author thanks the anonymous reviewers for their incisive and useful comments.

2 This article uses “Afrikaner” with reference to the identity created through Afrikaner nationalism, which claimed whiteness as a defining feature.

whiteness are not only in relation to externalised racial others but also about organising hierarchies *internal* to Afrikaner whiteness. The aspirational dimension of whiteness is expressed in the pursuit of respectability for Afrikaner identity. Respectability as a form of politics involves members of a group seeking to disprove negative stereotypes about that group by "correcting" the behaviour of lesser members of the group in accordance with dominant social norms (Gould 2009). Afrikaner nationalism, patterned on European nationalisms, in the early 20th century, addressed the precarious circumstances of

> Afrikaners [who] were not only of rural origin and the poorest of the white groups, but were also perceived as culturally backward and lacking in sophistication. [M]iddle class Afrikaners, particularly educators and clergy, [deployed] a strategy of ethnic mobilization to overcome the deep feelings of insecurity and social inferiority that plagued Afrikaners. It was they who disseminated the ethnic gospel that self-realization and human worth could only come through group identification and assertion (Giliomee 1995, 196).

Respectability became intertwined with nationalism in 19th-century Europe as an instrumentalisation of morals and manners for a bourgeois nationalist imaginary (Mosse 1982). Notions of respectability support nationalism by serving as a measure of, and disciplining adherence to, middle-class conventions of acceptable and unacceptable practices regarded as necessary to safeguard state and society (p. 221). Drawn together in respectability are middle-class concerns with restraint and moderation based on Protestant piety, hard work, and sexual "normalcy," differentially applied on the basis of gender bifurcation, to form subjects that would fit the desired national identity. Gender is central to these processes, as is also seen in early Afrikaner nationalism with its "uplift feminism" targeting poor white women to be made respectable for inclusion into the Afrikaner volk (Willoughby-Herard 2015). María Lugones (2007, 201) describes such processes as constituting the "light side" of the "colonial/modern gender system" in which white women are turned into "reproducers of 'the (white) race' and 'the (middle or upper) class": "Sexual purity and passivity are crucial characteristics of the white bourgeois females who reproduce the class and the colonial and racial standing of bourgeois, white men" (p. 206).

This pursuit of respectability enables the inner and outer intersectional ordering of Afrikaner whiteness. I describe and interpret the specificities of Afrikaner respectability with the ethno-cultural concept of ordentlikheid. Ordentlikheid can be translated with a conglomerate of related words, ranging from respectability, dignity, presentability, and good manners, to politeness and Calvinist humility.[3] It asserts a heteropatriarchal gender and sexual division, manifesting in a certain bodily comportment. For women,

3 It nourishes Christian nationalism, as created through the "religio-mythologisation" of Afrikaner nationalism in which the nation (or *volk* in this case) is formed according to God's will, to the extent that the *volkswil* is rendered God's will (Van Vuuren 2005, 64). It follows that Afrikaner nationalism became a civil religion to be embedded in Afrikaner identity (Moodie 1975).

the gender, class and race criteria of the *volksmoeder* must be embodied. Ordentlikheid is accomplished through the pursuit of whiteness by adhering to specific middle-class forms of femininity and heterosexuality.

This article explores Afrikaner adaptation to democracy through the mobilisation of ordentlikheid as a historically generated schema of moral worth. With the official transition in the 1990s to a democracy seeking to entrench human dignity, equality, and freedom, "the Afrikaner" represents a late move away from the colonial ideology and practice of white supremacy. In the face of international opprobrium, Afrikaner identity was spoilt by the moral stain of apartheid. Different strategies have since been deployed to rehabilitate Afrikaner identity and re-accomplish ordentlikheid (Van Noordwyk 2025; Marx Knoetze 2020; Steyn 2001). This analysis takes the form of a conceptual-historical essay, employing a methodology of a historiographical and critical discourse analysis of secondary literature and policy texts, bringing in primary materials where appropriate and building on, and further developing, my earlier analysis of primary data (Van der Westhuizen 2017).

The article is structured as follows. The next section provides a brief discussion of concepts relevant to understanding whiteness as an intersectional racial formation. Next is an explanation of ordentlikheid as an ethno-cultural nexus drawing together intersectional elements that constitute Afrikaner subjectivities. This is followed by sections unpeeling ordentlikheid's purchase at three historical moments: the formation of nascent Afrikaner identity at the start of the 20th century; the dislocation of the Afrikaner identity with the transition to democracy in the 1990s; and the reconnection of the Afrikaner identity into global white supremacist networks as part of an "emboldened en-whitening" (Boucher and Matias 2022, 345) witnessed in globally resurgent radical right and white nationalist politics in the 21st century.

Race, Intersectionality, and Ordentlikheid

Created as part of a schema of differentiation aimed at justification for the dispossession, exploitation, marginalisation, and generalised violence associated with slavery and colonialism, race is a powerful fabrication (Mbembe 2017; Fredrickson 1988; Fanon 1963). It works structurally, institutionally, discursively, psychically, and affectively—with real material effects (Hunter and Van der Westhuizen 2022). As the material that identities are made of, it works at the level of the collective and of the subject. Since the rise of scientific and biological racisms 200 years ago, the idea of race has passed through various permutations, including cultural racism and, most recently, an apparent return to biological racism (Saini 2019; Berg and Wendt 2011). Across the world, right-wing populism has captured imaginations and governments, driven by white supremacism and xenophobia (Rattansi 2020; Mudde 2018). The longevity of race is found in the continuation of colonialism into coloniality—particularly through continued colonial modes of racialisation, with whiteness as central organising element (Hunter and Van der Westhuizen 2022; Sithole 2021; Grosfoguel 2002). In global coloniality, whiteness signifies "fully human" and therefore represents the pinnacle of

the hierarchy determining human liveability (Mpofu and Steyn 2021). Seen through an intersectional lens, as the concept of the "colonial/modern gender system" (Lugones 2007) allows, exposes whiteness as its central pillar.

Examining whiteness is essential to understanding the workings of race and racism. In that sense, whiteness is to race what masculinity is to patriarchy and heterosexuality to heteronormativity (cf. Hearn 2014; Butler 1993). Whiteness is a social construct interpreting phenotype to falsely assign human value. It works as "a point of privilege, a position of power from where it has been possible to define, regulate, judge as well as accrue material and symbolic awards" (Gabriel 1998, 184). Similar to other central markers of unequal difference, whiteness is durable and simultaneously subject to continuous challenges and changes. These are best grasped with the concepts "racial formation" and "racialisation," as opposed to racism, which can be foreclosing and encumber analysis of how race endures. "Racial formations" refer to contested and unstable racial projects formed by intersecting but also conflicting discourses and structures (Omi and Winant 1994). Racialisation captures the fluidity of ongoing multidimensional processes that over time furnish race with cultural and political meaning, with the effect of hierarchising humanity into "fully human, not quite human yet, and not human" (Erasmus 2017, 53–54). Racialisation pivots around whiteness. Rather than the stable, taken-for-granted and normative position we perceive whiteness to be, intense socio-political labours have historically been required to create, sustain, and universalise whiteness.

The concept of intersectionality is key to analysing the external and internal othering through which whiteness is produced. Intersectionality is here understood as "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall 2005, 1771). Intersectionality as an analytical tool helps us to untangle "the way in which power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others," subordinating some while privileging others (Crenshaw 1995, 375). Using ordentlikheid as an intersectional lens addresses Scully's (1995, 341) criticism that analysis of colonial and metropolitan histories is insufficient if not approached as multilayered processes in which sexuality, gender, class, and race function as co-constitutive markers and "referents to each other." Historicisation further assists in unpicking the strands of intersectional differences woven together to construct whiteness; analysing whiteness at the intersections with ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality helps us to understand the workings of racialisation (Kindinger and Schmitt 2019; Ratele 2009). It becomes clear that the divisional dynamics of whiteness give it as much support internally as externally. Therefore, it is useful to include in the focus on whiteness not only external differentiation and hierarchisation outside of whiteness but also its internal stratification. As a comparative example: theories of men and masculinities tell us that hegemonic or ruling masculinities may not hold total sway, but they do produce and organise all other gender identities, including femininities and "lesser masculinities" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Similarly, whiteness works in the plural to establish an order of whitenesses, arranged within boundaries that are

continuously adapted in accordance with the vagaries of power. This is historically seen with the shifting positionings of ethnicised "lesser whites" such as Jewish, Irish, Italian whites in the United States (Painter 2010), the cultural "inferiority" of the peripheral "threatened whiteness" of eastern Europeans (Kalmar 2023), or in relation to class, with poor whites' grasp on whiteness deemed insecure (Money and Van Zyl-Hermann 2020).

To summarise, as race is adaptive and ever-changing, whiteness has uncertain boundaries determined by shifting patterns of domination and subordination. Inclusion is not assured. Whiteness is an aspirational condition of power and privilege. Subjects beholden to the vagaries of intersectional differences may have the makings of whiteness, but its accomplishment remains uncertain. Whiteness is not homogeneous. Alongside the continually fruitful concept of intersectionality, internal stratification within racial categories and specifically within whiteness is essential to the workings of race and must be brought into analysis. Groups belonging to minoritised whitenesses are both subjected to, and complicit with, racism (Gabriel 1998). When those others internal to whiteness are considered, the interactive intersectional workings of social markers of difference become apparent—particularly class, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and gender. The continuous but also contested processes of racialisation as a historical and socio-political phenomenon become clearer, and we can see how ideologies mobilise categories of difference in their service. This helps to explain the persistence of the global racial order, given rise to by colonialism, enduring as coloniality and resurgent as present-day white supremacism.

Like other subjects formed by the dominant discourses of coloniality, Afrikaners are beholden to the vagaries of intersectional differences, making the accomplishment of whiteness uncertain. The history of "the Afrikaner" illustrates the workings of whiteness as an aspirational condition of power and privilege. Using the intersectional lens of ordentlikheid, I will now discuss the racialisation of South Africa's Afrikaners as a lesser whiteness in relation to the English and the Dutch in global coloniality.

Ordentlikheid as Afrikaner Assertion of Whiteness

With colonialism as a vehicle, two formations of whiteness competed for dominance in South Africa from the 19th into the 20th century. At the founding of the British dominion of the Union of South Africa in 1910, British imperialism—as English nationalism writ large—was vying with fledgling Afrikaner and African nationalisms. British imperialism served as a vehicle for Englishness as an ethnicity that claims normative status for itself and sought to position all other ethnicities in a pecking order in the British Empire (Hall 1997). The English regarded the Boers as "an inferior or degraded class of colonist" in the late 1800s (Keegan 2001, 460); "uncivilised savages with a thin white veneer" (Nederveen Pieterse 1992, 104). The competition between the two settler classes reached its pinnacle with the South African War (1899–1902), followed by an imperial programme to anglicise the Boers, spurring the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. The identity of "the Afrikaner" was a political counter-invention seeking to amplify European descent and, hence, a claim on whiteness for colonists hoping to

counter their sizeable slave ancestry due to miscegenation during the years of Dutch control (Fredrickson 1988). These discursive constructions of the Boers/Afrikaners illustrate how racialisation creates inferiorised whitenesses, resulting in a hierarchy of whitenesses. It confirms a characteristic of whiteness as not being conferred "once and for all" but rather being subject to historical power relations.

Nationalist notions of English bourgeois respectability were incorporated into South African nationalisms of the Afrikaner and African variety (Thomas 2006; Hyslop 1995). As explained above, rising European nationalisms in the 19th century touted respectability as a constitutive element of desired national identities, driven by bourgeois ideals of morals and manners. The history of Afrikaner nationalism is very much about claiming respectability for peripheral Afrikaner whiteness in the global racial order of coloniality. Ordentlikheid is the ethno-racial form of respectability that this white ambition seeks to secure. The struggle for ordentlikheid was against the stigma of racialisation. Hence, the accomplishment of ordentlikheid legitimises Afrikaner claims on whiteness. As found with respectability in other nationalisms, ordentlikheid comes with its racial, class, gender and sexual implications, and also with a particular ethnic inflection. These differences work as constitutive intersectionalities; disentangling these intersectional strands helps us to better understand redistributional conflict in the creation of South Africa, and Afrikaners' persistent aspirational relationality to whiteness in the Global North. Hence, the concept of ordentlikheid assists in exploring the inner and outer ordering and hierarchisation of whitenesses. It facilitates an intersectional examination of Afrikaner identity in producing white Afrikaans-speaking subjectivities in colonial, apartheid, and postcolonial South Africa. Ordentlikheid is analysed as the "glue" that draws the identity together at the subjective but also intersubjective level, recruiting individuals for an ethno-racial project at the intersections with gender, sexuality, and class.

Dutch whiteness utilised ethnicity differently in comparison to the Afrikaner contestation with Anglo white ethnics. After the British claimed the Cape colony from the Dutch for the final time in 1806, the Dutch connection with South Africa waned to a point of relative disinterest. This changed after the British annexation of the Transvaal Boer republic in 1877, when the Boers regained their independence in 1880 with the first Anglo-Boer War. The Dutch imagination was fired up by a romantic vision of a small, courageous *volk* confronting the British Empire, with the Dutch reclaiming the Boers as their "cousins." Stamverwantskap, or ethnic relation, was created and elaborated as a form of transnational whiteness (Henkes 2016). From the late 19th century and into the 20th century, the assertion of stamverwantskap worked as a political project that buttressed both Afrikaner and Dutch whitenesses (Van der Westhuizen 2024). From the Dutch vantage point, the geopolitically weakened Netherlands of the late 19th century could, by association with the Boers, recapture some of its former imperial glory in relation to Britain and globally dominant Anglo whiteness. Seen from the Boers' vantage point, their colonial claim to South Africa was bolstered with the European association: stamverwantskap with the Dutch provided access to whiteness

and associated power and privilege to Afrikaners at the very moment that the British cast their whiteness as in doubt. In the second half of the 20th century, stamverwantskap shifted in a diametrically opposite direction with the emergence of the largest national anti-apartheid movement in the Netherlands. At that point, the re-racialisation of Afrikaners as a globally peripheral and hence inferior whiteness enabled the Dutch to adopt the moral high ground in relation to Afrikaners and their apartheid project. But it also allowed the Dutch to delay confrontation with their own colonial legacy in South Africa and elsewhere. The internal hierarchy between Dutch-Afrikaner transnational whitenesses created an opportunity for Dutch people to obfuscate and therefore distance themselves from their own complicity in apartheid and colonialism more generally. The next section shifts the focus from the competition between whitenesses to the gender-sexuality intersection at the heart of Afrikaner whiteness.

Ordentlikheid's Sexual and Gender Corralling

After the official founding of South Africa in 1910, manufacturing "the Afrikaner" included excluding from the identity those people racialised as "coloured." This racist expulsion was also a class project to shift Afrikaners from "poor white-ism" to middle-class status. These machinations played out politically in the Purified National Party, explicitly named as such in 1935. "Purified" nationalism was against "fusion" with English whiteness but for the entrenchment of Afrikaner whiteness behind harder boundaries in the pursuit of "racial purity" in a time of eugenics.[4] The "purified" vision was a precarious balancing act, seeking a niche in between dominant English whiteness and the latter's racialised others to claim the entitlements associated with whiteness while asserting ethnic difference. This is the strand of Afrikaner nationalism that went on to attain state power in 1948, installing apartheid.

Control over women's bodies is central to nationalisms. This is particularly true for the purified strain of Afrikaner nationalism, with its reasserted white ambition. The volk is constituted through biological and social reproduction, and these roles are assigned to women. Hence, ordentlikheid has a distinct sexual and gender inflection, at the intersections with race, ethnicity, and class. Symbolically, women's bodies serve as the border of the volk, thereby ensuring the boundaries of purified Afrikaner whiteness (McClintock 1993). Real-life women acting agentically can therefore pose a problem for the patriarchal nation (Eisenstein 2000; Bradford 2000). Amid the social turmoil after the South African War, Afrikaner women claimed public agency beyond what the patriarchal norm allowed, contributing as cultural entrepreneurs to the formation and institutionalisation of early Afrikaner nationalism (Van der Westhuizen 2018b).

4 "The imperative to constitute the 'purity' of the Afrikaner volk came alongside the articulation of a distinctive Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s, premised on ideas of being a 'chosen people,' on ideas of racial purity akin to those in Nazi Germany, and on an idea of the need to ensure the survival of the ethnic group after a discursively constituted historical experience of persecution and victimisation at the hands of the British" (Thumbran 2021, 139).

The trope of the volksmoeder neutralised this problem by mobilising subjects identified as "Afrikaners" in the pursuit of ordentlikheid. Afrikaner women's access to whiteness hinged on pursuing, upholding, and guarding ordentlikheid. In the early decades of the 20th century, middle-class first-wave uplift feminists were preoccupied with the threshold condition of "poor whites" (Willoughby-Herard 2015). They were anxious about blocking interracial sexual contact on the working-class peripheries of South African cities (Hyslop 1995). Embracing the volksmoeder, these Afrikaner nationalist cultural entrepreneurs defined Afrikaner culture as white and middle-class. "[P]oor whiteism was regarded as a temporary irregularity which had arisen as a result of a lack in the moral and political structure of society" (Vincent 1999, 55). Ordentlikheid is vital to this continuing logic of setting apart, of differentiating, that fed the apartheid imaginary and lingers on in post-apartheid whiteness. As is the case generally with respectability, women are the bearers of ordentlikheid. Respectability is demarcated by, but also imprinted on, their bodies as maternal conveyors of the volk. Achieving viable womanhood means becoming a heterosexually married wife and mother of multiple children. This is the pathway to validation for Afrikaner women. Therefore, womanhood is conflated with wifehood and motherhood. The volksmoeder is the model of this "woman/wife-as-mother," placing on each female subject the demands of compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood in the service of white social and biological reproduction, overseen by a godly, autocratic and paternalistic volksvader[5] (Van der Westhuizen 2017). Necessarily, these demands include the abjection or suppression of racial, sexual, and gender non-conforming others. Therefore, the seeming ethnic coherence and racial homogeneity of Afrikanerness was moulded from the actual social diversity found among Afrikaans speakers. This was done through the pointed policing of gender and sexuality, drawing racial and class boundaries, which were, after 1948, materially and forcefully imposed and maintained through apartheid laws and state violence. In pursuit of whiteness for Afrikaners, South Africa was remade into their purified Afrikaner nationalist image by projecting racial and ethnic particularism, buttressed by gender and sexual prescriptions, onto othered outsiders. This is most starkly evidenced by Grand Apartheid's so-called homelands scheme, which divided the country into a patchwork based on essentialised ethnicities. Apartheid was an intensified and more bureaucratised form of colonialism, a more intricately designed and increasingly more violently enforced system of colonial differentiation, subjugation, and exploitation. Nationalist ideas of respectability, expressed through an ethnic interpretation as ordentlikheid, were central to this project.

Ordentlikheid Under Democracy: Reversion to Ethnicity

South Africa's transition to a racially inclusive democracy rang in the official end to the project of apartheid. With the fall of apartheid, the modernist project of a white nation state, an outpost of Europe at the southern tip of the African continent, unravelled: Afrikaner nationalism seemingly collapsed. Pretensions at the normative status of

5 The primary gender focus of this article is on Afrikaner femininity. For more on the co-construction of Afrikaner masculinity, see pp 149–175 of Van der Westhuizen 2017.

Afrikaner whiteness were swept away by the advent of democracy. With that, South Africa became a failed settler state (Southall 2022). While this could be a liberating "failure" opening up newly democratic options for Afrikaner identity, abortive settlerhood emerged as a particularly troubling condition for apartheid's hegemonic identity. International opprobrium had, from the 1960s onward, pushed apartheid South Africa, into pariah status, which clung to Afrikaners after the official transition to democracy in the 1990s due to their implication in apartheid. As apartheid was instrumental in the political, economic, and social ascendancy of those who called themselves Afrikaners, the identity became morally suspect again. In the previous instance, at the beginning of the 20th century—in a time of colonialism, Social Darwinism and eugenics —Afrikaners' moral validity was in question as lesser whites at risk of assimilation with racialised others. As argued, the aspiration towards ordentlikheid paved their access to whiteness as the central position of privilege in the global racial order of colonialism and imperialism. However, with the relinquishing of European empires and the shift from direct to indirect colonialism during the course of the 20th century, apartheid South Africa became an anomaly in Western eyes. The Cold War gave succour to the National Party regime as a Western ally against communism, but the fall of the Soviet Union ended its strategic importance. The shift from official apartheid to democracy uprooted Afrikaners' sense of identity and catapulted them into moral ambiguity. While the imaginary of apartheid was in tatters, in public discourse its "taint attaches tenaciously to South African whites in general and to Afrikaners in particular" (Vanderhaeghen 2018, 2). Indeed, in public discourse Afrikaners "are 'othered' as the agents of apartheid whose moral standing is compromised both historically and as current beneficiaries of past exploitation and whose claim to full citizenship remains fraught as a result of contested understandings of 'the People'"' (p.201). Democracy radically challenged Afrikaner moral worth. Afrikaners sought to rescue the identity from the moral abyss that apartheid and its official ending tipped it into, and to re-infuse it with ordentlikheid.

As the ethno-racial nationalist project of Afrikaner political power crumbled, specific strategies can be noted to rehabilitate and revamp the inferiorised whiteness of the Afrikaners. Discourses are formulated construing apartheid as "white order," which is contrasted with democracy as "black disorder" (Van der Westhuizen 2016). Afrikaners reconstruct themselves as "victims" traumatised by the transition to democracy (Falkof 2022). Notably, victimhood is pertinently assigned to Afrikaner men, as indicated by the intensive identity work aimed at recuperating Afrikaner masculinity (see Van der Westhuizen 2017, 169–172). Yves Vanderhaeghen (2018) describes a discursive process that he calls "self-othering" in which the Afrikaners' historical culpability for creating apartheid is disarticulated to overturn the othering of Afrikaners as "monstrous oppressors" and therefore abject. Instead, innocence is proclaimed in a rearticulation of Afrikaners as victims of violence, discrimination, and political and social exclusion: "through a rhetorical displacement… Afrikaner ceases to be the 'metonym of apartheid' and becomes the synonym of victim. The innocent victim is the other of the monster" (p.213; see also Hunter and Van der Westhuizen 2022). Transposing monstrousness

with innocence enables the restoration of ordentlikheid. Such strategies of renewing and buffering Afrikaner whiteness over the past three decades can be read as a harbinger of white right politics in the Global North, particularly of white nationalism.

Historically, Afrikaner nationalism drew on European nationalisms of the 19th and 20th centuries to map an ethnic identity, as expressed through language, onto a territory. Ethnicities are self-defined groups that can become elevated to nations —the "volk" in this instance— through politicisation and staking a claim on a vaunted nation state as territory. The loss of the nation state cut Afrikaner identity down to size and relegated its reach to that of a minority nationalism. South Africa's reincorporation into the global order in the 1990s happened amid neoliberal globalisation. It sparked a proliferation of identities, with a "return to the local" in which defensive, exclusivist ethnicities were rediscovered as grounding (Hall 1997). In the post-apartheid era, Afrikaner enclave neo-nationalism drew together Afrikaner spaces—both virtual and geographic —to reclaim ethnic privileges (Van der Westhuizen 2017). With this "inward migration," Afrikaner nationalism was reoriented from the nation state to smaller locales. A defensive logic of localisation recreated white Afrikaans dominions within micro-apartheid geographies, with Afrikaners withdrawing from shared national spaces while whitening "own spaces" (Blaser and Van der Westhuizen 2012, 386).

These spatial claims of Afrikaner enclave neo-nationalism have the family as linchpin. Hence, inward migration is to class-based territories with particularist versions of sexuality, gender and race, creating an exclusive ethnic configuration of ordentlikheid. With the family as the template, the volk is naturalised as a collective with shared blood and therefore pure genealogy, on which claims to the land are based (Coetzee 2025; McClintock 1993). This process builds on colonial racisms in which the white family was of pivotal ideological and structural importance (Scully 1995). Drawing on colonial intersectionalities, gender and sexual hierarchies serve as the internal scaffolding of the enclave and reflect its external racial division. White Afrikaans women are tasked with re-establishing ordentlikheid as the sign of the Afrikaner identity's moral worth amid the upheavals and upsets of the intense power contestation that is democratisation. The next section draws the links from the local to the global, as ordentlikheid reinforces Afrikaner whiteness transnationally.

Transnationalising Ordentlikheid

The neo-nationalist strategy of localisation and ethnic closure finds organisational expression and support in the Solidarity Movement. The genesis of Solidarity lies in intra-white hierarchies based on historical intersectionalities. South Africa's transition to a constitutional democracy was partly enabled because of an intra-white ethnic split from the late 1960s onwards. In brief, the verligtes ("progressives") moved to defend capitalism through apartheid reformism, largely through co-optation of certain sections of the black population (Van der Westhuizen 2007). In response, the verkramptes ("reactionaries") split away to pursue a return to Verwoerdian apartheid. The verligtes formed the mainstream of the then ruling National Party (NP) in the 1980s and 1990s.

The most significant verkrampte challenger to the NP was the Conservative Party (CP), established in 1982 and becoming the official opposition in the white national assembly by the end of the 1980s. The NP suffered devastating defeats at the post-apartheid ballot box in 1994 and especially in 1999 at the hands of their liberal and African nationalist opponents. As the CP refused to participate in electoral democracy, other white right organisations stepped into the void. Remnants of the CP were absorbed into a new white right political party, Freedom Front Plus, which participated in elections.

In civil society, the most successful of post-apartheid verkrampte organisations, Solidariteit or Solidarity, traces its lineage to the colonial-era white Mine Workers' Union (MWU) founded in 1902. The MWU metamorphosed from explicit white supremacism into a United Nations-resonant "minority rights" discourse to reinforce white South Africans' claims as a "threatened" minority in a black majority country. It was renamed Solidarity as part of extending its reach beyond trade unionism. The Groter Solidariteit-beweging (Greater Solidarity movement) is patterned on the volksbeweging (people's movement) that advanced Afrikaner nationalism a century ago (O'Meara 1983). It includes a mostly white trade union, a non-profit welfare organisation, a media arm, a self-described "civil rights" organisation called Afriforum that provides security and other services, and a corporate arm offering services ranging from finance to education. The postcolonial weakening of the state provides optimal terrain for Solidarity. Its activities fit with the neoliberal shift to "indirect private government": "functions supposed to be public, and obligations that flow from sovereignty, are increasingly performed by private operators for private ends" (Mbembe 2001, 80). In Solidarity's case, these functions are performed for neo-nationalist ends, following the neoliberal logic.

Afrikaners had benefited handsomely from the incorporation of South Africa into neoliberal global circuits after the fall of apartheid (Van der Westhuizen 2007, 319–326). Afrikaner nationalism's grip slipped. As neoliberal but also white ethnics, Afrikaners became subject to, on the one hand, the commodification of the self and hence "the freedom to choose" their own identity, and on the other hand, the deterministic inscription of an ethnically defined group identity endowed with rights and moral agency. Solidarity contributed to these dynamics. Reinventing itself as a defender of racial minorities, specifically Afrikaners, against the vagaries of an African majority democracy (Van der Westhuizen 2018a), it shifted to what can be called neoliberal constitutionalism. Solidarity facilitates and benefits from Afrikaner consumer-citizenship. Its self-declared position is to "fight for the rights of its members and their communities" based on a competitive, growth-oriented market economy with low company taxes as "the best system to increase the prosperity of a country"; rejecting "reckless" "market fundamentalism" but wanting a "return to a healthier free-market system built on the proven values of economic freedom and humanity" (Solidarity n.d.). As is evident, Solidarity adopts a discourse that avoids race and instead uses the language of culture (also see Wright 1998). In pursuit of the enclave nationalism described above, it aims for "spaces in which Afrikaners and whites could organize their

own affairs, self-sufficient and free from black, majority intervention" (Van Zyl-Hermann 2018, 2685). Drawing on the familiar tenets of Christian nationalism as a civil religion, Solidarity presents its selfdoenkultuur (do-it-yourself culture) as an unavoidable calling from God (p.2683) to join its institutions. Solidarity retains self-determination as a political goal, but it uses the democratic-era Constitution to protect and extend its institutions in a quest for cultural, social, and economic autonomy at community level.

"Self-help" is the central motif and also modus operandi of Solidarity's politics and practices. The problematic of how this seemingly innocuous— if not positive — notion plays out is highlighted in Yves Vanderhaeghen's (2018) analysis. As explained earlier, rehabilitative post-apartheid Afrikaner discourses construct a binary of "white order/black disorder." The rehabilitation of Afrikaner identity is sought through a "self-granted absolution" from apartheid guilt (p.153). Intra-ethnic/intra-white self-help emerges as the necessary social practice. Self-help is placed in opposition to any interracial cooperation that could bridge persistent apartheid fractures. Only white Afrikaans subjects are rendered eligible to provide moral validation, or ordentlikheid. Thus, a self-referential loop of racialised moralisation is created (p.153). The ramifications fit a white nationalist agenda:

> [Solidarity] extends the corruption and state failure associated with ANC elites to a general callousness among all black South Africans. In contrast, Afrikaners – and whites generally – emerge as moral, biological, indeed racial superiors on account of their "self-doing culture" (Van Zyl-Hermann 2018, 2686).

Solidarity's discourse invokes race-based cultural and biological differences to install a "moral hierarchy" in which white people are elevated as "virtuous" in contrast to black people (p. 2684). "Moral obligation" to the state is displaced with "racial and ethnic solidarities," with "authority… transposed to [Solidarity] as saviour organization" (p.2684). Solidarity's version of the world is held forth as a "natural order." According to its marketing materials, what it seeks is merely "normal." Its moral hierarchy with inbuilt racial dichotomies is simply part of "normal" laws and "normal" ways of living (Solidarity Movement n.d.). This is ordentlikheid, as Solidarity interprets it.

Solidarity follows a two-pronged approach of transnationalisation alongside localisation. In the contemporary moment of the international resurgence of racial populism, claiming the moral high ground of ordentlikheid also facilitates linking into emboldened whiteness, with US President Donald Trump as transnational icon. Transnationalisation involves a reciprocal relationship, as the "Boers" of South Africa provide propaganda fodder for white right discourses in the Global North, ranging from the US's Fox News to the Scandinavian white right to parties in the European Union parliament (Kucera 2020). The breadth and coordination of the resultant networks surfaced in the second Trump administration in 2025, when repeated AfriForum visits to the USA yielded results. As the last collective of white people to sustain institutionalised white supremacism, the idea of Afrikaners bolstered the globally

resurgent white right imaginary. Trump and the billionaire and former South African Elon Musk drove a social media campaign lambasting the South African government for "bad things," including white farmers as targets for attacks and land expropriation. At the same time, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio refused to attend the Group of 20 meeting with South Africa as host, followed by Trump also indicting that he would not attend. The Trump regime's motivation, as circulated on Musk's X social media platform, included a rejection of the theme of the G20 meeting: "Fostering Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainable Development." Rubio criticised the theme as similar to the US's "diversity, equity and inclusion" policies that the Trump regime had terminated. Trump issued an executive order announcing a refugee programme for Afrikaners, and legislation was tabled in the US Congress to enable punitive action against the South African government (USA 2025a; USA 2025b).

In response, Solidarity's leadership visited Washington DC with a memorandum describing Afrikaners as a "Western community" "striving for cultural autonomy" (Solidarity Movement 2025, 3). This emphasis on Afrikaners' "Westernness" is read here again as claiming recognition in relation to global whiteness, this time in response to American whiteness. It provides for a reciprocal reinforcement where both sets of white subjects can claim the moral high ground. Symbolically, the Trumpist rescue operation of Afrikaners offers a justification of white power. Along with Trump's attack on South African land reform, it reads as a rebuff of redress, broadcast globally on social media. It cast retroactive doubt over US support for the democratisation of South Africa and the ending of apartheid. Confirming Afrikaners as victims of black South Africans implies that the end of white rule leads to social and economic destruction, specifically of white people. Suggestive of white victimhood across the world, it resonates with the racist conspiracy theory of "the great replacement" of white Europeans by racialised others (Ekman 2022). The dehumanising hyper-exploitation of apartheid and colonialism at large is placed out of view, while attempts to reverse the dehumanisation of black people through economic redress are vilified. Imposing a Manichaean schema of morality, if "bad things" were happening to Afrikaners, and those doing the bad things deserved punishment, the latter must be "wrongdoers," from whence it follows that Afrikaners must be "good." Victims are necessarily "good." Hence, restitution and redress are obviated as the real victims (of colonialism and racism) are erased. The beneficial reciprocity between the white right in South Africa and the USA serves as an excellent example of what Gabriel (1998, 98) described as lesser whiteness anchoring a more "dominant version of whiteness." In the process, the unlikely twist of an intervention by a white right regime in control of the most powerful state in the world placed Afrikaners at the centre of the global stage. The last time was with the official fall of apartheid in the 1990s, from which Afrikaners emerged as morally tainted. For the Afrikaner white right, the most powerful global Anglo white other offered an unexpected restoration of ordentlikheid, and therefore of their spoilt whiteness.

Conclusion

The accomplishment of whiteness is under constant pressure, as the boundaries of this racial formation expand and contract in accordance with shifting power relations. These dynamics are necessarily intersectional: whiteness is constituted through internal and external processes in which racial, ethnic, classed, gender, and sexual others are incorporated and disciplined, or expelled and abjected. External and internal hierarchies furnish whiteness in the plural. Hence, multiple whitenesses are formed in hierarchical relation to one another. The continuous renewal of whiteness as an aspirational status stands central to the global racial order underpinning coloniality. White ambition can be fruitfully analysed with the concept of respectability, operationalised in nationalisms to draw together race with gender and other differences in the constitution of "worthy" national subjects. In making sense of the formerly hegemonic apartheid identity of "the Afrikaner," the accomplishment of whiteness is here probed using the ethno-cultural term of ordentlikheid. The pursuit of ordentlikheid is explored across three historical moments, marked by shifting emphases in the intersectional deployment of differences. Gender (volksmoeder femininity) and class (middcleclassness) are more pronounced in the first period, while ethnicity is central to claims in the second period, and race (whiteness) is of greater import in the post-apartheid Trumpist period. Ordentlikheid captures the intersectional ordering of differences in the Afrikaner quest to achieve whiteness. This quest started with counteracting British-Boer competition and the inferiorisation of Afrikaners as "lesser whites," and "purifying" Afrikaner nationalism to ensure a white volk by corralling women into a heteropatriarchal regime of "woman/wife-as-mother." With the official ending of apartheid, Afrikaner whiteness is tipped into ignominy, leading to the rehabilitative pursuit of the restoration of ordentlikheid with apartheid held forth as "white order," in contradistinction to democracy as "black disorder." With the loss of the fantasy of a white nation state in Africa, Afrikaner enclave neo-nationalism emerges with its mix of strategies of inward migration, localisation and ethnic closure. This renewed ethnicisation dovetails with the neoliberal commodification of Afrikaner identity, and finds organisational expression in a white right "verkrampte" trade union with roots in the colonial era. Reinvented as Solidarity, its erstwhile marginal politics is mainstreamed in a process akin to the mainstreaming of the white right in the Global North. Solidarity's "self-help" discourse restores ordentlikheid by affirming the worthiness of Afrikaner whiteness in opposition to black South Africans, portrayed as collectively synonymous with disorder and corruption. Afrikaner white ambition receives an unexpected boon when it is incorporated into Trumpism, the white right movement congealing around US President Donald Trump. Ordentlikheid provides a mutually shared moral high ground for Afrikaners and whites in the Global North, as reciprocal transnational global white right politics elevates Afrikaners as exemplary white subjects in need of protection against black violence and corruption.

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