Whiteness under Threat

Farmlands and the construction of whiteness in its *YouTube* comment space

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Abstract

This study examines how whiteness, particularly South African whiteness, is constructed in a propagandistic *YouTube* documentary entitled *Farmlands* and how these constructions are taken up and negotiated by its viewers in its associated comment section. I suggest that these constructions are not only racialised, but resuscitate and popularise old colonial discourses that perpetuate the fear of a 'white genocide' and the perceived extermination of a 'pure white civilisation'. A thematic analysis informed by theories of representation, the establishment of difference through meaning, discourse and critical whiteness studies show that there are several narratives constructed through binary oppositions informed by colonial understandings of race, juxtaposing whiteness and blackness. In analysing these constructions, I aim to demonstrate that whiteness often becomes violent and defensive when its power is perceived to be under threat, reproducing itself through binary constructions that aim to protect it. In doing so, I demonstrate how whiteness is globalising from previous narrow nationalist framings to embracing a globalised notion of 'white civilisation under threat'. This study supports research that is sceptical of the democratizing ability of the internet and social media, focusing specifically on *YouTube's* comment forum and how it is utilized to mobilize attitudes based on hatred, racism and profound social exclusion.

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Chapter one – contextualisation

Introduction

This chapter marks the beginning of an extensive academic inquiry into a documentary published on *YouTube* and its associated comment section. I will begin by providing a detailed account of the documentary *Farmlands* and the filmmaker, Lauren Southern. In response to the central argument of the documentary and the manner in which it contextualises South African history, I will then provide a detailed local contextualisation of farm attacks and murders and legal remedies for racial equity such as land reform and land expropriation without compensation. Thereafter, I will discuss the origins of the discourse of a "white genocide", paying close attention to South African organisations that have nourished transnational conversations concerned with this conspiracy theory. I will then set out the broader context of global right-wing mobilization on the internet, with a specific reference to *YouTube* as a powerful online platform for disseminating right-wing political narratives.

My central concern is analysing how whiteness is constructed in the documentary and negotiated in its associated comment section. There are many different whitenesses, each with their own historical and contextual nuances. These different types of whitenesses can blur in global, online spaces such as *YouTube*. For example, South African whiteness includes historical and social features that Global North whiteness (United States of America and Europe) does not. Despite having economic power, South African whites are a minority with shrinking political power compared to the white majority of the United States and Europe. I demonstrate that despite these differences, South African whiteness becomes a trope that Global Northern whiteness utilises to further its political and social narratives.

My research finds itself bound by a specific historical moment: post-apartheid South Africa, where issues of farm attacks and murders, land reform and land expropriation without compensation have become distinct local and global markers of a "white genocide": a political conspiracy of white ethnic and civilisational substitution postulated by right-wing communities

across the world. Discussions concerned with global whiteness and South African whiteness in particular, are discussed against the backdrop of the rise of multiculturalism, miscegenation, a "great replacement" of the "pure" white race, the apartheid concept of the *swaart gevaar* (black peril or danger) and increased mobilization of right-wing communities.

Farmlands and Lauren Southern

In 2018, Lauren Southern, a Canadian right-wing journalist and activist, published a documentary called *Farmlands* on *YouTube*. The film, directed by Southern and produced by Caolan Robertson, selectively presents South Africa as a dangerous place, representing *plaasmoorde* (farm murders) as a political conspiracy that may result in a "white genocide". Current debates around land ownership and land (re)distribution in South Africa are represented as part of this "white genocide". The documentary illustrates farm attacks and murders as being systematic, racial and political attempts of ethnic and civilisational substitution that are accepted by South Africa's current ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). *Farmlands* was published to Southern's *YouTube* channel on the 25th of June 2018. Southern's *YouTube* subscriber count currently stands at approximately 684 000 people. At the time of writing, the documentary has 2 470 724 views, 93 000 "likes", 4200 "dislikes" and the public comment section is flooded with 27 220 polarized opinions (originally 30 923 comments, indicating that some comments may have been deleted). According to Southern, the documentary was mainly funded by her supporters. This volume of engagement seems significantly large when compared to the views and engagement of a well-known Canadian right-wing news website, *The Rebel Media*. *The Rebel* has 1.27 million subscribers on *YouTube* and publishes content that is "unapologetically conservative", providing its viewers with social and political narratives from a conservative perspective. Specific to *YouTube*, their content views range from 5 million to 4900 views. Considering *The Rebel* is a global brand that crowdfunded over $2 million from supporters from June 2017 to May 2018 (Rebel Staff, 2018), Southern's independent documentary has gained considerable traction.

The documentary describes itself as detailing the plight of white South Africans, with a specific focus on white South African farmers. This is done through a superficial attempt at contextualising South Africa's complex racial history and land ownership debates. The

documentary presents 366 years of South African history, with a specific focus on the Great Trek, King Shaka Zulu, King Dingane and Piet Retief. She fails to mention the bitter conflict that culminated in the Anglo Boer War with British imperialists – an event that continued to dominate Afrikaner Nationalist political thought through the twentieth century.

Thereafter, Southern presents an uncritical account of the apartheid regime, focusing only on how apartheid was a system that segregated black and white South Africans. She fails to mention the severe racial discrimination and violence black South Africans experienced, instead focusing on the "terrorist characteristics" of Nelson and Winnie Mandela. The documentary unfolds through several emotional interviews with white farmers who have experienced traumatic robberies and murders on their properties. Other interviews include an ANC-linked businessman, Thabo Mokwena and an interview with Zanele Zwane, the spokesperson for one of South Africa's most radical political groups, Black First Land First (BLF). Southern's decision to include the BLF in her documentary serves a specific purpose, presenting black South Africans as fanatical. The party's slogan 'land or death' was declared hate speech by the South African Equality Court (Lindeque, 2019). The BLF has also been criticised for intimidating and harassing journalists. In 2017, the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef) asked the High Court in Johannesburg to interdict the party from threatening journalists after members of the party allegedly harassed, intimidated, assaulted and threatened journalists who were reporting on state capture (eNCA, 2017). The court ruled in favour of Sanef (eNCA, 2017). In response to claims that the organisation continued to intimidate journalists and editors despite the interdict, Head of BLF Andile Mngxitama stated that the organisation had fully obeyed the court order and accused white-owned media outlets of sensationalising headlines and representing the BLF as a criminal organisation (Davies, 2017). The BLF has recently been deregistered as a political party in South Africa by the Electoral Court as they went against post-apartheid electoral legislation and denied membership based on race (Davis, 2019). Southern also interviews Simon Roche, spokesperson for a survivalist initiative known as *Suidlanders* (South Landers) and Carel Boshoff, president of the all-white Afrikaner community known as Orania, which is situated in the Northern Cape. These interviews are interspersed by snippets of footage that portray destructive acts being committed by black South Africans that lack sufficient contextualisation. The documentary fails

to produce statistical or other evidence to support the claim that there is a "white genocide" or that farm attacks and murders are racially motivated. Instead, it utilizes emotional and violent footage, selective interviews and an uncritical investigation into South African history to suggest that white South Africans face a possible genocide. The film ends with footage of white informal settlements or "white squatter camps" and interviews with white South Africans living in these spaces, accompanied by an emotive sound score. A detailed analysis of the documentary is provided in chapter four.

Lauren Southern is notorious in Western countries for being a conservative, right-wing activist who aggressively infiltrates conversations on left-wing social and political issues. Tamara Khandaker (2017) explains that Southern is well-known for being a former popular host for *The Rebel Media*, stating that "she's made a habit of parachuting into spaces where visible minorities are speaking out about their rights…". In 2015, Southern reported on the Vancouver Slutwalk protest for *The Rebel*, which was held in British Columbia. At the protest, she held a sign that read "there is no rape culture in the West". At the time, she was running as a Libertarian Party candidate in the Canadian federal elections and these actions resulted in her being suspended from the party. However, her supporters actively protested her removal and she was reinstated (Khandaker, 2017). Southern also wrote and published a book in 2016 called, "Barbarians: How Baby Boomers, Immigrants, and Islam Screwed My Generation". In 2017, *Patreon*, a subscription-based crowd-funding website, banned Southern's account following her alliance with Defend Europe, a right-wing group that attempts to stop the flow of migrants and refugees into Europe by obstructing ships in the Mediterranean (Gordon, 2017; Oppenheim, 2017). Defend Europe is a mission name for nationalist youth that belong to the Identitarian Movement, far-right activists from European countries that are anti-Muslim and anti-immigration and believe Europe's identity is under threat by immigrants who will replace them. Southern and the group she was with were briefly detained by the Italian Coast Guard for trying to block a ship that rescues stranded refugees (Claxton, 2017). Although Southern claimed that the funds she raised from the crowd-funding website were not allocated to Defend Europe and her intention was to merely cover the groups' activities and not participate in them, her sympathy with the organisation's motives did little to support her claim. In 2018, Southern attempted to conduct a 'social experiment' outside

a restaurant in Luton, United Kingdom by handing out flyers that read “Allah is a gay god” (Southern, 2018). Southern studied political science at the University of the Fraser Valley in Canada but did not complete her degree. This has not stopped her from expressing political ideals that stridently critique modern left politics: “[they are] being torn apart by insane identity politics, and people who want to berate white males all day,'' she told *Vice News* in an interview (Khandaker, 2017).

In 2018, Southern posted a vlog to her *YouTube* channel describing her experience during her time in South Africa whilst filming her documentary *Farmlands.* She concludes by characterising South Africa as damaged, fractured and tribalistic. In the same year, she reported on a white informal settlement or “squatter camp” in South Africa where she insinuated that white homelessness was a product of the ANC’s introduction of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE). B-BBEE is a law that seeks to rectify the inequalities of apartheid through a legislative framework that promotes black economic empowerment (Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 53 of 2003 | South African Government, 2020). Southern omits this important detail and instead explains that the “squatter camp”, just outside of Johannesburg, is “home to some of the most disadvantaged people in South Africa”. Southern fails to mention that there is a severe discrepancy in poverty levels between population groups in South Africa (Wilkinson, 2018). While not dismissing the existence and exigencies of white poverty, statistical evidence illustrates unambiguously that 9 out of every 10 people who suffer from poverty in South Africa are black (approximately 28 267 530 people), while only 1% (47 494 people) of those living in poverty are white (Wilkinson, 2018).

Southern’s representation of white minority persecution and replacement is palatable to right-wing organisations across the globe. Her online and offline presence has received enormous international attention from those who support similar conservative, nationalist ideologies. For example, the content of Southern’s documentary *Farmlands* was promoted by one of Australia’s largest media companies, *News Corp Australia*. *News Corp Australia* is owned by Rupert Murdoch and has been labelled as a conservative, right-wing media organisation (Alcorn, 2019; Cave, 2020). United States radio personality Michael Savage devoted an entire show to the issue,

providing Southern with a platform to discuss her views with over 11 million listeners (Wilson, 2018). *The Guardian* journalist, Jason Wilson, expresses concern that "Southern's treatment of this subject is selective, lurid and plays up to the long-established far-right meta-narrative of 'white genocide'" (Wilson, 2018). Nonetheless, her promotion of possible threats against white ethnonationalism has been an easy pill to swallow for many right-wing communities.

Farm attacks and murder statistics - the search for reliable data

Farm attacks and murders have been described as violent attacks on people residing on, working on, or visiting farms and smallholdings in South Africa (Wilkinson, 2017). Media concerned with this issue is persistent, with the phenomenon having its own *Wikipedia* page (South African farm attacks) as well as articles published by the *Daily Maverick* (Davis, 2018), and *TimesLive* (Gous, 2018). There are also tags solely dedicated to information concerning South African farm attacks and murders on *News24* (News24/Tags/Topics/Farm Attacks) which released 20 articles concerned with the issue in 2019. *Huffington Post* (Huffington Post/News/Farm murders) has published 21 articles concerning farm attacks and murders over a period of 3 years. There is also an abundance of footage concerned with the issue on YouTube.

Calculating official statistics on farm murders and attacks are a matter of contestation. This is because calculating farm murder and assault rates is difficult: estimating the total population of South Africans that reside, work or visit smallholdings or farms is extremely challenging (Wilkinson, 2017). Prior to 1997, the South African Police Services (SAPS) did not collect statistics on farm attacks and murders. In 2001, a Committee of Inquiry was appointed by the National Commissioner of Police to investigate the ongoing spate of attacks and murders on farms, with a report being released in 2003 that provided definitions, methodologies, case studies, victims, perpetrators, investigating officers and prosecutors as well as literature reviews (Committee of Inquiry, 2003). This report stated that in 2001, white people made up 61.6% of the victims. The Committee also noted that black people were increasingly being victimised. Unfortunately, SAPS has failed to publish accurate data based on *racial demographics* concerning farm murders in the subsequent 18 years, therefore there is no statistical basis to make claims that farm attacks and murders are racially motivated (News 24, 2018; Wilkinson, 2017).

In recent years, statistics from several institutions have been released, including the South African Police Service (SAPS), *AfriForum* and the Transvaal Agricultural Union. Official SAPS statistics for 2017/2018, show that of the 20 336 murders in South Africa, 62 people (0.3%) were murdered on a farm or smallholding (South African Police Service, 2018; Staff Reporter/IOL, 2018). The Transvaal Agricultural Union statistics state that 70 people were murdered on a farm or smallholding (Wilkinson, 2017). These statistics vary widely, and concerns of credibility often arise. Nonetheless, claims are being made using this disputed data as evidence. The South African agricultural body, *AgriSA*, released figures in May of 2018 that were based on police statistics as well as its own research and media reports. It deduced that there was a decline in farm murders and a slight increase in farm attacks (Pijoos, 2018). *AfriForum*, a conservative Afrikaner civil rights organisation, disagreed with these statistics, claiming that farm murders and attacks are increasing. According to their own statistics, head of policy and action Ernst Roets claimed that there was a 34% increase in murders and assaults in the first six months of 2018 (Pijoos, 2018). Ian Cameron, *AfriForum's* head of community safety, also appeared on *Sky News*, stating that there had been more than 344 attacks and about 45 murders since the beginning of 2018 (Smit, 2018).

While the statistical data of farm attacks and murders continue to be contested, it is vital to mention that, in analysing the documentary and its comments, I am in no way repudiating the violence faced by many farmers and the turmoil experienced by South Africans who are affected by it. However, the fact that global conservative and right-wing activists and organisations are using events such as these to insinuate the possibility of a "white genocide" needs to be critically analysed.

Land distribution in South Africa

Southern's documentary was published to *YouTube* four months after the National Assembly adopted a motion to amend the South African Constitution to allow for land expropriation without compensation (Dube, 2019; Merten, 2019). Southern attempts to link farm attacks and murders to the South African government's policy of land redistribution, an effort to rectify the

unequal land distribution during apartheid, when most of the economy and land ownership fell into the hands of a white minority.

In this section, I will firstly demonstrate how the issue of land in South Africa needs to be understood historically. I will then show how the introduction of land reform was a highly ordered, lawful project that, if anything, should be critiqued for its slow pace. I will explain how this has resulted in the introduction of the idea of land expropriation without compensation, and how political parties have responded to this idea. Challenging Southern's rhetoric, I will argue that this historical process cannot and should not be linked to farm attacks and murders in an attempt to heighten fears of a "white genocide". There is no doubt that land reform is a sensitive and complex issue in South Africa. Naturally, land expropriation without compensation has sparked widespread debate on issues concerning land ownership, agricultural production and the economy. However, as I said before, it is imperative that the issue of land reform in South Africa is understood historically.

The pattern of land distribution in South Africa is a direct consequence of colonialism and correlates strongly with apartheid history, where most of the economy and land ownership fell into the hands of a white minority. The 1913 Natives Land Act enabled the apartheid government to forcibly remove thousands of black families from their land. The Act limited African land ownership to 13% (1913 Natives Land Act Centenary | South African Government, 2020). The Act controlled who bought and occupied land, resulting in white ownership of 87% of the land. Abandoned black families were forced to relocate to poor homelands and poorly serviced townships (1913 Natives Land Act Centenary | South African Government, 2020). This Act marked the beginning of the challenges black South Africans face today, including but not limited to, landlessness, poverty and severe inequality.

In order to address this inequality, Section 25 of the South African Constitution provides a detailed framework for both land reform and protection of property rights. Land reform was initially based on a "willing buyer, willing seller" approach - but it had little impact. The legal mechanisms enabling just and equitable land expropriation without compensation exist in the

constitution, but its success has been painfully slow and therefore heavily criticised. While the Constitution has been in existence for more than 23 years, the implementation of Section 25 of the Constitution, “has had little impact in transforming the socio-economic dynamics and in the land redistribution/reform programme” (Nxumalo, 2018). Very few cases have had successful negotiations and as a result, “the socio-economic landscape of South Africa still remains largely untransformed and land ownership remains highly concentrated” (Nxumalo, 2018).

Up until now, the painfully slow pace of land reform has led many to argue that the state has failed to achieve a balance between protecting property rights from state interference and ensuring equity for all South Africans. However, Dube (2019) argues that “the property clause remains skewed towards property rights over equity” and South Africans living in poverty are past the point of frustration. This context frames the promulgation of the expropriation without compensation bill - a context which Southern fails to mention. These efforts to transform South Africa politically, economically, socially and culturally and bring about redress are not an easy task.

Land expropriation has become a political and economic beacon of hope for those affected by unequal distribution of land and severe poverty (Nxumalo, 2018). On the 27th of February 2018, the National Assembly adopted a motion to review the Constitution with a view to an amendment to explicitly address expropriation without compensation. In an effort to re-centre themselves in the political debate of land reform, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) brought the motion before the South African Parliament. South Africa’s leading party, the African National Congress, supported this motion, stating that it has made it a priority to transfer land back to the black majority. On December 4th 2018, a draft of the 2019 Expropriation Bill was gazetted - the first stage of putting the bill into effect (Dube, 2019). The important point here is that this policy is not as inopportune as Southern’s documentary represents it to be. Due to the fact that the general elections were on 8 May 2019, land expropriation without compensation was a policy that many political parties, including the ANC and EFF, fore-grounded in order to prove to the nation that they were doing something to address the slow pace of land reform and thereby deserve political support. While juggling black South African’s cry for a better future, the ANC as

the governing party also had to provide legal conditions that ensured the expropriation policy would not hinder international investment, damage agricultural production and food security or cause harm to other sectors of the economy (Merten, 2019).

Furthermore, putting this bill into effect will not be an easy process. It will require time, money, new legislations, more parliamentary processes, new regulations and other technicalities (Gerber, 2018). Merten (2018) explains that none of the political parties involved in this process have provided a set time frame for when the bill will be put into effect:

> For there to be expropriation without compensation in action, even after a constitutional amendment, there needs to be law and regulations setting out when it's done, how and for whom.

The South African Constitution represents land reform as an issue of social justice that is to be conducted in an orderly, legal manner. The Constitution itself is furthermore explicit in its representation of a racially inclusive society and therefore directly in contrast with Southern's narrative. Nonetheless, the lack of comprehension of the expropriation policy, along with the reality of farm attacks and murders, has resulted in large scale debates nationally and transnationally. These debates have turned into fears, with many people claiming South Africa is on the road to becoming the "next Zimbabwe". Addressing the land reform failure in Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe launched a land reform programme that would expropriate white-owned land. While support for rectifying historical injustices of colonialism forcefully taking African land are valid, Mugabe launched the programme to strengthen his political position within the governing party and was "simply exploiting the necessity of land reform for purely selfish gain" (Gumede, 2018). The new Zimbabwe president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, has reportedly promised to compensate the white farmers who lost their land during this failed land reform process (Gumede, 2018).With that being said, this context has undeniably proved fruitful and convenient for the discourse of a "white genocide".

The origins of a "white genocide"

The term “white genocide” did not originate in South Africa. The concept of a “white genocide” was popularised by American neo-Nazi terrorist and white supremacist David Lane in his 1988 manifesto (Moses, 2019: 207). Lane also coined the popular 14-word white nationalist slogan “we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”. For many years, white nationalists have repeated similar themes: that a “white genocide” will result in declining “pure” European birth rates, a relentless influx of immigrants to white nations and the deep fear of losing racial purity due to miscegenation.

The notion of a “white genocide” was born out of the concept of a “race suicide” - the belief that the white population could die out due to their own political choices. Levine-Rasky (2018) states that the concept of a “race suicide” originates from scientific racism of the late 19th and 20th century, where Europeans claimed they needed protection from numerous, “inferior qualities” of other races who in turn would ultimately outbreed the superior Anglo-Saxon race. Edward A. Ross is attributed with coining the term “race suicide”, which suggests the inevitable decline of the white race because “modern urban life promoted the survival of racially inferior immigrant races” (Levine-Rasky, 2018).

Today, the discourse that Western culture is declining due to “invaders”, diminishing white birth rates and racial mixing has become very popular amongst right-wing circles (Moses, 2019: 211). Broader, more extreme versions of a “race suicide” have been motivated in part by the fear of a “Great Replacement”, a racist conspiracy theory developed and popularized by French philosopher Renaud Camus (Croucher, 2019). Right-wing and white supremacist groups are taking it upon themselves to spread awareness of Camus’s theory, which presents falling birth-rates among whites and rising immigration in the West as an anti-white conspiracy of “ethnic and civilisational substitution” (Williams, 2017). These discourses have begun to include South Africa, where white farmers’ perceived plight has been popularised by white nationalists across the globe. Right-wing discourses are shifting from purely isolated nationalist discourses concerned with, for example, the threat of radical Islam, to increasingly emphasizing a more global civilisational discourse that constructs multiculturalism, “non-white” immigrants, and a “non-white” majority as a shared threat against Western values (Kundnani, 2012).

As the fear of being replaced by "non-white" immigrants or Muslim communities resonates amongst right-wing circles in the Global North, so too does the concept of the "*swart gevaar"* (black peril or danger) resonate amongst many white South Africans. The "*swart gevaar"* originates from apartheid times. It is a concept that is central to South African white political rhetoric, reminding white people that they face a common threat from black people (Brown, 1987: 262). There is thus a need for unity, where the "genocidal subjectivity" needs to act in self-defence to avoid destruction (Moses, 2019: 204). While the fear of the "*swart gevaar"* was conjured up during apartheid, its manifestation continues in the myth of a "white genocide" today, making its way into South African political discourse and becoming an increasingly popular talking point (Zulu, 2019).

Suidlanders and AfriForum - nourishing transnational conversations

Throughout 2017, 2018 and 2019, the narrative of a "white genocide" became very popular in South African mainstream media (Geyde, 2018; Zulu, 2019; McKenzie & Swails, 2018; Smith, 2019). *Suidlanders* and *AfriForum* have joined the political responses to these contextual specificities, nourishing conversations around the plight of white South African farmers. Before I begin this section, I wish to emphasise that whether these organisations may or may not promote fears of a "white genocide", my only aim is to critically investigate their political presence and rhetoric, highlighting the importance of thinking carefully about how these organisations are intellectually equipping white South Africans and international conservative media outlets and journalists in promoting particular narratives. As Moses (2019: 212) explains:

> If you postulate a cultural and or/demographic 'war', we now know all too well that some will take your words literally and arrogate to themselves the role of your words' executor: it only takes one or two.

Both organisations have toured western countries in an effort to lobby support from politicians, activists and governmental organisations that are openly conservative, some of whom are white nationalists.

Suidlanders (South Landers), a survivalist initiative founded by a white, Protestant Christian South African group, argues that South Africa is on the verge of a civil war. In 2017, *Suidlanders* spokesperson Simon Roche toured the United States lobbying support from various right-wing groups that included former Grand Wizard of the *Klu Klux Klan*, David Duke and persons who have been publicly criticized for being Nazi supporters, racists and white supremacists (Geyde, 2018). Roche was also photographed joining the notorious *Unite the Right* rally in Charlottesville, where a young counter-protestor was intentionally killed by a car. *Suidlanders* garnered a large amount of support, including support from *League of the South* (LOS), a right-wing organisation based in Alabama.

The narrative of the victimization of white South African farmers was also promoted by *News Corp Australia*, the same media publication that promoted Southern's documentary. *Suidlanders* have been very successful in planting a seed that has grown very popular amongst right-wing publications: Billy Roper's *The Roper Report* praised *Suidlanders* in an opinion piece stating that their emergency plans to prepare for a violent civil war are impressive and that local, regional and national organisations in the United States should follow suite (Roper, 2017).

AfriForum defines itself as a civil rights organisation that aims to protect minority rights. The organisation has been established from within the Afrikaner community, so its emphasis is on the interests of that community (AfriForum, 2019). They are politically different from the radical group *Suidlanders* and claim to "treasure the Afrikaner culture and heritage, taking into consideration mutual respect and recognition between communities" (AfriForum, 2019). Writing on white supremacy and white nationalism, Ernst Roets argues:

> To describe *AfriForum* as a conservative organisation would not be inaccurate. We regard ourselves, however, as conservative in terms of the real meaning of the word, while we disassociate with the stigma that is today associated with conservatism as an ideology that seeks to return to the past [apartheid], or that objects to change merely because it isn't able to deal with change, or that seeks to preserve heritage at the expense of progress (AfriForum, 2019).

In May 2018, *AfriForum* CEO Kallie Kriel and Ernest Roets toured the United States to meet with conservative groups, the government's international aid agency and president Donald Trump's security adviser, John Bolton (Chothia, 2018). Although this may not be directly linked to *AfriForum's* tour, in August 2018 Trump tweeted:

> I have asked Secretary of State @SecPompeo [Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo] to closely study the South Africa land and farm seizures and expropriations and the *large scale killings of farmers*. *'South African Government is now seizing land from white farmers'* [emphasis added]. @TuckerCarlson @FoxNews (Trump, 2018).

In the same year, Australian Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton considered fast-tracking visas for white South African farmers, stating that farmers "deserve special attention" because of land expropriation without compensation (Gedye, 2018).

In 2019, a South African court partially banned the gratuitous display of the apartheid flag, stating that its display constitutes "hate speech" and "harassment" (Staff Reporter/Al Jazeera, 2019). The ruling followed a petition to the court by the *Nelson Mandela Foundation Trust* after the flag was displayed in October 2017 during the *#BlackMonday* protest, where thousands of white South Africans protested the killing of farmers (Aljazeera, 2019). Shortly after this ban, Ernst Roets shared the apartheid flag on *Twitter* asking, "did I just commit hate speech?" (Ngqakamba, 2019). While the South African Constitution protects freedom of speech, this type of provocative behaviour has led to South African political analyst Somadoda Fikeni labelling *AfriForum* as not being able to "see the world where their privilege is challenged" stating that they have a tendency to "disregard history" (Chothia, 2018). Ernst Roets recently published a report entitled "Kill The Farmer, a brief study on the impact of politics and hate speech on the safety of South African farmers". The report is extensive and concludes by arguing that "politics, hate speech and racial factors do play a role" (Roets, 2019) in farm attacks and murders. It also states that if the South African justice system does not take the issue seriously, the organisation will escalate it to an international community (Roets, 2019). Roets has also published a book entitled "Kill The Boer", which claims South African politicians and the government have made a collaborative effort to ignore the proliferation of farm attacks and murders (Hlatshaneni, 2018). South African National

Civic Organisation (SANCO) spokesperson Jabu Mahlangu expressed concerns that the book deployed a specific narrative and would likely spark further racial tensions (Hlatshaneni, 2018).

Critical engagement with S*uidlanders* and *AfriForum's* position as political leaders in this debate is important. Whether they are explicitly spreading fears of a "white genocide" or not, their framing of post-apartheid South Africa is enabling white South Africans and international right-wing players to rejuvenate dangerous assumptions based on ahistorical understandings of South Africa.

Right-wing mobilisation and the internet

As like-minded individuals and organisations veer towards accepting similar discourses, the internet has proven fertile ground for mobilisation. Social media is ubiquitous for many reasons; one being that it is an accommodating habitat that allows individuals from different political spectrums to exchange and share ideas and discourses. The internet has several qualities that allow like-minded groups to gravitate towards each other, one being the:

> Low costs and the possibility to produce and rapidly spread user-generated content [which] should ease cooperation between like-minded groups that do not enjoy similar opportunities in other parts of the public sphere (Froio & Ganesh, 2019: 514).

The rise of the internet and social media has come to produce an 'ecosystem' of right-wing users - which, according to Jessie Daniels (2018: 61), can be linked to two underlying factors. The first is that the growing number of right-wing online users could be attributed to a crisis in white identity: angry, white men specifically, who may feel their social, cultural and political power is steadily declining. The second is that the rise of right-wing users is an unfortunate consequence of internet culture, aggravated by the ability to form polarized opinions through "filter bubbles" (Daniels, 2018: 61).

These reasons are in no way fully theorized, but rather a starting point to understand why the internet has become such an absorbent environment for right-wing individuals and organisations.

An extreme yet necessary example of this is the recent terrorist shooting attack against two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in which a white male killed 51 people and injured 49. The first massacre was live streamed on *Facebook* by the accused terrorists, Brenton Tarrant. *Facebook* announced that it deleted 1.5 million videos of the massacre in the first 24 hours of the incident. *Facebook* also prevented 1.2 million videos from being uploaded to its platform. However, this regulation could not keep up with monitoring its 2.2 billion global users (Tracy, 2019). What is important here is to avoid downplaying the role of the internet in facilitating right-wing discussions and discourses. As Daniels (2018: 64) highlights:

> And when they have a sitting President who will retweet accounts that use #whitegenocide hashtags and defend them after a deadly rally [*Unite The Right*], it is fair to say that white supremacists are succeeding at using media and technology to take their message mainstream.

YouTube as a powerful tool for right-wing mobilisation

Up until this point, I have attempted to critically contextualize the debate of a "white genocide", by historicizing South African farm attacks and murders and the complex issue of land. What is also contextually relevant are the online distribution platforms for right-wing media. Southern published *Farmlands* on *YouTube*, which has become a pivotal platform for broadcasting political and news-related content. *YouTube* was first introduced in 2005. Since then, it has been launched in over 91 countries and at present, the platform has over 1.9 billion logged in monthly users. It is the world's second largest search engine with over 1 billion hours of *YouTube* videos watched per day (Brandwatch, 2019). *YouTube's* ability to promote political arguments and reactionary discourses has often been overlooked, with early theories describing the platform as a space of cultural participation and the maintenance of a cultural public sphere (Burgess & Green, 2009: 77). Many people underestimate the power of *YouTube* as a platform that successfully circulates political ideas:

> One reason *YouTube* is so effective for circulating political ideas is because it is often ignored or underestimated in discourse on the rise of disinformation and far-right movements (Lewis, 2018: 5).

This has allowed right-wing collectives to maintain a huge amount of influence. Lewis (2018: 8) describes this influence as the AIN or the "Alternative Influence Network", a fully functioning media system that collectively opposes visions of social progress. *YouTube*'s motto, "Broadcast Yourself", endorses the promotion of individuals and ideologies outside of the limitations of mainstream media outlets such as print or television (Lewis, 2018: 4). It is a space that is hospitable to "influencers": people who shape public opinion and advertise goods and services through developing intimate relationships with their audiences. When the term "influencer" is used, people don't usually think of right-wing influencers on *YouTube*. Regardless of what content you produce, *YouTube*'s monetary reward systems function on behavioural user data such as clicks or likes - most times indiscriminate of content. As Lewis (2018: 4) adds:

> While the individuals of the AIN are not generally selling goods or services, they adopt the techniques of influencers to build audiences and 'sell' them on far-right ideology.

When we talk of the right-wing image, we may assume that they are individuals from the dark web who hide behind anonymity. Lewis (2018: 44) rejects this idea, stating that, "much extremist content is happening front and center, easily accessible on platforms like *YouTube*, publicly endorsed by well-resourced individuals, and interfacing directly with mainstream culture". Southern's documentary and its comment space are an appropriate example of such content. Together, they provide an important opportunity to examine how South African whiteness in this particular historical period is being constructed and in turn, globalised - connected to and harnessed by global right-wing organisations and opinion-makers. Her documentary represents farm murders as an anti-white conspiracy that includes current efforts for land reform in South Africa. It also offers specific representations of white and black South Africans that are negotiated in the comment section.

One might be tempted to consider it a mainstream platform as *YouTube'*s global reach makes it one of the most visited websites on the internet, and it is the world's largest platform for creating, sharing and discovering video content. Yet *YouTube*'s comment section is an unregulated environment that is prone to discussions of hostility, racism, hate speech, misogyny and homophobia. Research concerned with this environment is undertheorised, and the importance

of understanding the systematic and networked manifestations within this space is extremely vital (Murthy & Sharma, 2018: 3). For these reasons, *YouTube* presents a productive site to investigate how global right-wing discourses are being bolstered within an unregulated space. The content of Southern's documentary not only nourishes fears of a "white genocide" through visual and textual signals, but also intricately constructs South African whiteness as a victim in need of global support. The reactions to the documentary are abundant within the comment section, where constructions of whiteness and blackness are accepted as well as rejected. A detailed account of constructions produced within *Farmlands* and its associated comment section will be provided in chapter four and five.

Conclusion

My research journey is bound by a specific historical moment: post-apartheid South Africa, where issues of farm attacks and murders, land expropriation without compensation and land reform policies are perceived as both local and global markers of a "white genocide". This political conspiracy of white ethnic and civilisational substitution is promoted by right-wing communities across the world, where issues that are contextually specific to South Africa are being used to construct Global North whiteness. This context underpins my research as a whole, and it forms the basis from which I undertake the analysis of the documentary's construction of whiteness and how these constructions are negotiated in the comment section in chapter four. While *Farmlands* is a visual text that has been created by a Canadian white, right-wing journalist, understanding the local context that it represents is imperative. The historical dispensation of post-apartheid South Africa has established complex constructions of black and white South Africans, and these constructions continue to be meaningfully produced and negotiated with the rise of online platforms that are responsible for producing and consuming cultural meaning. The next chapter will propose a set of theoretical tools in order to make more sense of the data.

Chapter two – theoretical framework

Introduction

I will begin this chapter by outlining key theoretical concepts that underpin my interrogation of how the meaning of whiteness in South Africa is socially constructed, produced and globally exchanged. I will begin by presenting my understanding of Stuart Hall's (1997) work on representation and signifying practices - a foundational theoretical lens through which we look at how culture and meaning is socially produced. While this discussion of representation is necessarily limited, it is a vital theoretical tool that will help us comprehend the "white genocide" discourse introduced in chapter one. Further developing Hall's (1997) approach to representation, I will discuss how the concept of difference is integral to the process of representation. Thereafter, I present my understanding of the concept of discourse, paying close attention to French philosopher Michel Foucault's work on the relationship between discourse, power and the subject. In this section, I highlight how the concept of discourse is integral to my research, demonstrating the intricacies of how we come to understand, know and subject ourselves to "ways of knowing" the world including how subject positions are produced through particular discourses. Using this framework, I then present a Foucauldian approach to white normativity in order to come to terms with how, theoretically and symbolically, the white South African subject is formed, managed and maintained within local and global networks of power in post-apartheid South Africa. Thereafter, I present my understanding of what "whiteness" consists of, and what mechanisms or discursive strategies it uses to maintain and reproduce its universality, even in a context where it has lost political power and its historical background has been heavily scrutinized.

Stuart Hall's foundational theory of representation and signifying practices

The way we come to understand the world and ourselves, I believe, cannot be comprehended as some ahistorical, a-temporal phenomenon, but by socio-historical constructions and conventions that will only exist if meaning is attributed to them. In other words, our own identities, cultures and understandings of the world - of where and why we belong - exist because we give them

meaning. Stuart Hall's constructivist approach to representation links culture to language. From this perspective, culture is not something that is "genetically programmed into us" - like the colour of our eyes - but rather something that helps us understand the world we live in:

> ...culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways...Above all, cultural meanings are not only 'in the head'. They organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects (Hall, 1997: 2-3).

Hall argues that the members of a culture share a common set of understandings about the world: the meanings that they attribute to people, *things*, and historical events are broadly similar, as they share a common frame of reference by which they make sense of their experiences. As Hall (1997: 1) explains, culture is about the meanings we share and manage as a group. We find value in these meanings and these meanings need to be interpreted by others in order for them to be effectively communicated. Hall (1997: 3) goes on to suggest that, "culture in this sense, permeates all of society. Its study underlines the crucial role of the symbolic domain at the very heart of social life". Writing in 1997, Hall highlighted that the development of global communications and complex technologies allowed different meanings to circulate between different cultures "on a scale and speed hitherto unknown in history" (Hall, 1997: 3). It is now 22 years later, and the rise of social media has enabled the scale, speed and circulation of different meanings and interpretations to increase.

Moving on to a more technical understanding of how things come to be represented and given meaning, Hall (1997: 4) explains that the most favoured "medium" through which meaning is produced and managed is language. He speaks of language here not only as spoken languages, but as "systems of representations": written language, gestural language, facial language, painted language, pixelated language, coded language. Representation then, means utilizing this language to convey meaning or to represent the world in a meaningful way to other people. Hall (1997: 17) further elaborates this point by explaining that:

> Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer to* either

> the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events.

We develop shared conceptual meanings that we then translate into a common language - a very simple way of explaining a very complex procedure. It is easy to understand this process of meaning making when we think of tangible objects such as a mobile phone or a desk, but it becomes far more complicated when we form associations around abstract concepts like war, death or fear. Nonetheless, material or abstract, these concepts are intricately organized, arranged and categorized into complex relationships with one another. This is what happens when we, for example, differentiate people according to their skin colour and then develop the physical, emotional and ethical responses that accord with these categorisations. Illustrating this point, during apartheid black pupils were denied access to Mathematics education in schools as they were seen as unable to understand Mathematical concepts. Hall (1997: 22) goes on to explain that we:

> Unconsciously internalize the codes which allow [us] to express certain concepts and ideas through [our] systems of representations -writing, speech, gesture, visualization, and so on - and to interpret ideas which are communicated to [us] using the same systems.

My point here is to emphasize that meaning is not already fixed into things. As social constructionists would agree, meaning is socially constructed and produced within specific historical contexts. Meaning is produced in order to make things - such as skin colour - *mean* effectively. We may think the material world conveys meaning, but it is actually the language system we use that does so in order to represent our shared conceptual maps.

How meaning establishes difference

As I have previously stated, how we come to understand our identities, cultures and understandings of social reality transpire through attributions of meaning. According to Hall (1997) and Woodward (1997), an integral mechanism through which meaning is constructed is

the establishment of difference. A regime of representation in itself, difference is essential to the process of meaning construction. As Hall (1997: 226) explains:

> Representation is a complex business and, especially when dealing with 'difference', it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way.

When attempting to understand how we construct our identities within culture, the concept of difference plays an important role. Our identities are formed in relation to others - in relation to what they are not (Woodward, 1997: 35). As Hall (1997: 236) suggests, in order to give things meaning, we need to establish a clear difference between them in order to classify them. Thus, "social groups impose meaning on their world by ordering and organizing things into classificatory systems" (Hall, 1997: 236). A practical example of this, offered by Claude Levi-Strauss, is how we organize food through classificatory systems – food that should be cooked and food that should be eaten raw. We classify these products through their differences. Difference, then, is essential to the process of constructing meaning, forming language and culture and constructing social identities and a subjective sense of ourselves (Hall, 1997: 238).

Clearly our identities are not the same as fruit and vegetables, but we use similar classificatory systems to differentiate ourselves from others, in turn creating symbolic boundaries. In terms of our identity and culture, forms of symbolic and social difference are established through the operation of classificatory systems (Woodward, 1997: 29). These systems of classification help us order our social and personal lives. Douglas (1966: 4) confirms this, stating that concepts of separation, purification and social exclusion:

> Have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without...with and against, that a semblance of order is created.

In order to maintain social and cultural order, we use binary oppositions that create rigid categories of "insiders" and "outsiders" or "us" and "them". Woodward (1997: 36) suggests that

this dualism is a common feature in our thought systems - nature/culture, body/mind, emotion/reason. These dichotomies function within intricate power relations so that one binary is often valued more than the other. This results in the "other" being identified as deviant and the more valued binary becoming the "norm".

I am therefore concerned with how these binary oppositions operate to create racialized distinctions. Racialized discourses are structured through binary oppositions that seek to reduce individuals to a few, simple characteristics which are represented as fixed by Nature (Hall, 1997: 257). This representation of racial difference is known as stereotyping. As aforementioned, we make sense of the world by symbolically placing things, people or events into classificatory systems. Stereotyping then, reduces individuals to a few traits, exaggerates and simplifies them and fixes these characteristics by essentialising them. Because this process functions within intricate relations of power, stereotyping divides the "normal" from "abnormal", in turn excluding or expelling everything which does not fit into "normal" (Hall, 1997: 258). Stereotyping "symbolically fixes boundaries and excludes everything which does not belong" (Hall, 1997: 258). This produces material effects that result in negative feelings, understandings and behaviours towards the "other". An example of stereotyping most profound in social reality is that of whiteness representing civilisation, order and rationality and blackness representing chaos, madness and deviancy. A detailed analysis of these binary oppositions is provided at the end of this thesis.

Concluding this section of the chapter, in attempting to understand the importance of meaning in relation to our identities, cultures and understandings of social reality, the concept of difference plays a powerful role. In order to give social reality meaning, we establish differences between things, people and events in order to classify them. While these differences are essential in order to constructing meaning, they can often produce extremely negative symbolic and material effects. This is evident in the racialized representational practice of stereotyping, which places individuals into classificatory systems characterised by simple, widely recognized traits, in turn exaggerating and fixing difference. Stereotyping produces material effects when those who

are considered “outsiders” or do not fit into the “normal” category are physically and symbolically expelled from the social body.

Discourse, power and the subject

While the production of meaning is integral to understanding how representation works, the production of knowledge during different historical periods is just as important, as knowledge is meaning invested with authority. As he turns to consider later developments in the history of approaches to representations, Hall (1997: 42) explains that:

> Subsequent developments became more concerned with representation as a source for the production of social knowledge - a more open system, connected in more intimate ways with social practices and questions of power.

Here, the shift is from language to discourse, with a sharp focus on the construction of meaning within history. Michel Foucault’s concepts are imperative to understanding representation as a powerful social, political and cultural tool. Foucault was concerned with how our knowledge of the material and social world, shared meanings and embodied identities come to be constructed and managed in different historical periods. Foucault’s theories of representation, discourse, power and knowledge are explicit and multiplexed - focusing strongly on the power of knowledge and the reality of social control, as well as how the subject is a product of discursive formations (McNay, 1994: 5). A discursive formation, according to Foucault, is an assembly of statements or concepts that correlate with one another and the conditions of these elements are subjected to “rules of formation” - or conditions of existence (Foucault, 1972: 42). According to Robert Young (1995: 2), Foucault’s concept of discourse was very particular: a language to which knowledge has to conform in order to be true. An example of this is the discourse of medicine. It is subjected to conditions of existence, such as appropriately qualified individual members of the medical profession, bodies of knowledge and the practices concerned with medical practice and a general knowledge of medicine that is recognised by the public, law and government (Foucault, 1972: 46). Without these conditions of existence that underpin the discourse of medicine, it would fail to possess authority or even exist. Discourse in this sense not only constructs the topic of discussion, but it determines and constructs the objects of our knowledge:

> It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it (Hall, 1997: 44).

Previously, I spoke about how meaning is constructed within language or signs. While this theory remains useful, the argument that meaning and meaningful practices are constructed within discourse speaks more appropriately to this research (Hall, 1997: 44). Discourses are not translucent mediums that simply 'mirror' the world and we cannot, according to Seumas Miller (1990: 116), 'get 'outside' of discourse and gain access to anything beyond it'. As Tamboukou (1999: 208) emphasizes, "historically there are no final 'truths' about our nature or the norms our reason dictates to us and therefore there is no essential, natural or inevitable way of grouping or classifying people".

Foucault's theory of discourse provides researchers with a complex but helpful starting point to understanding that human reality is a product of the interweaving of certain historical and cultural practices (Tamboukou, 1999: 203). While Foucault's theories or methods of analysis focused on the conflict of discourses and power relations, his work often attempted to go further than this. Nonetheless, his work poses critical questions that ask how certain kinds of practices tied with certain kinds of external conditions determine the different "ways of knowing" in which we ourselves form as subjects. In other words, Foucault's work "introduces the problem of how, by becoming constituted as subjects, we come to be subjected within particular configurations" (Tamboukou, 1999: 208).

For the purpose of my research, I will refer to these configurations as constructions. For example, in applying this concept to the discourse of a "white genocide", it could be suggested that the existence of the concept of a "white genocide" only exists meaningfully within conditions of race and its associated binary oppositions of "blackness" and "whiteness". Applying Hall's (1997: 45) understanding of the elements of discourse to the discourse of a "white genocide", it can be suggested that there are sets of statements about "white genocide" which give us a certain kind

of knowledge about it. Secondly, there would be rules which direct certain ways of talking about the topic, ultimately excluding other ways of talking about it. This would include saying that all white South Africans are in danger because of systematic farm attacks and murders and land distribution without compensation, whilst excluding the very real fact that black South Africans are statistically the most vulnerable group in post-apartheid South Africa when it comes to landlessness, poverty and unemployment (Wilkinson, 2018). Hall (1997:45) goes on to say that subjects would then, in some way, embody this discourse given the way knowledge about the topic was constructed in that specific historical moment. The subject would be visible in the adherents of the white farmer or perhaps Afrikaner Nationalism. This knowledge would then acquire authority and become an embodiment of the "truth" about white South Africans. How then, would this "truth" be exercised? The discourse would be put to work through specific strategies of application, historical contexts and institutional settings in order to make it "true" (Hall, 1997: 49). These institutional settings would develop a way for dealing with the topic, such as the militaristic pursuit by the *Suidlanders* discussed in chapter one, right-wing extremism and terrorism, white nationalism and immigration laws.

To summarize, when investigating the discourse of a "white genocide", we need to study how the combination of discourse and the power that it exercises has produced certain conceptions of black South Africans and the "threat" they pose to the "vulnerable" white South African population and how this has had real effects for both subjects. Thereafter, we must study how these concepts have been set into practice in certain historically specific moments, such as the one we are now in, characterised by the immanence of land reform, a history of farm attacks and murders, the rise of immigration and miscegenation, and the fear of a "great replacement". Considering all these elements, the discourse has the ability to become very powerful.

While this application is very simple, my aim is to shed light on how this process is culturally and historically specific. As Hall (1997: 47) maintains, subjects cannot:

> Meaningfully exist outside specific discourses...outside the ways they were represented in discourse, produced in knowledge and regulated by the discursive practices and disciplinary techniques of a particular society and time.

In short, anything that signifies or produces some form of meaning can be considered an element of discourse (MacDonell, 1986: 4). As Foucault (1977: 200) suggests:

> Discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behaviour, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them.

Reconceptualising power

Maintaining the constructionist approach to representation, Hall (1997) emphasises the relationship between knowledge, power and the subject. When we think of the popular definition of power, we assume that it operates in a direct top-down, violent and oppressive manner. While power can certainly operate in a repressive fashion, its presence within culture, representation and knowledge production often goes unnoticed. Relations of power produce and integrate particular discourses and knowledge. These relations of power are neither necessarily visible nor sayable, but rather constitute a set of directives that determine what can be said, written, communicated and legitimated as "true" knowledge (Sidhu, 2003: 29). To emphasize this point, Hall (1997: 49) explains that, "knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true". All knowledge that conforms to a specific discourse, once applied in the real world, has real effects. Knowledge does not simply exist in a vacuum - it is implemented in specific situations, historical periods and institutional administrations. For this reason:

> By conceptualising discourse as a regularity (network) of practices which shape what can be thought and said, Foucault's work on discourse can be interpreted as linking the realms of 'the material' and the discursive. Discourse cannot be constructed, transmitted and validated in isolation of material (non-discursive) forces. Equally, discourses have significant material effects; they are not simply free-floating and independent entities (Sidhu, 2003: 34).

Although Sidhu's argument is concerned with the application of Foucault's work to international education, it is applicable to my inquiry. This relationship between discourse and the material

supports the idea that the discourse of a "white genocide" is linked to material concerns of land ownership in South Africa and the global "replacement" of the white race through immigration and miscegenation. This discourse legitimises these material concerns and in turn challenges other discourses related to the material notion of land expropriation without compensation, multiculturalism and pro-immigration beliefs. Sidhu (2003: 30) explains that it is through articulations of power and discourse that our ways of seeing and understanding the world and certain people in it come to materialise. Power establishes and sustains objects of discourse while simultaneously producing the subjects of that discourse who embody its principles. It is through differentially powerful discursive practices that discourses such as a "white genocide" materialise and the "vulnerable" white South African is constructed as the object of concern. In the same way, it is through powerful discursive practices that discourses of black South Africans as "dangerous", "violent" and "threatening" come to materialise – as we shall see in Southern's *YouTube* documentary.

Up until this point, I have explained that power in this sense is not our traditional conception of power. I want to refrain from focusing on the type of power that consciously produces repression. In other words, conceptions of power that "[radiate] in a single direction - from top to bottom - and coming from a specific source - the sovereign, the state, the ruling class…" (Hall, 1997: 49), such as the conscious, intentional power asserted by the apartheid government. While I am not rejecting the possibility of power functioning in this way, this paper is concerned with the reality of micro-practices of power - the power relations that we take for granted. It is a very dangerous assumption to think that these micro-practices of power are inconsequential. Confining myself to concerns of who has power and what their aims are is not my intention here. Rather, I am interested in the way power is exercised or how it installs itself:

> How power acquires the status of 'truth' and importantly, how power induces 'truth regimes' which collaborate to produce particular subject positions and both dominant and subjugated knowledges (Sidhu, 2003: 37).

On the topic of dominant and subjugated knowledges, an important element of Foucault's conception of power is that it is not stable. While it seems logical to think that discourse operates in a top to bottom manner, this is not the case. As Foucault writes:

> We must conceive discourse a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies (Foucault, 1978: 100).

If power relations produce particular discourses, then it is appropriate to suggest that these power relations permeate every degree of social existence and can be found to be functioning at every site of social life - from the private spheres of family to the public spheres of politics, the economy, the law and social media (Hall, 1997: 50). Power is not only in the hands of sovereignty and law - it needs to be understood, according to Foucault (1980: 119), as a "productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression". External and internal relations of power can influence how discourse functions and is produced, and it can also decide what topics are spoken about and what topics are rejected. I can only hope we are aware that there are "rational" discourses that function to exclude other discourses and experiences of the "irrational other". As Sidhu (2003: 47) illustrates:

> Historically, the discourses of women, indigenous people, and many non-western people, along with other minorities, have been constructed as 'irrational', and their knowledges subsequently subordinated. These binaries between rational and non-rational discourses continue to influence academic, political and media discourses.

However, the concept of binary discourses of "rational" and "non rational" seems to disallow the possibility of resistance. While discourse can be, at the same time, an instrument and effect of power, one discourse can also resist another: "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, 1978: 101) - thus resulting in different discourses competing in the same space. Discourses do not run counter to one another: different, contradictory discourses can exist

simultaneously, and they are never completely stable (Foucault, 1978: 102). Resistant discourses are evident within my research, and a detailed account of them will be provided in chapter four.

As previously stated, power relations are pervasive in the social fabrication of our lives, and it is important to investigate how various subjectivities are formed within these networks of power. I am specifically interested in the constitution of the white racial subject position within specific networks of power at a specific historical moment. I emphasize here that in the next section, the power I will speak of is not the repressive model of sovereign power we are most familiar with, but power which "lurks in the shadows of sovereignty and reveals itself through neither the repressive act of killing nor violent force" (Bhandaru, 2013: 228).

Foucauldian approach to white normativity - power and the white racial subject in post-apartheid South Africa

Even though the political transition in 1994 attempted to make way for a new democratic society that aimed to consolidate racial equality, South African whiteness has remained a social norm. Perhaps many would disagree with me, since white people in South Africa have lost considerable political support. However, I believe this opinion falls into the intellectual trap of presuming that because whiteness has lost sovereign power, it has become a vulnerable victim that no longer possesses any power at all. In searching for a way to study South African whiteness, I will attempt to discuss how the concept of biopower produces racialized subjectivities and how it in turn creates and protects white subjectivities. I will also aim to shed light on how the popular phrase "whiteness is a norm" holds no weight if we fail to critically analyse what we mean by this. Foucault's development of biopower aids in providing a conceptual understanding of what exactly white normativity is and why it is so persistent.

Although the South African Constitution rejects any form of racial discrimination, implicit forms of violence and exclusion against black South Africans is becoming increasingly overlooked since racism operates largely through white normativity (Bhandaru, 2013:225). Although Bhandaru's work on white normativity is concerned with post-Civil Rights America, I will be adapting it to a South African context. One may similarly conclude that once South Africa transitioned into a

democracy, it allowed whiteness to transition from a racial classification to a social norm and become a more "inclusive" category – which as Bhandaru (2013) argues from the context of the United States, would "open up" to those that were previously excluded from its privileges. Bhandaru (2013: 226) further explains, "as whiteness becomes more inclusive, non-whiteness merely becomes more marginal; and therefore violence against non-white people becomes more difficult to recognize". As the category of whiteness opens, so too does it remain a blueprint for the way life should be lived:

> With red, black, yellow and brown people construed as less well developed or evolved, nearer to nature and savagery, and requiring careful monitoring and management lest they endanger the productive white population and its reproductively ensured future (McWhorter, 2005: 543)

Now that sovereign power exerted by the apartheid government no longer functions and its repression has been rejected, whiteness has found a new way of exerting power, quietly. Foucault refers to this power as biopower - a "power that appears in the silence of sovereign power - where life is lived" (Bhandaru, 2013: 228). The "quietness" of biopower is what makes it so powerful. Unlike the repressive, sovereign power we are most familiar with, biopower is productive and its goal is not to destroy. Instead, we find it operating as something that fosters the life of the social body - both individual bodies and the collective social body (Bhandaru, 2013: 228). According to Foucault, biopower's task is to direct life by ensuring it and sustaining it, and it does this by producing the individual as self-subjecting and the social body as self-regulating. This type of power is most profound in liberal and democratic societies, where the enhancement of individual and collective life is a national goal, and as a result, a self-governing individual is produced (Bhandaru, 2013: 228 - 229). However, this self-governing community has always been built on racial inequality:

> The proposition of freedom, liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness [were] originally extended exclusively to a circumscribed community determined by race (Statzel, 2006: 20).

The question then is what mechanism does biopower rely on in order to function? According to Foucault, it is normative judgement. As Bhandaru (2013: 230) argues:

> The norm summarizes the standards inherent in the population that, in turn, govern the social body. It is distinct from the "will of the people", which is an active, self-conscious declaration of the people's power. The norm is a passive representation of an empirical conception of "the people".

This norm inherently produces judgments and exercises power through abandonment. This is done by refusing to support any form of life that would jeopardize the life, health, strength and functionality of the nation (McWhorter, 2010: 77). This empirical conception of who should be removed from the social body is, according to Foucault, fundamentally racist. In modern society today, the social body is made up of both "normal" and "abnormal" lives - one represents the "pure", "healthy" and "functional" way of life and the "other": an "abnormal", "undesirable" and "threatening" way of life whose materialization is inevitable but unwanted (Bhandaru, 2013: 231). Keeping in mind the extremely racialized history of South Africa, I think it is clear which racialised bodies fall into each category here.

To summarize, the end of apartheid mutated South African whiteness from a legal category to a social norm that controls the decisions and judgments of the social body (Bhandaru, 2013: 233). Perhaps this interpretation seems farfetched - but this is due to our intrinsic familiarity with the traditional concept of power. This conceals the violent nature of white normativity, preventing us from understanding and acknowledging its violent functions. This results in us being unable to equate whiteness with the social norm – if it lost political power after apartheid, how can it be dangerous? Most white South Africans are committed to the discourse of racial equality, so how can whiteness be a norm? This sheds light on how powerful normalization can be: white normalization is the promotion of life through the application of the social norm - which as I previously stated, is inherently racist. It appears to open up to those previously excluded, but it simultaneously abandons the "other" that "threatens" the functionality of the social body. Perhaps this is why the city of Cape Town - with sleek, sky rise buildings and fresh air complemented by both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean - is *still* contrasted with Khayelitsha ('Our New Home' in Xhosa), the 6th largest informal settlement in South Africa. As you drive toward the prosperous city, you will pass the last attempt by the apartheid regime to enforce the Group Areas Act of 1950, which designated separate living arrangements through racial classification

(Sefali, 2013). However, this act of abandonment is still persistent today, with 98.62% of Khayelitsha's residents being black (Frith, 2011). This is one of many examples of how biopower, in producing subjects, serves to not only expand space for certain subjects, but also actively abandons others from that space. As Bhandaru (2013: 236) emphasizes, "the lives of some of these abandoned subjects are never fully realized; in fact, they are barely realized".

My aim here is to demonstrate how Foucault's concept of biopower sheds light on how whiteness is normalized. This is not done through explicit discrimination or the explicit, violent repression of ethnically different people, but through a more subtle nature of abandoning the "other" to ensure the health and productivity of the Self - or whiteness. An extension of the concept of biopower, I believe, is the issue of white moral and ethical codes. As previously mentioned, biopower's task is to direct life by ensuring it and sustaining it and it does this by producing the individual as self-subjecting alongside a specific norm that is fundamentally racist. Although the legal codes that perpetuated racial segregation during apartheid have dissolved, the moral system that legitimated racial practices is extremely persistent. As Statzel (2006: 23) writes:

> The role of conscience however is not simply to designate who belongs inside or outside of the community, but also to regulate behaviour within the community. Although this conscience regulates apartheid by pushing people of colour outside of the bounds of the moral community, it is not conceptualized as a racist conscience by its adherents but as a moral conscience.

Statzel's work on what she calls "the apartheid conscience" provides valuable insight into how the self-regulating individual that biopower produces favours a white subjectivity. Her work is guided by critical race theory and critical whiteness studies to uncover the social construction of whiteness, with a specific focus on how American nationalism is built upon whiteness as a racially superior and functioning category.

As the self-subjecting individual and self-regulating community fear anything that would jeopardize its life, health and functionality it ultimately becomes threatened by degeneracy and maintains a desire to be respected. This in turn propels a dedication to racist and heterosexist

practices and identities (Statzel, 2006: 24). Because whiteness conceptualizes "non-white" people as morally and physically threatening and unstable, it serves to perpetuate a fear of racial "others", as we have seen in Southern's documentary and many other occasions. The discourse of a "white genocide" can be linked to this suggestion: during apartheid black South Africans often served as domestic workers, gardeners and general labourers while black women often raised white children. Although they were excluded from white communities, their presence was not threatening as the white community could monitor their movement. In post-apartheid South Africa, it is reasonable to assume that this control has dissolved somewhat, and black South Africans are no longer entirely controlled by the white population. Thus, their "independence" causes a threat to white society, wherein the "other" will "spread their perceived immoral and chaotic nature and transform the nation into something alien and foreign itself" (Statzel, 2006: 31), or in the case of a "white genocide", completely destroy white society.

On the topic of destroying white society, Statzel raises a very interesting observation. It is undeniable that European colonization, the institution of slavery and apartheid condoned horrific violence against coloured bodies, both mentally and physically. Because of this, Statzel highlights a particularly important concept: the pervasiveness of projection amongst white communities. The projection of fears and loss of power externally stems from a deep fear internally. Not only is projection of internal negativity connected to a need to dominate territory, but it is also connected to a need to maintain a sense of self. As a result, the projections generate fear "that the external projections may return to persecute the one who projects" (Statzel, 2006: 36). While this interpretation falls into a psychoanalytic perspective, it holds weight in possibly identifying why white communities fear the racial "other", amongst other perspectives. Statzel (2006: 36) goes onto explain that:

> Racially, the projection of evil as well as chaos, disorder, and immorality onto people of colour is dependent on as well as inspires a need for segregation. Due to fear of encountering the other, social distance is maintained which secures the projection as natural and uncontested by relationships.

Nonetheless, the concept of external and internal projections that Statzel speaks of uncovers an interesting analysis of white fear. Perhaps the fear of a "white genocide" is not a result of an actual threat to white communities, but a deep fear of the racial contract being broken down - as Statzel (2006: 37) explains:

> They fear that what whites have done to others will now be done to whites... Not only is the fear that violence will turn onto whites, but that the persecution will be genocidal, not just eventually destroying the white race but extinguishing whites today.

From this perspective, the extreme paranoia we see in Southern's documentary and the associated comments section may denote a fear of destructive returning projections.

Whiteness as a racial subject has always required a form of power to reinforce the presence of racial difference (Statzel, 2006: 38), but in this case, the power is not sovereign, as we'd assume it to be. Rather, it is a power that manifests itself in subtle practices of exclusion and segregation, where the self-subjecting individual and self-regulating community project certain fears that determine who should be included and excluded in the social body. Steyn (2005: 127) confirms this, stating that these practices or discourses are "white" "in that they preserve this centred position through employing exclusionary tactics and strategies, and in that they are structured in negative sentiment toward the 'other'". My research demonstrates that this is, in part, done through propagandistic qualities that attempt to shape viewers' perceptions through agitating representations of both black and white South Africans. This negative sentiment toward the "other" is done by signalling specific features that attempt to shock viewers and make them feel threatened (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012). These propagandistic qualities ultimately determine who should be symbolically excluded and what lives are considered healthy and functional, in turn abandoning ways of life that are considered threatening, abnormal and alien.

So, what is whiteness and why should we critically analyse it?

In this section, I will attempt to describe the properties of whiteness. I use the work of Green et al (2007) as a guideline to identify the complexities and meanings of whiteness and how these meanings help to reproduce the force of the idea. In order to do so, I draw on an array of

literature (Matthews, 2015; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Wildman & Davis, 1995; West, 2010; Steyn, 2005) that speaks to similar methods and interpretations of whiteness and its reproduction.

So, what *exactly* does 'whiteness' mean? *Who* is considered white? Many white people tend to distance themselves from conversations concerned with whiteness, racism and racial privilege through a range of discourses and practices, which upon closer analysis, protects and secures the dominance and normativity of whiteness (Green et al, 2007: 406). However, conversations concerned with white racial privilege and anti-racism should no longer rest solely on the shoulders of black people and people of colour. Instead it should be reconceptualised as a white problem that white people should address and investigate. In doing so, we should not aim to shift attention away from those who experience racism but aim to critically interrogate the dominance of whiteness and its cultural and political position and the privileges that come with it. Green et al (2007: 390) confirm this, stating that, "locating whiteness, rather than racism, at the centre of anti-racism focuses attention on how white people's identities are shaped by a broader racist culture, and brings to the fore the responsibilities white people have for addressing racism" (Green et al, 2007: 390).

Whiteness is complex, and it shouldn't simply be defined as humans that have pale skin or a certain type of hair, for example. Rather, it should be understood as:

> The occupation of a *particular societal position:* whites are those who occupy a dominant position as a consequence of a colonialist expansion and who are advantaged by the societal hierarchies that were established as part of European expansion over the last few centuries (Matthews, 2015: 118).

Matthews (2015: 118) offers an observation concerned with whiteness in her work, arguing that although the parameters of the white race can be defined through "political machinations" of domination, physical similarities obviously assist certain categories of people. For example, white South Africans, Afrikaners, Jewish people and Eastern Europeans are all culturally different, but they are all physically white. This allows them "to overcome their ambiguous racial status, while

dissimilarity in physical appearance surely contributed to closing off the possibility of "ascension" to whiteness for other categories of people (black Africans and native Americans, for example)" (Matthews, 2015: 118).

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) explain that we need to "make the center visible" by highlighting that whiteness is a socially constructed phenomenon that is subject to an array of influences (Green et al, 2007: 393). As I've mentioned before, whiteness remains in power even after black majority rule was achieved and the Apartheid regime ended. This power continues to shape the standard against which black bodies are judged (Green et al, 2007: 396). The study of whiteness, according to Green et al (2007: 390), aims to investigate the powerful positions and discourses afforded to white people and how these discourses and privileges are pervasive in every fabric of social life, yet remain invisible - especially to white people. Steyn (2005: 121) defines whiteness as being, "the shared social space in which psychological, cultural, political and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalized and rendered unmarkable".

Whatever we may define it as, the production and maintenance of whiteness as a social and political identity has shifted considerably after apartheid, and it is still privileged by institutions and practices, providing material and psychological entitlements to white people (Green et al, 2007: 398). Therefore, in a post-apartheid South African context, investigating whiteness in a space where its power is no longer exercised through direct sovereignty requires a lens through which to understand the meanings and constructions of whiteness's values, practices and discourses.

In their work, Green et al (2007) provide three mechanisms through which whiteness is produced and reproduced; namely knowledge and historical constructions; national identity and belonging; and anti-racism practice. Nakayama and Krizek (2007) demonstrate that whiteness is produced and reproduced through strategic rhetorical devices that render it invisible. Both sets of work share similarities, highlighting the ability for whiteness to be many things at once, while maintaining power through its invisibility - a contradiction at best. In South Africa, although whiteness has been somewhat locally decentralized from a position where our advantage was

legally entrenched to where it is now actively disciplined, our whiteness still links us to centres of international power - economically, cultural, politically and socially (Steyn, 2005: 125). Steyn (2005) identifies discursive strategies of whiteness that also aim to maintain and reproduce it. She further explains that these discursive strategies are:

> Concerned with preserving privilege, maintaining, as far as possible, the status quo inherited from the era of institutionalized unequal power distribution, and with slowing down the rate of change toward a more substantively democratic, multicultural society within the country (2005: 127).

Although these strategies of maintenance and reproduction differ, they all aim to highlight that identifying whiteness is difficult as it is fluid, composite and invisible - but there are useful methods to identify these strategies. These mechanisms help to understand "how people act and interact and how white people and established institutions and practices that privilege white people continue to dominate" (Green et al, 2007: 408).

Melissa Steyn's (2001; 2005; 2008) work, *"White Talk": White South Africans and the Management of Diasporic Whiteness"; "Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa"* and *"Repertoires for Talking White: Resistant Whiteness in PostApartheid South Africa"* (Steyn & Foster, 2008) have been integral theoretical blueprints for my research. Steyn examines how South African whiteness attempts to perpetuate its privileges, but pays careful attention to its self-representation through what she calls "White Talk" - discursive strategies that aim to protect white privilege and maintain racial superiority. Steyn identified, through a period of ten years, that "White Talk" adopted specific discursive strategies (Steyn, 2005: 127 - 132). For example:

- A use of diasporic links to mainstream whiteness which could be a possible reflection of the subjective experience of losing control of the local context - thus withdrawing themselves to spaces where whiteness is more protected.
- The creation of a "white" brand of political discourse that represents white people as being able to "take charge" of societal transformation in the interests of Africans.

- "White Talk" is a skilled shape-shifter, often focusing on signalling themes such as crime, violence, corruption, dropping standards that indirectly 'confirm' 'black' incompetence and corruption
- "White Talk" constructs whiteness as a victimized positionality

These particular discursive strategies have echoed what I am interested in researching, demonstrating that my findings could be theoretically generalisable. Other theorists (Verwey & Quayle, 2012; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Steyn & Foster, 2008; Kanjere, 2018) with similar methods will also guide my research. The value of Steyn's work, alongside all the theorists I have mentioned, is unquestionable. Their work provides fundamental conceptual mappings and methods that aid collection and exploration of the data. Not only does their work guide me, but it also highlights the importance of investigating the "subtleness" of whiteness and how it is pervasive in every stitch of the fabric of social life. I have thus chosen to do a broad thematic analysis of the documentary to identify specific themes related to South African whiteness. This becomes a foundation from which to conduct a more detailed thematic analysis of the comment section of Southern's documentary in order to identify discourses predominate within it (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017: 3352 - 3353). A thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2012: 57) is a method for systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes or discourses) across a set of data. The emphasis here is on *across* - in order to interpret my data meaningfully and truthfully, a thematic analysis will allow me to investigate a collection of shared meanings and experiences, rather than a single data item, such as the documentary on its own. These themes will be provided in detail in chapter four.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have contextualised my research with reference to a wide body of literature concerned with representation and whiteness. The conceptual tools that guide my research are Stuart Hall's work on representation and difference, Michel Foucault's work on discourse, power and the subject, a Foucauldian approach to white normativity and an array of literature concerned with global whiteness and South African whiteness. What I have aimed to

demonstrate is the notion of conceptual maps and associations of meanings, as well as the concept of discourses and how these enable the formation of subjects and knowledge to legitimise particular forms of power. Whiteness as a subject position is of particular interest, and how this form of life affects social life and produces material effects that are often taken for granted. These conceptual tools enable me to engage with my research questions in further chapters. I am interested in exploring how whiteness, particularly South African whiteness, is constructed in *Farmlands* and negotiated in its associated *YouTube* comment section. I am also interested in why issues that are specific to a South African context are being used to construct Global North whitenesses. The work of representation and difference, discourse, power and the subject, as well as critical understandings of whiteness inform my choice of methodological positioning and how I conduct my thematic analysis of the documentary and the comment section. The next chapter will provide an extensive account of my methodological process, my choice of methods and my data collection process.

Chapter three – methodological approach

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a detailed account of my research process. I will begin by offering an extensive reflection of my positionality as a white researcher, discussing the importance of reflexivity and demonstrating the philosophical challenges I have faced during my research process. I then describe the first stage of my research, which led me to develop my research questions. Following this, I set out my methodological choice and methods and thereafter, include an evaluation of the reliability and validity of qualitative research and qualitative methods respectively in relation to my research questions. I then describe the intricacies of my research as I reflect on my sampling choices and a detailed description of my data collection process. My research explores how whiteness, particularly South African whiteness, is constructed in a documentary that was produced by a white, right-wing Canadian journalist, Lauren Southern. It is also interested in how whiteness is further constructed and negotiated in the documentary's associated comment section. The aim of my methodological choice is not to attempt to prove or disprove any factual claims related to South African whites, but to demonstrate how social reality and meaning are socially and historically constructed, and to in turn critique and fracture whiteness by describing its manifestations and contradictions.

The beginning stages of my research preparation were originally focused around investigating the social construction and positioning of my own whiteness within post-apartheid South Africa. As a media studies researcher, I wanted to examine my own whiteness in an attempt to understand its nuanced constructions and material effects on the social fabric of everyday life - but I had not thought beyond that or what my site of inquiry would include. Through investigating possible spaces that reproduce whiteness, particularly online spaces such as *Facebook* and *YouTube*, I discovered conversations around land expropriation without compensation and farm attacks and murders. Throughout these conversations, there was a general lack of historicizing the racial history of South Africa and I noticed that white people increasingly represented themselves as victims in these conversations. I discovered that these conversations and understandings were not restricted locally and nationally, but had been bolstered internationally by conservative,

right-wing circles. This led me to discovering Southern's documentary *Farmlands* on *YouTube*. After watching it, I felt deep remorse for the families that had been affected by farm murders and attacks, but I was also shocked at the blatant ahistorical representation of not just the murders and attacks, but land expropriation without compensation, the history of South Africa and the intentional selection and exclusion of who was interviewed as well as the glaring propagandistic nature of the film. Questions concerned with the historical, social, cultural and political backdrop of the documentary began to arise, with my initial intention being to analyse how the documentary constructs specific meanings and understandings of South Africans. I then, however, began to identify meanings and understandings that individuals in the documentary's comment section were constructing alongside it. This provoked the following questions: how is South African whiteness constructed in the documentary and how is whiteness negotiated and understood in its associated comments section?

Positionality and reflexivity

An extensive reflection of my positionality as a white researcher feels imperative. The process of reflexivity in research is vital as it encourages a consideration of the silent processes within academic research (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995: 303). Here, my reference to this silence echoes the need to reflect on and critique the invisibility of whiteness in my personal and academic life. As Nakayama and & Krizek (1995: 305) explain, the construction of whiteness has material effects on the entire global, social structure and our places in relation to it, so there is an urgent need to critically map and incorporate whiteness in academic analysis and other institutional sites of life. Whiteness - whatever we may interpret that as - is extremely powerful. To presume that being white allows me to successfully analyse the powerful, multifaceted nature of whiteness is a dangerous mistake. Although I have been aware of the term "white privilege", my familiarity with the unearned assets, both social and material, offered to me by my subjectivity has been hitherto uncritical. Through this research, I have come to acknowledge that the knowledge I produce and my process of self-reflection will not "free" me from my privileged position and it will not make whiteness "okay". The knowledge I am producing and the argument you are reading right now is affected by my positionality, even as I critique the very essence of my identity.

As a white researcher, I am part of the 98% of white academics that produce research in South Africa, yet I only make up 8% of the total South African population (Ngobeni, 2006). This alarming statistic highlights that the knowledge I produce is constructed in line with dominant standards. The reality is that my academic competency, success, and the credibility of my knowledge will be measured against the extent to which it conforms to Western paradigms of thought (Green et al, 2007: 400). This condition means that my work will remain visible - and by virtue of my visibility, my interpretations of social milieu are likely to be understood as a dominant idea (Green et al, 2007: 401). My work then is an attempt to critically grapple with these realities and present research that experiments with new ways of thinking about whiteness, with the help of theorists who have done the same.

The intention of my research is to disrupt networks of power by making "everyday" whiteness visible, even if it is a microscopic amount of "everyday" whiteness. I am aware that white researchers are not automatically better at studying whiteness because they are white. While my lived experience of whiteness may allow me to identify specific white rhetoric, I have also engaged with contextual research, literature on whiteness and close observation of the documentary and the comments. This has enabled me to more critically decipher the 'dog whistles' in this particular context. In doing so, I have been able to identify specific white rhetorics, discursive strategies and historical understandings. This has aided me in attempting to foreground the unconscious yet powerful practices of whiteness, in turn presenting the reality that South Africa's history of racial segregation has produced white subjectivities as the form of life that should be protected, discarding other forms of life in the process (Bhandaru, 2013: 243). In my work, I aim to contribute to the project of an antiracist politics - attempting to take responsibility for my unnoticeable participation in the practices that reproduce racial inequality as well as actively opposing white normativity. As Bhandaru (2013: 242 -244) explains, an antiracist politics seeks to resist the persistence of deciding which living subjects should be promoted and which subjects should be abandoned. This project urges the white self to challenge social structures that make most lives unliveable, instead of practicing complicity and silence.

When studying and analysing the complexities of social reality, a researcher must decide what the best way to study the particular phenomena would be. In order to conceptualise what the most suitable way forward will be, I have adopted a qualitative methodological approach, paying close attention to the fact that my choice of methodology will affect my philosophical orientation, subjectivity, choice of methods, and my own interpretation of social phenomena.

Methodological choice - qualitative research

My questions of the *how* and *why* constructions of whiteness are produced within meaning is best answered through a qualitative methodological approach to social research. This methodology has allowed me, for example, to analyse texts - in whatever format they may be - in such a way that I am able to interpret people's use of language in their negotiation and construction of social practices, ultimately allowing some understanding of people's actions and behaviours (Kura, 2012: 6). Here, my aim is not to explain the causes of behaviour or provide a "truthful" description of reality, but to rather demonstrate how Southern and the commenters construct and negotiate *meanings* of whiteness. Qualitative research is mainly concerned with the representation of people's knowledge, subjectivity and experiences and sees them as meaningful and worthy of exploration (Byrne, 2009: 182). Therefore, in order to make sense of these constructions, I have adopted an interpretivist or phenomenological orientation, whereby I attempt to provide a detailed, rich understanding and interpretation of meanings, events, texts and specific experiences (Kura, 2012: 6). As Babbie and Mouton (2001: 28) explain:

> The phenomenologist emphasizes that all human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their worlds. We continuously interpret, create, and give meaning to, define, justify and rationalize our actions. According to the phenomenological position, the fact that people are continuously constructing, developing, and changing the everyday interpretations of their worlds, should be taken into account in any conception of social science research.

The suitability of a qualitative approach to my research can also be defended by its emphasis on contextual interests. The terrain that I've located myself in is grounded in history, and the texts that I am examining are conspicuous in their choice of disregarding such important history - thus

my preference for understanding specific events and discourses within their context can be safeguarded:

> It is only...if one understands events against the background of the whole context and how such a context confers meaning to the events concerned, that one can truly claim to "understand" the events (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 272).

Considering the above mentioned features, I began my research by closely reading the documentary and the conversations in the comments section, describing the representation of specific events, people and contexts in the documentary as accurately as possible and thereafter slowly accumulating theories that spoke to these first-order descriptions (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 273). By entering into a space and observing its nuances, subjects and their constructions of social reality, theories emerged that helped me identify and explain specific themes and discourses within the documentary and its associated comments section: Hall's theory of representation and markings of difference, Foucault's theory of power, discourse, the subject and biopower, and an abundance of literature concerned with how whiteness is constructed, maintained and reproduced (Statzel, 2006; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Wildman & Davis, 1995; West, 2010; Steyn, 2005; Kanjere, 2018) as well as literature concerned with whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa (Steyn & Foster, 2008; Steyn, 2001; West, 2010; Verwey & Quayle, 2012).

Evaluation and justification for methodological choice

Questions concerned with reliability and validity in qualitative research are related to the fact that researchers are often isolated and work alone, focusing on the findings rather than providing a detailed, statistical description of how the results were obtained (Meyer, 2001: 343). Evaluating and critiquing my choice of methodology then, is an essential process in my research as I carried out my research alone, focusing strongly on my findings and its correlation to theoretical evidence with no intention of providing statistical evidence, but rather a valuable interpretation of a specific phenomenon. A weakness of qualitative research is that the researcher could fail to remain objective by becoming too involved with the participants or site of inquiry, thus becoming an advocate rather than an observer (Meyer, 2001: 344). However, qualitative research seeks to make sense of social reality and intricate constructions of meaning, thus distancing oneself from

research participants would be impossible for the qualitative researcher. Although my research does not include research participants and interviews, it does involve interpreting individuals' personal understandings of social reality on an accessible, public social media platform. This does not refute the fact that I need to be extremely conscious of my own possible biases. Meyer (2001: 344) explains that it is vital that the researcher's judgments and prior experience do not affect the research in any way. This safeguarding can be carried out by explicitly recognizing one's preconceptions through reflexive methods, thus providing a means to establish academic rigour and trustworthiness through an audit trail (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016: 105). This reflexivity is provided in the beginning of this chapter, but I will further elaborate on my research experience in chapter five.

Research reliability and validity are protected through criteria of objectivity, construct validity, internal validity and generalizability. However, individual's understandings of social practices, their perceptions and mental structures and their constructions of meaning are, specifically in my research, not quantifiable. They are fluid and complex, so qualitative research allows for flexibility and interactivity through mechanisms that probe meaning, cover topics from different angles and explore complicated concepts and the relationships between them (Meyer, 2001: 345). Qualitative research, if executed effectively, allows the researcher to collect sufficiently detailed descriptions of data in a context, thereafter analysing and reporting them in just as much detail. Adopting this research approach has aided me in conceptualizing the contexts and spaces I am interested in, focusing strongly on describing the documentary, researching the producer and interviewees, critically examining the historical narratives and statistical information presented in the documentary as well as gathering a reliable data set from the associated comment section.

The main concern of reliability is to ensure that the data collected is undertaken in a consistent manner and the nature of the data remains stable throughout the research process (Long & Johnson, 2000: 31). However, considering perceptions, social practices, understandings and constructions of meanings are never stable and are always subject to change, it is likely for the nature of the data and sample to change in qualitative research. This is acceptable so long as the quality of evidence upholds the research question (Long & Johnson, 2000: 31). In the beginning

of my research, I initially wanted to analyse constructions of whiteness in the documentary but decided to include the comment section as another source for data collection, changing the nature of my research to focus on collections of words, symbols, themes, discourses and meaning constructions in both the documentary and the comments section, rather than an in-depth investigation into the representations offered by the documentary alone. I was interested in studying the comment section to observe how viewers were interpreting and responding to the documentary thus, the reason for including the comment section in my analysis rests upon the rich and meaningful conversations and constructions evident in the comment forum that both accepted and rejected the constructions offered by the documentary.

Concluding this section of the chapter, qualitative research is deemed appropriate for my research as it is concerned with contextually specific meanings and constructions, in turn providing a useful, conceptual backdrop that has aided me in understanding and interpreting specific constructions. Qualitative research provides guidance in answering the questions of *how* and *why* constructions and understandings of whiteness are produced, in turn enabling me to locate myself into my research, allowing me to visualize, understand and interpret the social phenomena I am interested in investigating so that I can attempt to understand the meanings individuals attach to phenomena based on their contextual understandings, actions, subjectivities and decisions within their social contextualities (Kura, 2012: 9). Apart from these reasons, I believe the value of qualitative research for my study lies not only in the knowledge and understanding that can originate from it, but that the research methods employed resist simple classifications of phenomena, instead aiming to establish meaning and important phenomenological findings (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013: 399).

Method choice

In qualitative research, the nature of the claim and its centrality to the study will decide the degree of evidence required, along with the most appropriate method (Long & Johnson, 2000: 31). In terms of assessing validity, the method of analysis, sampling process and the degree to which the phenomenon is addressed is vital. I have used Melissa Steyn's (2005) dissertation, *"White Talk": White South Africans and the Management of Diasporic Whiteness"* as a guiding

framework to how I approach my data. In her work, Steyn examines how South African whiteness attempts to perpetuate its privileges but pays careful attention to its self-representation through what she calls "White Talk" - discursive strategies that aim to protect white privilege and maintain racial superiority. Over a period of ten years, Steyn identified that "White Talk" adopts several strategies, some of which are similar to what I have discovered in *Farmlands* and its associated comment section. For example, the documentary represents black South Africans as an extremely violent "other", burning and breaking property, while white South Africans are represented as victims who are being exterminated by the "other". Steyn (2001) identifies a similar construction that represents whiteness as the victim in post-apartheid South Africa.

My preliminary readings of the data revealed that there are clear binaries being constructed both within the documentary and the comments section. While these constructions are explicitly racist, I also identified a repetitive nature of implicit ideas and constructions of both black and white South Africans. In order to analyse and interpret these underlying meanings, I adopt a suitable method of analysis that will help yield practical, reliable results. Because the nature of my data is comprised of visual and rhetorical elements of subjective understandings of individuals, I use a thematic analysis approach in order to interpret these elements, both obvious and abstract, within their socio-contextual space. My reason for choosing a thematic analysis approach, apart from its interpretive nature, is its ability to identify abstract themes. While this may seem obvious, the analytical importance of a theme highlights how texts are not immeasurable voids, but carriers of multiple meanings and constructions which need to be identified and interpreted. Vaismoradi et al (2016: 101) highlight that a theme is:

> An implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas, [and] it enables researchers to answer the study question. It contains codes that have a common point of reference and has a high degree of generality that unifies ideas regarding the subject of inquiry.

While it is easy to identify explicitly racist constructions, more abstract understandings are conceptually challenging to decode. Thus, a thematic analysis method offers tools by which I can code and analyse my data systematically, thereafter linking my data to theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2012: 58).

In deciding how I go about conducting a thematic analysis, my modalities include both an inductive and deductive approach to my data. My analysis is somewhat inductive in that certain themes derive from the content of the data itself, allowing me to match theoretical frameworks to the data. At the same time, my analysis is mostly deductive in that I have brought to my data a series of theoretical concepts present in my literature review. This literature, specifically Steyn (2001; 2005; 2008) and Anastasia Kanjere's (2018) work, assist me to generate themes alongside Hall's work on representation and difference, Foucault's theory of power, discourse, the subject and biopower and an array of literature concerned with whiteness theory and South African whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa.

I am aware that actively choosing to complete my literature review before my data collection may have resulted in the introduction of perceived notions and bias. However, I believe the benefits of conceptualising my research first outweighs the threat of perceived bias. For example, by conducting my literature review first, I can draw on an extensive body of research, potentially providing a much deeper conceptualisation of the social phenomena I am concerned with. Understanding theoretical concepts and contextualising my research has allowed me to formulate rich, reliable themes that can be linked to critical theoretical models concerned with examining how social reality is constructed, thus furthering the reliability and rigour of my data. A thematic analysis method has proved a reliable and appropriate approach to analyse my data as it analytically investigates narrative materials from subjectivities by breaking the text into relatively small units of analysis, thereafter submitting them to descriptive treatment (Vaismoradi et al, 2013: 400). This descriptive treatment will be outlined in my choices of sampling and data collection undertaking.

Sampling, process of data collection and data analysis

Before beginning this section of my data collection process, it is important to note that while I initially wanted to analyse the documentary as a single source of data, the associated comment section is used as the main site of inquiry. Thus, the text within the comment section provides my primary data-set, with the documentary becoming a secondary or 'sub data-set'.

The documentary provides the conceptual starting point that guides me in interpreting further constructions in the comment section. I use the film as a grounding site of investigation to inform the reading and interpretation of the comment section. In familiarizing the visual text of *Farmlands*, I use a broad thematic analysis and touch on literature concerned with documentary film and rhetoric. Soules (2015: 3) defines rhetoric as "the art of communicating effectively and persuasively in a particular context", whereby strategies that appeal through character (*ethos*), emotion (*pathos*) and demonstrative proofs (*logos*) are utilized in order to argue a stance. As chapter four will discuss, Southern makes use of these strategies: each interviewee's character develops throughout the documentary, allowing the audience to "confer a sense of *ethos* onto their contributions" (Fox, 2017: 59). Perhaps the most profound rhetorical strategy Southern uses is that of *pathos,* where, for example, violent images of crime scenes, protestors and fires are likely to create visceral responses. Lastly, Southern interviews representatives of verified organisations and parties as well as citizens who have experienced certain issues first-hand. This is the demonstrative argument that appeals to a sense of *logos* by showing the audience "evidence". These rhetorical strategies are very persuasive, and I began to identify propagandistic qualities in the documentary. As Soules (2015: 4) argues, propaganda often appeals to national values, for example, and it serves as an "anchor to define – and limit – the persuasive argument". According to Jowett & O'Donnell (2012: 289), propaganda is defined as:

> A deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012: 289).

Jowett & O'Donnell (2012: 290) provide 10 divisions for analysing propaganda text. These divisions have prompted questions concerned with how Southern, during a time where a narrative of the white race losing power has become very popular, utilizes special symbols to elicit a desired reaction:

1. The ideology and purpose of the propaganda campaign
2. The context in which the propaganda occurs

3. Identification of the propagandist
4. The structure of the propaganda organization
5. The target audience
6. Media utilization techniques
7. Special techniques to maximize effect
8. Audience reaction to various techniques
9. Counterpropaganda, if present
10. Effects and evaluation

These identifications are provided in detail in the next chapter. Once I had interpreted the propagandistic qualities, I thematised the documentary into 3 narratives. These narratives attempt to deliberately construct and shape perceptions of South African history, farm attacks and murders and issues of land, amongst other social phenomena. These will be discussed in detail in chapter four alongside screenshots of visual texts that signal specific features. Once these themes are discussed, a detailed thematic analysis of the comment section will commence. I will begin to identify texts in the associated comments section, thereafter selecting units of analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2000: 780). In terms of collecting comments, Murthy & Sharma (2018) and Arthurs et al., (2017) both use *YouTube's* application programming interface (API) to collect their research on *YouTube*. Due to a lack of sufficient knowledge, funds, a research team and technological support, I was unable to use this interface to collect my data. As Arthurs et al., (2017: 11) explain:

> Collecting large data sets 'scraped' through the platforms' API is a task that requires programming knowledge and that many researchers in the arts and humanities or the social sciences still lack and therefore research teams that combine multiple types of expertise are required to address the complexity of the work.

However, I do not believe this inability to scrape my data through the programming interface will result in inconsistencies. In their work, Meddaugh & Kay (2009) and Kanjere (2018) do not use a programming interface to collect their data, but rather a close examination of comments and discursive strategies through observation, collection and thematisation. The documentary has 27

220 comments that are publicly accessible and do not require any form of password or log in details to access them. Topics range from explicit racist opinions, sexist commentary, advertisements, implicitly racist and nationalist conversations and general compliments to Southern's work. I have made a choice to analyse *N*=310 of those comments, including some 'replies' to the comments. This amounts to approximately 1.09% of the total comment population. Although this sample size is small, it is a purposive sample that incorporates rich information concerned with constructions of meaning. This decision can be defended by Babbie & Mouton (2001: 277), who explain that:

> In contrast to random sampling that is used in quantitative studies, qualitative research seeks to maximize the range of specific information that can be obtained from and about that context by purposely selecting locations and information that differ from one another.

I have collected *N*=75 of the "top comments"; comments that have received the most engagement ("thumbs up" and replies). A discrepancy whilst collecting my data resulted in me having to continuously refresh the *YouTube* browser due to a poor internet connection and losing my place in the data collection process, so I made the choice to collect text from both the "top comments" category and "newest comments" category, which collates the comments chronologically. The remaining *N*=235 comments were collected from this category. I do not believe this has caused a discrepancy in my data as my analysis is not interested in when the comments are written but rather the constructions of meaning in the text and how these constructions are negotiated amongst the commenters. Initially I decided that my sample would only include comments of 50 words or longer, but this proved ineffective as comments of, for example, 10 words, sometimes incorporated useful and valuable data. I have thus allowed the word-size of my samples to range from 3 words to over 100 words.

Unlike statistical sampling, my goal is to choose samples that are likely to replicate or extend my theoretical literature (Meyer, 2001: 333), so I have chosen comments that prove most relevant to my research question and theoretical understandings, as mentioned in my modality approach of deductivism. After these choices, I copied my data into a word document, numbering them from 1 to 310. I included number of "likes" or "thumbs ups" for most comments in order to

foreground how certain constructions are received by other commenters. These range from 1 to 2000 “likes”. I have also made the ethical choice to disassociate all usernames from the comments to protect anonymity. Collecting all 310 comments and several replies took me approximately 4 days. Thereafter, I printed my data and began the process of extensive engagement and familiarization.

Using the work of Braun & Clarke (2012) and Vaismoradi et al (2016) to guide me in interpreting my data, I analysed my data in specific phases. The entire process of analysis took 7 days. In order to reach an overall understanding of my data, I began by immersing myself in the text through reading and rereading all 310 comments and replies. At this point, I only took “mental notes”, ensuring that I managed to recognize the constructs presented in the data (Vaismoradi, 2016: 103) instead of hastily decoding it. At this stage, I identified constructions that resonate with Steyn’s work, and I also identified other constructions that were not present in my theoretical groundings.

In the next phase of data analysis, I began to read the data *as data* - reading the text actively, critically and analytically (Braun & Clarke, 2012: 61) and conceptualising it against the knowledge afforded by my literature review. I then identified meaningful ideas with a general understanding of the phenomena that is supported by the literature. Thereafter, I systematically decoded my data by generating codes - identifying explicit and abstract meanings that speak to my research questions. I highlighted these portions of text in pink highlighter and wrote extensive notes on each to maintain an audit trail of my thoughts, questions and interpretations (Vaismoradi, 2016: 105). Braun & Clarke (2012: 63) suggest that researchers conducting a thematic analysis should identify enough codes to capture the diversity and patterns within the data. Most codes I identified are conceptual codes which identify key elements and dimensions of the phenomenon in my study as well as participant perspective codes, which identify the participant's negative and positive comments about a particular experience (Vaismoradi, 2016: 103). If specific codes began to repeat themselves in a patterned way, I labelled them as themes and highlighted these labels in blue highlighter. Each theme was made up of a cluster of codes that began to reflect a coherent and meaningful pattern in my data (Braun & Clarke, 2012: 63) I interpreted them as themes as

they captured something important about the data in relation to my research question, which is concerned specifically with constructions of whiteness. Every time I identified meaningful construction or pattern, I noted it next to the respective code and in a separate journal under the label “general theme” or “GT”. While these were not my finalized themes, this strategy aided me in collating my interpretations systematically. Some interpretations were simply thoughts or general observations and others were concrete, unique themes. Other interpretations resonated strongly with Steyn’s work on “White Talk” and other research she has conducted (2001; 2008) as well as the work of Kanjere (2018), Nakayama & Krizek (1995) and Meddaugh & Kay (2009).

My next phase of analysis required me to review my potential themes for quality purposes. At this point, I had identified 24 “themes”. These themes were not all perfectly defined, and some were just codes, so I refined and reviewed my themes in relation to my data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012: 65) by reading through all 24 interpretations, making sure they correlated with my data set. I was able to refine my interpretations into 5 concrete themes as well as resistant discourses that are distinct but relative and directly address my research questions.

Conclusion

Concluding this chapter, I would like to emphasize that these are my personal research interpretations that focus on a specific space where right-wing discourses of whiteness are dominant. These themes aim to examine defenders of whiteness, offering an analysis into how whiteness is understood and continuously negotiated and maintained both within the documentary and its associated comment section. This chapter has provided a detailed account of my research process, reflecting on my positionality as a white researcher and how my choice of methodology and method have allowed me to fulfil the responsibility I have taken on as a researcher. This chapter discusses the usefulness of using a qualitative methodological approach, emphasizing how this approach will aid me in providing a detailed, rich understanding and interpretation of meanings, events, texts and specific experiences in a particular historical moment. The decision to adopt a thematic analysis rests upon this method’s utility to analyse and interpret texts as carriers of multiple meanings and constructions. I have provided an extensive account of my sampling choices alongside a reflection on the possible challenges and

limitations of my data collection process. The next chapter will extensively present my findings, providing a detailed analysis of the documentary and the data set, which are both comprised into themes that demonstrate how whiteness is constructed and negotiated.

Chapter four - findings

Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to answer my research questions by presenting my research findings. My research is interested in analysing and interpreting how whiteness, specifically South African whiteness, is constructed in Lauren Southern's documentary *Farmlands,* and how this has resulted in specific understandings and negotiations of whiteness in the documentary's associated *YouTube* comment section. The substance of my findings originates from a comprehensive thematic analysis of 310 comments and some replies including extensive theoretical research concerned with theories of representation, difference, discourse, power, the subject and critical whiteness studies. In contextualising the thematic categories collated from the data, this chapter will begin by presenting a brief thematic analysis of the constructions of South African whiteness offered in the documentary: through visual and rhetorical propaganda, *Farmlands* provides a historical narrative that emphasizes themes of *terra nullius*[1]*; white victimhood and black brutality;* and *white order and black chaos.* This analysis is supported by visual screenshots taken from the documentary. Thereafter, the chapter provides a more detailed demonstration of the discourses and understandings of whiteness identified within my data set. This comprises the majority of my findings. The chapter will first offer the resistant discourses evident in the data set to demonstrate that there were contestations. Thereafter, the central, organising tool to analyse my data is that of colonial, racialized binary oppositions which will be presented in Section 1. An appendix of the collated binary oppositions is provided at the end of the reference list. In Section 2 and 3, I categorise the rest of my analysis into several themes that attempt to answer my research questions. Concerning the local, these focus on the ideas of white

[1] All themes will be italicised

saviours and victims: "*Whites improve the lives of blacks and this is how we are repaid?"*[2]*; Equal footing is oppression - South African whiteness as the victim.* Section 3 is concerned with the global: *"They are the true asylum seekers, not those worthless invaders";* and *South Africa - a warning symbol to the West.* It is vital to consider that these themes are linked to the broader context of post-apartheid South Africa, where issues of farm attacks and murders, land expropriation without compensation and land reform remedies have become distinct local and global markers of a "white genocide" - a political conspiracy of white ethnic and civilisational substitution promoted by right-wing communities across the world. My findings demonstrate that global whiteness and South African whiteness in particular, have come to be understood and negotiated against the backdrop of the rise of multiculturalism, enduring myths of miscegenation, a "great replacement" of the "pure" white race, the apartheid concept of the "*swaart gevaar"* and the increased mobilization of right-wing communities. Concluding, this chapter will present several resistant discourses evident in the comment section, demonstrating that contestation is possible.

Farmlands - constructing a skewed historical account of South African whiteness

This section begins by analysing the documentary through 3 themes: *terra nullius; white victimhood and black brutality;* and *white order and black chaos.* In doing so, I am hoping to demonstrate that these themes construct a historical narrative of whiteness in a specific way.

The documentary utilizes agitation propaganda, where the text attempts to evoke people into participating or supporting a cause (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012: 291). This is done by stimulating mass action through emphasizing one signalling feature of the situation that is either threatening or shocking (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012: 292). I have most noticeably identified a deliberate lack of historicizing and contextualising South Africa's racial history, farm murders and attacks and land expropriation without compensation. Specific visual signals that represent black and white South Africans are offered, generating, in my opinion, very dangerous assumptions that many commenters accept. The purpose of the documentary is to present an account of what "all" white

[2] Themes that include quotation marks are direct, unedited quotes from the comment section

South Africans experience "everyday", focusing strongly on farm murder and attacks, land expropriation policies and the "violent nature" of black South Africans. The context in which the propaganda occurs is multiplexed, with local and global fears of a "white genocide" - concerns that whiteness is losing power due to miscegenation, an influx of immigrants, and fears that black people are taking over with an intent to destroy white people globally. The target audience is assumed to be white people, many of whom may fear the same phenomenon. Rhetorical strategies that aim to maximize the effect of the documentary are evident, most notably a strong appeal to the audience's *pathos* through violent images, video footage, archival photographs, an emotive sound score and interviews of a selective nature.

Terra nullius

The documentary describes itself as detailing the plight of white South Africans, with a specific focus on white South African farmers. Beginning with an uncritical attempt at contextualising South Africa's complex racial history, Southern provides a biased historical account of 366 years of South African history, focusing on the "peaceful" nature of the Voortrekkers and Piet Retief, in contrast to the "violent" nature of the Zulu King, Dingane and his warriors. She also fails to account for the imperative role of the British in this conquest. While all parties were violent in their quest for land, Southern specifically represents King Dingane and his black warriors as deceitful, in contrast to the white Voortrekkers whose advance across the country she described as "mostly peaceful". As Grobler (2011: 131) suggests:

> What happened at Mgungudlovu was not - as was written in old Eurocentric history books that were overly sympathetic towards the Voortrekkers - the savage murder by a barbaric African monarch of well-meaning, peace-loving Christians. Instead it was a well-planned, pre-emptive attack by the Zulus on the Voortrekkers.

Representing the massacre of Piet Retief as a violent and deceptive murder serves the Eurocentric narrative of the massacre that Grobler speaks of. Her rewriting of this battle indicates that Dingane's plan was justified in looking upon the Voortrekkers with suspicion in order to protect the sovereignty of his kingdom (Grobler, 2012: 131). Here, Southern has already appealed to the

audience's *pathos* by setting up the representation of King Dingane as evil, malicious and deceptive in contrast to Piet Retief and the Voortrekkers as innocent and peaceful settlers.

Upon critical analysis, Southern also implies that most areas in South Africa were depopulated after the Mfecane, and that the rest of the country was inhabited only by the indigenous Khoisan people. Eurocentric narratives of South African history construct the Mfecane as a political conflict within the Zulu Kingdom that left the land they were occupying completely depopulated. This narrative is similar to Eurocentric accounts of the colonization of South Africa, where the land was considered empty and that European settlers and Bantu people had arrived at the same time, thus European claims to land were justified (South African History Online, 2019). While a detailed historical account of South African history is beyond the intention of this paper, the concept of terra nullius (nobody's land) was central to European colonial history in South Africa, where European settlers, both British and Afrikaans, believed they had equal rights to the land and could take ownership of it through force because they arrived at the same time as the Bantu people. Speaking about the Boers specifically, Steyn (2001: 33) confirms this:

> They believed they had an equal claim to the territory. In part the belief that the land was 'empty' could be the effect of the migrations caused by reconfigurations taking place within African nation building (a process known as the *Mfecane*), but it also undoubtedly was part of the European construction of Africa as being devoid of legitimate occupants, barring game.

Southern also fails to mention how the Great Trek, a series of violent wars between indigenous African people and the Boers, initiated the development of an Afrikaner, Christian nationalist identity constituted by whiteness, where racial exclusion was built into its foundations:

> Afrikaner 'freedom' came to be understood as freedom to exercise racial hegemony. The right to be 'white' was yoked to the rightlessness of 'non-whites'. Being 'civilized' in a savage, untamed country entailed the right to be masters of the heathens (Steyn, 2001: 32)

Southern also intentionally conceals the lead up and aftermath of the Anglo Boer War between the British and the Boer. While this dissertation does not seek to present a detailed analysis of the complexities of the war caused by British imperialism, Southern downplays any conflicts between whites in South Africa and so ignores much of the basis on which Afrikaner white nationalism was constructed. Steyn (2001: 34) contextualizes this war, explaining that the powerful British settlers destroyed Afrikaner farms and homesteads through the "scorched earth" policy, "leaving the Boers without means of livelihood, the women and children having been interned in concentration camps". In doing so, she creates a false sense of white unity against black South Africans that dovetails with right-wing narratives of global white unity. After the war, the British reconstructed South Africa into a union of the former independent Afrikaner territories and the British colonies of the Cape and Natal (Steyn, 2001: 34), in an effort to maintain peace negotiations. South Africa became a white settler state, and the glue that ensured the peace negotiations remained intact was ensuring the country was livable for whites, defending their civilisation against indigenous Africans (Steyn, 2001: 34).

White victimhood and black brutality

In contextualising apartheid, Southern simply states that "for a time, separation of blacks and whites was only a social convention, not the rigidly enforced legal structure it came to be…" and mentions that black and white South Africans were separated by laws. She fails to mention the 1913 Natives Land Act that legally enabled the apartheid government to forcibly remove thousands of black families from their homes. She fails to mention the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, where 69 peaceful protestors were killed by the South African police; the 1976 Soweto Uprising

which was met with teargas and live bullets, killing hundreds of protestors. She fails to mention the complete disenfranchisement of black South Africans, the torture, despair and violence most black South Africans experienced and the daily struggle of being restricted by apartheid laws that restricted every facet of black South African's lives (Blakemore, 2019). Instead, she represents Nelson and Winnie Mandela as violent terrorists, only focusing on the militaristic nature of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the sabotage campaigns carried out by them against the Apartheid government - such as the bombings - and the act of necklacing apartheid state collaborators. While these events are true, Southern selectively chooses them to emphasize a signalling feature of black South Africans as "inherently violent", completely disguising atrocities committed by the Apartheid government and in turn representing white South Africans as threatened by black South Africans.

To perpetuate this representation, Southern then presents a range of footage of present South Africa that shows black South Africans protesting and burning property, failing to contextualise any of the protests. In *Farmlands,* Southern's driver [time stamp: 12 min 43 secs) further supports this representation:

It's an ongoing thing, people get discontented and they destroy. There is a sort of

> Schadenfreude (pleasure derived by someone from another person's misfortune) in the thing, not because I say so but because causal examination of the thing reveals that it's true.

Southern then introduces farm murders and attacks. She begins by interviewing a white woman from Blood Sisters*,* an organisation that cleans up crime scenes across South Africa. Southern presents horrific images from crime scenes, which is likely to elicit extreme fear, shock and threat in those who watch the documentary. This strategy not only appeals to the audience's *pathos,* but it appeals to a sense of *logos* where material evidence is likely to evoke a visceral response in viewers (Fox, 2017: 63).

While the crime that is mentioned by the interviewee is true, extremely brutal and inexcusable, it did not happen on a farm (*Daily Mail*, 2012). An important conversation in the interview that further elicits fear of black South Africans is as follows:

> **Interviewee:** 90% of the increase we found is due to unemployment, racial discrimination and there's just no hope
> **Southern:** racial discrimination against who?

Background voice: careful…
Interviewee: Ja, I have to be careful
Background voice: racial discrimination against...people
(Interviewee uncomfortably covers her face)
Background voice: we have to exercise so much restraint
Interviewee: anonymously, I will tell you a lot of stuff

While racial discrimination against white people by black people is not mentioned explicitly, it is implied in this conversation. Southern interviews another woman, whose father was shot dead on their farm by a former black employee in 2015. What Southern does not mention is that she conducted this interview under false pretences, stating that she was making a documentary about the drought in South Africa. The interviewee claims that Lauren then sat down and asked her to tell her about her father's murder (Levy, 2019). According to the *New Yorker,* the murder of the interviewee's father was not racially motivated, but retributive. The accused was on tik (methamphetamine) at the time of killing and had also stabbed his partner to death a few days earlier (Levy, 2019). The information contained in this article suggests that Southern manipulated the interviewee's experience to serve the interest of her documentary. Regardless of this, Southern utilizes the rhetorical strategy of identification, whereby the viewers associate themselves with the interviewees and their experiences. As Soules (2015: 144-145) explains, identification can become ideological when "the film leads them to identify with characters and what those characters are associated with". The audience is likely to think of these victims as needing global support and help from their "aggressive", "murderous" counterparts.

Southern begins to include land expropriation without compensation into the narrative, stating that:

> The ANC announced they would absolutely be taking white land by force. Expropriation without compensation. Even the ANC'S most famous leader, Nelson Mandela, a known radical communist, at least believed in the concepts of compensation

A detailed analysis of land expropriation without compensation is given in chapter one. This bill has not been put into effect and its aim is not to take "white land by force" as Southern suggests, but to attempt to transform the lives of those who are affected by the unequal distribution of

land and severe poverty (Nxumalo, 2018). Southern fails to mention that *farming land* and *agricultural holdings* make up 30% of the total of South African land. White South Africans own 22% of this specific land, while black South Africans only own 1% (Pretorius & Makou, 2019). Southern then interviews Zanele Lwana, the deputy President of *Black Land First* (BLF), a revolutionary movement that believes the black majority of South Africa should be prioritised and centre (Mngxitama, 2015). The movement is guided by Black Consciousness principles and promotes black empowerment (Mngxitama, 2015). It was recently deregistered as a political party by the Electoral Court as they denied membership into the party based on race, which is against the post-apartheid electoral legislation (Davis, 2019). Lwana, in line with the party's unapologetic stance on sweeping restorative and redistributive justice, states that "we are coming for you and we are going to get everything that you owe, it's ours". Although Lwana holds views that are not representative of most black South Africans, Southern chose Lwana and her words deliberately, as the powerful nature of Lwana's language will likely elicit the desired response from Southern's audience, that of fear and anxiety of *all* black South Africans. Here, an appeal to the audience's *ethos* works against Lwana. The viewers are likely to withdraw and disidentify themselves with Lwana's values.

Towards the end of her documentary, Southern presents another phenomenon "sweeping" the country:

> White squatter camps. This squatter camp just outside the nation's capital is one of many across South Africa and is home to some of the country's most disadvantaged people, many of whom have struggled to find work, basic medical care or even shelter because of the country's Black Economic Empowerment Law.

While white informal settlements do exist, Southern fails to mention that the white population in South Africa has the highest real annual median expenditure compared to other population groups, with black and coloured households being classified as the most vulnerable and chronically poor (Kubheka, 2019). The appeal to the audience's *pathos* through *logos* (demonstrative evidence of white informal settlements without contextualisation and statistical background) is likely to elicit a strong emotional response in viewers. The merging of white informal settlements, representations of land expropriation without compensation as the government taking "white land by force" and the language used by Zanele Lwana serves to

manipulate viewers' perceptions and understandings of South Africa without critical contextualisation, perpetuating the discourse of a possible "white genocide".

What this analysis indicates then is that constructions of *white victimhood* and *black brutality* become themes whereby farm murders and attacks and land expropriation without compensation are presented as an anti-white conspiracy, which is evident in the discourse of a "white genocide": black South Africans are portrayed as brutally violent through visuals of necklacing, people protesting, fire, violence and an interview with radical politician Zanele Lwana from Black First Land First, to mention a few. White South Africans, in contrast, are portrayed as victims through emotive music, visuals of crime scenes, white informal settlements, people crying, and an interview with survivalist group *Suidlanders* spokesperson, Simon Roche.

White order and black chaos

Furthering these binary constructions, Southern ends off by presenting Orania, an all-white, Afrikaans community in the Northern Cape:

> I was certainly struck by the sense of peace in Orania, something which stood in stark contrast to many of the other towns I visited while in South Africa. Orania is just one potential solution to this crisis and for the people living there, it seems to be working

The only "peaceful" example of South Africa is an all-white community, which Southern contrasts to the "violence" of other areas in South Africa. Representing Orania as the only peaceful town in South Africa sustains colonial logic and white supremacist discourse of order versus chaos and civilisation versus savagery, where whiteness is the only signifier of order, the standard of civilisation: "it is the white race that has create culture and civilization" (Ferber & Kimmel, 2000: 201).

Reflecting upon the documentary and its visual texts and rhetoric, *Farmlands* constructs whiteness as vulnerable, innocent and in need of global support. Upon closer analysis, in constructing whiteness in this way, Southern perpetuates racialized representations that seek to

reduce black South Africans to exaggerated traits of a violent, destructive, and chaotic nature. The propagandistic qualities of her documentary evoke specific responses, stimulating mass action and participation in the discourses she offers to over 2.4 million people who have viewed the documentary. This participation is evident in the comment section, where global constructions of whiteness are negotiated based on the documentary's representations of black and white South Africans. What this section aims to demonstrate is that Southern constructs a binary South African historical narrative of white victimhood and black brutality through cherry picking and distorting history, ignoring historical facts that overwhelmingly show black victimhood and white brutality.

Resistant discourses

This section demonstrates that there were resistant discourses evident in the comment forum and it did not simply reproduce recurring racist, colonial discourses amongst like-minded individuals. In fact, there were several comments that labelled the documentary as "fake news" and "whitewashed propaganda", indicating that some viewers did not uncritically accept the discourses offered by the documentary. Discourses are always being contested, "with shifting and competing power relations among different interest groups [that attempt] to create a dominant version of events challenged through reframing and 'recontextualisation'" (Prendergast, 2018: 3). One commenter proved very critical of the propagandistic nature of the documentary:

> This is really bad, right sided and very subjective journalism… how can you make a documentary about the situation over there and only show white people? The only two black people that are interviewed don't give a damn overview about the black opinion in general. Yes, she is radical and no I don't support her, but for god sakes she's the leader of the most radical movement, not any but the most radical one. Ask a leader of the white power movement and he will poison your ears with crap too... The poor white outlaws in the village, yes, I feel sorry for them, but bloody hell, what about thousands of black people still living in slums? Where are these pictures?

This comment, amongst others, indicates that many viewers are aware of the skewed subjective narrative Southern offers in *Farmlands,* often criticizing the documentary of being "one sided", "a far right tactic", "right wing nonsense" and "racist propaganda". This observation resonates with Lincoln Dahlberg's (2011: 49) work on discourse theory and critical media politics, where he states that:

> Political identities can develop from out of often quite diverse and heterogeneous counter-publics and associated counter-discourses, and form counter-hegemonic fronts that can more effectively challenge ideologically sedimented forms of political engagement.

Several commenters directly oppose what Steyn (2001) terms "the master narrative" - narratives of European Western civilisation as politically and culturally "superior" in contrast to colonial narratives of ethnically different communities. This political and cultural superiority complex is counteracted by one commenter who states that "you created the separation we are in right now. The issues we face are your own making… you are not as special as you think!".

Unfortunately, while there is an array of resistant discourses in the comment section, their visibility is often hidden. As an online platform organised by finely tuned algorithms, *YouTube* does not privilege the comment section, but rather the visual and cultural materials individuals produce and consume. This has two interconnected consequences: first, the way comments are presented to us on *YouTube* is of a substandard nature (Schultes et al., 2013: 660). Usually, only a few comments are visible in the entire browser. The remaining comments can only be seen if you actively scroll through the comment forum. Secondly, *YouTube* favours the "top comments" category; comments that receive the most engagement. These comments are privileged and likely to be read (Schultes et al., 2013: 660). A consequence of this is that comments that receive little to no engagement virtually disappear, and unless you are conducting academic research or have a purpose, time and patience to dig out these comments, they are likely to never surface. The resistant discourses evident in my data set receive little to no engagement. When they do, the engagement is often very defensive and threatening. One commenter attempted to highlight how black South Africans live in far worse conditions that white South Africans, to which someone responded: "yeah you keep apologizing for the black man's crimes till you die you scared little

bitch". Commenters who support the struggles that black people face are considered "apologetic traitors", acting not on rationality but emotion. Another commenter stated that "there's no genocide against white people in South Africa", to which a commenter responded: "okay @[user name], but drop that machete". An important observation here is how those who offer alternative discourses are excluded from the conversation. Those who attempt to contribute to a resistant discourse struggle to engage meaningfully within this space. As Hall (1997: 44) suggests, as discourses "rule in" certain ways of talking about a topic, so too do they "rule out" and restrict other ways of talking meaningfully about a topic.

Nonetheless, the presence of resistant discourses - whether visible or hidden - highlights individuals' ability to contest and challenge the colonial discourses and constructions offered by Southern. This results in an important outcome where:

> A critique of power and discursive relations as constructed reveals the agency behind such a construction which troubles the claim to innocence or blankness that normativity holds so dear (Kanjere, 2018: 8).

In understanding the effects of the documentary and using the analysis of the film to make sense of the data set, the next section of this chapter will thematically analyse the comment section in depth through the tool of racialized, binary oppositions. These binaries rearticulate colonial discourses of civilized/uncivilized; competence/incompetence; order/violence and the extreme stereotype of the 'cannibalistic savage' as well as emotional/rational. A table showing the collation of these binary constructions can be found at the end of this chapter.

Section 1

Representations of whiteness and blackness through binary oppositions

A large portion of the data set was synthesized into this theme. This section will begin by interpreting how whiteness and blackness are represented through opposing binary extremes in the data set, offering a narrative map of the discourses of whiteness and blackness. Because there is a large amount of language used to represent blackness and whiteness, I hybridised terms I

interpreted as being in similar classifications. These classifications are all stereotypical, highlighting individual's tendencies to reduce blackness to simple, essential characteristics. These classifications are extremely racist and may cause discomfort to the reader. However, the necessity of presenting them lies in the need to demonstrate how and why whiteness simplifies and exaggerates bodies that do not fit into the "stability" of its culture. Once these classifications are discussed, I will reflect on how individuals in the comments often exaggerate claims at the expense of accuracy, demonstrating very sensationalised interpretations of blackness. The findings will be discussed in relation to Stuart Hall (1997) and Kathryn Woodward's (1997) work on the signifying practices of difference. My aim in this analysis of the relatively small data set is not to make statistical generalisations about the comments or commenters, but to rather illustrate how in this discursive space, whiteness is constructed through opposites. Claude Levi-Strauss suggested that "social groups impose meaning on their world by ordering and organizing things into classificatory systems" (in Hall, 1997: 236). This is done through binary oppositions. The identification of difference is an essential representational practice, and we do this by ordering individuals or things according to binary forms of representation.

Upon discussing these findings, the racialized representational practice of stereotyping requires exploration as its presence within the data set is persistent. Hall (1997: 257) defines stereotyping as the representational practice of "reducing people to a few, simple, essential characteristics which are represented as fixed by Nature". This representational practice has been racialized within moments of history comprised of slavery, European colonization of Africa, imperialism and, at present, the rise of right-wing nationalism across the globe. As Hall (1997: 239) explains, Western concepts of race and representing racial difference were - and still are - profoundly shaped by these historical moments. Many comments demonstrate how the action of stereotyping maintains a desirable social and symbolic order by setting up symbolic understandings of what is normal and what is deviant, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. As Hall (1997: 258) further explains, stereotyping "facilitates the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community'; and it sends into exile all of Them - the Others - who are in some way different". The stereotypes interpreted in the data are extremely exaggerated, sensationalist and often demonstrate a deep ignorance and

hatred toward blackness. These binaries unfortunately find themselves rearticulating colonial discourses of civilized/uncivilized; competence/incompetence; order/violence and the extreme stereotype of the "cannibalistic savage" and emotion/rational - to mention a few.

Binary 1: Civilized/uncivilized

"A shame that the only race to improve human existence since the invention of fire is being slaughtered by a race that refuses to evolve"[3]

Whiteness as "the very essence of what makes up society", the only race to "improve human existence" rearticulates colonial discourses that perceive whiteness as the only way of life that is civilized and sophisticated. These discourses were pervasive during the period of slavery:

> Heavily emphasized was the historical case against the black man based on his supposed failure to develop a civilized way of life in Africa (Fredrickson, 1987: 49).

These discourses continue to be transmitted in contemporary society, where whiteness is understood as the race that "built a beautiful Civilized Nation", in contrast to "Protesting Blacks [that] got their way & turned the place into a shit dump of crime, disease, drugs, rape & Murder!". Here, the racial signifier of blackness becomes the limiting trait of its potential development (Frederickson, 1987: 53). Understandings of black people become fixed through colonial binary oppositions, where whiteness is understood to be "the only race to improve human existence", but their progress is being halted by those who "refuse to evolve". As Frederickson (1987: 53) emphasizes, the perceived duality or instability of blackness was a contribution made by proslavery propagandists in America that has evidently outlasted the institution of slavery.

Binary 2: Competent/incompetent

In constructing and negotiating whiteness, commenters use colonial binary oppositions of competent/incompetent, among other classifications, to form understandings of themselves in

[3] In this section, quotation marks signal direct, unedited comments from the data set

relation to what they are not. Other classifications such as “lazy”; “useless”; “jealous” and “low IQ” were used to construct blackness. Here, commenters mark blackness as “stupid”, constantly “blaming” whiteness for its lived experience characterised by inequality and poverty. In constructing blackness, the term “stupid” was mentioned 12 times and the term “blame” or “blaming” was mentioned 13 times. This indicates a persistent use of the colonial discourse that black people are “inherently incompetent” and in need of guidance and help from the white race.

Binary 3: Order/violence and the “cannibalistic savage”

The documentary constructs black South Africans as violent and destructive and the term “destroy” was mentioned 24 times in the data set, where several comments constructed blackness as violent. As one commenter wrote:

> “Based on the history you presented [Southern’s documentary], [warring] is in the blood of the people. They are wired to fight, against anything, anyone, for any reason. The murder and destruction of any form of modern culture just furthers this concept. There is no right or fair to it, and it makes me wonder if apartheid wasn’t in place because our ancestors knew there was no reasoning with a primal mind”.

Through these constructions of the violent, destructive “other”, commenters adopt discursive strategies of stereotyping, where a colonial discourse of the “cannibalistic savage” constantly manifests. These images of “vultures [feasting] on it’s [South Africa] carcass”; “feeding” off the white, civilized body perpetuates a colonial discourse where the “colonised is produced as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (Bhabha, 1996: 41). The skin of black South Africans here is the primary signifier of difference in the stereotype, “recognised as ‘common knowledge’ in a range of cultural, political and historical discourses, [which] plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies” (Bhabha, 1996: 48). While South Africa no longer functions through administrative colonialism, internal, colonial discourses are pervasive in the comments:

> “You would be chucking spears at each other and losing family members to lions in the night”

> "These blacks are very satanic and they practice witchcraft African voodoo and untomba which is bantu style voodoo so this is why they kill and murder without any care, these are extremely wicked evil disgusting animals every last one of them and they must be eradicated like the rodents they are"

In these colonial discursive strategies, stereotypes of cannibalism and savagery signal points of identifying the other through alienation (Bhabha, 1996: 43), leaving whiteness unmarked. Here, the representation of blackness as the "other" is profound, although the representations incorporate ignorance at best. Black individuals are represented as unacceptable, deviant communities who do not fit into Western culture and they are severely reduced to characteristics based on inaccurate assumptions. While these representations are highly essentialised, they are produced within relations of power that function to include and exclude individuals who do not fit into the category of whiteness, thus producing real, material effects. As Bhabha (1996: 52) suggests, "by 'knowing' the native population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate". Further illustrating this point, Frederickson (1987: 49) writes:

> As portrayed in proslavery writings, Africa was and always had been the scene of unmitigated savagery, cannibalism, devil worship, and licentiousness. Also advanced was an early form of the biological argument, based on real or imagined physiological and anatomical differences - especially in cranial characteristics and facial angles - which allegedly explained mental and physical inferiority

Binary 4: Emotional/rational

Another example of a stereotypical representation of blackness interpreted in the data set was a propensity to equate blackness with anger and reduce every black person to this category. As previously mentioned, Southern interviews Zanele Lwana, the deputy President of Black Land First, a radical, socialist political movement. Lwana states in the documentary that "we are coming for you and we are going to get everything that you owe, it's ours". Responding to this segment of the documentary, one individual commented "that is basically every black woman in South Africa". Apart from this, blackness was marked as "lacking a moral compass"; "emotional" and "satanic". Similar to colonial discourses of whiteness being able to exercise "civilized

restraint" in their emotional, sexual and civil life (Hall, 1997: 243), blackness is constructed as the opposite - as instinctual. Hall elaborates (1997: 243):

> The open expression of emotion and feeling rather than intellect, a lack of 'civilized refinement' in sexual and social life, a reliance on custom and ritual, and the lack of developed civil institutions, all of which are linked to 'Nature'.

Upon interpretation, these colonial binaries highlight how difference can symbolically function to stigmatize and essentialise every individual in a society that is identified - through the eyes of whiteness - as the "other". The organising tool of binary oppositions demonstrates how the concept of difference is essential to the process of constructing meaning and identification. As Woodward (1997: 35) explains, when analysing how identities are constructed, representations of difference are an essential part of how we come to understand who we are - it is in relation to what we are not that we come to represent "normal" ways of being and "abnormal" ways of being. Negative, racialized constructions of difference in the data set are overwhelming, demonstrating the very real effects of how individuals construct and negotiate specific representations of people. In doing so, the deep-seated fears of whiteness become visible, where the fear of the white race degenerating becomes apparent through colonial representations of blackness, a defence mechanism to ensure power and privilege is maintained.

Section 2

In this section, two themes are analysed: "*Whites improve the lives of blacks and this is how we are repaid?"* and *Equal footing is oppression – South African whiteness as the victim.* These themes locate themselves in the post-apartheid dispensation, highlighting how policies that seek to remedy racial inequality effect the "noble and altruistic" white South African or the "white victim".

"Whites improve the lives of blacks and this is how we are repaid?"

At a local level, several comments indicate a strong sense of white entitlement, constructing white South Africans as the saving grace of South Africa. South African whiteness here is

understood as a custodian and saviour of the land and institutional structures, albeit egocentric. Many comments constructed whiteness as an emancipator of black people and that "without whites to support them, they'll fail", as one commenter wrote. Steyn (2005: 127) interprets similar characteristic in her work on "White Talk", arguing that whiteness often forms a ''white' brand of political discourse that represents white people as being best able to 'take charge' of societal transformation, in the interest of Africans". The following comments illustrate this point:

"...If not for the Europeans the place would still be uninhabited and the whole continent would be living in the stone age. You should be grateful".

"A shame that the only race to improve human existence since the invention of fire is being slaughtered by a race that refuses to evolve".

Here, only whiteness is represented as having the ability to improve the lives of black people. Whiteness is constructed as reliable and competent in several comments, in turn constructing black people as incapable of surviving without the presence of "the hands that feed them". Although South African whiteness is responsible for the oppression of the black majority, it constructs and negotiates itself as the only form of life that can contribute to the quality of black people's wellbeing (Steyn, 2005: 128) and if white people leave or are exterminated, black people will "starve" and revert back to "chucking spears" and "dancing around fires". The term "starve" was mentioned 13 times in the data set. The use of this term indicates the assumption that black people are incapable of looking after themselves, and that when the whites leave "the vast majority of blacks will starve and turn on one another, and the rainbow nation dream will be over before it even started", as one commenter wrote.

This construction of whiteness as the caretaker of black people functions to deny any form of agency, humanity or subjectivity to black people. As one individual commented, black people have "not a drop of history that [they] can claim. Not a cave, painting or building, nothing". Any sense of social or cultural agency here is afforded to whiteness, with the future of South Africa being bestowed upon white people. This denial of agency is hatefully perpetuated by one individual in the comment section, who indicates that "South African styled farm thuggery" will

never happen in the United States of America because “their thugs” are “trained”, “heavily monitored” and have been “trained” to “utilize their energy derived from food” to “focus on killing each other”. This is an extreme example of how black people are stripped of their humanity and agency and constructed as animals who are “trained” to “kill each other”. For this to happen they need close monitoring by white people. Bhandaru’s (2013:36) observation of how “the lives of some of these abandoned subjects are never fully realized” resonates with this finding, where black people’s lives are only understood as extensions of the “white saviour”.

It can be suggested that commenters are becoming constituted as subjects within particular racialized configurations. Certain ways of knowing whiteness are constructed: the subject of the noble, selfless white shapes what can be said about both black and white South Africans, defining who is noble and who is not. Powerful colonial discourses, clearly still pervasive in post-apartheid South Africa, are reproduced linguistically and symbolically, in turn sustaining the white subject that embodies principles of perceived superiority, nobility, civility and selflessness.

Following the construction of whiteness as the custodian and saviour of the land, two comments equated the geographical beauty of South Africa with the presence of whiteness:

“It just makes me sad. South Africa is one of the most beautiful places on earth and it is absolutely breathtaking, but it is slowly turning to ruin”

“This is horrible, South Africa beauty is going down...”

These comments discursively connect the beauty of South Africa to whiteness, furthering the sense of white entitlement previously mentioned. South Africa as a beautiful country is constructed alongside whiteness and “everything [it] has done” for the country, in turn equating South Africa’s perceived path to destruction with blackness’s “inability to govern itself”.

Equal footing is oppression - South African whiteness as the victim

This theme demonstrates how South African whiteness is constructed as a victim that suffers from the legal policies that promote racial equity, or “reverse racism”. South African whiteness

negotiates these policies as a form of oppression and marginalization, in turn constructing South African whiteness as a victimized positionality, where being placed on equal footing is considered oppressive and that because black people are a majority, whiteness's privileged position is under attack. This "reverse racism" is understood in terms of measurements taken by the government to ensure representation, fairness and equality in the workplace for those who have historically experienced extreme underrepresentation and oppression, such as black, coloured and Indian people, as well as women and those with disabilities. However, legal remedies that promote racial equity are only associated with black people in the data set. In the documentary, the Black Economic Empowerment programme and land expropriation without compensation are represented as measures taken against white people whose only function is white oppression. These policies - which serve to ensure that those who were affected by the unequal distribution of social capital, land, employment and privilege during apartheid (and who remain affected by inequality in post-apartheid South Africa) - are considered by one commenter as "an extreme example of the ills of affirmative action". Apart from these, one individual considers a new law another form of oppression:

> "There is even a new law, the hate speech law which can find you in prison if you say anything hateful to someone else (mostly/mainly black people), this law will only or mostly (99%) see white people arrested and imprisoned. I mean why all these laws that discriminate and oppress white people? We are about 8% of the population we can, in reality, do nothing to threaten the majority of the population".

The Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill was passed in 2016 to ensure that measures are taken against people who express hatred or intolerance towards others. Although there are implications of this bill restricting freedom of speech, a right protected by the South African Constitution, it is a necessary measure considering the level of discrimination and racism in South Africa. The bill attempts to echo South Africa's Constitutional ban on racism and its dedication to equality, yet in this commenter's construction, it is considered a form of discrimination against white people. In interpreting this construction, Steyn (2005: 131) argues that because whiteness is placed on a more equal footing, it is presented as marginalization, where "the binaries that underpin whiteness are seen to be simply reversed". Because white people construct themselves as being in the same position as black people were during apartheid,

their privileged positionality is understood to be under attack, reconstructing it as victimized. This construction of whiteness is accepted, for example, by an individual who stated that the black lives matter movement is "the most hypocritical bullsh*t in the world" and that anyone person who believes black people are oppressed, specifically in America, is an "ignorant piece of shit". What this theme highlights is that representations of difference are most profound when perceived resources, including political power, are understood to be threatened (Meddaugh & Kay, 2009: 256). As Steyn (2001: 153) further emphasizes:

> People who… still believe in the Manichean binaries of master narrative, but find them 'illogically' inverted by the new order. Seething with racial envy, these people experience what is happening in terms of reversal and victimization - the new order is 'out to get them'

Both the documentary and commenters demonstrate a fear of losing a lifestyle where whiteness is the assumed norm, and the inability to self-preserve this is perceived as extremely threatening.

Here, the subject position of the white victim is constructed. The white victim is considered true through specific ways of talking about both white and black South Africans. This subject position and the shared meanings associated with it are produced in a specific historical period that is characterised by a new democratic South Africa attempting to rectify the wrongdoings of apartheid through policies that seek to promote representation, fairness and equality economically, politically and culturally, but these policies are considered a threat to the maintenance of whiteness's privileged position.

Section 3

This section analyses two themes from a global perspective: *"They are the true asylum seekers, not those worthless invaders"* and *South Africa – a warning symbol to the West.* What these themes illustrate is that although what is happening in South Africa is contextually specific, it has come to represent fears about immigrants and a loss of white power in Western countries, further emphasizing how right-wing discourses are being globalised.

'They are the true asylum seekers, not those worthless invaders'

White South Africans, especially white farmers, were identified as "actual refugees" in several comments. Most comments indicated that white South Africans deserve to seek asylum and that Western countries should provide monetary and supportive measures to help them migrate to countries where their culture would provide considerable contributions to Western economic and cultural values. As one individual commented:

"Can we please take refugees from South Africa rather than Syria or the mass migrants who claim to be refugees. These people will at least adjust to American values and society fairly quickly"

Many comments illustrated that white South Africans were hardworking and would integrate into Western society with ease. This was attributed to the racial commonality they share with white, Western individuals. Here, a construction of whiteness as a "worthy" asylum seeker that "fits the description" of an "actual refugee" is offered, with most comments receiving a considerable amount of acknowledgement through likes. Counter to this finding, individuals who did not fit into the worthy, white refugee category were labelled "illegal immigrants", "radical, religious cults", "unskilled", "involved in crime", "worthless", "destructive", and "idiots". A critical interpretation of this data indicates that bodies who do not fit into the racial category of whiteness are judged on a presumption that their presence will jeopardize the life, health, strength and functionality of Western culture (McWhorter, 2010: 77). One individual's comment correlates with this interpretation:

"What a shame we can't just pluck all the whites out of there, and let those friggin idiots have it, so they can f*** it all up and starve. Unfortunately only blacks and Muslims get special treatment as refugees in this world"

Here, whiteness conceptualizes black and ethnically different individuals as morally and physically unable to contribute to Western culture and values, in turn excluding them from those who deserve refugee status. Following this finding, many comments suggested that white South Africans would be welcomed in Western countries if they wish to leave. There is a general consensus within the comments that Western borders should be prepared to open up for white

South Africans, indicating that in order to maintain solidarity, global borders should be removed so long as the individual is white. One commenter echoes this attitude:

"Why [doesn't] the EU open [its] doors to white people instead of [these] terrorists from Syria, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kenya, [Morocco] etc?"

An interesting observation here points to how white South Africans are considered global refugees, in turn compacting them into a homogeneous group. Although white South Africans can be comprised of an array of different whitenesses (such as Afrikaans and English), whiteness is understood through global sameness here: where *all* white South Africans are assumed to be able to easily assimilate into other forms of whiteness. The sympathy demonstrated by commenters indicates that when white power is perceived to be threatened, a fictional sameness is constructed in the service of global right-wing discourses, demonstrating that whoever is white and feels threatened should reconnect to centers of whiteness in order to maintain solidarity, although this center is highly fabricated. In contrast to this, anyone who does not fit the category of whiteness should be rejected, suggesting that global borders should remain secured and protected when bodies of colour seek asylum from violence. My interpretation of this theme resonates with Bhandaru's (2013) work presented in chapter two: in modern society today, the social body is comprised of both "normal" and "abnormal" lives and this distinction is racially categorised. One life is considered pure and functional and the other is considered undesirable and threatening. To ensure the undesired life does not threaten the functionality of the "normal" life, their lives are never fully realized and their presence in the social body is often excluded. This theoretical understanding is evident in the interpretation of the comments, where individuals indicate a need to protect their borders to exclude ethnically different lives, in turn opening up their borders to allow whiteness asylum from the "dysfunctional other".

South Africa - a warning symbol to the West

> "South Africa is just the beginning. It's coming for you too soon, no matter where in the world you live. The sooner we realise it the better prepared we will be"
>
> "South Africa is a warning to us all!"

At a global level, a recurring theme within the data is that users perceive South Africa to be an exemplar of what is to come for Western countries, often warning other users. The fact that black South Africans comprise the majority population in South Africa leads to users establishing a discourse that blackness as majority is a threat to the preservation of the white majority in Western countries, thus identifying South Africa's black majority - coupled with the documentary's representations of black South Africans as violent - as an example of what will happen if whiteness "loses the ideological and demographic war", as one individual wrote. Another individual's viewpoint, apart from being explicitly racist, was that South Africa's black majority population is a direct consequence of equality:

> "All of the crime is committed by blacks. This point needs to be made. The whites are being killed by blacks and discriminated against by the black controlled government. This was a country that the whites created, and they allowed the blacks to come in and gave them equal rights, and now their country has been taken over and destroyed. Europe please don't make the same mistake! Demographics is destiny!"

The commenter is ignorant of the fact that South Africa has *always* been a black majority country. The commenter further distorts Southern's narrative in order to apply it to a European context concerned with anti-immigration. The construction of South African whiteness under threat is taken up and adapted and mutated to a different context. This comment also offers a particular understanding of blackness concerned with demographic power. Blackness's association with a numerical majority is considered a direct attack on whiteness and everything it stands for. As one individual expressed, "this is what happens when White people become a minority, brace yourselves Sweden". This construction is endorsed through representations of black South Africans offered by Southern, illustrating that users often equate blackness as an aggressive threat to whiteness's demographic power and future. In contrast, whiteness is constructed as failing to be aware of, and to protect and secure its future as a result of, this demographic "imbalance".

The term "future" was frequently used. South Africa as a black majority country was perceived to be an unwanted but imminent blueprint for Western nations' futures. As a result, commenters often emphasized the need to "watch closely", "brace yourselves", "make sure it never happens!"

and to “wake up” to ensure the future of whiteness remains in power. The need for protection, preparation and attentiveness was often expressed as a solution. This theme appears totally incongruous with the realities of South Africa as the fear of a “white genocide” does not specifically include a concern of increasing “non-white” immigrants, but rather the fear of black South African citizens. Several comments indicated that a loss of majority power was linked to an influx of “non-white” immigrants. I use the term “non-white” here to indicate that transnational fears of a “white genocide” or a “race war” are identified with the fear of an “other” - Migrant, Black, Islamic, Indians, Mexicans. Immigration was a concern brought up by several users, indicating a transnational fear of “replacement” by different bodies of colour. An important interpretation here is that although what is happening in South Africa is contextually specific, the same discourses have begun to shift and be appropriated within different contextual spaces, suggesting that regardless of who the person is, their “non-whiteness” imposes a direct threat to the maintenance of whiteness: “coming soon to every western nation if the tide of migrants is not stopped NOW”. This comment received 1200 likes, suggesting a sense of agreement amongst users.

Another finding in the data set included a common negotiation that Orania is the only acceptable, liveable space in South Africa, even though South Africa is perceived to be a warning symbol to Western countries. Orania is a small, whites-only town situated in the province of the Northern Cape with an estimated population of 1600 people (Shaw, 2018). Protected by the South African Constitution’s right to self-determination, Orania has carved out its own space within a post-apartheid South Africa, rejecting any individual that is not committed to upholding Afrikaner culture. The following comment identified Orania as a solution to the perceived threat of a black majority:

> “Orania is a good model for white South Africans to emulate across the country. White homelands. Why not? All the best”

This construction of Orania as a beacon of hope for white South Africans demonstrates that the presence of whiteness makes certain spaces liveable, in contrast to the presence of blackness, which makes spaces uninhabitable for whiteness. As Statzel (2006: 36) emphasizes, the

projection of violence and chaos onto black South Africans inspires a need for segregation, and a fear of encountering individuals who do not manifest whiteness is safeguarded through geographical distance. This observation finds theoretical grounding in Van der Westhuizen's (2016: 2) work on Afrikaner enclaves, where she demonstrates that after 22 years (now 25 years) into democracy, "an Afrikaner neo-nationalism has arisen that shifts the perspective from the nation state to smaller locales, targeted to be made 'homely' again". Here, a defensive mechanism to protect whiteness involves an "inward migration to white spaces" (Van der Westhuizen, 2016: 8).

My interpretation of this theme demonstrates how specific constructions of South African whiteness and blackness offered by Southern are taken up within the comment section, in turn producing similar negotiated meanings (Hall, 1997: 1). What is interesting is how understandings of South Africa differed, yet there was a recurring discourse: that South Africa was a warning to all white nations, an exemplar of whiteness's future if the "white man does not wake up" and that the functionality of a country can only be attributed to whiteness. Adjacent to this finding, blackness - specifically as a majority - was constructed as a violent threat with "a true black agenda" advancing the discourse of whiteness's future being under attack.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically analysed how whiteness is constructed in the documentary and its associated comment section. In doing so, a brief thematic analysis of *Farmlands was* presented, identifying a skewed historical narrative. What this section demonstrates is how Southern creates a narrative of global whiteness where conflict has historically only manifested in racial terms. Not only does Southern provide a very biased account of South African history, farm murders and attacks and complex land issues, but she also fails to represent any historical tensions between different groups of *white* settlers, namely the British and the Boer. These historical tensions are imperative to understanding constructions of white nationalism in South Africa, yet they are actively ignored. Section 1 of this chapter presents the colonial, racialized constructions of whiteness and blackness evident in the comment section using an organising tool of binary

oppositions. What this section illustrates is that a civilisational discourse of “us” and “them” is used to construct black people as lacking any civilisation whatsoever, in turn explicitly resuscitating colonial discourses of black barbarism that were previously used to justify colonisation. Section 2 shows that these racist ideas still remain in play, promoting a climate of fear that western civilisation is under threat, demonstrating that South African whites deserve special attention as they are not only noble and selfless but that they are victims facing oppression by a government that is “out to get them”. Despite the way white people oppressed the majority of black South Africans during apartheid, they were still embraced as citizens in its constitution once South Africa transitioned into a democracy. Section 3 illustrates how the complex context of post-apartheid South Africa is used to justify the global “threat” of immigrants, yet those who possess white skin are urged to immigrate to Western European countries.

The rise of these constructions indicates an urgency to increase an emphasis on pre-colonial African civilisations as well as pervasive racialized colonial constructions in democratic societies. These findings also call for a deeper understanding of the history of colonialism and of the civilisations that predate Western civilisation. It urges white people who consider themselves progressive or wish to contribute to an anti-racist project, to not only learn about African civilisations, but the institutionalised effects of colonial administration. These findings urge researchers to incorporate theories of coloniality in their work, which I will cover in the next chapter.

Casting light on how whiteness is constructed and negotiated, this chapter attempts to contribute towards a critical understanding of the complexities of whiteness and its pervasive dominance, investigating the powerful representations afforded to white people in a moment of history where black South Africans have gained political power and measures have been taken to rectify the wrongdoings of apartheid. The next chapter will reflect thoroughly on these results, with specific reference to my research question and a larger field of research concerned with my findings. Secondly, the chapter will focus on how South African whiteness is used to bolster global right-wing narratives of “western civilisation under threat” and how this narrative promotes

colonial discourses. Thereafter, I will propose a series of questions for further researchers, specifically white researchers.

Chapter Five – discussion and concluding thoughts

Introduction

This chapter seeks to locate my findings within a broader paradigm of research, reflecting on the research I have provided thus far. I will begin by discussing why my research is an important contribution to qualitative research examining *YouTube* as a cultural system. Here, I will engage with early optimistic research on the internet and participation, and how the internet was perceived to be an inclusive space that facilitates shared narratives that contribute to democratic participation. However, the internet, with a specific reference to *YouTube,* is not inherently progressive as first assumed, but indeed facilitates right-wing reactionary conversations with anti-democratic principles. My research, alongside other studies of right-wing communities on the internet, shows that *YouTube,* amongst other online platforms, is increasingly sustaining right-wing discourses. Secondly, I will focus on how South African whiteness is used to bolster global right-wing ideas of "white civilisation under threat", and how individuals are engaging in an unregulated space where there is little knowledge of the historical context of South Africa. Concluding, I will propose a series of questions that should be considered by white researchers specifically, and how a deeper consciousness of coloniality is imperative to understanding the social conditions that underpin post-apartheid South Africa and pervasive global racial structures.

The internet and *YouTube* – sustaining racialized discourses

The democratizing ability of the internet has been considerably contested, and in recent years, the democratizing effects of the internet have come to be faced with deep scepticism. Papacharissi (2002) offers optimistic viewpoints of the internet, suggesting that proponents believe it can provide a space that increases political participation and maintain a democratic utopia, facilitating relationships with people across geographical boundaries. Scholars such as

Clay Shirky (2008) and Dan Gillmor (2004) highlight how the internet and social media provide new avenues of participation, ultimately allowing society to become more democratizing. Explaining how the internet and social media facilitate cooperation and collective action, Shirky (2008: 20) argues:

> We are living in the middle of a remarkable increase in our ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations.

Gillmor (2004) argues that the internet and social media have profoundly transformed the dynamics of journalism, allowing ordinary citizens to contribute to democracy through grassroots journalism:

> The ability of anyone to make the news will give new voice to people who've felt voiceless – and whose words we need to hear. They are showing all of us – citizen, journalist, newsmaker – new ways of talking, of learning. In the end, they may help spark a renaissance of the notion, now threatened, of a truly informed citizenry (Gillmor, 2004: xviii).

On cultural participation and *YouTube,* Burgess & Green (2009: 77) suggest that *YouTube* is a "platform designed to enable cultural participation by ordinary citizens", in turn existing as a "significant mediating mechanism for the cultural public sphere" (Burgess & Green, 2009: 77). *YouTube* as a virtual platform and mediated cultural system (Burgess & Green, 2009: 7) allows users to connect with one another across national boundaries and produce and consume unique visual and symbolic content. In investigating *YouTube* as a cultural space that produces meaning and not just a virtual storehouse of visual data; scholars suggest that the platform is a useful site of inquiry for research concerned with digital culture and broader understandings of society (Arthurs, Drakopoulou & Gandini, 2018: 4). *YouTube* is the world's second largest search engine, with over 1.9 billion logged in monthly users recorded in 2013 (Brandwatch, 2019). Arthurs et al. (2018: 3) even suggest that it is one of the largest virtual repositories of culture.

While these positive attributes cannot be denied, opponents are sceptical of such an optimistic outlook and suggest that the degree of people's participation in digital public spheres is unequal and there is an increasingly induced fragmentation into small communities of likeminded individuals (Schäfer, 2015: 4). Another critical perspective is offered by Fuchs (2014), who is concerned with the exploitative role of social media and the internet in a capitalist world system. He argues that approaches that glorify the participatory role of social media and the internet "miss a theoretically grounded understanding of participation" (2014: 98). He further argues:

> The history of communication and transport technologies is not a progressive success story. Although many people today benefit in mutual ways from using books, telephones, trains, cars, television, radio, computers, the Internet, or mobile phones, the history of these technologies is deeply embedded into the history of capitalism, colonialism, warfare, exploitation and inequality (Fuchs, 2014: 255).

Further developing the dystopian argument, scholars (Meddaugh & Kay, 2009; Kanjere, 2018; Murthy & Sharma, 2018) argue that *YouTube* has moved beyond an archive of culture and is increasingly becoming a space that reproduces racialized discourses. What then, does this mean for us - a generation born into an age characterised by mass information? As Daniels (2012: 698) explains, in an age of globalization, people use the internet, whatever platform it may be, to construct individual racial identities and communities. The connectedness the internet provides accelerates this construction:

> As people move across national boundaries due to shifting capital flows and changing state regulations, online spaces of connection based on racial and ethnic identity become increasingly important mechanisms for sustaining imagined communities (Daniels, 2012: 699).

The internet provides spaces for intimate discursive interactions that we often take for granted. What my research shows is that these discursive spaces allow people to construct identities and communities around racial and ethnic commonalities. What *Farmlands* and its associated comment section highlight is that the internet provides whiteness with a space that not only seeks to protect its social position and privilege, but provides a secure space for discursive

practices that rationalize and "fix" discrimination in order to protect white social capital and majority status (Brock, 2006: 364).

Specifically concerned with *YouTube's* quasi-anonymous comments section, Murthy & Sharma (2018: 2) state that expressions of online trolling, flaming and abuse through racist, homophobic and misogynistic language is a reality that should be taken seriously. This reality could be attributed to the fact that, according to research conducted by Soffer and Gordoni (2018: 399), the lower the fear of isolation in an online commenter, the higher their willingness to express opinion and actual expression will be. This indicates that comment sections, often characterised by semi-anonymity, are useful for observing discourses that are normative (Kanjere, 2018: 1). Like-minded individuals veer towards accepting similar discourses and navigate towards online "ecosystems" that offer opportunities an offline public sphere would not. What my research shows is that the *Farmlands* comment forum sustains a space for expressions of whiteness across geographical boundaries (Daniels, 2009: 660), but this space does not necessarily allow democratic participation. While there are commenters who express resistant discourses, they are often dismissed, receive little to no engagement, or are overpowered by defensive and violent comments.

Globalising the notion of 'white civilisation under threat'

South African whiteness plays an important role in bolstering global notions of "whiteness under threat" by the "other". The recurring colonial image of black South Africans as an uncivilized, violent, threatening *majority* has been taken up by right-wing communities across the globe. Similar to Steyn's (2008: 26) project of tracing resistant white discourses that inform much of white sense-making about living in post-apartheid South Africa, this section attempts to place a greater emphasis on the need to understand why such colonial images of black South Africans precede colonialism.

As mentioned in chapter two, difference is an essential process when constructing meaning, forming language and culture and constructing social identities and a subjective sense of ourselves (Hall, 1997: 238). Considering this construction of difference, whiteness perpetuates a

racialized polarization of binaries to construct itself. Adrienne Davis (1996: 701), in her work on the persistence of racial binaries in law and legal scholarship, explains that the construction of ethnically different identities is "critical to the maintenance of white identity" and that whiteness is constantly juxtaposed to "racialized colour in general and blackness in particular". In order to define itself and protect itself, the centrality of whiteness is inextricably bound by the racialized "other" (Davies, 1996: 714).

The significance of my findings rests in the pervasiveness of colonial discourses about the "other" - or the Orient. The Orient, according to Edward Said (1996: 20), is:

> A place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.

Orientalism then, is how European Western civilisation (by this I mean whiteness) deals with the "other", how it speaks about it, rules over it, and maintains authority over the "other" (Said, 1996: 21). Orientalism as a discourse demonstrates how European culture gained its strength and identity by setting itself against images of the "other". The Orient, or the "other" is not a fact of nature. It is an idea that has been constructed through discursive practices throughout history and it has been given meaning, a reality and presence in and for the West (Said, 1996: 23). The sheer strength and power of the Orientalist discourse lies in its "redoubtable durability" (Said, 1996: 24), its longevity in a postcolonial world. My findings demonstrate that this redoubtable durability finds itself in what Rogers Brubaker (2017) calls "civilizationism":

> The opposition is between insiders and outsiders: between "people like us", those who share our way of life, and those on the outside who are said to threaten our way of life. This includes "internal outsiders": those living in our midst who, even when they are citizens of the state, are not seen as belonging to the nation. The "outside" also includes impersonal forces or institutions that are seen as threatening our way of life or our security: globalization, unfettered trade, the European Union, radical Islam, and so on" (Brubaker, 2017: 2).

Specific to Western European countries, this threat to civilisation is preoccupied with the religion of Islam, where western civilisation is under attack by those "that threaten to destroy the high

cultural level and the superior values that (white) Europe harbours" (Keskinen, 2013: 227). These "barbarians" are associated with migrants from Africa and the Middle East, specifically Muslims (Keskinen, 2013: 227). For example, the provision of halaal food or prayer breaks in the workplace is considered "creeping sharia", the beginning stages of Muslims taking over society (Kundnani, 2012: 9); or Muslims advocating for representation within political office or for their civil rights to be respected is considered a secret plan to impose totalitarian government on the world (Kundnani, 2012: 9). Here, the primary threat to western civilisation is the "extreme" culture within Muslim communities, facilitated by multicultural policies that undermine Western European values (Kundnani, 2012: 27).

For Western European countries as well as white South Africans, fears of being overrun, being dominated, of losing "purity" and of experiencing a cultural genocide through miscegenation and multiculturalism have always been present and still are. Focusing on South Africa specifically, Steyn (2001: 25) even suggests that "whiteness in South Africa has always, at least in some part, been constellated around discourses of resistance against a constant threat". She indicates that during apartheid, it took a great deal of violence and force to ensure black South Africans were ruled by white minority supremacy, and it did so successfully for many years. Now, in post-apartheid South Africa, whiteness has had to come to grips with the fact that this new reality "does not support, and indeed is hostile to, many of the taken for granted assumptions of superiority and entitlement which the master narrative belief system had inculcated" (Steyn, 2001: 152). The "master narrative of whiteness" (Steyn, 2001), where colonial narratives of European Western civilisation as superior, provided the social identity of South African whiteness:

> The European narrative of a superior group of 'white' people with special entitlement took hold with a particular strength and tenacity in South Africa, shaping the society legally, politically, economically, and culturally (Steyn, 2001: 24).

White South African's self-image (both English and Afrikaans) has been shaped by the master narrative of European whiteness:

> European assumptions of racial and cultural superiority, of entitlement to political control and land ownership, and the right to benefit from their access to the world capitalist system at the expense of an exploited subjugated non-white minority' Steyn (2001: xxiii).

The significance of this lies in how South Africa, contextually different from the Global North, has become a red flag: what will happen to every European or Western country if they "lose the demographic war". This has resulted in an array of overlapping discursive strategies that have signalled global support: marking black South Africans through colonial discourses of the "uncivilized savage out to get white people" has resulted in whiteness reconstructing itself as "vulnerable" and "under threat". This construction of "whiteness under threat" has also demonstrated a sense of global, white solidarity being established through marking South African whiteness as a victim of contemporary social and political changes. The documentary and data set indicate a general agreement that policies that seek to establish racial equity are oppressive, as these measures threaten the underpinnings of white superiority and create an uncomfortable environment for white people to live in. What is ironic about this construction is that righting the wrongs of the past is perceived as far worse than the original faults of apartheid. Steyn & Foster (2008: 37), who identify a similar construction in their work, state:

> That would mean that disinheritance of land, conquest, legalized oppression, political disenfranchisement, systemic economic exclusion, unfree labour on mines and farms, destruction of families and cultural genocide of the 'other' - and more - all were less discomforting to white selves than living with fewer guaranteed privileges.

Being placed on equal footing is assumed to be a threat to the preservation of a white nation. This reconnection to global whiteness is evident through the way whiteness often symbolically gravitates toward its "roots" when it perceives its power as under threat. Global whiteness seems to act as a magnet here, pulling whites in "need" back to where they "belong", opening their borders so that like-minded individuals may gravitate toward the centre of whiteness in order to be safe and more secure. Here, Foucault's concept of biopower is at work - a discourse has been taken up that aims to foster the life of the social body but in turn, it actively abandons others from that space (Bhandaru, 2013: 228). This representation of the "other" does not only include black South Africans, but "worthless", "unskilled" "illegal immigrants" and "radicals" who

jeopardize the functionality of Western values. Although *Farmlands* only represents black and white South Africans in polarized ways, the discourse of "whiteness under threat" has been taken up transnationally through a copy and paste mechanism. What is important to highlight here is that whiteness is constructed as being the same - all whites can easily assimilate into other forms of whiteness - even though whiteness is not homogenous:

> Whiteness, even when understood as a positionality of power and privilege, and not some internal, immutable essence, does not remain constant in varying circumstances. Specific whitenesses are constituted through concrete social relations and within concrete historical socioeconomic situations, while yet they may have an overall coherence through exercising domination (Steyn, 2001: xxxii).

What this stipulates is that while there are different whitenesses, a withdrawal to the centre of whiteness happens when its power is threatened, and its contextual situation is not conducive to its maintenance. South Africa then, has become a symbolic warning for nations across the world, an exemplar of what is to come if the "other" becomes the majority and "takes over". Although black South Africans have always been a majority in South Africa, their demographic power is an enormous threat to right-wing communities.

In the "New South Africa" (Steyn & Foster, 2008), it has become difficult to actively oppose transformation and democracy while still attempting to maintain a superior position in the presence of the majority "other". What my research demonstrates is that these discursive practices aim to protect whiteness's privilege and power by constructing itself as under threat through the discourse of a "white genocide", amongst other constructions, ultimately undermining the value of transformation and racial equality.

Concluding thoughts and further research suggestions

I have attempted to catch the process of social construction in the act as white South Africans and right-wing communities attempt to shape narratives of history and identity (Steyn, 2001: xxii). Constructions of whiteness are often normalized and hidden in everyday interactions, but when they are confronted, fractured and critically analysed, these contradictions become visible:

> Criticising the way things 'just are' is seen to be a violence that tampers with - and in doing so reveals the contestable nature of - a normativity that desires to see itself as blank, as immanent. Revealing that this normativity can be contested is almost as key here as the nature or content of the challenge: what is revealed within such a contest is the fact that the normative construction of reality - of social relations, of power structures, of production and interpretation of meaning - is, in fact, a construction, and is therefore subject to critique and contestation (Kanjere, 2018: 8)

The importance of interrogating whiteness rests on the very fact that "whiteness is a complex, dynamic, and power-laden assemblage that remains elusive" (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995: 304). This elusiveness is what my research aims to fracture. Through synthesizing tools and themes that unveil this elusiveness, I've shown that whiteness still utilizes colonial discourses that represent black people and other ethnically different cultures as uncivilized and threatening, constructions upon which white civilisationalism continue to be sustained. Through online platforms, these constructions are being globalised - connected to and harnessed by global right-wing organisations and opinion-makers.

Apart from interrogating constructions of whiteness in the documentary and *YouTube* comment section, uncovering the material effects of these constructions is what makes my research significant: a *Facebook* group called 'Stop South African White Genocide' has accumulated over 33 000 followers; Southern's documentary has amassed over 2.4 million views; organisations such as *Suidlanders,* claiming to have over 150 000 members, are promoting a narrative that "South Africa's present is the West's future"; the creation of the *National Christian Resistance Movement* or the *Crusaders*, a terrorist organisation in South Africa. Recently, five suspects affiliated with this organisation were arrested on account of co-ordinating an alleged terrorist plot that would target national key points, shopping malls and informal settlements (Mitchley, 2019). One of the suspects was charged with illegal possession of a firearm, explosives and explosive devices and was granted bail of R1000 (Friedman, 2019). At a global level: in 2018, right-wing extremist movements killed at least 50 people in the United States: "most terrorist attacks in the United States, and most deaths from terrorist attacks, are caused by white extremists"

(Serwer, 2019). What is disturbing is that right-wing extremism is regarded as an individualistic problem orchestrated by “lone wolves” or disturbed individuals:

> Governments have thus absolved themselves of a broader reflection on the social and political contexts from which far-right violence draws its sustenance...murders carried out by the far-right have been seen as one-offs that are not indicative of social issues (Kundnani, 2017: 27)

These effects, to mention a few, are why scholars need to map spaces of whiteness, interrogating specifically its historical, social and political configurations. In doing so, we need to emphasize the dangers of uncritically consuming information and unconsciously interpellating discriminatory discourses that form who we are as a nation and individuals.

What I hope I have attempted to do is create an understanding of the contours of structural racism (Leonardo, 2004: 140) through analysing the intricacies of whiteness and how this perpetuates dangerous constructions at a local and global level. Obviously not all white people understand themselves and other ways of life through these discourses, but that does not mean we can simply dis-identify ourselves from our whiteness. In providing a nuanced account of constructions of whiteness so pervasive in contemporary society, where an intolerance of the “other” is increasing (Meddaugh & Kay, 2009: 265), I hope to challenge this intolerance whilst maintaining conscious thought that I too am white. By no means is this research an attempt to provide you with the “truth”, or “rid” myself of the need to critically engage with my identity, but to provide you with an authentic evaluation of phenomena plaguing efforts to decolonize and transform society as a whole.

This work, along with other studies, has shown that we cannot only understand the internet and social media platforms as necessarily promoting inclusivity and democratic values. Instead, we should be aware that the internet is increasingly becoming a space that promotes racist hatred, reactionary propaganda and right-wing extremism. Online platforms have accelerated right-wing mobilisation on a global front, and I believe the nuanced and explicit consequences of this are not being critically dealt with: in academia, institutional structures and in our personal lives.

Progressive white people should not only be conscious of the fact that whiteness is used to serve racist and exclusionary discourses but should develop mechanisms to counter these. One such attempt is *Busting the Myth of White Genocide in SA*, a *Facebook* group with over 15 000 likes at the time of writing that directly addresses white people and provides them with social media tools, opinions and resources to counter right-wing discourses. Yet we must consider that fixating on and critiquing the extreme right might make us blind to our own prejudices – we are the "good white people", the "heroes" that are saving the country from right-wing extremism. This process of critiquing the extreme right will not "free" us from our unearned privileged position or dissolve our unnoticeable participation in the reproduction of racial inequality.

In providing a suggestion, I urge scholars, *especially* white scholars, to take the relevance of coloniality seriously. Coloniality survives colonialism - it is a modern-day extension of colonialism that is not simply economic and political, but manifests itself in knowledge production, global asymmetrical power relations and the continued subordination of racialized bodies. Decolonial theorist Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014: 187) explains that the world system we live in today is a "racially hierarchized, patriarchal, sexist, hetero-normative, Christian-centric, Euro-North-American centric, imperial, colonial and capitalist system" and it is so powerful that the world unconsciously represents it, allowing little room to contest it. Global coloniality serves as a defensive wall that marginalised, racialized bodies are struggling to break down (NdlovuGatsheni, 2014: 198) and it has produced systematic control over other ways of knowing, structuring and understanding the world. This moment in history calls for profound changes in epistemological production, societal structures and our personal lives. The time has come to de-westernise knowledge production and societal rules and norms and develop research that echoes the lived experiences of marginalised communities. In order to do this, we need to "destructure the racially hierarchical modern world-system and re-structure the asymmetrical power relations in this system" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 349) that continue to be perpetuated by coloniality. While this may seem counterintuitive as my research is located in Western paradigms of thought, my intention is to critically grapple with this reality and present a new lens through which whiteness can be seen, understood and critiqued.

Reflecting upon this research process, I am aware that my work will include theoretical discrepancies. However, I believe I have at least attempted to contribute to literature concerned with the complexities of whiteness, both locally and globally. In doing so, I hope my research provides a discovery that could contribute to a decolonial and anti-racist project. I urge researchers to continue the work of fracturing whiteness, emphasizing that the pervasiveness of racism and right-wing extremism will continue so long as whiteness is left unchecked.

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Appendix A - Binary constructions of blackness and whiteness

F = Frequency of words mentioned in the data set

Constructions of blackness	**Constructions of whiteness**
Uncivilized (in contrast to civilized) or Unevolved (in contrast to evolved) F = 4 'Whites should leave South Africa, there's no hope in that country, against **tribes** and people who didn't **evolve**' 'Are black cultures in conflict with themselves and others because their evolution did not **evolve** through architecture and saving food? 'White people should leave Africa until all the people there fully **evolve** like the rest of the world' 'Already you can see it in the U.S where all of a sudden 400 years ago the Indians and Hollywood tell you that every inch of American soil was owned, cultivated, **civilized** before the white man arrived' 'And now we have let them into the UK under the misguided notion that they will somehow mysteriously start to act **civilized**… and surprise surprise they didn't'	Civilized F = 4 'This isn't rocket science, nor is it racist! Whites built a beautiful **Civilized** Nation, Protesting Blacks got their way, & turned the place into a **shit dump** of **crime**, **disease**, **drugs**, **rape**, & **Murder**!' 'When the whites leave and the only **civilized** part of Africa crumbles I'm sure they'll be happy going back to **chucking spears** due to the sudden lack of engineers' 'A shame that the only race to improve human existence since the invention of fire is being **slaughtered** by a race that refuses to **evolve**' *Similar classifications:* Hard working F = 3 Progressive F = 2 Independent F = 2 Self-sacrifice F = 1 Self-effort F = 1 Self-reliant F = 1 Self-teaching F = 1 Clean F = 1 Orderly F = 1
Violent F = 5	Peaceful F = 1

'It is our duty to help them away from that racists, **violent** hypocrite country' 'Soon the squatter camps will be far more successful than the **violent** lazy black run cities and country sides and then they will call that racism as well' 'The black towns and areas are trashy, sad, decrepit, **violent**, and ugly. Blacks **destroy** every single thing they touch' 'I'm an afrikaner... my family has been living in s.a since 1802 and we lived [left] the country because of the **'others'** were to **violent**...this breaks my heart..' 'Key takeaway -- the **Bantu** are **incurably violent**' *Similar classifications:* Destroy F = 24 Chaos F = 3 Destruction F = 2 Menace F = 1 'I think every race must unite to destroy this black **menace**' Spiteful F = 1 'The darker the crueler' F = 1 Black Grim Reaper/Black Freddy Kruger F = 1 Committer of crime F = 5	'The all-white community is **clean, quiet, peaceful, orderly**, lovely' *Similar classifications:* Caring F = 2 Kind F = 2

Incompetent F = 2 *Similar classifications:* Stupid F = 12 Blaming F = 13 Lazy F = 6 Useless F = 5 Jealous F = 3 Low IQ F = 2 Talentless F = 1 Illiterate F = 1 Nagging F = 1	Competent *Similar classifications:* High IQ F = 1 Intelligent F = 2 Amazing F = 1 Proud F = 3 Capable F = 4 Whiteness is capable because blackness is not: 'Blacks are not genetically **capable** of operating in a modern society' 'They are not **capable** of farming of producing ANYTHING but everything is turning into dust…' 'If they were able to run farms that would feed the entire

	country, they would have taken over and farmed the abandoned farms long ago. But they are not **capable** of it' 'The blacks are hell-bent on killing off all the whites who are **intelligent**, **capable** and willing to produce and foster the very essence of what makes up society' Innovative F = 1 Whiteness is innovative because blackness is not: 'Nothing the blacks do is **innovative or forward thinking** anymore'.

Animals - F = 11 *Similar classifications:* Roaches F = 1 Rodent F = 1 Vultures F = 1 Feral Pigs F = 1 Parasite F = 1	*Whiteness marking the 'other' in relation to what it is not - whiteness remains unmarked*
Cannibals NTM = 2 *Similar classifications:* Tribal Barbarians F = 1 Natives F - 4 Savages F = 3 Monsters F = 4 Beasts F = 2	*Whiteness marking the 'other' in relation to what it is not - whiteness remains unmarked*
Immoral/Emotional	Moral/Rational
Similar classifications: Lack a moral compass F = 1 Evil F = 5 Satanic F = 2 Emotional F = 1 Angry F = 2	*Similar classifications:* Rational F = 2