Romanticising the "*Boer*": Narratives of White Victimhood in South African Popular Culture

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Summary

In this article, I present a critical reading of a purposive sample of popular cultural expressions from various sites as they relate to the emergence of narratives of white victimhood in South Africa. The particular focus falls on the resurgence of nostalgic appropriations of the construct of the Afrikaner Boer imaginary, and the concomitant utopian farm ideal. The argument is that this resurgence, in conjunction with popularised, yet unfounded, claims of "white genocide" as it pertains to the murder of white farmers in South Africa, is employed as a means of restoring white hegemony. I contend, moreover, that the globalisation of the genocide-narrative gives nationalist, Afrikaner whiteness – which has historically been regarded as a "lesser whiteness" (Van der Westhuizen 2018) – access to global, normative whiteness, thereby legitimising its hegemonic ideals. A counterargument, however, is that these narratives result in the hypervisibility of whiteness, negating its normative invisibility and creating the potential to subvert and decolonise whiteness as a dominant ideology. The research is theoretically situated within critical whiteness studies and, following a deep description of the context, presents analysis and interpretation alongside concrete examples of popular cultural expressions.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel bied 'n kritiese ontleding van 'n doelmatige steekproef van populêre kulturele uitdrukkings soos wat dit verband hou met narratiewe van wit slagofferskap in Suid-Afrika. Meer spesifiek val die fokus op hedendaagse nostalgiese appropriasies van die historiese konstruk van die Afrikaner as "Boer" en daarmee saam konstruksies van die plaas as 'n verlore utopie. Ek voer aan dat hierdie hernude klem – tesame met populêre, dog ongegronde, narratiewe van wit-volksmoord, soos dit verbandhou met plaasmoorde van wit boere – gebruik word om wit legitimiteit en mag te herstel. Hierbenewens kom ek tot die gevolgtrekking dat die globalisering van die wit-volksmoord narratief aan Afrikaner-witwees, wat histories gesien is as 'n mindere vorm van witwees (Van der Westhuizen 2018), toegang verleen tot normatiewe witwees, wat die hegemoniese potensiaal daarvan versterk. Hierteenoor kan egter geargumenteer word dat hierdie narratiewe die hipersigbaarheid van witwees tot gevolg het, wat kan lei tot die negering, moontlike ondermying, en dekolonisering van hegemoniese witheid se normatiewe onsigbaarheid. Die analise word benader vanuit die teoretiese raamwerk van Witweesstudies. Ná 'n diepliggende konteksbeskrywing volg my analise en interpretasie wat telkens geïllustreer word deur konkrete voorbeelde van tersaaklike populêre kulturele uitdrukkings.

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Introduction

After the summer holidays, I had my 4-year-old boy's hair cut at a recently opened barbershop, called *Buffelsfontein Baardolie,* in our neighbourhood. While waiting our turn, what struck me was the particular aesthetic of the shop and the brand it represents, and how the customers frequenting the shop perpetuate this. It seemed that the overtly masculine, Afrikaner, Boer[1]-inspired look and feel of the shop is perpetuated by, amongst other things, the two-tone shirts of some of the customers, and consolidated by the "Klippies and Cola"[2] available to customers of drinking age while they get a haircut and a shave. These nostalgic appropriations of the Afrikaner-as-Boer imaginary, manifesting in an urban setting, so far removed from any actual farm, resonated with a trend I had recently picked up in social media and other popular cultural expressions. It seemed I was witnessing a kind of re-invigoration of the construction of the white Afrikaner-as-Boer – a romanticising of the Boer, as it were – as a means of restoring white legitimacy. This, together with the increasing prevalence of South African narratives of farm murders as a so-called "white genocide"[3] in popular mass and social media, prompted the analysis presented here.

Scholars in critical whiteness studies have argued that the invisibility which comes with normativity is one of the most enduring characteristics of whiteness. While whiteness in the South African context, as in numerous contexts across the world, still to some extent connotes a normative position of power, the key difference here lies in the fact that whites are in the minority. In South Africa, this numerical minority, in conjunction with their political and historical prominence, means that white peoples' racialisation is not as obscured from consciousness as in other "heartlands of whiteness" (Steyn 1998). In the post-apartheid era, Steyn (2007: 422) observes that the "relatively disempowered relationship to the state and to political power

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1. As is the case with the use of *platteland* referenced later, I contend that the nuances of meaning connected to the word "Boer" are more accurate than those of the English "farmer", so for the purposes of this analysis, I prefer to use this word with its attendant connotations of Afrikaner whiteness.

2. "Klipdrift and Cola" (colloquially referred to as Klippies and Cola) is a pre-mixed drink consisting of Klipdrift brandy and Coke. As with all types of alcohol, the choice of a specific drink holds certain connotations. In this regard, Trapido (2016) observes that brandy has an "image problem" with research interviews suggesting that it is "linked to the brandy-and-coke-laden legacy of apartheid inequality".

3. There is no reliable data to suggest that white farmers are targeted more than any other South Africans. Ward (2018) maintains that the myth of "white-genocide" is based on a "host of misleading factoids and talking points that can be dangerously persuasive in the 'fake news' era".

positions whiteness in South Africa differently from whiteness in any of the other places that are theorising whiteness". In the South African context, then, whiteness has become "hyper-visible" and I argue that a focus on this hyper-visibility presents an ideal opportunity to interrogate, and possibly disrupt, the ways in which whiteness negotiates threats to its hegemony.

In this study, I specifically interrogate Afrikaner whiteness. Notably, Afrikaner identity is by no means hegemonic or singular, but the specific construction of nationalist, Afrikaner identity referenced here is one that occupies a prominent space in the Afrikaner socio-cultural sphere, as a visible, and culturally pervasive, performance of white identity in South Africa. Apart from the fact that Afrikaner whiteness is inherently hyper-visible as argued above, it is distinguishable from normative whiteness for another reason. As the descendants of the Dutch (or Boer) settlers, Afrikaners constructed their identities "in opposition to, on the one hand, black identities, and on the other Anglo whiteness", resulting in what can be termed a "lesser whiteness" (Van der Westhuizen 2018). Historically then, Afrikaners have been classified as "just-about-white" enough in relation to the hegemonic, normative whiteness represented by British colonialists and subsequently white, English-speaking South Africans (WESSAs), which, in turn, draws on global constructions of Anglo whiteness (Van der Westhuizen 2017: 5; Van der Westhuizen 2018). By this understanding, Afrikaner whiteness, since its inception, has been in a perpetual state of un-belonging, while still clinging to white hegemony.

Apartheid, as the supporting scaffolding of Afrikaner identity (Van der Westhuizen 2017: 5), created a temporary sense of belonging for Afrikaners, but, with its demise, Afrikaner nationalism lost its centrality in South Africa and white identities are now, again, being renegotiated and defended in multiple ways. According to Steyn (2007: 422), South African whiteness, and by implication Afrikaner whiteness, is "characterized by a sense of vulnerability, by the belief that the spaces of whiteness are being infiltrated by strangers … by … profound feelings of displacement … [and] victimization". One result of this vulnerability and dislocation, which piqued my interest in the topic of this article, seems to be a nostalgic yearning for life in the "platteland",[4] a life connoting dreams of plenitude, security and values such as simplicity, virtuousness and righteousness (Van Zyl 2008: 126). All utopias are impossible, however, and the consequences of this impossibility results in some white people cultivating each other's fears through discourses that can broadly be categorised as narratives of white victimhood (Bloom 2009: 167; Steyn 2004). I argue that these fear-induced narratives, have, at their roots,

4. Van Zyl (2008: 127) writes that, even though the terms "countryside" or "rural areas" may be considered synonyms for the Afrikaans term "platteland", she prefers to use the latter because it "embodies the very imagery, identity, values and notions that Afrikaners yearn for". For these reasons the word *platteland*, like *boer*, is also preferred here.

the need for Afrikaners to protect their unselfconscious entitlement and constant striving for privilege and belonging.

Narratives of white victimhood manifest in various spaces, also in popular cultural expressions found in mass and social media. Examples I reference in this article include commercial and personal Facebook, Twitter and web-pages; social media campaigns; and even popular Afrikaans music videos. I contend that popular culture provides privileged access to the social realities of a specific time and can thus be read to gain insight into a specific society at a given moment (Kellner 1996; milton 2008: 255). Against this background, the goal of my analysis is to investigate examples from popular Afrikaans culture and social media to provide insight into the ways in which white Afrikaners are using narratives of victimhood – particularly as they pertain to a resurgence of the idea of the Afrikaner-as-Boer and the myth of white-genocide – as discursive tools to restore white legitimacy.

The theoretical framework relevant to this analysis is critical whiteness studies (CWS). CWS can be situated within the broader discourses of cultural studies, but also, more specifically, critical race studies. Morrison (1992: 90) posits that the principal goal of CWS is an effort to "avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served". Similar to developments in other approaches to diversity (such as the study of gender, sexuality and disability, for example), with CWS the academic gaze has shifted from the margins to the centre (masculinity, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness) in order to focus on the empowered positions that normally deflect attention (Steyn 2007: 420). In this regard, Shome (1999) writes that CWS theorists recognise the covert "formation of White identity that occurs when Whites serve as the normative referent against which Other identities are constructed". Scholarship in this field aims to provide a platform for the radical critique of the racial order and it interrogates the social identity of those who are "racialized into whiteness, identifying the discursive and semiotic, political and legal, egregious and everyday practices that establish and maintain racial privilege as the normative place from which racial power is deployed" (Steyn 2007: 420). In South Africa, despite the fact that whiteness differs from contexts where whites are in a numerical majority, the country's history of colonisation and apartheid certainly makes white racial privilege prevalent.

Three general "waves" of CWS can be identified (Steyn 2007: 420-421).[5] Work in the most recent wave often takes a postcolonial perspective since

5. The first wave drew attention to the unmarked nature of whiteness, specifically with regard to literature and film. The focus fell on how whiteness functions as the norm, but also how this normativity is only possible when constructed with blackness as its binary Other. The objective is thus to render whiteness and its strategies visible, and naming it, in order to neutralise its power (Steyn 2007: 420). Subsequent work on whiteness (regarded as the second wave)

there is a relationship between exposing whiteness and "decolonising the imagination of both the oppressed and the oppressors" (Steyn 2007). According to Twine and Gallagher (2008: 15), "analyses of diverse cultural sites, including newspapers, autobiographical writings, music, public policy debates, social relationships and state discourse, are central to third wave whiteness". The topic of this analysis clearly falls into this category because it aims to decolonise whiteness through analyses of its manifestation in samples from popular mass and social media.

I take cognisance of the criticism levelled against CWS. It provokes the same uneasiness that followed the shift in feminist and gender studies when the focus moved to masculinity, or the theory of the crises of masculinity, and its consequent implications for re-centring and recreating hegemony (Stevens 2007: 426). Similarly, the most prominent criticism against CWS is that this body of work attempts to re-centre whiteness. In addition to this, Stevens (2007: 425) advises against applying and extending international work on whiteness studies to a specific context without caution because whiteness manifests differently across contexts. Taking heed of Stevens' warnings, I specifically investigate the functioning of whiteness in the South African context, and, like Stevens, I do not perceive CWS to be a "silver bullet" or ultimate solution for comprehending and opposing racism. Rather, whiteness studies is viewed as a complementary tool for anti-racist praxis and as a "potential node of resistance in the form of tactical reversals against the strategic relations of power that constitute racism" (Stevens 2007: 429).

This analysis is grounded within a qualitative paradigm and the narratives of victimhood are regarded as cultural products that employ discursive practices to construct certain identities. To situate the analysed examples, and true to the phenomenological approach which emphasises "personal perspective, interpretation, description and exploration" (Steenkamp 2016: 316), I start out with a rich description of the context. This entails providing a brief background of the historical link between the Afrikaner and the Boer, their historical connection to land, and more recent manifestations of the Boer-imaginary in South African popular culture. The contextual overview forms the basis of the textual-visual discourse analysis that follows: of a purposive sample of popular cultural expressions perpetuating narratives of white victimhood. Literature on whiteness, on narratives of white victimhood, and on nostalgia and shame is integrated into the analysis to provide a critical, yet substantiated, reading of the discourses produced by the selected texts. My analysis is presented alongside examples from the analysed texts.

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aimed to particularise whiteness by "identifying, describing and contextualising various expressions of 'whitenesses' which share the 'founding narratives' of white superiority, and therefore have 'family resemblances', but have come about through different historical, class, gendered and geographical experiences" (Steyn 2007: 420).

“O, Boereplaas, geboortegrond”:[6] The Afrikaner, The Boer and His Farm

The farm is one of the central themes that played a role in constructing Afrikaner whiteness as a normative position of racial privilege, and I argue that its importance is enjoying a resurgence, exactly for the purposes of renegotiating, or protecting, this privilege. In conjunction with the historical idea of the “Boer”, the farm is integral to the specific version of the white Afrikaner imaginary interrogated here. Coetzee (1988: 6) observes that the farm is considered the natural milieu of the Afrikaner and the only place where Afrikaner identity can be realised optimally. This is substantiated by Van der Westhuizen’s (2018) reference to a “discourse of Boers-as-unspoilt-children-of-nature” and Wepener’s (2019) description of the farm as an archetype in the Afrikaner subconscious, one that often influences their actions. Land ownership is central to this construction, and with that comes an emphasis on proximity to nature, the nobility of hard labour, gender roles within an established patriarchy, a particular class which is more accurately based on race, as well as the importance of inheritance and the preservation of the farm (Wepener 2019).

A detailed exploration of the complex ways in which the construction of the white, Afrikaner Boer imaginary has occurred in South African history is beyond the scope of this article. Steenkamp (2016: 316) observes that during the past century the construct of Afrikaner masculinity (and, by implication, the Afrikaner in general) “evolved from Voortrekker hero to that of religious farmer who tamed the land of his secluded farm after the Great Trek, to that of the impoverished urban dweller during the Great Depression”. What is crucial to the construction of my argument, however, is that, contrary to the romanticised version nostalgically appropriated in recent popular cultural discourses, the Afrikaner identity was not always considered noble or positive.

The conceptualisation of the Afrikaner as a “lesser-white” can be traced historically. The Afrikaners were some of the first colonial people to sever ties with their European roots and develop a distinct burgher community, one in which land, and land ownership were central. However, as Giliomee (2003: xiv) argues, this resulted in Afrikaners being regarded as “both a colonized people and colonizers themselves”, first under the rule of the Dutch East India Company, and later the British Empire. During the 1800s Boers were regarded as “an inferior or degraded class of colonist” (Keegan 2001: 460) and Lord Kitchener reportedly characterised the Boers as “uncivilised Afrikaner savages with a thin white veneer” (Steyn 2001: 26). During the “poor white”

6. Excerpt taken from C.F. Visser’s poem entitled, “O, Boereplaas”. The first line of the poem reads: “O, Boereplaas, geboortegrond! Jou het ek lief bo alles” (*Oh, Farmland, Place of Birth! You, I Love Above All*).

scare of the 1930s, once more, the "threat of disqualification" from whiteness was particularly prevalent. "Poor whites" can be likened to the American phenomenon of "white trash", always "just-about-white" enough (Van der Westhuizen 2017: 5). Van der Westhuizen (2017: 28) emphasises this "in-between status" when she writes that Afrikaners were constructed as an "intermediate group mired between their aspirations to the material and cultural power and affluence" of the British colonialists and WESSAs and "their fears of competition with black people and of group depletion through miscegenation".

These aspirations complicated the historical link between the Afrikaner and land, or farm. Economic development, a steady supply of affordable black labourers and the improvement of access to education from 1948 onwards ensured a rapid rise in the mobility of the Afrikaner and led to their embourgeoisement. Van Zyl (2008: 135) observes that, from the 1960s, "Afrikaners' mentality was informed by their rapid economic rise to a solid middle class status, and their political and cultural supremacy in South Africa". The republican ideal had been realised, political domination had been secured through apartheid ideology, and Afrikaans language and culture had been elevated to occupy equal status to their English counterparts. This, together with the resultant political stability and economic prosperity, "fostered feelings of self-assurance, control and contentment" (Van Zyl 2008: 135). The shift in emphasis to materialism, technification, affluence and sophistication resulted in most Afrikaners becoming middle to upper class. More significantly, urbanisation resulted in Afrikaners being distanced from their "rural roots" with their "modern, unchallenged nationalist identity" creating an alternative utopian paradise (Van Zyl 2008: 135). In stark contrast to the romantic notion of the Afrikaner as unconditionally connected to the land, urban space was now the new utopia. Urbanisation also distanced Afrikaners from the more negative connotations associated with being an Afrikaner Boer, implicit in derogatory terms such as "Dutchman", "hairyback", "rock spider", "mealie muncher", "takhaar" (long hair), "bywoner" (backyard dweller), "backvelder" and "plank" (Van der West-huizen 2018). For a moment in history, the Afrikaner belonged. However, this belonging was, once more, disrupted with the demise of apartheid, emphasising that a state of un-belonging, a constant quest for belonging – also extending to the way in which Afrikaners are considered "just-about-white" enough to be racialised into normative, Western whiteness – is another constant in the construction of Afrikaner identity.

Despite all of the above, however, the farm and the construction of the Afrikaner-as-Boer remains central to contemporary constructions of white Afrikaans identity, even if its application has become less literal. This argument is supported by Pogue (2019), who claims that descendants of the Boere see agriculture not only as their history and identity, but also, importantly, as their rightful inheritance. This recurrent theme can be traced

back as present in cultural production for more than a century. As an example of its ubiquity, Wepener (2019) cites the "plaasroman",[7] a central genre in Afrikaans literature.[8] He argues that, despite critical developments in the genre, as well as the fact that the majority of Afrikaners do not live on farms anymore, the romanticised idea of the farm still thrives within Afrikaans culture. Wepener (2019) observes that, regardless of whether the church bazaar is in Sandton, Sasolburg or Swartruggens, the occasion is built around hay bales, farm bread and campfires – all of which, once more, connote the farm as paradise.

Narratives of White Victimhood in Contemporary Popular Cultural Expression: Regaining Hegemony on the Back of the "Hairy-back"[9]

References to the farm, and the Boer in particular then, are nothing new. However, the farm seems to be increasingly referenced in current discourses and cultural texts focused on the topic of Afrikaners. I argue that this recurrence is connected to current and perceived threats to white hegemony in South Africa and that it inevitably translates into narratives of white victimhood.

References to farms and farming notably manifest in various forms of the nostalgic appropriation of the platteland. Steenkamp (2016: 315) writes that nostalgia serves as a powerful mechanism in creating romanticised ideas about the past, but it also functions as a form of selective memory, presenting a "sanitised version of the past" (Steenkamp 2016: 315). This specific affinity for the platteland, or the longing to return, provides provocative insight into Afrikaners' "historical experiences and self-conception since the advent of democracy in South Africa" (Van Zyl 2008: 127). Van der Waal and Robins (2011: 774) contend that nostalgia is about the "past as imagined, lost and idealised, in contrast to a present that is experienced as a time of alienation and suffering". The farm is conceptualised as a venerated paradise and viewed

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7. Similar to the use of *platteland*, or *Boer*, I will use the Afrikaans term "plaasroman" when referring to this specific genre in Afrikaans literature. Various theorists have translated the term into, amongst others, "farm novel" or "the story of an African farm", but these apparent synonyms do not have the same history, or nuance, of meaning.

8. Examples of seminal plaasromans include *Somer* and *Laat Vrugte* by C.M. van den Heever.

9. The word "hairyback" is a derogative or offensive term used to describe the "Afrikaner" specifically as it pertains to poor whites, farmers or manual labourers.

as a binary opposition to the harsh realities of urban settings, in particular to the situation of Afrikaners in post-apartheid South Africa. A concrete manifestation of this sentimental yearning, according to Van Zyl (2008: 127), is the "rural property boom, the development of agri-tourism and the deliberate marketing of small towns as these romantic notions draw urbanites to the *platteland*". In Afrikaans popular culture, images, slogans or arguments that sentimentalise the Boer and the platteland are used to (re)generate feelings of white Afrikaner superiority, arguably as a direct result of the perceived loss of white hegemony. Due to the limited scope of this article, I briefly discuss only two such examples.

Firstly, the *Buffelsfontein Baardolie* brand, referenced earlier, is one example of the nostalgic appropriation of the Boer aesthetic and Afrikaner, nationalist ideology in contemporary, urban popular culture. With the tagline, "Bederf jouself, jou rowwe bliksem" (*Spoil yourself, you rough bastard*), it sells the aesthetic of a rough and tough, bearded Boer, specifically in Afrikaans. Features such as beards and hats, associated with traditional farmers, are appropriated to create merchandise ranging from baardolie (beard oil), badges indicating blood group, shower gel, brandy, clothing, and leather goods. The brand also extends into a lifestyle show entitled *Baard, Bos en Kos*[10] currently being broadcast for a second season on the Afrikaans pay-to-view channel, *Via*. Urbanites thus get to sport the look, and buy into the ideology, without having to be a farmer. In *Buffelsfontein Baardolie*'s online store, their typical customer is described as follows:

> Jy klim berge en jy brandmerk beeste. Jy vang vis met dinamiet en jy drink bier uit 'n gedroogde ratel se skrotum. Jy jag en jy maak vuur en jy moor inbrekers met jou kaal hande. Jy is lief vir drie dinge: jou ma, jou bakkie, jou baard.
>
> (*You climb mountains and you brand cattle. You use dynamite to catch fish and you drink beer from the dried-out scrotum of a badger. You hunt and you make fire and you kill burglars with your bare hands. You love three things: your mother, your bakkie [truck] and your beard*.)
>
> ("Buffelsfontein" 2019)

Even though whiteness – and in this case Afrikaner whiteness in particular – is constructed, not often explicitly acknowledged and constantly adapting, certain characteristics can be attributed to it. Despite the fact that the brand can be read as tongue-in-cheek, its construction still resonates with a number of these key characteristics. Earlier, I referred to the established patriarchy

10. *Baard, Bos en Kos* features chef, Johan Hall. He and the owner of *Buffelsfontein Baardolie*, Meyer le Roux, prepare meals in unexpected locations. During the course of the first season, for example, they cooked chicken on a car engine in the middle of the Karoo.

inherent in Afrikaner identity. Whiteness, similarly, is associated with heterosexuality. Foster (2003: 123) argues that whiteness as a hegemonic power demands compulsory heterosexuality and encourages the myth of the nuclear family. Thus, heteronormative performances of marriage and parenthood are considered to be well-performed whiteness. These kinds of performances are perpetuated in descriptions of the overtly masculine Boer who practices the normative family values of respect and loving his mother – the "volksmoeder" (*mother of the nation*).[11]

Another example of Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans' investment in the Boer-imaginary is the popularity of *Boer soek 'n Vrou*,[12] a reality series broadcast on the pay-to-view channel, *KykNET*. I contend that the show's popularity, with its 15th season starting in 2020, hinges on its successful appeal to the nostalgic yearnings of its target audience, reclaiming a redemptive identity for the Boer. Steenkamp (2016: 317) maintains that, in a postmodern context, the term nostalgia connotes not only a "longing for a loss of home, remembering an ideal past … but also a yearning for love". The premise of the show speaks to both the yearning for the past and the yearning for love: it presents idealised versions of farmers, is set in spectacular farming locations, and promises the added possibility of true love. The show's premise thus resonates with the compulsory heterosexuality and the myth of the nuclear family significant for constructions of whiteness.

Viewers' investment in affirmations of dominant ideas of manliness (and womanliness) within the Afrikaner nationalist ideology was evident in the vehement resistance to the introduction of a gay farmer in season 12. During the first episode of season 12 (May 2019), it became apparent that "nine of the ten male farmers are looking for a female companion and the remaining one hopes to find the ideal male partner" (Channel 24, 2019). This deviation from the normative construction of the heteronormative Boer, as the head of the family, led to a social media frenzy with numerous viewers voicing their discontent. The overall sentiment was that public representations of gay

11. Van der Westhuizen (2017: 8) writes that the "volksmoeder" represents "a nodal point, a privileged signifier, …the more revered femininity of normative ordentlikheid, a hegemonic femininity in relation to which white, Afrikaans-speaking, female-bodied subjects are produced, policed and disciplined".

12. *Boer soek 'n Vrou* is the Afrikaans spin-off of an Australian reality television series, "The Farmer wants a Wife", developed by Fremantle media. The South African version consists of 13 episodes and is broadcast on the Dstv platform's KykNET channel. It is, in essence, a matchmaking programme where single farmers are presented to the public whereupon single females are invited to send them letters of interest. The show follows the development of these relationships. The female admirers are eliminated along the way as the show progresses towards the end goal of the most popular farmers finding true love. A new presenter, for season 15, was announced at the beginning of 2020.

people went against viewers' religious principles, principles explicitly represented as part and parcel of white, Afrikaans identity. This can be read as indicative of the entrenched Calvinistic, patriarchal heteronormativity, but also the normalised homophobia, of this particular version of Afrikaner whiteness.

While both the examples discussed above pertain to the construction of the Afrikaner/Boer with its concurrent heteronormative, patriarchal performances, there is also a hint at white defensiveness or victimhood present in the *Buffelsfontein* example. It is telling that in a three-line description of the norms and values of the ideal *Buffelsfontein* customer (read Afrikaner Boer), there is a reference to "inbrekers" (burglars or robbers). The inclusion of such a word can be read as revealing that the notion of defence is a feature central to the construction of the Boer, even in contemporary life. The reference to "inbrekers" in *Buffelsfontein Baardolie*'s brand description supports the idea of the Boer who has to violently protect himself from onslaughts against that which he perceives to belong to him – it indicates that Afrikaner identity may partly be based upon a belief in property as threatened by a generic outsider.

Shome (2000: 368) argues that when whiteness is comfortable in its hegemony, it constructs itself as the norm. However, when contested,

> different strategies of self-naming emerge. Instead of positioning itself as the "norm", it begins to mark itself as the "Other", as "different", as an identity in crisis … and therefore having a particular location that, like minority locations, needs to be defended, salvaged, and protected.

So, when the mythical, romanticised space of the farm, that which "signifies the history and historical identity of white Afrikaners" (Steenkamp 2016: 321) is perceived as under threat, it gives rise to a range of narratives of white victimhood. I argue that Afrikaners are currently feeling especially threatened or defensive about their historical identity, as connected to the platteland, for two related reasons in particular: the so-called "land question" and the "farm murder"/"white-genocide" narrative.

Since the inception of the EFF in 2012, its leader, Julius Malema, has been vocal about land occupation and redistribution. Malema's controversial utterances, some of which have seen him accused of hate speech, have connected land occupation with murder. In 2016, for example, while addressing a crowd of supporters on land redistribution, Malema was confronted by a journalist for allegedly advocating for the murder of white people. He denied this, saying that the party was not calling for white slaughter, "at least for now" (Mthethwa 2019). One of the first policies adopted by South Africa's newest president, Cyril Ramaphosa, moreover, was "expropriation without compensation", which initiated the process of adapting the country's constitution to permit land seizures. According to the ANC, these official land seizures constituted a "legitimate option in an effort to create mixed ownership of land" (Pogue 2019). This has, predictably, sparked a reaction from white

South Africans who perceive the policy to be a threat to their livelihoods and property.

In addition, white commercial farmers in South Africa have complained for some time that they are the target of rising, racially motivated, violent crime and that the government is ignoring their plight. I concede that the element of racial hatred inherent in some of the murders of white farmers cannot be contested. However, the fact remains that, in a country where almost twenty thousand people were killed in 2018, most of them black, there were, according to government statistics, less than 100 farm murders (Ward 2018). Notably, not all of the victims of farm murders were white, and the long-term trend shows a decline (Ward 2018). Furthermore, farmers are only one collective at high risk of being murdered in South Africa today. Statistically, night-shift workers and *uber* drivers, for example, are at greater risk (Pogue 2019).

The idea of so-called "farm murders" has been amplified by international media, mainstreaming white nationalist narratives about "white-genocide" (Ward 2018). Even though there is no definitive link between the proposed law and the murders of white farmers, white conservative associations such as Afriforum[13] and the Suidlanders[14] have been creating mass media hype, also targeting international sympathisers. Ernst Roets, deputy CEO of Afriforum, for example, appeared on the Tucker Carlson[15] show to garner support for its cause (Ward 2018), citing the hashtag *#TheWorldMustKnow*. Pogue (2019) writes that news about land reform in South Africa is

> refracted through the lens of a narrative promoted by white conservatives about a supposed "white genocide" – killings of mostly Afrikaner farmers – equating land redistribution with race war. Even though there is no direct connection between murders of white farmers and land reform, an idea has nonetheless taken hold in the international media of landowners under murderous assault by the black masses, the clearest symbol that in twenty-five

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13. Afriforum describes itself as a non-government organisation whose main goal is to protect minority rights, specifically the rights of Afrikaners as a community on the southern tip of Africa.

14. The Suidlanders is a South African, ethno-nationalist, racist, white Afrikaner survivalist group whose ideologies are based on the prophecies of "Siener van Rensburg". The group describes itself as an "[e]mergency plan initiative officially founded in 2006 to prepare a Protestant Christian South African Minority for a coming violent revolution". According to the Suidlanders, since 2006, it has become clear that anarchy in South Africa is a real possibility. Preparations include training manuals, refugee management, a nation-wide off-grid communications network, etc. (Suidlanders 2019).

15. Carlson is an American conservative journalist and political commentator, and host of the *Tucker Carlson Tonight*-show on *Fox News*.

> years of post-apartheid majority rule whites have become a persecuted minority.

These types of reactions may indicate how normative whiteness retaliates when it is challenged or negated. In her book, *Whiteness just isn't what it used to be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa,* Steyn (2001) unpacks several narratives that can be connected specifically to white people's reactions to a changing South Africa. The second narrative she identifies, and the one I argue is most pertinent to the popular and social media examples I discuss here, is what she names, *This shouldn't happen to a white*. Linked to Shome's argument, one of the ways in which whites protect themselves, or attempt to renegotiate hegemony and power, is in (re)constructing their identity as the "new minority" or the "new oppressed". According to Dolby (2001: 8), drawing on Nietzche, this can also be referred to as a "politics of resentment" with threatened whites positioning themselves as victims. Steyn (2012: 8) postulates in this regard that some white South Africans claim, for example, that "it was not as bad for black people during apartheid as it is for white South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa". This narrative involves an unshaken faith in white superiority, but also disillusionment with the new, and decidedly more hostile, environment. Whiteness is thus more keenly felt, and, by this logic, should therefore be more publicly defended. This results in a socially sanctioned array of what DiAngelo (2011: 61) describes as "counter" or "defensive moves".

DiAngelo (2011: 64) connects these discourses of victimisation to "white fragility". She (2011: 54) defines "white fragility" as a state in which "even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves", and claims that this happens because whites have not had to develop the cognitive or affective skills required for constructive engagement across racial divides. The result is often a discourse of self-defence through which whites "position themselves as victimized, slammed, blamed, attacked, and being used as 'punching bags'" (DiAngelo 2011: 64). These self-defence claims, however, construct speakers as morally superior while simultaneously obscuring the power of their social locations, in the process blaming others with less social power for the situation. Thus, by positioning themselves as victims, whites avoid the responsibility of racial power and privilege (DiAngelo 2011; Applebaum 2016).

To illustrate my argument, I briefly outline some examples of how narratives of white victimhood have recently manifested in popular, South African mass and social media.

Ernst Roets' book *Kill the Boer* is one example of a defensive move that takes the form of a narrative of white victimhood. The book centres around what he calls the "brutal reality" of farm attacks in South Africa, and how, according to him, "the South African government is complicit in the crisis" (Roets 2018). Roets argues that "a looming process of ethnic cleansing should be regarded as a serious threat and something to be prevented". According to

him, his book also indicates the complicity of the South African media "by analysis of news reports which clearly indicate biased reporting, leading to vilification and negative stereotyping of white farmers in particular". For Roets (2018), whites are clearly the victims here. He claims that there are a

> variety of reasons why farm attacks are unique and deserving to be treated as a priority crime .... These include the unique frequency at which these attacks take place, the horrific levels of torture that often accompanies these crimes, the role that farmers should play in society and the unique circumstances that farmers are in.

Roets is not alone in his construction of the Boer, and by extension white South Africans, as undergoing "ethnic cleansing". Facebook groups with large followings spread horrendous, explicit images of brutal murders, thereby "cultivating" white fear (Bloom 2009). In support of what was termed "Black Monday",[16] for example, a campaign in the form of a temporary profile picture frame was launched on Facebook. The frame read, #supportourfarmers30October2017, and it could be added to Facebook users' profile pictures to indicate their support for the protest against the alleged plight of (white) farmers, and this particular Black Monday initiative in general. The moral value of the campaign aside, what happened is that people bought into the idea of "white genocide" without questioning the actual statistics, thus blindly simplifying the matter. Some Facebook users even posted messages calling for "international intervention as our own government turns a blind eye to the unthinkable violence that is committed against the people that feed our country". What is most pertinent to my argument here is that, because of the inherent link between the Boer and the Afrikaner, white South Africans who perpetuate this myth also represent themselves as victims. Whites thus become victims by association.

Likewise, many Facebook groups created specifically in response to the media hype around "white genocide" surfaced. These include, amongst others, groups entitled: "Stop Farm Attacks & Murders in South Africa", "White Genocide Preppers South Africa", "Gatvol vir Plaasmoorde in Suid-Afrika" (*Tired of Farm Murders in South Africa*), "Plaasmoord Aksie en Inligting" (*Farm Murder Action and Information*), "Blanke, Boere Suid-Afrikaners in nood" (*White, Farmers South Africans in Need*), "Farm Murders in South Africa / Plaasmoorde is 'n werklikheid" and many more. On the "Stop Farm Attacks & Murders in South Africa" Facebook page, comprising 65 000 members, the following quote is presented as a mantra:

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16. Playing on the idea of a "Black Monday" as representative of a time when something destructive or turbulent (such as massacres, military battles or stock market crashes) took place, 20 October 2017 was termed "Black Monday" in support of the protest against the so-called genocide of (white) farmers in South Africa.

> Nothing reaches far and wide like murmerings [sic] of Genocide
> Yet nothing else sounds more bizarre than hearing
> It from lands afar
> Ignorance is bliss they say so I am wiping it far away
> You cannot claim you didn't know or try to say it isn't so ….
> Genocide
> Mass Murder of white people in SA

This post clearly resonates with Roets' *#TheWorldMustKnow* discourse in its appeal to global alt-right activists, warning that they cannot remain ignorant. In general, the message contributes to the mainstreaming of white nationalist narratives of white genocide, as Ward phrases it.

milton and Marx (2014: 20) identify contemporary occurrences of this rhetoric of "white-genocide" in Afrikaans pop music too. Popular Afrikaans musicians like Steve Hofmeyr[17] and Bok van Blerk[18] sing about the ordeals to which the Afrikaner people have been subjected, drawing an explicit, if not logical, connection between the suffering of the Boers and contemporary Afrikaners, and thus perpetuating narratives of white victimhood. The lyrics of Hofmeyr's song, "We shall survive" (2011), for example, suggest that "Afrikaans speaking white South Africans are being targeted once more in post-apartheid South Africa … [c]ompletely negating any reference to the Afrikaner as oppressor under the Afrikaner-led National Party of the apartheid period" (milton & Marx 2014: 21). Similarly, in support of "Black Monday", Sean Else[19] and Ampie, released a song entitled "Staanvas" (Staanvas 2019). The song's introduction compares the statistics of the Iraq war to the larger number of murders in South Africa during that same period. Even though some of the lyrics speak to "South Africans" in general, the music video's

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17. Steve Hofmeyr is a popular Afrikaans singer, songwriter, presenter and actor turned political activist for the far right. Hofmeyr is controversial for, amongst other things, a 2014 tweet claiming that he believed black people to be the "architects of apartheid", and more recently for inciting his supporters to destroy their *Dstv* decoders after content related to, or created by, him was banned from this platform due to his apartheid denialism. Hofmeyr actively perpetuates the myth of white genocide (locally and abroad) with statements such as white farmers being "killed like flies".

18. Van Blerk's repertoire includes "De la Rey" (a song about Boer general Koos de la Rey), and various other songs such as "Tyd om te trek" (*Time to Move*), "Afrikanerhart" (*Afrikaner Heart*), "Land van melk en heuning" (*Land of Milk and Honey*) to name a few, all on the same theme of Afrikaner suffering and Afrikaners' link to the promised land.

19. Sean Else is a South African producer, director, musician and songwriter responsible for hit songs like "De la Rey", "Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika", "Tyd om te trek" and "Die Kaplyn", as well as the musical "Ons vir jou" (in partnership with Deon Opperman).

visuals overtly focus on Afrikaans newspaper articles detailing farm murders or presenting white children, presumably orphaned by violence or poverty. Other images included are of Angus Buchan.[20] All of the above creates a specific ideological stance, one which arguably resonates more readily with the Boer-imaginary described earlier, than with South Africans as a whole.

More recently, Steve Hofmeyr's "Die land" (a collaboration with Bok van Blerk, Bobby van Jaarsveld, Jay en Ruhan du Plessis) has been the topic of controversy. Wepener (2019), in his article "Dié land kan julle maar hou" (*You are Welcome to Keep* this *Land*), describes the song as an "avatar" of the plaasroman, one in which the artists articulate the inheritance of "die land" (*The Land*) as the birth right of their children. The words "ek los vir jou die son, en die see, en die land, my kind … my vlag sal aanhou waai" (*I leave to you the sun, and the sea, and the land my child ... I will keep waving my flag*) are accompanied by visuals of a row of white men walking across an empty landscape. These images connote a Boer army during a rebellion or liberation war. The song ends with the words, "Ek belowe jou, die land behoort aan jou" (*I promise you, this land belongs to you*), complemented with images of a white family dancing in the rain on what is, ostensibly, a farm. The lyrics, with their explicit references to land ownership and inheritance, perpetuate the discourses of belonging identified above. Moreover, the recurring theme of the ongoing struggle to ensure said ownership, as well as the unwavering entitlement to it, is also central. The song explicitly combines patriarchy, religion, class and race with a focus on the inheritance of the land (Wepener 2019).

These cultural expressions could, furthermore, be read in the context of Hofmeyr's politically contentious utterings. Hofmeyr, for example, posted a tweet stating, "sorry to offend but in my books Blacks were the architects of Apartheid". Hofmeyr clearly performs a "paradoxical hybrid of Afrikaner exceptionalism and self-imposed victimhood" (Broodryk 2016), as is apparent in the above example, which polarises blacks and whites and shifts the blame for Apartheid and its resultant atrocities onto black South Africans. Hofmeyr's public alt-right utterances resulted in various institutions withdrawing any sponsorship that benefited him. The banning of the music video of "Die land" from the *Ghoema*-awards and *Dstv*'s subsequent announcement that the platform will no longer carry any new, or existing, content featuring or produced by Hofmeyr was met by outrage from a certain demographic of the Afrikaans population. The primary discourse emanating from this reaction again reflected the construct of the Afrikaner as silenced and victimised. Hofmeyr is, thus, another example of a public figure spearheading these narratives, "cultivating white fear" and garnering support for his cause. As is

20. Angus Buchan is a Christian author and evangelist based in South Africa. He started out his early life as a maize and cattle farmer. He is renowned for his book: "Faith like Potatoes".

the case with the "white-genocide" narrative, there are also numerous Facebook groups in support of Hofmeyr, some of which have upwards of 18 900 members. Incidentally the tagline of one of these groups – "Staan saam vir Steve Hofmeyr …!!!" (which has 56 000 members) – is: "Love your farmer, he feeds you", another clear indication of how the narratives of white victimhood, in this case those of the suffering white farmer and whiteness threatened by genocide, are conflated.

At the onset of my argument, I mentioned that these narratives are also giving "lesser Afrikaner whiteness" access to more normative, hegemonic whiteness. White South Africans' fear and feelings of persecution are being fuelled, and legitimised, by the attention they are getting from alt-right activists internationally. One example of the scale this "myth of white genocide" has taken on internationally is US president Donald Trump's public support of this white nationalist propaganda. On 23 August 2018, he tweeted: "I have asked Secretary of State @SecPompeo to closely study the South African land and farm seizures and expropriations and large scale killing of farmers. 'South African Government is now seizing land from white farmers.' @TuckerCarlson @FoxNews". Ann Coulter[21] similarly emphasised the South African "situation" in a number of her public appearances.

Conclusion

From the preceding analysis, it is clear that the difference in positioning between global whiteness and South African whiteness does not imply that a sense of entitlement to the privileges of white supremacy was (and in some cases still is) not taken for granted in South Africa (Steyn 2007: 422). Even though whites in South Africa no longer have an overtly dominant political position, they still occupy an economically dominant position and the remains of the ideologies of whiteness enforced during apartheid still shape social relations in South Africa today. However, political transformation means that white South Africans, and Afrikaners in particular, are experiencing vulnerability. They perceive their former privilege as being unfairly eroded by Africanisation, decolonisation, and other manifestations of change.

For Afrikaners longing to escape their realities, nostalgic, sanitised versions of life on the farm provide access to an imagined Afrikaner past associated with honour, dignity and heroism. The miscellany of cultural texts dealing with nostalgia and white victimhood available in popular mass and social media clearly reflects attempts at the counter-moves to which DiAngelo refers. They capture the way in which "the hegemonic nationalism" of the apartheid era is being repackaged for an "audience desiring nostalgic

21. Ann Coulter is far-right conservative writer and political commentator from America.

identification with a 'pre-apartheid' Boer past that was characterised by heroic suffering and resistance" (Van der Waal & Robins 2011: 765). In efforts to rehabilitate "a whiteness disgraced" (Steyn 2009), even urbanised Afrikaners sentimentalise the Boer to restore white legitimacy. In contrast to the derogatory views held of farmers (and poor whites) during urbanisation, or the binary opposition which developed between the urban and the rural, the Boer is once again a source of pride. Forgotten are the days when the Boer was viewed as a "hairyback, mealie-muncher", or when the urban setting seemed utopian.

What is implicit in these utterances of proclaimed pride and decency, however (and linked to my earlier inferences that one of the defining characteristics of Afrikaner identity is a sense of un-belonging), is a sense of shame. "Shame upon shame" – shame for embodying a lesser whiteness in comparison to the WESSAs, upon shame for apartheid, all of which translates into an existential angst about having a right to belong here in South Africa (Van der Westhuizen 2017: 43-44). Van der Waal and Robins (2011: 772) write that this shame is hidden by "selective erasure" circumventing the "historical legacy of the generation of 'guilty fathers'". Afrikaners in South Africa today have to find a way to form a sense of self which can "coherently integrate the Anglo-Boer war past, the apartheid past and the new South African present" (Krog 2007). It is this sense of un-belonging or be-*longing*, amongst Afrikaans speaking whites in particular, which leads to efforts to maintain undeserved privilege through narratives of white victimhood. Because Afrikaner identity is, once again, under duress, it is recalibrated to remove offensive characteristics such as racism and guilt, and it is rebranded as "cultural blamelessness" (Van der Westhuizen 2017: 47) and innocence, in the form of victimhood. Nostalgia and indignation serve Afrikaners' present need to belong and provide hiding places for internalised shame.

In South Africa, it is still possible, to some extent, for whites to lead segregated lives. So, Afrikaners can claim to be victims, while actively ignoring the similar plight of other South Africans. Van der Westhuizen (2017: 20) calls this "enclave neo-nationalism", developed to recuperate the Afrikaner and retain power and privilege. She writes that Blank Suid-Afrika (*White South Africa*), is "privatized and recreated on microcosmic scale in white, Afrikaans enclaves" (Van der Westhuizen 2017: 20). This insulated "environment of racial privilege builds white expectations of racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress" (DiAngelo 2011: 55). In these microcosms, whites receive "little or no authentic information about racism and are thus unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity" (DiAngelo 2011: 58). So, when the idealised version of the farm is threatened by expropriation of land and farm murders, the plight of the white farmer becomes the plight of all Afrikaners, urbanised or not. In these "enclaves" it is possible to argue that whiteness is more threatened than other

groups or identities in South Africa and farm murders can be viewed as a genocide, even when statistically this is not a viable claim (Ward 2018).

Moreover, this fear of violence, of poverty, of un-belonging, is exactly what cultural institutions like Afriforum or celebrities like Hofmeyr use in social media to perpetuate a victim rhetoric and the myth of "white genocide". These media discourses create a cultural product that can be, and certainly is – commercially and internationally – "marketed", drawing the attention of international right-wing activists.

Earlier on, I emphasised that whiteness manifests differently across contexts, and that in South Africa whiteness has never managed to attain the same level of normativity and hegemony as Western whiteness. This makes the "globalisation" of the "white-genocide" issue significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it implies that South African whiteness, and Afrikaner whiteness in particular, has now gained access to a global, normative whiteness to which it has never properly belonged. Ironically, the same factors that distinguished it from normative, Western whiteness, that resulted in its "just-about-white" status, are the same ones that are now being appropriated by global alt-right activists in order to argue for white victimhood. Put differently, it is exactly the "hairyback", *back*ward-status of Afrikaner whiteness that now affords it access to global whiteness. Perhaps more importantly, in contradiction to normative whiteness's usual functioning as invisible, these social media narratives, and the attention paid to the so-called "white-genocide" by international alt-right extremists, foreground the white body, making whiteness "hyper-visible", not only in South Africa, but globally.

While CWS does not present a silver bullet, as argued earlier, one of its principle goals is making the centre visible to expose the normative place from which power is deployed. Pogue (2019) writes that what he has learned about confronting white supremacy is that it means white people "giving things up". Perhaps the fact that both Afrikaner whiteness and international hegemonic whiteness are increasingly forced to give up their invisible normativity might be a step in the direction of negating or decolonising white supremacy, a step in the direction of whites giving some things up.

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