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WHITE TALK: WHITE SOUTH AFRICANS
AND THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT
OF DIASPORIC WHITENESS

by

Melissa Elizabeth Steyn

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines resistant whiteness in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Situating white South Africans as part of the powerful racial dispersal of Europe formed as a result of colonial expansion, it argues that since democracy, which has placed white South Africans in a weak position to the immediate centres of state power, white South Africans are constructing typically diasporic dimensions to the way in which they operate. Utilizing insights from the Discourse Theory of Laclau and Mouffe, and based on four studies which range across a period of a decade and incorporate large samples of different forms of publicly available everyday discourse, the thesis traces the pervasive and resilient discursive formation that it calls *white talk*: a resistant and flexible set of ideologically-charged discursive strategies which attempt to perpetuate privilege into the new dispensation while paying careful attention to self-presentation. While the dynamics for English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans are not identical, the manipulative power of *white talk* is shown to depend on its ability to leverage the intersections within the social space that whites in South Africa occupy. This space incorporates elements of whiteness, the powerfully centred social positionality, and diaspora, which is usually theorized as a marginalized and weak positionality. The dissertation confirms the importance of understanding whiteness in both its global and local dimensions, and of recognizing how these interact and bolster each other to perpetuate seemingly innocent, but in fact reactive, sites in which racial advantage is normalized.

For the little boy who stole the cellular phone.

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My daughters, Suzanne and Anna, for their constant love and encouragement;

My parents, for the precious memories I cherish;

And Reg, *sine quo non*.

PREFACE

Two comments on stylistic issues need to preface this dissertation. First, the convention in social constructivist writing is to use quotation marks around words designating any categorization involving the notion of race. In the interest of readability, this dissertation dispenses with this practice for the most part, but relies on the reader to take them as “understood.” Second, spelling conventions are in flux and contested, most particularly between standards adhered to the United States and Britain. A country like South Africa is divided in practice. This dissertation, despite following the American Psychological Association stylistic guidelines in most respects, has used the Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors (2000), The Oxford Guide to Style (2002), The South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002) and the Shorter Oxford Dictionary on CD-ROM, Version 2.0 (2002) to regularize its spelling. This dictionary already contains some Americanizations, such as the use of “z” instead of “s” in words that end in “ize” (with the notable exception of “analyse”). This route has been taken as being more in line with actual South African practice.

It is apposite to clarify up front the use of terms to designate racial groupings. I take it as given that the concept of “race” as well as actual “racial” groups are socially constructed, and this applies to ethnic and cultural groups as well. To facilitate reading, however, I am not using quotation marks each time I use such a group label for any of the four “racial” groups that have been historically constructed within the country, namely “coloureds,” “Indians,” “whites,” and “blacks.”

I acknowledge that we cannot yet dispense with these categories as units of analysis because the major fault-lines in the society still run along these “racial” divides, particularly as the racial economy of the past has had such a profound effect on the expression of other markers of difference. The task of reconciliation requires that South Africans continue to examine the dynamics that impede or facilitate the development of social movements that transcend and deconstruct this divide at the level of lived experience. The fact that scholars recognize “race” as the reified, essentializing construct of an earlier global European social movement should not be allowed to mask its on-going and long-term continuities in shaping the society.

The racial distinctions above do not necessarily correspond to the formal classifications used by current government in its equity legislation to redress apartheid

policies. I use “black” to include any indigenous African while government classifies “coloureds,” “Indians” and “Africans” as “black.” The reason I choose to use different terminology is to incorporate the nuances of nationality and positionality in South African society.

Two of the chapters in this dissertation have been published in an earlier form: Chapter Four, *Pictures of Transition* appears in *Shifting Selves: Post-apartheid essays on mass media, culture and identity*, edited by H. Wasserman and S. Jacobs, under the heading of “*Taxi to Soweto*” and “*Panic Mechanic*”: *Two cinematic representations of whiteness in South Africa post-1994*. A different version of Chapter Five, *Two Nations Talk* is published in *Intercultural Alliances: Critical Transformation* (Ed. M. J. Collier) under the heading *The Two Nations Talk: An analysis of rapprochement and alienation in the two South African national radio talk shows*. A section of Chapter Eight, *Rehabilitating a Whiteness Disgraced* adapted for presentation as a conference paper, has been awarded the Ralph Cooley Top Paper Award in the International and Intercultural Division of the National Communication Association, 2003. The Zapiro cartoon is reproduced with his permission, and much appreciation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
PREFACE	vi
CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO	
THEORETICAL AND LITERARY POSITIONING	11
CHAPTER THREE	
METHODOLOGY	43
CHAPTER FOUR	
PICTURES OF "TRANSITION"	67
CHAPTER FIVE	
TWO NATIONS TALK	83
CHAPTER SIX	
ELITE PREFORMULATIONS: AN IDEOLOGICAL MANICURE	109
CHAPTER SEVEN	
SAVING FACE, CALLING THE RACE: REPERTOIRES FOR TALKING WHITE	163
CHAPTER EIGHT	
REHABILITATING A WHITENESS DISGRACED: AFRIKANER <i>WHITE TALK</i>	215
CHAPTER NINE	
CONCLUSION: WHAT HAPPENS TO WHITENESS, THEN?	271
REFERENCES	286

WHITES WHO NEVER BENEFITED FROM APARTHEID:

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ZAPIRO®

What happens to whiteness, in other words, after it loses its colonial privileges?

—*Posts and Pasts: A theory of postcolonialism*. Alfred J. López

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INTRODUCTION

Whiteness is ownership of the earth—W.E.B. Du Bois

Background and Problem Identification

In the extremity of its intergroup dynamics, South Africa has always been instructive to those with an international perspective on the issue of interracial and intercultural relations. The history of settlement and conquest and the subsequent cultural stratification within the society bears similarities to most of the territories that were part of Europe's expansion across the globe. Yet in its particularities, the South African "mix," governed by entrenched minority white supremacy, was notorious across the globe as epitomizing racial oppression and segregationist extremism.

Since April 1994, with the first democratic election, the country has been rearticulating its intergroup relations through a process of reconciliation and nation building. These changes are being driven at a macro-level by government policies, which pursue the majority African National Congress's platform to provide "a better life for all" within a non-racist, non-sexist political, economic and social order. Concomitantly, the discursive terrain within the country is criss-crossed with contesting discourses that promote, contest, entrench, deny, delimit, contain, champion, discredit the vying interests of those who wish to hasten in the new and those who wish to sustain what suited them in the old. New discursive formations, and combinations of new and old,

provide the conditions for changed subjectivities. For South Africans on the ground this shaking down process inevitably involves a substantial reframing of the social identities forged within the old apartheid certainties, and requires complex individual and collective psychological adjustments as the population moves into an indeterminate future (Ballard, 2002; Franchi, 2003a; Franchi & Swart, 2003; Moultrie, 1999; Munro, 2001; Norval, 1996; Steyn, 1997b, 1997c, 1998c, 1999, 2002, 2003, In press; Thornton, 1996; Van Niekerk, 2000; Van Rooyen, 2000; Vestergaard, 2001; Wicomb, 2001; Zegeye, 2001c; Zegeye & Kriger, 2001)

Given their history of overtly supremacist racist sentiments and practices, the world has been curious to see how white South Africans would negotiate this adjustment (Goldberg, 1993; Goodwin & Schiff, 1995; Schutte, 1995), a change which, even on the eve of democracy, close to a million whites rejected in a referendum (Schönteich & Boshoff, 2003). With the buttresses that held up old white South African identity collapsed, whites clearly have to find different frames of "self" and "other" understanding as they position themselves within the new order: possibly as an indispensable part of the emerging society, or as a resistance movement, perhaps even as one of the world's "lost whites tribes" (Orizio, 2001), forgotten remnants of the receding era of colonial glory. One certainty in this scenario is that the political pressures within the country militate against "whiteness," and push to deconstruct the taken-for-granted privileges that came with being at the centre of power. On this score there are both parallels and divergences from whiteness in contexts such as Euro-America, where whiteness is also being challenged, but not with the same intensity, and where many of the assumptions of whiteness remain relatively unthreatened (Steyn, 1997b, 1998c, 2001a, 2002).

Of course, white South Africa is far from a homogenous population. Historically there has been a fault line running between the English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking groups, which have throughout the modern history of the country competed for domination of the land, its resources, and its indigenous population. Neither of these groups, in turn, is homogenous, or self-evident. They were constructed from disparate peoples who developed more-or-less common identifications clustered around certain core constituencies. In the case of the Afrikaners, the early core group was of Dutch colonial origin, and in the case of English-speaking South Africa, the core group consisted of British settlers. Both the groups, however, have in varying degrees at different times in their history drawn in other European settlers and immigrants of

European ethnic origin. Some of those who bolstered the two rival groups arrived as fairly intact communities, such as the French Huguenots, the 1820 Settlers, and the Portuguese colonials from Mozambique and Angola at the time of the demise of the Portuguese empire to the north of the country's borders. Others arrived in the form of a steady trickle of individual immigrants who sought to change their life opportunities in the colonies. All, however, were able to become part of the broader social group, at first referred to as "Europeans," that accumulated advantage by being positioned within structurally skewed economic and political relationships to "non-Europeans"—a distinction that later gave way in official discourse to the more overtly racial, and less colonial categories of "whites" and "non-whites."¹ Politically and socially, there still tends to be a fairly clear divide between Afrikaners and English South Africans, although this cleft has softened—in no small measure as a result of the efficacy of apartheid economics and social engineering in manufacturing a common identification of whiteness (Unterhalter, 1995). There has consequently been considerable intermarriage between these communities, evidenced in the fact that it is no longer possible to "read" from a surname whether a person will speak English or Afrikaans as their home language.

The formation of modern South Africa within the history of colonial conquest has had the effect that white South Africans have always tended to regard themselves as Westerners in Africa. Because they were able to rule the country, they regarded South Africa as more closely linked to the West than to Africa, although the exact nature of this link was always contested. O'Callaghan (1995) has argued that settler societies differed from earlier movements of people:

European settlers remained part of the former exporting country both in terms of tracing ancestry and of being brokers in the extraction and exportation of surplus. (p. 26)

In the South African context this connection to a European homeland has been truer of the English-speaking community. Zakes Mda (2001) characterizes English-speaking South Africans in this way:

Unlike the Afrikaners who evolved a culture of their own and had no political or sentimental connection to a European country (except, of course, for the religious connection with the Netherlands) the English-speaking South Africans had their centre elsewhere. For a long time they

viewed South Africa as a colonial outpost. . . . It is a fact that the English-speaking South Africans never regarded themselves as Africans even though they called themselves South Africans—Africans of the South. They led a life of diaspora, with a mother country as a point of reference. (p. 1)

But even in the case of Afrikaners, who were less ambivalent about rooting their destinies in African soil, the belief that it was their European (Christian) heritage that set them apart from the local population was adamantly maintained. Again, Mda (2001) sums up the identification of Afrikaners neatly:

In South Africa the first people to collectively call themselves Africans were the descendants of the Dutch and French Huguenot settlers who were known as the Boers because of their agrarian culture. . . . The Afrikaners were quite ambivalent about their Africanness. They saw themselves as the children of God in the pagan wilderness that they were predestined to civilize. They were Europeans with a tribal allegiance to Africa, while stubbornly refusing to recognize the Africanness of the indigenous black people they found on the lands they conquered. (p. 2)

When Rian Malan (1990) writes the psychic displacement of his socialization, therefore, his words resonate for generations of white South Africans:

It's just that I'm trying to fight my way out from under an ages-old accretion of myth about the world I grew up in. An African boyhood? An Afrikaner boyhood? I don't think so. Looking back, the strangest thing about my African childhood is that it wasn't really African at all. It was a more or less generically Western childhood unfolding in generic white suburbs where almost everyone subscribed to *Life* and *Reader's Digest*, and to the generic Western verities they upheld. Our heads turned to the north like flowers to the sun, toward where the great white mother culture lay. Our imaginary lives were rooted there, not in this strange place, where Zionists danced on Thursdays and rain washed the red earth of Africa into the streets. (p. 62)

Strong economic bonds with the West were cultivated and operated from a dominant position within the local context throughout both the British colonial period and the time of Afrikaner control of the apartheid economy. These connections were part of the

mechanisms of control over the disenfranchised African majority. As brokers for, and beneficiaries of, western capitalism, white South Africans were able to acquire and maintain an excellent first world lifestyle and to regard that as the “norm”: white people within the colonially established networks of trade and communication, not their African compatriots, formed the reference group in comparison with whom they set their life expectations (see, for example, Lester, 2001).

Since democracy, however, white South Africans are in a more ambivalent relationship to the power of the state, and, through the enfranchisement of the majority African population and the establishment of constitutional rights that guarantee dignity, freedom and equality to all citizens, they are also in a dramatically different relationship to those whose labour they previously exploited. Subjectively, the loss of political control is experienced as a circumstance of extreme vulnerability (Steyn, 2001a). The moment is one of acute “dislocation” (Laclau, 1990, 1994; Norval, 1990, 1996). With the old certainties unhinged, many white South Africans are increasingly filling the shifting and empty signifying spaces with meaning content that rehearses, reactivates, and even creates, what this dissertation calls the *diasporic dimension* in their positionality. A small, visible minority in the country where they live, separated from their original cultural heartlands, their whiteness clings uneasily as they choose between fighting the legacy of their own sectional advantage, integrating more fully into the democratic society, hanging on to a “purity” that will increasingly alienate them from the mainstream of South Africa, relocating to established whiteness elsewhere, or using their whiteness in “creative” ways to hedge their loss of privilege.

Positioned at the intersections of the African and the European, the “first” and “third” world, this diasporic dimension is evidenced in the quality of shifting layeredness that is characteristic of diaspora. Part of this is manifested in what Werbner (1997) has called the “reaching out to the valued other.” White South African identification tugs towards white people elsewhere: “home” is where other whites are. In typically diasporic manner whiteness in South Africa retains and nurtures a sense of its bond with the contemporary centres of whiteness, such as Euro-America and Australasia. Moreover, the diasporic characteristic of being grounded in shared sentiments with co-ethnic elsewhere is apparent. But it is not suffering, as in the case of many other diasporic peoples, that bonds these communities to whites elsewhere. Rather, Eurocentric expectations of privilege relative to the globe’s “less civilized” “others”—expectations

that have solidified into a sense of entitlement—form the common, uniting structure of feeling.

As a dispersed, but privileged, grouping, this diasporic experience is therefore qualitatively different from that of diasporic peoples who are oppressed by colonial, imperial and neo-colonial dynamics. One main difference lies in the degree of choice available to white South Africans. They may move internationally with relative ease, through business and leisure travel; they may relocate. They have a great deal of choice in claiming a symbolic ethnicity, to use Waters's (1990) term: just how much "Africanness" or "Europeanness" they wish to take on is a matter of their own taste. They are also economically very powerful and educationally advantaged. To a large extent they control the symbolic resources of the country, and can still dominate the flow of discursive influences that define how issues are interpreted. This is hybridity very much on their own terms. They can invoke, or deny, the tensions of living at the intersections at will.

Delimitation of Subject of Study: *White Talk*

This dissertation looks closely at one subject position those who inhabit this location of whiteness assume. It does this by specifically examining a discursive repertoire (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 2) that I am calling *white talk*. This is a set of discursive practices that, I suggest, attempts to manage the intersectional positionality of white South Africans to their (perceived) greatest competitive advantage, given the changes in their position within the society. Both the vulnerabilities and the strengths of being intersectionally situated are managed by *white talk*. A thoroughly diasporic activity, *white talk* has as its main function manipulating the contradictions of this displaced whiteness in order to maximize advantage in post-apartheid South Africa. It holds in tension the privileges that usually accompany mainstream racial identity, with the displacement and de-centredness of a diasporic people. It plays this field so as to display what is advantageous to reveal and to obscure what is advantageous to conceal. These discursive strategies are white in that they are concerned with preserving privilege, with 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 towards a more substantively democratic, multicultural society within the country. These discourses are "white," moreover, in that they preserve this centred position through employing exclusionary tactics and strategies, and in that they are structured in negative sentiment

towards the "other." Yet, through the shift in power in the immediate context, *white talk* has to deal with enormous emotional dissonance. It carries the emotional load of whiteness evicted from paradise, whiteness on the edge, off-centre in a manner that runs counter to all the premises on which whiteness is based.

The dissertation explores some of the vectors creating, and holding, these tensions within a diasporic moment of a historical configuration of whiteness. It does not attempt to give an account of many of the different subject positions that are being constructed for white South Africans at the present moment. The focus of the study is quite specific, in that it attempts to plot out the terrain of the particular discursive formation that it refers to as *white talk*.

Outline of the Dissertation

This chapter has provided a brief background into the social location of white South Africans, and identified the focus of the research. The next chapter reviews the literature on whiteness and on diaspora, and then indicates how these frameworks have been seen to apply, or not, in the context of whites in South Africa. The argument is presented for the paradoxical intersectionality that this dissertation calls *diasporic whiteness*. The subject matter of this dissertation is a discursive terrain, *white talk*. Chapter Three deals with the ontological, epistemological and methodological issues which apply to discourse analysis as an approach to research. The approach that informs this dissertation is culled from Laclau and Mouffe, but some concepts are drawn from other streams of discursive analysis, and these are briefly explained. The general methodological approach is explained, and the construction of the dissertation which comprises of four, layered, studies.

In the first study (Chapter Four), two films which were popular in white South Africa around the time of political transition are analysed. The two films are *Panic Mechanic* (Leon Shuster) and *Taxi to Soweto* (Manie van Rensburg). These films reflect the dislocation of the transition for white South Africa, and show how, in the indeterminacy at the time, the "New South Africa" was being constructed as a signifier for the chaotic and the absurd, whereas "whiteness," as the (toppled) bearer of order and rationality, was being constructed in terms of alienation. Marking the advent of the diasporic moment, the films portray White South Africans as beginning to "recognize" their visible strangeness in a strange land. Nevertheless, the films also reveal that a central fantasy at the time of transition for white South Africans was that, give or take a few minor adjustments, their whiteness would remain essentially intact.

Chapter Five looks at the boundary formation between white South Africa and black South Africa. The chapter considers two radio talk shows on the national English radio service SAFM, recorded in the period of 1997-8. An analysis of black and white callers' comments on the themes *Are white South Africans African?* and *Do white South Africans owe black South Africans restitution?* are examined in the light of Baumann's suggestion that two discursive competencies are needed in the building of intercultural alliance: demotic and dominant strategies. This analysis shows the existence of an enduring division between the constructions of the worlds of whiteness and blackness in the New South Africa, and indicates that strategic discursive work is being done on both sides to maintain the boundaries between these worlds in those areas that are perceived to be advantageous to their respective groups. The chapter shows the tendency on both sides, but for different reasons, to see white South Africa as an "inassimilable" minority, and also begins to sketch out the complex cross-currents that characterize the terrain of *white talk*.

Chapters Six and Seven both utilize the same corpus of discourse: three op-ed columns from the most widely read English-speaking Sunday Newspaper, analysed for the year, 2000. These chapters zoom in on *white talk* in English-speaking South Africa. Drawing on Van Dijk's notion of "elite discourse" Chapter Six shows the discursive constructions of "self" and "other" operating from an ideological epicentre of whiteness outside the country, and constructing post-apartheid South Africa as increasingly identified with the "ideological other," Africa. At the same time, the Afrikaners are constructed as the "social other" and act as a foil that deflects attention away from the implication of English-speaking South Africans in white advantage. The next chapter shows the strategic operation of *white talk* to re-energize whiteness, consolidating the race in ways that utilize the connections to whiteness in a global context, and drawing on *apparently* antagonistic discourses in such a way as to create a strategic ambiguity which makes *white talk* difficult to pin down. The strategic construction of the diasporic dimension emerges clearly in this section.

The final study consists of an analysis of the letters to the editor written to the "equal but opposite" Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, in 2001. The analysis shows that *white talk* operates very differently in this section of white South Africa. An important factor shaping the contours of Afrikaans whiteness is the difference in its relation to the international centres of whiteness. Afrikaners have constituted a resistant whiteness, which has always seen itself having to defend its particular brand of whiteness from the

internationally dominant Anglo whiteness. A more creolized group, Afrikaners have spent a great deal of their communal psychic energy on exorcizing the traces of intersectionality in their whiteness. In trying to rehabilitate their whiteness and at the same time re-suture Afrikanerness within the framework of the New South Africa, a serious struggle over the content of a new myth of the Afrikaner nation is taking place. An important strain in this struggle is the re-clamation of the diasporic aspect of their history, and the concomitant opportunity to present themselves as victims.

The final chapter draws together the layers of the dissertation. The tendency to construct calamitous aspects of being a small, stranded patch of whiteness in a continent increasingly dominated by African priorities is clearly pervasive in *white talk*. One outflow of this construction is that as whites can see themselves as newly “diasporized” from their “real” home—the lost white South Africa—by the political changes, “return” or at least “reconnection” with other communities of European colonial diasporic origin is seen as appropriate, sensible, even inevitable now. For the by far greater majority who choose to remain, however, the connection to global whiteness, in different ways, continues to shape their subjectivity. It also continues to be an important resource in maximizing the outcomes for themselves in the struggles of the intersectional politics of their location, and in exercising their agency in how they construct this historical moment. In a sense, whiteness provides a buffer to the potentially difficult aspects of a more “authentic” diasporic condition. It provides mobility, and ensures the retention of the interest in the region of most powerful nations on earth. In true diasporic fashion, the contrapuntal dynamic between the centre and margin is unmistakable, even if the cycle has been a long time in coming round.

NOTES

1. It also needs to be said that there were Europeans—Greeks, Portuguese, Italians and more—who married into (particularly) the coloured community, especially before the coloured population was taken off the common voters’ roll in the Cape Province.

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2

THEORETICAL AND LITERARY POSITIONING

This chapter provides an overview of the theorizations of the two subject positions—*whiteness* and *diaspora*—that frame the analysis of *diasporic whiteness* in this dissertation.

(a) Whiteness: At the Centre

Whiteness is probably best understood as an ideologically supported social positionality, a social location, which has accrued to people of European descent as a consequence of the economic and political advantage gained during and following on from European colonial expansion (Bonnett, 2000; Steyn, 2001b; Wander, Martin, & Nakayama, 1999). The position was originally facilitated by the construction of race which acted as a marker of entitlement to this position. The phenotypes, especially skin color, around which the notion of race was organized, were a useful means of naturalizing what were in fact political and economic relationships, supporting the fiction that the inequities structured into these relationships were the result of endogenous, probably biologically determined, inequalities between races. Whiteness is the shared social space in which the psychological, cultural, political and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalized, and rendered unremarkable.

Taking whiteness as an object of study is seen as a critical move in race studies. It involves redirecting the academic gaze: from racism i.e. the way in which the centre

constructs the margins, to the way the white centre constructs itself. Concentrating on the racialization of the margins has functioned to keep attention fixed on those “others” who are seen as the problem which society needs to explain, and change. The centres of power remain invisible operating as the norm, the still, unproblematic point of reference. Dyer’s (1988) formulation of this dynamic has become classic within the literature:

Looking with such passion and single-mindedness at non-dominant groups has had the effect of reproducing the sense of the oddness, differentness, exceptionality of these groups, the feeling that they are departures from the norm. Meanwhile the norm has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human. (Dyer 1988, p. 44)

Reframing the racial problem in terms of whiteness has been a very powerful critical move. An analogous strategy has occurred in some feminist studies. In her book, *The Man Question*, Ferguson (1993) shifts attention away from the way in which women have been socialized, to the construction of masculinity as the issue that needs explanation. Morrell’s (2001) book on “changing men in South Africa” extends this scholarship to the local multicultural context. Another example of how critical scholars are increasingly interrogating the norm, rather than the margin, is Monique Wittig’s (1992) *The Straight Mind*, which analyses how heterosexuality constructs itself in order to perpetuate the marginalization of homosexuality.

A growing body of interdisciplinary literature that has been coming into its own right (Stowe, 1996) labeled variously as “Whiteness Studies,” “White Studies,” “Whiteness Critique” or “Critical Studies of Whiteness” dedicates itself to subverting the power of whiteness, dislodging it from the position of authority from which it purports to be the measure of all humanity. It is generally accepted that the first work in the field started emerging in the early 1990s,¹ when the ripples caused by Richard Dyer’s (1988) analysis of the representation of whiteness by whites in western visual culture started to spread through academia. Dyer points out that, in fact, the converse of critical attention applies to the way in which ubiquitous whiteness is approached:

For most of the time white people speak about nothing but white people, it’s just that we couch it in terms of ‘people’ in general. Research . . . shows that in Western representation whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, have the central and elaborated roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard. (1997, p. 3)

Fishkin (1995) gives the credit for having put whiteness firmly on the academic agenda in the United States to Morrison's (1992) work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Morrison pointed out the asymmetry in the portrayal of the impact of racism in American literature: while African Americans are depicted as "different" as a consequence of being racialized, the effects on the psyches of those who perpetuate racism are never exposed, despite the fact that their identity construction is dependent upon the existence of this "other" which carries their projections. Peggy McIntosh's (1992)² *White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in Women's Studies* unpacked the "invisible knapsack" of privileges that white people can take for granted on an everyday basis, privileges conferred on them by virtue of belonging to the dominant racial group. McIntosh's article has become one of the most widely read works for exposing the extent to which the racial order imperceptibly functions around the comfort, convenience, affirmation, solidarity, psychological well-being, advantage, and advancement of whites. Ruth Frankenberg's study of the discourses of whiteness that frame white women's self-understanding of their whiteness, *White women, Race matters: The social construction of whiteness* appeared in 1993, and made the important point that despite the way in which white people experience their social space as culturally neutral and individually determined, whiteness has definite cultural content, characterized by certain assumptions, belief systems, and value structures.

Parallel to these and other works which explored the internal dynamics of whiteness, a body of scholarship was consolidating which systematically exposed the constructedness of the "white race" itself—how it limited membership and shifted its boundaries according to its perceived group interests in different historical contexts, operating through strategies of inclusion and exclusion, while at all times policing the privileged access to resources for those who count as members. Foremost amongst those whose analysis highlights a "split working class" dynamic as fundamental to the consolidation of the white race, is the work of Roediger (1991; 1994). Roediger traces the historical processes by which the white working class population in the US was able to insert itself advantageously into the economy, through identifying as "white," rather than as workers. Similar historical excavation by Ignatiev (1995) recounts how the Irish "success" in whitening largely depended on adopting extreme supremacist positions to distance themselves from African-Americans. In the same vein, Allen (1994), writes about whiteness as a form of social control, and traces the racializing process by which

the ethnic groups from the British Isles who were highly stratified on “home” soil (the most disadvantaged being the Irish), became part of a single, socially-elevated group: the white race. He points out that:

When an emigrant population from “multicultural” Europe goes to North America or South Africa and there, by constitutional fiat, incorporates itself as the “white race,” that is no part of genetic evolution. It is rather a political act: the invention of “the white race.” (p. 22)

Jacobson’s (1998) historical study, *Whiteness of a different color*, shows that the reracialization of European ethnic minority immigrants from such “racial” groups as “celts,” “slavs,” and “Hebrews”—initially regarded as “non-whites”—into the “Caucasian” group was at the centre of their assimilation into the national construction, “American.” Jacobson writes about the social currency of race:

The European immigrants’ experience was decisively shaped by their entering an arena where Europeanness—that is to say, whiteness—was among the most important possessions one could lay claim to. It was their *whiteness*, not any kind of New World magnanimity, that opened the Golden Door. (p. 8)

In 1993, Cheryl Harris published her rightfully acclaimed article, *Whiteness as property*, which showed how structural privilege for whites had been codified as a birthright and protected by the court system in the US, which concomitantly dispossessed African Americans. A further extended examination of the structural underpinnings of white advantage is presented in *The possessive investment in whiteness* by Lipsitz (1998).

Subsequent to these groundbreaking works, there has been a deluge of literature, across a broad range of disciplines, examining the construction of whiteness. By 1997, the rush of “readers” which appeared on the bookshelves, such as *Critical white studies* by Delgado and Stefancic (1997), *Off white* by Fine et al.(1997), *Displacing whiteness* by Frankenberg, (1997) and *Whiteness: A critical reader* by Hill (1997), indicated that the field had come of age within the university curricula. Also in 1997, the first major academic conference to discuss the state of research on whiteness in the United States, *The making and unmaking of whiteness*, was held at the University of California, Berkeley, and a publication of papers from the conference appeared in 2001 (Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001).

It would be impossible to give a detailed account of all the literature that has appeared in the last decade on the topic of whiteness, so the rest of this review will highlight some key areas relevant to this study.

Viewing whiteness as a social positionality allows for multifaceted study. Of relevance to this dissertation is the well-established line of research that has discovered the strategic quality that informs the attitudes and behaviour of people thus positioned. A great deal of this work on the group-oriented tactics which ensure and perpetuate advantage has been done by critical race theorists, such as Lopez (1996), Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997) and Fine et al. (1997). The “discursive turn” in social theory has had a marked influence on the work in this area, as in others, and a fairly extensive literature has developed that examines the strategies of whiteness through the multiply-interrelated frames of discourse, language, rhetoric, ideology, and communication: how whiteness is “communicated, spread, maintained” (Tierney & Jackson, 2003, p. 90). A few examples are given to indicate the range of this work. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) have exposed some of the rhetorical strategies that whites in the United States of America use to deflect attention from their central position. Tierney and Jackson (2003) identify common rhetorical fantasy themes that communicate and entrench the ideology of whiteness in the United States. The “discursive production of ‘good (white) girls’” is the subject matter of Moon’s (1999) *White enculturation and bourgeois ideology*. In the area of popular visual culture, Projansky and Ono (1999) expose the operations of what they call *strategic whiteness* in selected films which purport to challenge racism, but in fact subtly reconstitute the space of white dominance.

A sensitivity that has been engendered by the post-colonial/feminist framework, and that is eminently pertinent in the study of social positionality, is the importance of the “politics of location.” This entails attention to the way in which axes of social power, which include the colonial/postcolonial power dynamic, intersect within specific social/historical contexts, as an antidote to the trend of generalizing across diverse contexts, and/or valorizing a particular dimension of social oppression, such as class, to the point of obscuring the action of others (Brah, 1996; Shome, 1999). As Frankenberg and Mani (1993) argue:

The engagement of colonization/decolonization thus has transnational dimensions, its local expression multiply inflected by regional and global affinities and considerations, in turn crosscut by class, race, gender,

sexuality, etc. Not all places in this transnational circuit are, however, similarly “postcolonial.” (p. 302)

This salutary call accords with what has been identified as a direction that whiteness studies needs to take, i.e. to particularize specific whitenesses (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Steyn, 1998c). Attention to the specifics of location, conceived of as a delimited social site that the analyst attempts to describe without erasure the complex intersections of power operating upon the subjectivities shaped in the location, has produced a rich range of literature. The work of feminist scholars highlighting the gendered dynamics operating within whiteness has certainly been at the forefront of this stream of scholarship (M. B. Pratt, 1984; Segrest, 1994; Ware, 1992). Pfeil (1995) has undertaken a similar examination of the construction of white, heterosexual masculinity. Studies have also foregrounded how some subjectivities, although white, are marginalized on other axes of power, such as non-dominant sexualities (Puar, 2001; Stokes, 2001), and “poor whites” (Wray & Newitz, 1997).

Hand-in-hand with this impetus to focus on local inflections of whiteness is a growing understanding that whiteness can only be properly understood when full account is taken of its global dimensions. Those with the strongest grasp of its global reach are often most aware of the need to particularize, rather than universalize observations and theory from one subject position, usually the United States (see, for example, Bonnett, 1998a, 1998b; Gabriel, 1998; Hartigan, 1997; López, 2001; Ware, 2001; Ware & Back, 2002).³ A welcome development, therefore, has been the trickle of literature from other international contexts. Publications have been emerging on whiteness in Australia (Jakubowicz, 2002), Britain (Hickman & Walter, 1995; Nayak, 2002; Phoenix, 1997), Canada (Harper, 2002), India (Kidder, 1997), Japan and Latin America (Bonnett, 2002), Kenya (Uusihakala, 1999), New Zealand (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), as well as delimiting particular areas in US (Hartigan, 2001). International scholarship has played an important role in preventing what could otherwise develop into serious blind spots in the scholarship. Bonnett (2000) comments, for example, that:

Indeed, a more international frame of reference brings into visibility the association of whiteness with modernity, rather than simply capitalism and, by extension, is suggestive of the complicity of Marxism and class reductionism with Eurocentrism. (p. 141)

The construction of whiteness was central not only to the processes of power and oppression established during the modern era of colonial domination, but still shapes the postcolonial world we live in. There is a relationship between exposing whiteness and decolonizing the imagination of both the oppressed and oppressors (López, 2001; Shome, 1999; Steyn, 2001b). Whiteness is therefore firmly on the agenda of those working within the broad field of postcolonialism, where both its ideological and psychoanalytical underpinnings, particularly, are being carefully dissected (Carlson, 1997; Gabriel, 1998; Guillaumin, 1995; Hickman & Walter, 1995; Levine-Rasky, 2002b; López, 2001; McClintock, 1995; Muller, 2001; Nederveen Pieterse, 1992; Nederveen Pieterse & Parekh, 1995; Said, 1994; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000; Shome, 1999; Steyn, 1998c; Ware, 1992; Yeboah, 1997; Young, 1990; 1995).

In the wake of all the publications in recent decade, and changes in social dynamics have seen whiteness become more defensive, some scholars maintain that whiteness is no longer “invisible” (Apple, 1998; Gallagher, 1997; Giroux, 1997b). For those who want their scholarship to contribute to the demise of racial social organization, the question arises: Where to now? There seems to be a strong consensus that Whiteness Studies need to provide vision, guidelines, strategies, plans of action that will help those who do not want to be stuck with the heritage of whiteness to access more democratic and self-respecting subject positions. For this reason, a good deal of scholarship emanates from the area of education/pedagogy (Dolby, 2001; Giroux, 1992, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998; McIntyre, 1997; Perry, 2002; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000). But there are, predictably, divergent views on the apposite route to take, and on what is actually possible. For the editors of *Race Traitor*, Ignatiev and Garvey (1996), the answer is abolishing whiteness and taking on blackness:

Politically, whiteness is the willingness to seek a comfortable place within the system of race privilege. . . . To the extent so-called whites oppose the race line, repudiate their own race privileges, and jeopardize their own standing in the white race, they can be said to have washed away their whiteness and taken in some blackness. (Ignatiev, 1997, p. 609)

Roediger (2002) proposes that the concept of “nonwhiteness” should be theorized as a way of offering a subjectivity that offers “possibility and transcendence” to the *entire* American nation, a way to be *other* than white (p. 17). Others argue that it is possible to

have a more nuanced understanding of whiteness that allows for proud, antiracist, yet white, subject positions that oppose the ideology of whiteness and embrace solidarity across racial lines (Giroux, 1997c; Kincheloe et al., 1998). Levine-Rasky (2002a) believes that “the task for whites is to redefine themselves as racialized social actors in a shared and ambitious quest to build a common social domain reticulated with and beyond identity” (p. 5). López (2001) believes that what is required is a “a new script or narrative of post-mastery whiteness” (p. 119). Ware and Back (2002) comment that it depends on

whether or not race is seen as something that can be not only deconstructed on paper, but also eventually rendered obsolete as a system of discriminating among humans. (p. 6)

In their book, Ware and Back are concerned with “excavating and understanding the sources of nonracial wisdom” and propose a “vigilantly antiracist position” and reject the idea of any “safe and innocent notion of ‘white identity.’” Ware and Back maintain that anti-whiteness is one “block” within the new social movements that comprise the left in current global politics. They are adamant that the continuity with earlier anti-racist activism and practice (see, for example, Cose, 1998; Doob, 1999; Katz, 1978; Kivel, 1996; Omi & Winant, 1994; Wellman, 1993; Williams, 1997) needs to be acknowledged, even as the struggle for non-racial societies works within changed historical and political circumstances and with new paradigms:⁴

But if we can accept that the politics of race is played out differently in postcolonial times, we cannot agree that the demands made by the abolitionists of whiteness are intrinsically new or unprecedented. Where the opponents of New Abolitionism are sometimes unwilling to see how the project is connected to other kinds of politics, we would want to emphasize both the honorable legacy of “race treason” and the congruence of hatred of white supremacy with a new “politics of change.” More than this, it offers a form of politics that does not provide short-term gratification: it is definitely not a campaign to be won, or lost, and then forgotten. A new social movement that seeks to expose and dismantle the machinations of White Power requires more than emotional energy, and open mind, and a commitment to direct action; it also needs a constant flow of analysis and theoretical debate in order to comprehend

the ways in which racism is intrinsically interconnected with other forms of social division. (p. 13)

The above quotation is indeed apt to introduce a discussion of the literature on whiteness in South Africa, the site of the massive anti-apartheid struggle in the past, and, if the analysis presented in this dissertation is correct, potentially the site of a protracted anti-whiteness struggle still to come.

(b) Whiteness: In South Africa

Europe is gone, yet it remains. Whiteness remains, often in the form of whites who do not follow the retreat of the (former?) country's ships and the descent of its flags, but remain as citizens of the new nation. (p. 92)

López (2001) regards the challenge of dealing with legacies/residues/traces of whiteness as the crux of the challenge faced by the postcolonial state, indeed, by postcolonialism itself. The previously colonized and colonizer are psychologically enmeshed around a "pathogenic nucleus" of the "ideal of whiteness" which neither fully own up to, yet it is the daily encounters between whiteness and its others on the street, in cafés, at work, which will determine the political future of the former colony, now postcolonial, multiracial society. (p. 96)

The psychic influence of whiteness, most concentrated in the remaining white population itself, resists transformation and refuses the "postcolonial reckoning with whiteness in its historical, aesthetic and ontological manifestations" (p. 96).

In the *late-colonial* and *postcolonial* context, however, within which the true violence of the of the colonial regime is to some extent exposed, denounced, and reproached (but seldom really avenged), repression continues less successfully to censor feelings or suspicions of national guilt and individual culpability. (p. 86)

López sees the suppression of knowledge about the past, in form of denial of wrongs and guilt over the past injustices and oppression, as characteristic of the "colonial unconscious." It is the continuation of earlier suppression in colonial times of self-knowledge of the true aggressive drives and desires to dominate which underlay the "civilizing mission." To this content of the colonial unconscious we can add the unexamined, anxiety-provoking phantasmagoria of images of the black "other" on which the construction of white identity depended (Mudimbe, 1994; Nederveen Pieterse, 1992;

Steyn, 1998c, 2001b). Whiteness in South Africa is fraught with such psychological splitting, tension between “manifest denial and latent white guilt.” Too much is now unveiled for comfort, and yet the path to the “irrevocably intersubjective” (López, 2001) relation with the “other” in post-apartheid South Africa is painful to achieve and would require letting go of the *desire*, the *will to whiteness*.

A sort of cultural memory, or more precisely, the *inheritance* or legacy of a memory, of the prestige of whiteness and the nostalgia of white-European colonial power lingers in residues within the formerly colonizing culture. Whiteness may have lost something of the material basis of power, but within the psychic life of the western subject, it retains much of its allure. (p. 91)

Essentially, then, there is a tension between national consciousness and the colonial unconscious. López, I believe correctly, maintains that the “proper work of postcolonial discourse” is to “systematically uncover and interrogate such colonial traces wherever they may surface.” If this is true, however, it needs to be said that South African academia has hardly begun its postcolonial task (Posel, Hyslop, & Nieftagodien, 2001). And yet, at the same time, it also needs to be said that if any context for the study of whiteness brings the colonial-postcolonial axis of power to the fore, it is the South African context.

The literature on race in post-apartheid South Africa has been very thin on the ground. Where it has been more forthcoming, it has tended to continue the line of research that looks at “inter-racial” relations and attitudes, well established during the apartheid years, but energized by the process of reconciliation in the country. Various research projects have shown mixed success within the nation in overcoming the separateness of the past. Several sets of findings have pointed to enduring separate realities along the old racial divides (Ansell, 2001; Brodie, Altman, & Sinclair, 1999; Franchi, 2003b; Gibson & Macdonald, 2001). Others have indicated emerging tendencies towards “alliances” between privileged and semi-privileged groupings, along the lines described by analysts such as Gans (1999) and Warren and Twine (1997) of racial trends in the United States (see, for example, Duncan, 2003; Finchilescu & Dawes, 1999; Mynhardt, 1999).

Since 1994, a small body of literature has been mapping how “racial” and cultural groupings within the country have been redefining their identities under the

changed political circumstances. So for example, a series of books was launched in 2001 by Kwela books and South African History Online, which looks at social identity from different disciplinary perspectives, and spans the gambit of groupings in the country (Ebr-Vally, 2001; Erasmus, 2001b; Sienaert, 2001; Zegeye, 2001c; Zegeye & Kriger, 2001). These debates generally continue within an ongoing attempt to formulate a helpful stance on the issue of what to do with the notion of “race,” and “racial identity” now that it is accepted to be a social construction which has no biological reality, but which yet continues to exercise power socially (Franchi, 2003c; Giroux, 1992, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Zegeye, 2001c; Zegeye & Kriger, 2001).

The first collective, structured attempt to address whiteness in South Africa was a conference on the theme, *The burden of race? “Whiteness” and “Blackness” in modern South Africa* held at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in July 2001. It was followed by a special edition of *Transformation* which published selected papers (Posel et al., 2001). Most studies of white South Africa have focused on specific “problem” groups. Afrikaners, seen as the initiators and upholders of apartheid, with the greatest adjustment to make in the new dispensation, have been the objects of a good deal of attention (L. Botha, 2001; De Beer, 1997; Dubow, 1992; Giliomee, 2001; Goodwin & Schiff, 1995; Krog, 1998; Norval, 1994a, 1996; Schutte, 1995; Vestergaard, 2001; Wicomb, 2001). Another group that is monitored on the basis that they have been regarded as particular repositories for racist attitudes is the “poor white” population (Hyslop, 1999; Jung & Seekings, 1997; Teppo, 2001). Some self-examination has emerged from white women exploring the particular intersections of their positionality (Bennett & Friedman, 1997; Holland-Muter, 1995; Steyn, 1998a). At the other end of the spectrum, an equally unrepresentative group of white South Africans, namely those exceptional people who participated in the struggle, has been represented in autobiography and biography (Bernstein, 1999; Clingman, 1998; Frankel, 1999; Kasrils, 1998; Niehaus, 1993; Podbrey, 1993; Roux, 1993; Sachs, 1990; Slovo, 1995; Sparg, Schreiner, & Ansell, 2001; Verwoerd, 1997) and also in academic studies (Nuttall, 2001; Ware & Back, 2002). Nuttall’s study is interesting in that she finds that the whiteness of these subversive activists was marked, not by invisibility, but by attempts at concealment of a whiteness that seemed hyper-visible in that context.

Other studies, while not necessarily framing themselves within Critical White Studies, have started to excavate the role of whiteness in such areas as the colonial mythology that has informed white identity (Morrell, 1996; Wylie, 2000) or in the

construction of scientific racism (Dubow, 1995), or in framing environmental discourse (Dixon, Foster, Durrheim, & Wilbraham, 1994; Dixon, Reicher, & Foster, 1997). Collectively, this work has gone a long way to show that the knowledge produced about Africa(ns) tells us more about the subjectivities of the producers of the knowledge, than about those it purports to explain.⁵ Research more self-consciously positioned within the Critical Whiteness paradigm has been emerging in graduate theses. Ballard (2002), in his study, *Desegregating minds: White identities and urban change in the New South Africa* uses Bauman's (1997) notion of "the stranger"—those "others" who cannot be dealt with either by expulsion or assimilation, who refuse to go, and disrupt the psychic equilibrium of "our space"—to interpret the attitudes of whites in a Durban suburb to the presence of squatters, informal traders and middle class blacks who move into the suburb. Ballard found that:

whereas cities and neighbourhoods were once identity-affirming they are increasingly identity-disturbing . . . whereas concerns about racial mixing were once addressed through segregation, they are now largely expressed in the language of assimilation. . . . While non-whites would be accepted, they would only be admitted if they made themselves *acceptable as defined by white people.*" (pp. 205, 210)

He concludes that "although cities are now 'open' to all races, the 'spirit' of apartheid remains in many ways" (p. 209). In her study of English-speaking white South Africans, Salusbury (2003) found correspondences between the manner in which they construct their whiteness and the constructions of normative whiteness in the United States of America, in that they believe they are "cultureless" and "individualistic" and, as a consequence of this "objectivity," well-suited to be social leaders in a globalizing South Africa. Her work is important for starting to fill the lacuna that has resulted from this normative whiteness hitherto evading analysis, with few exceptions (Foley, 1991, 1992; Sennett & Foster, 1996).

A strand of research, particularly relevant to this dissertation, is undertaken in the context of the literature on reconciliation. Various works describe the characteristics of discourses used by white South Africans as they position themselves in relation to reconciliation (see Ansell, 2001; Moultrie, 1999). In their study "Project Reconciliation" in which they interviewed eight "racially homogenous" focus groups in the Western Cape for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Du Toit, Biggs & Greyling (2001)

reported the prevalence of opinions within the white group (Bishopscourt⁶ residents) such as the following:

They were more at home in Europe than Africa; their “heritage,” which was understood to mean a quality of life, was being destroyed in South Africa; Afrikaners were the whites who were important for the future development of the country; although South Africa is a “beautiful country” they are encouraging their children to leave; black South Africans had a culture of entitlement post-1994; poverty was aggravated by African promiscuity and their inability to manage money; integration should not be forced; blacks who move into the suburbs should fall in line with the practices of their neighbours; the TRC had been a “useless exercise” and that reconciliation had become retribution; and that the country was without effective leadership. (Section 7.8)

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, which was established after the formal work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was completed, has produced a fairly substantial, and consistent, oeuvre of articles on whiteness in South Africa post-1994. Some of the titles of articles that have appeared in the press under the auspices of the Institute bear witness to the persistent interrogation and prodding of white South Africa’s apparent unwillingness to examine its position as beneficiary of inequitable political, economic, and social policies.⁷

No reconciliation until whites acknowledge being beneficiaries of apartheid—Helen Macdonald, Sunday Independent, 23 July 2000

Don’t write whites off, present them with a challenge—Charles Villa-Vicencio, Cape Times, 6 September 2000

Waiting for the white Prince(ss)—Charles Villa-Vicencio, Mail & Guardian, n.d.

It’s time white South Africa came to the party—Helen Macdonald, Cape Argus, 2 October 2000

Democracy involves more than the vote—Charles Villa-Vicencio, Cape Times, 24 October 2000

Erkenning of apologie (Acknowledgement or apology)—Fanie du Toit, Die Burger, 15 November 2000

Why I signed the declaration—Albie Sachs, Cape Times, 27 February 2001

The challenge of hearts and minds—Helen Macdonald, Cape Times, n.d.

Proud to be white, free to be African—Fanie du Toit, Cape Argus, n.d.

Africanness still in the making—Zakes Mda, Cape Times, n.d.

South African schools: Is the rainbow nation being overrun by racial storms?—Karin Lombard, Cape Times, n.d.

Can white South Africans rise to the challenges of economic compromise?
—Karin Lombard, Cape Times, 2 April 2003.

As elsewhere, there has been a good deal of incisive critique of whiteness coming from their compatriots who have not shared their privileged space (N. Biko, 2000; S. Biko, 1978; Farred, 1997; Gqola, 2001; Magubane, 1999; Makgoba, 1998, 1999; Ndebele, 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Wicomb, 2001). Contrary to all the commentators that note white South Africa's anxieties under conditions of dislocation, Farred (1997) writes about their confidence, indemnity and sense of sanctuary:

Postapartheid white South Africa has displayed a confidence rare among previously oppressive or colonizing constituencies; this community has an authoritative sense of its place in the new society (p. 67).

Farred makes the point that "only a keen sense of historical accountability will inhibit the repetition (or continuation) of hegemonic behavior" (p. 67) and maintains that the Pan African Congress's slogan "One settler, One bullet" was a campaign to attack that confidence, a call for accountability:

[T]o name white South Africans "settlers" is to mark them as aliens when they present themselves as unproblematic nationals. Unlike their black counterparts, white South Africans have already begun the process of selectively forgetting the ravages caused by their racist rule. "One settler, One bullet" is an urgent reminder that there should be political consequences for the act of white forgetting. White South Africa must acknowledge the effects of its forgetting so publicly; they should be reminded of how much offence they have given and continue to give and how much arrogance underlies the absence of their memory. . . . the campaign [is] to attack a white confidence that is rapidly becoming a

smugness, an arrogance that is historically offensive. . . . they must change their “mode of thinking,” rethink their place in the postapartheid society. . . [and transform] the culture of white confidence into a culture of postapartheid civic accountability. (pp. 72-76)

The particular historical and political configuration in South Africa has meant that whites have never experienced their whiteness and the advantage it afforded them as invisible—one of the key components in the way whiteness is theorized in the Metropolitan heart of whiteness. Throughout the apartheid era white South Africans knew they were racialized, and some of their earliest memories recount differences in how they were positioned relative to “others” (Steyn 2001). What *was* taken for granted, however, was the “naturalness” of being thus privileged. White South Africans held on to many of the colonial assumptions that helped to underwrite the social construction of whiteness with particular tenacity. Perhaps one reason white South Africans embraced this narrative so ardently is that whiteness here has never been as secure as in countries where Europe’s settlers gained demographic, as well as political and economic power.

What has happened in South Africa is particularly interesting because we have seen here a sudden and fairly decisive decentring of whiteness within the society, from a position where white advantage was legally entrenched, to where it is actively disciplined. Whites have lost political power. They largely maintain economic power, and because western cultures are held in esteem as the believed key to internationalism, they still hold cultural power. The decentring of white power is therefore unequal in terms of social capital; their position is certainly not that of marginalization. Nevertheless, the pressure within the new society is towards dismantling, and indeed deconstructing, old social relations. Whites need to find new narratives to explain who they are, what they are doing in Africa, and what their relationship is to the indigenous people and to the continent. Some of the narratives attempt to recycle the old Master Narrative in such a way that it may still do the job of preserving privileged positionality, despite the new dispensation. All of these narratives have to position themselves in relation to past constructions of whiteness. All of the narratives have to make sense of, and provide a stance towards, the subjective experience of losing aspects of highly a privileged positionality (Steyn 2001).

This change in the positioning of South African whiteness sets it apart from whiteness in the centres from which whiteness is generally theorized. It also brings to the

fore the diasporic dimension of this particular site of whiteness. The next section therefore briefly turns to the notion of diaspora, as the second theoretical point of reference from which to chart some of this paradoxical white terrain.

(c) Diaspora: At the Margins

Another term that has recently gained a great deal of currency in attempts to theorize contemporary society is *diaspora*; it, too has been emerging into a field in own right, called Diaspora Studies (Butler, 2002). Generally, though, the term has gained currency within the literature on globalization, where it has been employed to interrogate the changing fortunes of the modern nation,⁸ and relatedly, in the area of post-colonial literature, where it speaks particularly to the positionalities of contemporary transnationals within the axis of power formed by “the memory and legacy of colonization/decolonization” (Frankenberg & Mani, 1993, p. 301).

The term was originally used to describe the dispersion of the ancient Greeks through colonization,⁹ at which time it bore positive connotations (Cohen, 1996, 1997). It is now applied in so many contexts that its meaning is becoming less clear (Butler, 2002; Tölölyan, 1996).¹⁰ Clifford (1994) calls *diaspora* “a traveling term in changing global conditions,” which is used to describe “a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling, and traveling within and across nations” (p. 306). Tölölyan (1996) points out that the enhanced currency of the label is the consequence of both an increase in the number of social formations to which it may sensibly apply, as well as a shift in the discourses of dispersal which tend to re-name many groups in order to assign “diasporic” attributes to them (p. 3).

A greatly contested label, the attempt to fix its signification is itself now very much part of the politics it describes—“the struggles over and contradictions within ideas and practices of collective identity, of homeland and nation” (Tölölyan, 1991). The contestation occurs on different levels. At a historical and sociological level, the wrangle is over which communities legitimately can be regarded as diasporic. The search is on for essential characteristics, definitive typologies, ideal cases, and scholars are divided on the issue of how prescriptive or inclusive the category may be taken to be in relation to these means of definition (Van Hear, 1998). But the contestation is also over the level of abstraction at which the term may be invoked. For some scholars, the link to a specific historical experience is crucial. Chow (1992), for example, argues that diasporas are sites of historical entanglement which “should not be reduced to epiphenomena of

postmodern fragmentation, neocolonial transnationality, or global capitalism” (p. 152). By contrast, Butler (2002) suggests that diaspora should be considered as a *framework for the study* of particular processes of community formation (p. 194). For others, particularly those who work within the linguistic turn afforded by post-structuralism, the *diasporic* is a signifier which can operate on a metaphorical level even to describe what are postulated as currently endemic conditions, such as the split psyche prevalent in contemporary subjectivities, or the ambivalent qualities of all populations under global conditions. Brah (1996) postulates a concept that she calls *diaspora space*:

The concept of diaspora space references the global condition of “culture as a site of travel” (Clifford, 1992) which seriously problematises the subject position of the “native.” Diaspora space is the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of “us” and “them” are contested. My argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is “inhabited,” not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of “staying put.” (pp. 208-9)

Similar debates mark the terms with which *diaspora* shares the order of discourse (Fairclough, 1995a) which concerns the politics of transnational location, terms such as *migrant, border, borderlands, Creole, hybridity, exile* and even *colonizer/ed*. Brah (1992) rightly comments that the meanings of such terms of identification are less determined by the nature of their referents than by their semiotic function within discourses of difference. The different meanings signal differing political strategies and outcomes. They mobilize different sets of cultural and political identities, and set limits to where the boundaries of a community are established (Brah, 1992). The semiotic function of “diaspora” is to mark the predicament of multiply located subjectivities.

Because of its deterritorializing potential,¹¹ the notion of diaspora has been used to signify the collapsing of the modern political binaries of local/global, minority/state, native/migrant which were constructed as discrete categories; diaspora represents the leaking and blending between different cultural and national entities (Appiah & Gates, 1995; Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Hannerz, 1987; Kraidy, 1999; Nederveen Pieterse,

1994). Of course, dispersion and migration have always been part of human history (Ahmad, 1995; Butler, 2002; Goldberg, 1994; Kotkin, 1992) and cultures and nations have always been hybrid (Hall, 2000; Werbner & Modood, 1997). Butler (2002, p. 212) even argues that it is possible to construct an alternative perspective on world history as a series of overlapping diasporizations. Nevertheless, almost all contemporary diasporas have been brought about by modern colonial and imperial history (with notable exceptions, such as the Jewish and Roma peoples).¹² Said (1994) has said that one of the achievements of modern imperialism has been to redistribute populations in such a way that Europe and its "others" now live side by side across the length and breadth of the globe. There has been a massive redistribution of human groupings in the name of Empire that current narratives of European nationalism simplify (Mishra, 1996). The West and the rest are irreversibly intertwined; all have been influenced by, and structured into, relations established by European expansion. This is true of the original colonial expansion, but it is also true, as post-colonial critics have argued, of the reverse migration of previously colonized people into the cosmopolitan centres (Hall, 2000). Van Hear (1998) observes that a regrouping, what he calls "in-gathering," of dispersed communities is also taking place as diasporas move back "home" within the broad flows of people that are associated with processes of decolonization (p. 51). These contractions, as well as the onward movements between settlements abroad of people originally from the same homeland, create new layers of migratory people so that the same people become part of older and newer diasporas simultaneously (Brah, 1996; Butler, 2002).

Such restless migration is not new to the character of scattered peoples. Diasporic communities tend to be always in the processes of "making, remaking, unmaking" as secondary and tertiary migration movements create new flows, and continue, sustain and augment cumulative flows (Van Hear, 1998). Even "pure" forms of diaspora may therefore be ambivalent; the basic features, such as home and host territory, may be multiple and unclear (Clifford, 1994). Nevertheless, for analysts whose concern is primarily sociological, the emphasis in approaching the diasporic condition of such groupings is placed on issues such as the conditions that led to the dispersal, the duration of stay in, and relationship to, the host society, the existence of multiple sites of settlement and enduring economic and cultural ties and networks, which are becoming increasingly technological (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994).

One criterion that has been mooted as definitive of diaspora is its relation to power. An important consequence of the way in which modern human dispersals have been brought about is that they fit into patterns of stratification within a deeply unequal global system. All dispersed people are not in the same relation to the distribution of the globe's assets, and much of the contention around who "counts" as diasporic relates to this fact. Through the modern era, patterns of population diffusion followed the movements of colonial settlers moving outwards from the European centre. Given the differentials in power, the people thus transplanted were in control of the places where they settled, in charge of the people amongst whom they settled. Cohen (1996, 1997) quite specifically, and perhaps controversially, includes *imperial* dispersals as one type within his typology of diaspora. These dispersals were "diaspora by design," and are marked by a "deference to and imitation of [the imperial nation's] social and political institutions and a sense of forming part of a grand imperial design. . . ." (p. 67).

Usually, however, when we think of diaspora, we think of what Cohen calls "victim diaspora". These are people who have been dispossessed and displaced: through slavery; through forced, involuntary, limited choice migration—exiles, refugees, migrant workers who have had to leave home as a consequence of economic imperatives to make their livings in a new environment, trying their hands at small scale trade, undertaking domestic and farm labour—people who have very little bargaining power in the countries where they end up, and are politically, socially, economically and culturally vulnerable. Writers such as Safran (1991) regard these subaltern experiences as quintessential and definitive of diaspora, and argue that those settlers who are dispersed through volition and aggressive pursuit of opportunity, who have not been "politically disabled" (p. 88) should not be included in the field. This position is bolstered by the academic orthodoxy of taking the case of the scattering of the Jewish people under catastrophic conditions as the normative, the "ideal type," of diasporic experience (Butler, 2002; Cohen, 1996, 1997; Mishra, 1996; Safran, 1991; Tölölyan, 1996).

In our contemporary, globalizing times, the flows of diaspora are still stratified, but the picture is probably even more complicated, and cannot be viewed in monological terms. As Hall (2000) argues, the reconfigured social forces and relations across the globe since the Second World War have, at the very time of globalization, brought about different and new forms of the local and the multicultural, which emerge at many sites, one of the most significant being that planned and unplanned, compelled and so-called "free" migration, which has brought

the margins to the centre, the multi-cultural disseminated “particular” to the heart of the metropolitan western city. (p. 217)

For example, another layer, perhaps a “middle tier” of diasporic people, are elites from their homelands, such as India and Nigeria, who leave home and become dispersed through individual choice and opportunity. This “untimely appearance of the margins in the centre” (Hall, 2000) consists of global players—skilled professionals, employees of multinational companies, and internationally competitive intellectuals. This is the positionality from which a great deal of post-colonial theory is given voice, a point perhaps not fully acknowledged in the growing body of literature which valorizes hybridity (Ahmad, 1995). As Friedman (1997) points out, the truly marginalized of this world tend to have no truck with the type of anti-essentialist theory coming from this relatively privileged positionality, as they believe it leaves them with less political leverage than more essentialized, primordial identities.¹³

Entanglement in the social and political spheres inevitably is integrally related to enmeshment in the subjective domain. Whiteness and blackness were co-constructed (Steyn, 2001b), so were Europe and its “others” (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992). There has been a psychological enmeshment between the colonizer and the colonized (Bhabha, 1994; Memmi, 1990). Imaginations have been shaped within the “dialectics of empire and emancipation” (Nederveen Pieterse & Parekh, 1995 p. 14). As O’Callaghan (1995) argues, the “others” paradoxically ceased to exist when European expansion brought about a world in which the “others” were created (p. 42).

It is in this subjective realm, caught in the tensions between the interests of home and host country and the play of global politics, that many seek the defining qualities of diaspora. Diasporas, through this lens, can be understood as “communities imagined in a certain way” (Butler, 2002, p. 192); people who share a subjectivity that is dislocated from their primary centres of identification, shaped within contexts of limited power in relation to the centres which impact immediately upon their lives and which does not assimilate into the dominant identifications of the host society. The diaspora is bonded by shared “structures of feelings,” such as suffering (Gilroy, 1993; Werbner & Modood, 1997), a sense of precariousness (Tölölyan, 1996), reworked collective memories (Mankekar, 1994) and ambivalent future plans of return, myths of reconnection, that “echo back and forth” (Clifford, 1994). These structures of feeling contribute to a sense of being caught up in a common history, despite being scattered. Diasporic subjectivities

are grounded in founding narratives which originate away from the context in which their lives are lived out, but have enduring ethnic identities, real or ascribed, which link them to those contexts.¹⁴ Diasporic people do not identify with a single place—they may dwell in one place and feel solidarity elsewhere; their identities do not stake everything on a future in a single nation (Clifford, 1994). Mishra (1996), whose analysis draws on Lacan and Žižek, describes the diasporic imaginary as

any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously, or because of the political self-interest of a racialized nation-state, as a group that lives in displacement. (p. 423)

Probably the most salient point usually made in relation to diasporic identity, though, is the prevalence of hybridity—multiple, fluid identities—what Gilroy has called “restless (dis)continuity.” Hall (2000) emphasizes that even invocations of “traditional” identities in contemporary multicultural contexts do not replay authentic, uncontaminated selfhoods; they are not

[a] simple revival of archaic ethnicities, though such elements persist. Older traces are combined with new, emergent, forms of “ethnicity” which are often a product of uneven globalization and failed modernization. (p. 214)

Drawing on Bhabha, Hall (2000) explains hybridity in terms of cultural translation, a process which is not merely adaptation or assimilation, but a process by which cultures revise their own meaning systems through negotiating with the difference of the “other,” a transfer which is never seamless or complete (p. 226).

The notion of hybridity has undergone a sea-change as the post-colonial ethos has reworked the terrain of colonial knowledge systems (Gikandi, 1996; Kraidy, 1999). Earlier, the colonial imagination, as Young (1995) has shown, was pre-occupied with notions of degrees of “falling away” from the “pure” white norm. The hybrid was associated with all the negative consequences of transgression of racial boundaries. The abomination of the hybrid could act as a disciplinary strategy for maintaining the purity of the in-group. Increasingly, however, in the time of the “posts,” the notion has been reclaimed as a signifier that is paradoxically “celebrated as powerfully disruptive and yet theorized as commonplace and pervasive” (Werbner, 1997, p. 1). This paradox is perhaps not as contradictory as it seems; both of these rhetorical strategies can fit into a progressive, anti-essentialist agenda. On the one hand, to disrupt the oppressive effects

of essentialism requires recognizing the logical and psychological impossibility of the notion of purity where hybridity is not readily discerned, just as acknowledging the genetic variation within racial groups disrupts the notion of homogenous racial groupings. These are the *reductio ad absurdum* counters to arguments for distinct, bounded, homogenous social groupings—racial, ethnic, cultural or other. On the other hand, celebrating the hybrid where it *is* easily recognized, is to applaud and encourage the disruptive, the transgressive, and to turn conventional racist discourse upside down. The theorization of diaspora as a troubling, resistant, and interruptive presence, exerting its influence from the margins, generally fits into the latter category.

By this turn in the “post” literatures, diaspora has become a liberatory position, unseating modernity’s centres of power. Brah (1992), for example, writes that hybridity emerges from, and denotes, those distinct historical situations and domains of complex cultural formations produced by, and partially subverting, colonial dichotomies and hierarchies (p. 330). The cultural and political bifocality (Mankekar, 1994), the flexible citizenship (Ong, 1996), the dual loyalties (Cohen, 1997), the hyphenated ethnicities (Mishra, 1996), provide diasporic communities with the wherewithal to transcend the nation-state, to interpenetrate its once-sacrosanct bastions of homogeneity, and to provide alternative bases of global power. Kotkin (1992), for example, sees diasporic “tribes” as the bearers of cosmopolitanism; Clifford (1994) writes that diasporas are “interpretive communities where critical alternatives can be expressed” (p. 315) where “quests for non-exclusive practices of community, politics, and cultural difference” (p. 302) take place.

Bhabha (1994), one of the most celebrated of the post-colonial theorists, writes: What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (pp. 1-2)

? What is important for the argument of this dissertation, however, is that while diasporas are not uniformly dispossessed, nor are they necessarily the wellspring of emancipatory energy some postmodern/postcolonial theorists would have us believe (Barkhan &

Shelton, 1998; Henderson, 1995; Mankekar, 1994). Mishra (1996) cautions that diasporas may become romanticized as *the* ideal social condition, yet in reality diasporic groups construct the homeland in ways different from the people of the homelands themselves—often in purist, even racist and reactionary terms (p. 424) and contrary to the democratic tenor they promote in their host countries:

Under a gaze that threatens their already precarious sense of the “familiar temporariness”, diasporas lose their enlightened ethos and retreat into discourses of ethnic purity that are always the “imaginary” underside of their own constructions of the homeland (p. 426). . . . The democratic impulse of diasporas thus has an underside that explodes, under duress, under the imaginary gaze of the Other, into the semantics of exclusivism and separation. . . . At these moments the fantasy structure of the homeland appears as the imaginary haven, as the sublime sign, and absence, to which diasporas return for refuge. (p. 442)

An important part of the political subjectivity of those who dwell in small, displaced communities is the capacity to engage in “tactics of collective articulation and disarticulation” (Clifford, 1994, p. 315). Cohen (1996) argues that in the age of globalization it has become easier for diasporic communities to use the nation-state instrumentally, rather than to “revere” it “affectionately.” Through mobilizing sentiments and leverage in the host country, the diaspora may influence the politics of the home nation state. Not uncommonly, this influence may be conservative and backward looking, primarily motivated by the agendas they have for themselves in the host country, and invested in outdated political representations, though, of course, the connection may also be energized to forge alliances working towards greater social justice. The corollary is also true, of course, in that diasporic people may mobilize political, discursive and economic resources in the home state to influence processes in the territory in which they are settled. Those who have a leg in two different continents can be privileged in one context, and marginalized in another. The identity politics of dispersed groups can hinge on maximizing their positions by playing these dimensions off against each other. For example, Drzewiecka’s (Drzewiecka, 2002a, 2002b; Drzewiecka & Halualani, 2002) work shows how the Polish mainland and its eastern and western diasporas mutually have constructed themselves and each other in different ways over time in order to achieve specific ends within changing historical and political times.

While the ambivalence and multiple allegiances of diasporic groups can generate suspicion, hostility and accusations of divided loyalties among host populations, especially under conditions of strain (Van Hear, 1998), and may also make them subject to similar rejection from those who have “stayed put” (Safran, 1991),¹⁵ the ambivalent lines of responsibility for, and ambiguous feelings towards, these scattered people on the part of both host and home countries also create the conditions of possibility for diasporic people to manage the host-home-diaspora articulation to their advantage. It is largely this power that is sought after in the current turn to the “victim” position, indicated by the rising number of groups seeking to be understood as either diasporas or Creoles within current global dynamics. As Butler (2002), following Clifford, puts it:

[O]ppressed peoples that may once have conceived of their situation in the context of “majority-minority” power relations are now embracing diasporan discourse as an alternative. This more recent usage is a departure from earlier identifications in which a sense of powerlessness, longing, exile, and displacement was strongly associated with the Jewish diaspora. Membership in a diaspora now implies potential empowerment based on the ability to mobilize international support and influence in both the homeland and host-land. (p. 190)

The next section of this chapter argues the case for applying these two theories that address different axes of subjectivity, whiteness and diaspora, into the same location as a way of understanding the intersections that constitute the politics of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa.

(d) Diasporic Whiteness: Disrupting the Dichotomies?

This dissertation examines the particularities of a whiteness that is here called *diasporic whiteness*; it explores a particular dynamic of subjectivity operating within the complex location of being white in the Africanizing New South Africa. This dynamic is developing within the intersection between what are usually theorized as two diametrically opposed identity positionalities: the “centre” of mainstream racial identity construction, whiteness, and its relationally marginalized counterpart, diaspora. The context, then, provides an interesting example of how multiple, and even conflicting, aspects of identity compete for our single bodies (Gates & Kwame, 1995).

The question of whether white South Africans can be regarded as diaspora is not unproblematic. As has been indicated in the outline of the literature on diaspora above,

many critics are quite adamant that people who did not leave home under conditions of duress and/or who lived under advantaged conditions in the host country, do not meet the basic criteria for inclusion within the category of diaspora.

As has been discussed in the previous section, though, the choice of how to define diaspora is a function of identity politics and the notion that only permanently disadvantaged refugees form diasporic communities is by no means shared by all theorists writing in this field (Butler, 2002; Cohen, 1996, 1997). Cohen points out that the people from various parts of Europe that settled in South Africa overwhelmingly did so, in fact, to escape poor conditions in their home countries, and came to enjoy the better life that could be attained as a consequence of the South African racial economy. Cohen argues that the connection to centres of power has performed the desired effect for those “living in pockets of Europeanness”: even working class Britons were able to enjoy the lifestyle of lords in southern Africa; they coupled patricianship abroad to upper class pretensions at home (p. 78). This advantaged positioning does not concern Cohen; he argues that many diasporic people, including the members of the Jewish diaspora, have flourished in their countries of settlement. Indeed, he considers the potential for prospering in the host country one of the factors that typify the diasporic experience.

At the same time, Cohen (1997) regards South Africa as “that most difficult of countries to classify or typologize.” One obstacle he identifies to the establishment of a “pure” British dominion diaspora stemmed from competing claims to political hegemony posed by both Afrikaners and Africans. The difficulty, as he sees it, seems to be that white South Africans are a composite group, having arrived at different times, from different home countries in Europe, and were forged into a similar positionality and (an imperfect) sense of shared identity through the racial politics operating within the country (Steyn, 1999; Unterhalter, 1995). White South Africa, then is not an uncomplicated ethnic or national diaspora, as much as a diaspora of the supraethnic/national identification that became available to Europe as part of the formation of the white race (Balibar, 1990; Steyn, 2001b). The legitimacy of using *diaspora* to refer to a *racial* collectivity has, however, been acknowledged in other contexts.¹⁶ This analysis extends such an understanding in viewing white South Africans as part of a broader European dispersal that nevertheless identifies as having a unifying origin, a (constructed) commonality visibly marked through their whiteness.

While Cohen avers that global racial identification is disappearing, Frankenberg and Mani (1993) take a different view, maintaining that western “postcolonial” subjects

are still interpellated by classical colonialism itself, and that colonial discourses can be “hauled out apparently unchanged, and redeployed”:

The white subject, in short, remains enamoured of colonial imagery long after the heyday of direct rule, in ways that are both different and the same, changed, and not changed at all. (p. 299)

I believe that the analysis that follows in this work will justify my concurrence with Frankenberg and Mani that white racial identification is pervasive, enduring, and indeed, still a vehicle for stray, dispersed members in far-flung regions of the world to effect advantageous positional choices in relation to the racial others on this globe.

In fact, even if one were to concede the point that *diaspora* should not be applied to dispersed people who are linked to centres of power through dominance and privilege, one could still make out a case for the use of the term in this particular context. White South Africans themselves would be quick to tell an enquirer that subsequent to 1994 they no longer control the country, and that they are in a decentred position in relation to (black) African national power. Cohen comments on the changing status of white South Africans of British descent:

Until quite recently, many New Zealanders, Canadians, Australians and white South Africans and Rhodesians/Zimbabweans stubbornly clung on to British passports as a means of affirming their British identity and hedging their political bets. . . . The minority British diasporic communities in Zimbabwe, and increasingly in South Africa, are gradually being corralled into accepting black majority rule. Thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, may take up their opportunity to live in the UK, but over the next generation many will lose their “patrial” rights and will slowly adopt a single, local citizenship. (pp. 75, 77)

In other words, the change in the political dispensation has created a diasporic moment: an experience of displacement and disempowerment, of lack of fit in the country to which they migrated. By staying put, they might say, they have been stranded, their condition changed from overseers of the western project to an ill at ease minority constantly weighing up their losses and the possibilities and wisdom of reconnection with other societies in which European ethnicities dominate. As Ballard (2002) found:

For some, the importance of the West as a normative centre, and indeed a physical escape route, remains paramount in the face of the “third world

creeping in". . . . Optimists pin their hopes on the reinstatement of first world conditions while pessimists despair at the apparent impossibility of this ever being achieved. (p. 211)

The implication is therefore that a population group can *become* more, or less, diasporic through changing interethnic and political situations rather than because of essential attributes that remain constant and fixed throughout the history of the group. Loosening up the notion of *diaspora* seems to be salutary, and concurs with the undogmatic, anti-essentialist approach of Clifford (1992, 1994), who calls for a more complex notion of diaspora:

At different times in their history, societies may wax and wane in diasporism, depending on changing possibilities—obstacles, openings, antagonisms, and connections—in their host countries and transnationally. (p. 306)

In the late 20th century, all or most communities have diasporic dimensions (moments, tactics, practices, articulations). Some are more diasporic than others. I have suggested it is not possible to define diaspora sharply, either by recourse to essential features or to privative oppositions. But it is possible to perceive a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement. . . . The language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home. (p. 310).

In line with this anti-essentialist reading of Clifford, therefore, this dissertation argues that the current political context is bringing out the diasporic dimension in the experience of white South Africans, and that this dimension can be discerned in their tactics, practices, and discourses. In short, aspects of what could be termed a diasporic subjectivity are under (re)construction, and it is this “slice” of white South African subjectivity that the dissertation explores. This diasporic dimension has similarities to, and differences from, what may be regarded as more “typical” diasporas, but this atypicality is exactly what makes it a useful site to analyse. Yet again, this approach accords with the direction given by Clifford:

Different diasporic maps of displacement and connection can be compared on the basis of family resemblance, of shared elements, no subset of which is defined as essential to the discourse. A polythetic field

would seem to be most conducive to tracking rather than policing the contemporary range of diasporic forms. (pp. 306-7)

In sum, while decentred in the local political context, whiteness links white South Africa to the centres of western international power: economically, culturally, politically, socially, familial-ly. But their whiteness also makes them a highly visible minority in the context of Africa. This creates one of the basic conditions for them to experience their lives as diasporic. Certainly, the vision of the apocalypse, the reversal of fortunes that would herald black majority rule and relegate whites to a vulnerable visible minority, has always rattled around in the white South African psyche (see Thornton, 1996). It was always implicitly understood that if the “black peril” were to triumph, and whites were to lose control of the state, it would mark the moment at which the colonial rulers could turn into a “genuine” diaspora.

Both their whiteness and their diasporization are functions of broader global movements, colonial and post-colonial, and require analysis in terms of the politics of their location (Mankekar, 1994), of their positioning within the intersecting currents of power that operate upon this particular grouping in this specific social site. Within this force-field, there are white South Africans who grapple with how to make meaningful adjustments that would align the previous ruling class with the goals of a democratic, non-racial, but nevertheless, complex African society. Certainly, however, this is not the case for all the discursive patterns emerging within the minority group. There are also powerful discourses that attempt to find—both despite and because of the new dispensation—justifications, rationalizations, and motivations for preserving the privileged positionality the scatterings of Europe have enjoyed over the last three or four centuries. These discursive constructions are vehicles for resistance to the new order, and they are the focus of interest in this study.

The scope of this dissertation does not include the discursive constructions emanating from those white South Africans who are emigrating. Ironically, the term “diaspora” seems to be more readily used to describe this secondary layer of movement, as white South Africans “regroup,” relocating (mostly) to other parts of the Anglo-American world: North America, Australasia, Britain (Schönfeldt-Aultman, 2001a, 2002; Van Rooyen, 2000). Yet even in the case of this secondary layer of scattering, the applicability of this term to the white South African communities in the USA has been marked as problematic, and for much the same kinds of reasons as the “parent”

community is regarded as troublesome. Schönfeldt-Aultman (2001b), for example, works with a definition of diaspora as a visible minority group, a resistant, activist collective (p. 19). He rehearses the concerns about the power and privilege discussed above: those settling in the USA, where his studies are situated, did not have to leave South Africa as a consequence of persecution; they are mostly privileged members of their “home” society and become part of the same class in their new locations. Perhaps most significantly, as a group they can easily assimilate into the host culture and thus avoid being racially, or otherwise, marked as a minority group. Once they settle in the USA, white South Africans automatically have access to the dominant social formations by virtue of their whiteness. They are “in many ways similarly identified with a hegemonic ideology, state, and identity. . . things they are more apt to support and encourage than resist” (p. 17). The primary resistance they seem to engage in is against the new (black) government back “home.” This prompts Schönfeldt-Aultman to ask: “What kind of resistance is it? A resistance that is accommodating of racial privilege, to a national identity that is racist/privileged?” (p. 18). Schönfeldt-Aultman even identifies some behaviour on the part of “ex-pats” that he labels as “*counter-diasporic resistance*” (my emphasis), such as *disidentifying* themselves with their homeland, and claiming to be British or Australian to avoid being castigated as racist and supportive of apartheid. It seems that one could argue, therefore, that a reason for white emigration from post-apartheid South Africa is exactly to *avoid* the diasporic moment being experienced by those whites who stay behind, who remain as a visible minority group, and who are forming what is actually a more typically diasporic subjectivity, often engaging in the collective, strategic, resistant behaviour for which diasporas are often known. It is this resistant stance that this dissertation attempts to interpret more closely.

What the earlier quotation of Zakes Mda shows, is that that the term “diaspora” has more readily been applied to English-speaking South Africans, whose link to Britain is more accentuated. I believe the discussion in this dissertation shows that the sense of displacement is currently more acute for Afrikaners, who feel shaken in their sense of belonging, in security of land ownership, and in their cultural bearings than many of their English counterparts whose identification has always been more dualistic, and less dependent on living in Africa. The consequence is that some Afrikaners, too, are now constituting this displacement in diasporic terms. Within both these linguistic and cultural groups, therefore, there are those who are dwelling on their sense of being strangers in a strange land and of having limited agency over their fates within the

national borders. Those who are framing themselves in such terms, (re)activate their connectedness to ethnic affinities elsewhere to provide security and guarantees, or else attempt to ensure that what they bring to the national agenda will render them indispensable to the majority. Both of these are “typical” diasporic behavioural patterns, ways of coping with feelings of vulnerability. Both of these reactions are found within both cultural groups, although in differing degrees, as they “wax” in diasporism, engaging in “moments, tactics, practices, articulations” to develop “a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement”(Clifford, 1994, p. 310). And ironically, even this re-identification with Europeanness and whiteness, is being assisted by the current acceleration of globalization. As Gabriel (1998) has shown, the cross-fertilizing processes of Anglicization and Americanization, greatly assisted by the globalizing media, have helped to configure whiteness on both sides of the Atlantic, and have contributed to the normalizing of whiteness through both cultural production and consumption (p. 187). Whiteness in South Africa is able to capitalize on these cross-flows of symbolic resources.

In sum, therefore, while taking cognizance of the factors that some would feel disqualify the use of the term, this dissertation takes the view that using the *diasporan framework* to elucidate *aspects of the processes of community formation* as Butler (2002, p. 194) suggests, has valuable explanatory potential in this context. The diasporan lens enables certain specifics of the subjectivity being constructed within the white community in the post-apartheid South Africa location to be dis-closed, aspects which are profoundly part of their life world, but might otherwise evade examination.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the theoretical underpinnings for the diasporic whiteness that this dissertation attempts to explore more closely. It has given an overview of the literature on whiteness, and on diaspora, and then indicated why these two seemingly incompatible subject positions actually are intricately conjoined in the contradictory location that white South Africans inhabit since the demise of the white-centric Old South Africa. The next chapter positions the methodological approach that informs this work within the quite diverse grouping of theory/practice that is collectively known as Discourse Theory.

NOTES (cont.)

1. Of course, as Roediger (1998, 2002) points out, this generally accepted dating of the emergence of writing on whiteness is not really accurate. A substantial literature on whiteness has been produced over a long period of time by black people in the United States such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright. Also see Bay (2000). In the colonial context writers such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi come to mind. In South Africa, Sol Plaatje's writings, as one example, contain many astute observations of the contradictions informing the ways of "Europeans" in South Africa (see Willan, 1996).

2. Originally published in 1988 as *Wellesley College Center for Research on Women Working Paper Series, 189*.

3. Ware and Beck (2002) comment that "until now the field might be more accurately described as 'American whiteness studies,'" and cite the need for "a comparative focus that is both alert to the transnational relationships within the cultures of racism and sensitive to the histories of specific local and national arenas in which racial power is forged." (p. 14)

4. Bonnett (2000), however, argues that whiteness has actually often been a characteristic of anti-racist work, in that whiteness has tended to be approached by anti-racists as a fixed, asocial category rather than something with a history and geography. In other words, anti-racists have, for the most part, yet to become aware of, and escape from, the practice of treating whiteness as . . . something that defines the "other" but is not itself subject to others' definitions. (p. 138). He regards the area of "White Studies" as providing exactly the intervention needed for "more historically and theoretically sophisticated anti-racist readings of whiteness." (p. 138)

5. Dubow (Dubow, 1995) positions his work as follows:

It may now be appropriate for white historians to become rather more curious about their own collective pasts, not so much in the spirit of *mea culpa* as with the view to recognizing *themselves* as historical agents and products. It must be possible to own one's own history, though not necessarily to identify with it. (p. 5)

6. An upper class suburb of Cape Town.

7. All these articles were downloaded from the SA Monitor, on the IJR's website http://www.ijr.org.za/sa_mon/home.html on 8 April 2003.

8. In the words of Tölölyan:

[The] vision of a homogenous nation is now being replaced by a vision of the world as a 'space' continually reshaped by forces—cultural, political, technological, demographic, and above all economic—whose varying intersections in real estate constitute every 'place' as a heterogeneous and disequilibriated site of production, appropriation, and consumption, of negotiated identity and affect. (1991, p. 6)

9. The word is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over), implying to scatter widely. (Cohen, 1997)

NOTES (cont.)

10. Tölölyan (1996) argues for “a return to diaspora” to stem its becoming a promiscuously capacious category that is taken to include all the adjacent phenomena to which it is linked but from which it actually differs in ways that are constitutive, that in fact make a viable definition of diaspora possible. (p. 8)
11. The term used by Deleuze and Guattari to analyse a number of texts regarded as “border writing.” Deleuze and Guattari use the term in the context of “minor literature” which writes against the grain of canonical literature, and which describes displacement and dislocation of identities, signifiers and signs. (See Brah, 1996, p. 203).
12. Mishra (1996) comments that these two diasporas are extreme instances of the diasporic imaginary, and have been treated with particular disdain by nation-states precisely because they “exemplify in varying degrees characteristics of a past that nation-states want to repudiate” (p. 425).
13. See also Mendoza (2003) who argues that “indigenization” is a necessary first step in any cultural struggle to achieve self-determination and a point of departure for subject formation. Only once this footing has been established can historically marginalized peoples afford the luxury of anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism.
14. Clifford (1994) describes diaspora in terms of “forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside with a difference” (p. 308), and who achieve “selective accommodation” within the host societies. Cohen (1997) defines diasporic consciousness as “demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background” (p. ix).
15. See, for example, Halualani (2003) who describes the struggles around the notion of “authenticity” between island Hawaiians and the diaspora on the mainland USA.
16. See, for example, Butler (2002), p. 191.

METHODOLOGY

Discourse Analysis

Discourse can be understood as patterns of meaning that organize the worlds that we inhabit. They are systems of sense-making, which define what is understood as knowledge, regulate social behaviour, and exert power effects on social organization (Fairclough, 1995a; Gotsbachner, 2001; Parker, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Discourse analysis¹ has become the method of choice for researchers with a leaning towards social constructionism. As a broad, interdisciplinary church, discourse analysis covers a range of approaches, varying firstly, in the degree to which they retain a measure of insistence on non-discursive, structural “givens” in social organization or see discursivity as explaining social reality in its entirety; secondly, in the degree and manner in which human agency is theorized and prioritized; and thirdly, in respect of the role that situated language plays in research and in the methods used to “get at” the meaning in the texts.²

One classification of the different approaches employed to analyse discourse is offered by Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), who delimit three broad schools:³ (i) Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse analysis, which is the “purest” post-structuralist position and focuses on the ways in which social construction works through, and upon, broad, large-scale discursive patterning; (ii) critical discourse analysis,⁴ which is the most dualistic in

terms of maintaining an insistence on non-discursive material practices (which require other social theories and methodologies than discourse analysis to excavate), and focuses on the linguistic aspects of specific texts; and (iii) discursive psychology,⁵ which studies situated discourse to show the active use of discourse by agents to achieve social ends, often construed as an essentially rhetorical activity.

In any research, ontology, epistemology and methodology need to be congruent. For this reason, Phillips and Jørgensen argue that it is necessary for a researcher employing discourse analysis to situate herself clearly within the terrain. This does not exclude the possibility of using concepts or analytical tools from various schools of discourse analysis, or even from outside the field. In fact, they strongly recommend this multiperspectival approach,⁶ but it does require working consciously with the discursive analytical frameworks and the research material, clearly thinking through issues of compatibility, doing adequate “translations” where required, and being transparent in reporting the research:

It is possible to create one’s own package by combining elements from different discourse analytical perspectives and, if appropriate, non-discourse analytical perspectives. Such *multiperspectival* work is not only permissible but positively valued in most forms of discourse analysis. The view is that different perspectives provide different forms of knowledge about a phenomenon so that, together, they produce a broader understanding. Multiperspectival work is distinguished from an eclecticism based on a mishmash of disparate approaches without serious assessment of their relations with each other. Multiperspectivalism requires that one weighs the approaches up against each other, identifying what kind of (local) knowledge each approach can supply and modifying the approaches in the light of these considerations. (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 4. Italics in the original.)

The section that follows therefore delineates the position that informs this dissertation, indicating key discourse analytical concepts that frame the analysis, and where appropriate, the reasons for “appropriating” them as analytical tools. Such a sketch is, of necessity, a greatly simplified version of the complex philosophies that gave rise to the knowledge edifices that have been constructed upon them, but the purpose of the section is limited to situating the work that follows, rather than providing a detailed exploration

of the nuances of sophisticated theories. In other words, as this dissertation sets out to study a discursive terrain constructed by a social grouping, which I am calling *white talk*, it is necessary to ask (i) “What is the nature of discourse, and how is it related to other key notions of *the social*, such as meaning, subjectivity, group?” (ontology) (ii) “How can one get to know about a discursive terrain?” (epistemology) and (iii) “What, practically, does one do to get this knowledge?” (methodology).

Ontological Positioning

In outlining some of the main social constructionist concepts that are subscribed to in this work, I am following Phillips and Jørgensen’s (2002) division of theories of discursive practice into the three approaches named above.

Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory

Social constructionism entails the ontological assumption that our ways of talking about the world do not reflect what is “out there” in a neutral, immediate way, but actually create, or constitute, the reality in which we live (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Best & Kellner, 1991; Fairclough, 1995a; Gergen, 1991, 1999, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sarup, 1993; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The philosophical premises of constructivism are therefore anti-foundational, in that social constructions are regarded as historically and culturally specific, contingent, and unfinished. And because our identities, knowledge, social relations are all constructed in and through discourse, rather than fixed, the premises of social constructionism are also anti-essentialist.

This dissertation depends most heavily on the social constructionist position articulated by Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau, 1993, 1996, 1994; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c). Some of the most influential concepts taken from their work to articulate the particular understandings contained in this dissertation are briefly noted below.

Discourse

Post-structuralism emphasizes that meaning is always unstable; the social domain is always contested. Signs/signifiers, including our social practices, are invested with meaning not through their relation to “reality” but through their relationship to other possible meanings. Notions of “truth” are always (temporarily) settled through fixing meaning within the context of discursive contestation and struggle in a field of meaning

that is ultimately always undecidable. Laclau and Mouffe do not distinguish between a non-discursive and discursive reality. This does not imply a naïve idealist ontology (Barrett, 1994; Best & Kellner, 1991), merely that our knowledge of the physical world does not exist separately from human meaning-making activities:

[T]he discursive character of an object does not, by any means, imply putting its *existence* into question. The fact that a football is only a football as long as it is integrated within a system of socially constructed rules does not mean that it thereby ceases to be a physical object. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1990, pp. 100-1. Italics in the original.)

Discourses have “real” consequences in that certain social possibilities may be opened up by particular fixings of meaning, whereas others may become “unthinkable,” thus reducing possibility. The particular shape of the social is created through the productive operation of power channelled according to closures of meaning that exclude other possibilities of organization. Discourses are therefore material—institutions, identities and knowledge formations are all effects of discourse. All new articulations of meaning have an effect on existing discourses, which they may reproduce, challenge or change. An important implication of this understanding of discourse is that far from merely reflecting what is “out there,” discourse actually constitutes our world; until something is represented in discourse, it isn’t part of our reality. Discursive struggle is the struggle over reality.⁷

Articulation

The concept of “articulation” is key to how elements (open signs) are assigned fixed meaning in relation to each other, and around certain key “nodal points,” bringing closure (albeit temporary and incomplete) and thus producing a discourse. The flow of meaning is reduced and the possibilities for other articulations are limited, although the possibility of challenge is always there (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985):

[W]e will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse (p. 105).

The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this

fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, as a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity (p. 113).

Those signifiers that are highly contested, with different discourses competing to articulate them in alternative ways, are called “floating signifiers,” and it is in the struggle to organize society differently through vying articulations of such available signifiers that the highly political nature of the social is most apparent:

[P]olitics, far from being confined to a superstructure, occupies the role of what we can call an *ontology of the social*. If politics is the ensemble of the decisions taken in an undecidable terrain—that is a terrain in which power is constitutive—then the social can consist only in the sedimented forms of a power that has blurred the traces of its own contingency. (Laclau, 1996, p. 103. Italics in the original.)

Ideology

Antagonism occurs when discourses compete in ways that are contradictory. The contingency of meaning becomes highly visible through the active struggle that takes place in the society to settle the signifiers.

The moment of antagonism where the undecidable nature of the alternatives and their resolution through power relations becomes fully visible constitutes the field of the “political.” (Laclau, 1990, p. 35)

When meanings become fixed, it is the consequence of one way of sense-making having won over other, often antagonistic, possibilities. However, certain antagonisms may become naturalized through the power of hegemony, when empty signifiers (lack) become filled with a particular content that presents itself as serving the wider population. The prevailing articulations may then become sedimented⁸ through the weightiness of habit and time. This makes it difficult to recognize them as the “victors” of previous discursive conflict; the meanings seem to have been permanent, just simply “common sense” and “objective.” Because the “objective” hides the fact that the prevailing sense-making is actually dependent on the suppression of other possibilities, the objective is *ideological* (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Ideology, in other words, concerns the “non-recognition of the precarious character of any positivity, of the

impossibility of any ultimate suture” (Barrett, 1994, p. 260); it is the hiding of the political.

Insofar as an act of institution has been successful, a “forgetting of the origins” tends to occur; the system of possible alternatives tends to vanish and the traces of the original contingency to fade. In this way, the instituted tends to assume the form of a mere objective presence. (Laclau, 1990, p. 34)

The process by which ~~the contingency~~ of the discourse is dis-covered is deconstruction, ~~which reveals how any particular articulation has been a consequence of social/political/power, within “the system of real historic options that were discarded”~~ (p. 34).

Subjectivity

Different discourses make different subject positions available to individuals, setting limits to the scope that the individual has for imagining the “self,” and to personal agency. As a subject in the discourse, an individual acquires a position from which to speak. In this way, discourses speak through individuals, which leads Laclau and Mouffe to see the subject as decentred. Because subjectivity is never complete, but is in fact split and driven by a Lacanian lack (Laclau, 1994), we always seek our identity in the representations available in discourse—we may see ourselves in a subject position, accept it or reject it. This is the process of identification. Moreover, subject positions are constructed within the flow and contestation of discourses that wish to assign different meanings to the person within each. Identity is therefore also fragmented, multiple, contradictory, displaced, contingent, precarious, overdetermined, but temporarily fixed at intersecting identifications within competing discursive formations (Laclau, 1994). This always takes place within power relations:

Our dissertation is that the constitution of a social identity is an act of power and that identity as such *is* power. (Laclau, 1990, p. 31. Italics in the original.)

Social groups, society and myth

In post-structuralist ontology, social groups are always created through social processes, not pre-given either biologically or through divisive operations of base and superstructure. Rather, groups are always created and shaped through the power effects

of discourse. Social groups, society, social identities, all these are a function of discourse, and therefore are decentred and ultimately unstable. Any one particular understanding of the social is an attempt at articulation, at fixing social organization in line with a particular set of interests based on excluding other possibilities of collective identification. Group formation is an inherently political activity, and which social groups become politically relevant depends on discursive struggle. Similarly, different social groups have unequal access to those subject positions that have the power to challenge or change the “objective,” and are thus more, or less, constrained. Categorization through representation therefore is deeply political, affecting the possibilities for action of those subjected in particular ways. There is always a discrepancy, dislocation, between the representative and the represented:

[T]he field of social identities is not one of full identities, but of the ultimate failure to be constituted” (Laclau, 1990, p. 38)

The floating signifier that refers to the potential totality of society, and which different discourses struggle to invest with competing meaning, is called a *myth*. The myth of a society delimits what can be regarded as possible (the horizons of the possible), it stems from “the perception or intuition of a fullness that cannot be granted by the reality of the present” (p. 63). In any society, the understanding of what counts as “natural groups” affects the way in which the myth of the society is constituted. A change in the notion of what comprises society will change the articulation of groups, and vice versa, as representations take on different content, and different dislocations give rise to different expressions by which the fullness could be achieved. “Social myths are essentially incomplete: Their content is constantly reconstituted and displaced” (p. 63).

Dislocation

As a consequence of the processes of sedimentation, we generally experience social reality as quite stable, reproduced by succeeding articulations. Nevertheless, even in the case of stable, sedimented discourses, there is an element of re-articulation with other potential meanings available in the total field of discursivity, a process that involves creative agency:

The social world presents itself to us, primarily, as a sedimented ensemble of social practices accepted at face value, without questioning the founding acts of their institution. If the social world, however, is not entirely defined in terms of repetitive, sedimented practices, it is because

the social always overflows the institutionalized frameworks of “society”, and because social antagonisms show the inherent contingency of those frameworks. Thus a dimension of construction and creation is inherent in all social practice. The latter do not involve only repetition, but also reconstruction. (Laclau, 1994, p. 3)

The relationship between the institutional/structural and the subject is never identical—there is always an element of dislocation. Under certain conditions of crisis (which may be brought about or accelerated by political activism), however, the myth of a society may weaken, or even collapse, and the representations of groups are called into question. At such times, there is a generalization of deeper dislocation of identity, nodal points become dis-articulated, floating, and there will be attempts to articulate the signifiers into a new discursive patterning. The space opened up by dislocation, if it is extensive and deep enough, allows for new social orders, new power centres, to emerge.

A dislocated structure opens up the space for a multitude of possibilities of re-articulations which are by definition indeterminate. A dislocated structure is thus an open structure in which the crisis can be resolved in a variety of directions. From this it is clear that any attempt at re-articulation will be an eminently political project.

The more dislocated a structure is, the more the field of decisions not determined by it will expand. The recompositions and rearticulations will thus operate at increasingly deeper structural levels, thereby leading to an increase in the role of the “subject” and to history becoming less and less repetitive. (Laclau, 1990, p. 39-40)

Such a time therefore also has the potential to reveal “new possibilities of historical action,” for social creativity:

The world is less “given” and must be increasingly constructed. But this is not just a construction of the world, but of the social agents who transform themselves and forge new identities as a result. (Laclau, 1990, p. 40)

Discursive Psychology

A significant difference between discourse analysis, as theorized by Laclau and Mouffe, and discursive psychology lies in the value which discursive psychology attaches to the active choices of human agency within *situated* discourse, i.e. discursive practices in

specific contexts where language is in action, rather than focusing almost entirely on the meaning content of broad, wide-ranging discursive systems that structure society. The field of discursive psychology itself consists of schools which, in discourse analytical terms, are antagonistic in terms of ontological assumptions (Burman & Parker, 1993).

The following exposition of discursive psychology by Wetherell (1998), indicates a clear compatibility with the approach taken in this dissertation:

Analysis works by carving out a piece of the argumentative social fabric for closer examination [while maintaining an interest in the] argumentative threads which run through this set as warp and woof connecting it in again with the broader cloth. . . . In analysing our always partial piece of the argumentative texture we look also to the broader forms of intelligibility running through the texture form generally.

(p. 403)

Interpretive repertoire

This study is concerned with the way in which white South Africans are actively constructing a particular kind of subject position—the subject that “talks white”—of which they can avail themselves. The notion of “interpretive repertoire” which is used in discursive psychology, most particularly by Wetherell and Potter (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Potter, 1988, 1992) has proved a useful concept to analyse the nature of this discourse. An interpretive repertoire is a “culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes (doxa)” (Wetherell, 1998, p. 400), which provides the context of argumentation, it is the “backcloth for the realization of locally managed positions in actual interaction” (p. 400). Social interaction therefore has emergent and transformative properties, as participants orient selves to the discourses, and use them to perform certain actions. The notion is not really divergent from Laclau and Mouffe, who also see a role for agency in the construction of discourse, particularly in the construction of identity,⁹ and who also understand existing discourse as providing resources for new articulations. Therefore the term does not require specific “translation” to be ontologically compatible with the other assumptions informing this work. This concept is used where it is most particularly useful: to emphasize the active choices being made by white South Africans from talk circulating in the society, particularly as these require putting a new “spin” on such existing discourses.

Rhetorical force/Strategy

The notions of the social as inescapably political and contested, as always unfinished, and for which the achievement of a “totality” is “impossible,” is central to Laclau and Mouffe. Laclau (1993) refers to society as a “vast argumentative texture through which people construct their reality” (p. 341). Some scholars in discursive psychology, however, place the argumentative/rhetorical/strategic nature of the construction of reality more centrally in their framework, and this emphasis has been particularly important in framing the argument of this dissertation. The rhetorical lens of scholars such as Billig (1988a; 1988b; 1991; 1995; 1996) sensitizes the discussion to how each attempt to articulate a discourse in a particular way is always in competition with some other possibility(ies) that are likely to be championed by other groups. Discourses therefore need to be recognized as persuasive texts:

All discourse can be considered to be not only dialogically, but rhetorically organized with regard to actual or potential alternatives.
(Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992)

The same discursive resources may be used for very different rhetorical ends. This added nuance to understanding discourse alerts the analyst to the strategic and tactical element in the situated production of texts, an approach that is, of course, finally established in the rhetorical tradition of communication studies (Drzewiecka, 2002a, 2002b; Drzewiecka & Halualani, 2002; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

Critical Discourse Analysis

The ontological assumptions of the area known as critical discourse analysis are less compatible with those of Laclau and Mouffe than are those of the discursive psychology theorists above. This is because of the realist ontology and more conventional understanding of ideology that is retained within most of these theories, in which non-discursive influences partially structure the discursive, and also because of the strong emphasis on (functionalist) methodologies drawn from linguistics used to perform close textual analysis. Nevertheless, insights into aspects of how the structuring of language/signs can contribute to discursive closure or change have been taken from the work of Fairclough and Van Dijk.

Interdiscursivity

Fairclough (1989; 1992; 1995a; 1995c) has described an aspect of language that he calls *interdiscursivity*. The notion describes how “discourse types are combined in new and complex ways” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 71) and therefore is particularly useful to show change in discourse. The new “interdiscursive mixes” both reflect and bring about mutation in understandings of reality. Because the concept is in some measure already drawn from post-structuralism, it was not regarded as incompatible with the basic assumptions of discourse pervading this dissertation.¹⁰

Elite discourse

The work of Van Dijk (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 1998; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Van Dijk & Wodak, 1988) is mostly focused on the subjugation of one group by another through discursive effects, and how the discursive practices further the interests of dominant groups (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 63). Van Dijk also includes an element of cognitivism in his approach, as cognitive structures are seen to mediate the social and the discursive. The description of “elite discourse” as Van Dijk has developed it across many texts, however, can fit the criterion of a broad, systemic articulation of meaning which attempts to hegemonize an antagonistic struggle between social groups, and it has been used in this manner in this dissertation.

Semiotics

Best and Kellner (1991) point out that discourse theory is a development from semiotics, which it has largely replaced (p. 26). Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) mention the field of social semiotics only in passing, but do note that social semiotics, “an alternative approach that takes as its object of analysis the articulation between sign systems and exosemiotic processes” (Gottdiener, 1994, p. 170) shares many basic assumptions with critical discourse analysis. One of these is that discourse encompasses not only written and spoken language, but also visual images, which are often analysed along similar lines to linguistic texts (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 61). This recognition has been drawn upon in Chapter Four, which analyses two South African films.

Semiosphere

An analytical tool that has been drawn from the area of semiotics is Lotman’s (1991) notion of the semiosphere. It has proved to be useful when a concept was needed

to refer to the “totality” of signification available within a society or community. The nearest alternative would be Laclau and Mouffe’s *field of discursivity*, but as this carries the idea of the reservoir, or surplus, of meaning which is specifically *excluded by a particular articulatory practice* (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 27), it is considerably more circumscribed in scope. Lotman sees the semiosphere, “the whole semiotic space of culture,” as the cultural equivalent of the *biosphere* in environmental theory (p. 125). It is the heterogeneous totality of the “dynamic process of influence, transformation and coexistence within the space of culture” (Papastergiades, 1997, p. 268).

Other disciplines

The above thumbnail sketches cover the most important concepts drawn from disciplinary bases that specifically theorize the discursive construction of the social domain. Since the “linguistic turn” in social theory, however, most disciplines in the social sciences and humanities have well developed traditions of discursive analysis to their subject matter. For that reason, interdisciplinarity is greatly facilitated. Where concepts are appropriately conceptualized, or conceptualizable, in terms of constructivist ontology, these have been taken up without any further explanation. In this respect, the feminist formulation of “politics of location” (Frankenberg & Mani, 1993; Mankekar, 1994) has already been referred to, and Baumann’s (1997) anthropological work on “discursive competence” in negotiating identity in intercultural contexts has required no additional “translation” or explanation.

Epistemology

If we live in an era of deconstruction, it is because the crisis of essentialist universalism as a self-asserted ground has led our attention to the contingent grounds (in the plural) of its emergence and to the complex processes of its construction. This operation is, *sensu stricto*, *transcendental*: it involves a retreat from an object to its conditions of possibility. (Laclau, 1994, p. 2)

The above quotation from Laclau encapsulates the change in epistemology that accompanies the shift from a realist ontology to social constructivism, from positivism to discourse analysis. The researcher enters into relationship with the social construction process. If we cannot get to the reality outside of discourse, as Laclau and Mouffe maintain, the analyst must study discourse itself, and try to understand why we think of

the world the way we do, explore the patterns in the discourse, and identify the social consequences of how people talk, write, and represent issues. If attempts to present current social arrangements as natural and inevitable are the outcomes of concealed earlier contestations, then the task of the researcher is uncovering those “conditions of possibility,” to try to answer the question “why do we know the way we do?” rather than “what do we know?” The analyst investigates common sense understandings, what is accepted as true, but could have been different, so as to understand how we create reality through, and within, discourse. If the struggle to invest signifiers with meanings, and then to stabilize this meaning, is how groups come to be formed, gain dominance or lose it, silence others, channel material rewards, determine quality of life of “self” and “other,” then the task of discourse analysis is to recognize the struggle as it may be occurring in contemporary discourses, and to name the signifying processes as they create or limit possibilities (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 29-39).

Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) explain the epistemological implications of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of discourse analysis:

[E]very concrete fixation of the signs’ meaning is contingent; it is possible but not necessary. It is precisely those constant attempts that never completely succeed which are the entry point for discourse analysis. The aim of discourse analysis is to map out the processes in which we struggle about the way in which the meaning of signs is to be fixed, and the processes by which some fixations of meaning become so conventionalized that we think of them as natural. (p. 26)

What different understandings of reality are at stake, where are they in antagonistic opposition to one another? And what are the consequences if one or the other wins out and hegemonically pins down the meaning of the floating signifier? (p. 51)

All research outputs are participants in the construction of discourses and either reduce or expand the possibilities of social articulation. In other words, discourse analysis partakes in the political, and according to Laclau and Mouffe’s stance, becomes effective in deepening and expanding democracy when it is articulated in a discourse of “radical and plural democracy”:

The democratic process in present-day societies can be considerably deepened and expanded if it is made accountable to the demands of large

sections of the population—minorities ethnic groups and so on—who traditionally have been excluded from it. Liberal democratic theory and institutions have in this sense to be deconstructed. As they were originally thought for societies which were far more homogenous than the present ones, they were based on all kinds of unexpressed assumptions which no longer obtain in the present situation. (Laclau, 1996, p. 33-4)

The framework from which the interrogation of discourses proceeds should include a notion of citizenship that embraces the social rights of justice, equality and community (Mouffe, 1992b, 1992c):

By combining the ideal of rights and pluralism with the ideas of public spiritedness and ethico-political concern, a new modern democratic conception of citizenship could restore dignity to the political and provide the vehicle for the construction of a radical democratic hegemony. (Mouffe, 1992a, p. 238)

Best and Kellner (1991) regard one of the contributions of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory to be their emphasis on the need for "struggle over the meaning of terms such as democracy and rights in order to articulate new political identities" (p. 200). This struggle is an inherent part of the process of producing knowledge:

Our central problem is to identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and changing relations of subordination. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 153)

In effect, therefore, the findings of research are value-mediated, in that the values of the investigator, aligned with the general objectives of critical inquiry, influence what is "found" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). This means that the conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology, between knower and known, becomes untenable. "Findings" are literally created as the investigation proceeds (p.111), and are a product of the engagement of the discourses that frame the researcher's approach, with the sense-making in the text.

The implication of this for the researcher is the need for self-reflexivity in the face of the contingency of truth and knowledge, and the inevitable contingency of her research product. The researcher needs to (i) make clear her own position, and (ii) assess the possible social consequences of her discursive production.

Self-reflexivity

Both the literature on whiteness, and that of the discourse analytical position which underpins the methodology used in this study, emphasize the importance of self-reflexivity. The need for such self-awareness in the whiteness literature rests mainly on the difficulties of how one can work with/on a racial category, without reinscribing it. The concern is that whiteness study may actually keep racial categories alive. Ware (Ware & Back, 2002) asks:

To put this bluntly, how do we—whether in the United States, Europe, Australia, or South Africa—study the discursive production of whiteness in all its locally and socially differentiated forms, and how much does it matter not who we are when we do this, but where we are, theoretically, when we do it. Where and how should critics and enemies of whiteness locate or reposition themselves, and what are the most effective strategies for forcing a separation between an imposed identity that is still based primarily on skin color, on the one hand, and the less visible signs of identification and political solidarity, on the other? (p. 30)

Refreshingly, Ware believes that a rigorous sense of the politics of one's location, coupled with commitment to the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of whiteness studies, provides a way through the entrapment of race.

My point is simply that the study of whiteness offers to all those individuals caught up in racial discourse against their will potentially the opportunities to make sense of their own political location and to recognize a degree of agency in challenging (and therefore changing) the many ways in which the beneficiaries of racial hierarchy are complicit with injustice. (p. 31)

As a white South African woman, who has been grappling with some of the double binds engendered by the positioning of my birth and the difficulty of promoting more deeply democratic social understandings against the grain of the “stickiness” of race in social discourse and organization, I can only concur with Ware's viewpoint. Having worked in this area for close on a decade now, I find the challenges on both fronts ongoing. Of course it is never possible for someone brought up in white South Africa to get completely outside the discourses of whiteness that I analyse. Yet it is possible to find subject positions in antagonistic discourses that provide the sense of agency that Ware

refers to above, and that challenge ongoing attempts to block new possibilities for a better life for all South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa. Because some reflections on the politics of my location are in the public domain (Steyn, 1996, 1997a, 1998b, 1998c, 2001b), I am not going to dwell on them here, but rather just reaffirm the appreciation I have felt for the liberatory windows that working in the whiteness paradigm has provided.

Methodology

The work which follows consists of four (sub)studies, each of which was approached as an inquiry in its own right, but which, when collected together, provide a broad ranging portrayal of the discursive terrain I am calling *white talk*.

Delimiting the discourse(s)

One of the immediate practical challenges in trying to describe a particular patterning within all the discursive activity in a society is to decide where one discourse ends and another begins (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 143). Phillips and Jørgensen point out that none of the approaches to discourse analysis provide an adequate answer to this problem, and suggest that researchers treat discourse

as an analytical concept, that is as an entity that the researcher projects onto the reality in order to create a framework for study. This means that the question of delimitation is determined strategically in relation to the research aims. Thus the research aims determine the “distance” the researcher assumes in relation to the material and hence to what can be treated as a single discourse. (pp. 143-4)

The onus is on the researcher to establish that the delimitations she has made are reasonable, through clearly indicating such features as:

The aspects of the world to which the discourse ascribes meaning;

The particular ways in which it ascribes meaning;

The points on which there is open struggle between different representations;

Any understandings naturalized as common sense;

How these change over time; and

How these are used rhetorically. (p. 145)

To provide a thumbnail delimitation: *white talk* does not refer to all the possible or actual patternings that prevail in the talk of white South Africans, but quite specifically the articulations that manage—as strategic resistance to actual or perceived loss of power and privilege—the politics of location that pertain at the intersectional moment between the centredness of whiteness, and the marginality of diaspora in post-apartheid South Africa.

Deconstructing the discourse

In the most general sense of the term, the methodology of discourse analysis is *deconstruction*:

Discourse analysis aims at the deconstruction of the structures that we take for granted; it tries to show that the given organization of the world is the result of political processes with social consequences. (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 48)

In excavating the constructed *white talk* terrain, certain kinds of general questions were asked of the data:

- (a) What meanings are established, by positioning elements in certain relationship with one another, i.e. how are chains of meaning established, and what meaning potentials do they exclude?
- (b) What discourse, or discourses does a particular articulation of *white talk* draw on, what discourses does it reproduce? Or alternatively, does it challenge and transform an existing discourse by redefining some of its moments?
- (c) What signs are the objects of struggle over meaning between *white talk* and competing discourses, what signs have relatively fixed and undisputed meanings? How are floating signifiers being invested with different meaning by those who “talk white” compared with other social actors?
- (d) How is *white talk* competing with other discourses to position the white subject differently at the same time? How are groups being represented? Which subject positions being constructed as relevant? Along what lines is *white talk* struggling to divide the social into groups?
- (e) What understanding of society does *white talk* champion? What does it challenge? Against which other antagonistic constructions does it pit itself? What is

being excluded as a social possibility? What ideology is revealed that can be shown to be the product of earlier discursive dynamics?

(f) How does *white talk* employ the kinds of discursive strategies listed above to manage the contradictions of “being white” in the post-apartheid South Africa, and what does this reveal about the nature of “diasporic whiteness”? What rhetorical/strategic effectiveness does it have in the current context to win over subjects from other discursive possibilities?

Sample

The exploration that constitutes this dissertation attempts to track some of the processes through which *white talk* crystallizes into recognizable discursive strategies, competencies, performances. Although there is no attempt to infer a linear, sequential logic across the different studies, there is, nevertheless a longitudinal dimension to the dissertation in that the texts range from 1992 in the first study through 2001 in the final chapter. Similarly, there is a wide scope across different social domains, and discursive genres—film, radio talk shows, letters to the editor, newspaper opinion editorial columns—including visual, written and spoken discourse. Finally, the analysis also considers texts produced by English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans.

There is deliberately no attempt to lock the different studies into some neat, coherent template across different times of publication, varied topics, and conditions of production. Each chapter finds a different point of entry into the world of white South Africa, has its own internal logic, and discloses different veins in the discursive strata it mines. Rather than a close logical progression, the chapters converse with each other, “adding up” in layers to show the variation, complexity and multi-vocality that make up the *ultimately* predictable discursive patterning which emerges as a consequence of the common intent to further what is (narrowly) perceived to be white interest in changing circumstances. By lying alongside each other, the chapters show what the subjects perceive to be at stake in different possible understandings of the social, in different settings, at different stages in the unfolding of their new political realities. Collectively, the studies show *white talk* to be the product of non-inevitable interventions in prior articulations, the active expression(s) of the political struggle of one set of possible social definitions against many others.

Everyday discourse

Drawing on the rationale that informs the methodologies of discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis, I have chosen to undertake empirical analysis of concrete examples of discourse that occurs in everyday South Africa. There has been no attempt to create deliberately devised situations, like interviews or focus groups. The texts chosen for analysis are in the public domain, part of the flows of meaning that crisscross the society—what Gotsbachner (2001) calls “sense-in-action” (p. 743)—which vie for the hearts and minds of ordinary South Africans every day.

Having said that, all the texts are also, to a greater or lesser extent, mediated, in that they occur in newspapers, on the radio, in locally produced film. In other words, while the texts analysed are examples of everyday discourse, and mostly produced by “ordinary” people, they are not “naturally occurring,” conversational discourse as is preferred in branches of discourse analysis such as conversation analysis. Everyday texts that are constructed for public consumption contain an element of “cultural performance,” where a community puts itself “on show,” representing itself for itself and “others.” The “editing” that accompanies the greater element of self-consciousness in such language use is geared to ensure “presentability.” The levels of meaning in the word point to two functions of this kind of everyday discourse that are more accentuated than in completely private contexts: one is the dimension of face-presentation, of tailoring a position to be socially acceptable; the second is the rhetorical dimension, the attempt to gain support for a position above other antagonistic options which may also be given a public audience. The implication is that the ideological dimensions in the discourse are more accentuated in these kinds of texts, as personal, idiosyncratic motivations within interpersonal dynamics are less likely to inform the discursive strategies which are discernible, whereas the contestation for group positioning, for the definition of social myth, for winning the “big fights” over the meanings of social signifiers, are more likely to be prominent. This makes everyday, but publicly available, texts highly suitable to the subject matter under discussion in this dissertation, where *white talk* is seen as a publicly available and shared set of rhetorical strategies and procedures for constructing certain social effects, for structuring political discussion, and for promoting/retaining the privileged interests of the white in-group.

Stages/levels of analysis

Each chapter was approached differently as the particular questions asked of the data and methodology employed to answer the questions were very much organic to the material itself. In each case, however, the sample consisted of a fairly sizable corpus of texts. Additional socio-political texts which had bearing on the area under discussion were consulted to contextualize the discursive analysis. Each corpus of literature opened up in a different way, showing different dimensions/issues of contestation, and the analyses in the different chapters try to represent that. Although the overall theoretical positioning of the dissertation has been outlined, in each study particular theoretical concepts emerged to be most useful to that specific analysis, so that those details, along with the details of methodology particular to the analysis in question, are described at the beginning of each chapter. Nevertheless, all the analyses followed the basic procedures accepted to be appropriate to discourse analysis:

- (i) careful engagement with the text(s) over a period of time—reading, and rereading, (in the case of the film chapter, viewing and reviewing);
- (ii) a first level of analysis to find themes/categories/strands of sense-making. I have not attempted to provide the range of the entire “order of discourse” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002) available to post-apartheid white South Africa.¹¹ Depending on the particular focus of a chapter, I usually only mention other discursive options comparatively as a way to provide definition to the contours of *white talk*;
- (iii) a second level analysis of how the broader social contestations work through the text. The purpose of this stage of analysis was to ascertain what the subjects were *doing* with *white talk*, how they were struggling over meaning to achieve social effects in the way they were representing issues, and what the persuasive import of their discursive strategies was in relation to the politics of their location: post-apartheid South Africa, the Old South Africa, “others,” their whiteness, their relationship to the broader world of whiteness, their colonial heritage, and Africa.

Criteria for research validity

In positivistic research the criteria for evaluating research are generally regarded as quite established, but in social constructionist research, there is less agreement as to the criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Punch, 1994). Guba and Lincoln mention two main categories: *trustworthiness*, which includes the credibility of the way in which constructed realities are presented, dependability, and confirmability; and *authenticity*,

which includes fairness, the capacity to enlarge personal constructions, to lead to improved understanding of the constructions of others, and to empower action (p. 114).

Phillips & Jørgensen (2002) suggest that as there is no agreement on the criteria for evaluating text analysis, “the single most important criterion is to *explicate and follow the criteria for validity* to which one adheres” (p. 173. Italics in the original). They mention the criterion of *fruitfulness*, which is the extent to which the analysis provides new explanations and ways of thinking, and cite Tracy’s (1995) criterion of *helpful problem framing*, which stresses the extent to which the analysis opens up possibilities for reflection. Phillips & Jørgensen’s “rules of thumb” are that the analysis should be:

- (i) *solid*—it should be based on a range of textual features;
- (ii) *comprehensive*—the questions posed to texts should be answered fully;
- (ii) *transparent*—access should be provided to the empirical material by reproducing long extracts; interpretations should be well documented and the relationship between the text and inferences should be clear. (p. 173)

In conclusion, I would like to stress the critical dimension, where research participates in the

process of critical world making, guided by the shadowed outline of a dream of a world less conditioned by misery, suffering, and the politics of deceit. It is . . . a pragmatics of hope. (Kincheloe & McClaren, 1994, p. 154)

The first three chapters of this dissertation have provided the background, the theoretical co-ordinates, and the methodological orientation for the analyses that follow. The next chapter presents the first of four studies. It analyses two films that were popular at about the time of political transition, and shows how the psychological pre-conditions were being created for the development of post-apartheid *white talk*.

NOTES

1. As part of the vocabulary integral to the sea change that has occurred in western academic approaches in recent times, “discourse” has come to be so widely used as to have become ambiguous at best, and vague at worst. As Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) comment, “there is no clear consensus as to what discourses are or how to analyse them.” The discussion which follows is limited to approaches which are generally regarded as social constructionist, and to those “schools” which are recognized as taking the serious theorizing of discourse analysis as their point of departure, rather than those that employ the term as part of academic business as usual, but do not consciously theorize it as a subject in its own right.

2. Ethnomethodological and conversation analytical methodologies remain close to the text, and tend not to link the content of the sample to broader social conflicts, retaining an interest more in purely interactional effects (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Boden & Zimmerman, 1991; Coultard, 1977; Stubbs, 1983; Ten Have, 1999). At the other end of continuum, realist-oriented discourse analysts see discourse as an effect of structural factors and retain a strong emphasis on these extra-discursive factors (Parker, 1992; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The inner-outer dichotomy is broken down by those theorists that see emotions, remembering, and psychological states as the product of culture and discourse; seemingly individual psychological phenomena are regarded as part of larger cultural production (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Harré & Stearns, 1995; Shotter, 1993). Among those who work within the linguistic tradition there is a tendency to retain an element of cognition in the way discourse is understood (Gumperz, 1982; Van Dijk, 1997, 1985a, 1985b, 1985c; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). An example of a highly hybrid approach is that of Stillar (1998) who uses a framework drawn from the functional linguistics of Halliday, the rhetoric of Kenneth Burke, and social theories of Bourdieu and Giddens.

3. The typology offered by Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) is highly dependent on the particular theorists within the schools on which they choose to base their comparisons, and therefore does not do justice to the ontological variations *within* the different schools, a limitation that they acknowledge; nevertheless it does provide a useful first base from which to make differentiations.

4. Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) use the work of Norman Fairclough to exemplify this approach. Some other prominent researchers that retain a critical realist ontology and fall into this school are Ruth Wodak and Stefan Titscher. (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000)

5. Phillips and Jørgensen draw primarily on the work of Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter in their discussion of Discursive Psychology. This is a large area, and in itself is divided (mainly) between those who follow the ethnomethodological/conversation analytical approach, which pays little attention to the content of signifiers that link the text to the social world “outside” the text, and those who see the text as integrally linked to its social effects and broader social conditions, whether these are seen as the effects of discourse or not.

6. The practice of using concepts from different schools to complement and enhance the analytical tools offered by any one is becoming more the norm than the exception. See for example, Wetherell’s (1998)

NOTES (cont.)

argument for a syncretic approach within discursive psychology, and Best and Kellner's argument for a multiperspectival approach to critical social theory in general. (Best & Kellner, 1991)

7. This is where this conceptual framework departs most significantly from the theorists of Critical Discourse Analysis, as well as some of the more realist/cognitive theorists in Discursive Psychology. It is also, however, an insight that has been picked up within the Rhetorical stream of Communication Studies. (see, for example, Charland, 1987)

8. Laclau (1994): "Sedimented social practices are unchallenged and, as such, they conceal the political moment of their institution." (p. 4)

9. For example, Laclau (1994):

If agents were to have an always already defined location in the social structure, the problem of their identity, considered in a radical way, would not arise—or, at most, would be seen as a matter of people *discovering* or *recognising* their own identity, not of *constructing* it. (p. 2. Italics in original.)

10. Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) make this connection quite explicit: "Like Fairclough's concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, "articulation" encapsulates the point that discursive practice both draws on and destabilises, earlier patterns." (p. 140)

11. In some ways, this is what my book (2002) has done. This dissertation does not wish to repeat this "survey" approach to positionality, but rather to focus on a more circumscribed aspect of white discourse.

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4

PICTURES OF “TRANSITION”

Contained within the plot structures, the characters and social practices they represent, working unconsciously at deeper levels of signification, are to be found the suppressed traumas, hopes, fears and preoccupations of Afrikaner culture. (Tomaselli & Van Zyl, 1992, p. 396)

The transition of the early 1990s was a time when the social imaginary in South Africa was in disarray. The country was undergoing profound political change accompanied by the ever-present (threat of) violence; the future was profoundly uncertain. The ideological defences of whiteness had always depended on some measure of psychological misrecognition, personal inflation and denial (Coetzee, 1988; M. L. Pratt, 1992; Wylie, 2000), but with the changes the society was undergoing, these ideological defences were increasingly visible as constructions that were not inevitable or infallible. Increasingly they were being confronted by other possible constructions emanating from newly emerging political centres, which could, and were, challenging hegemonic sense making. The extent to which past social organization was the product of white political domination, rather than a “natural” order brought about by discrepancies in inherent racial abilities, was being exposed by alternative visions for the society, which prioritized antagonistic agendas in discursive articulations with drastically different meaning content and social consequences. The established sense-making thus greatly under threat, history could go in many different directions. In the language of Laclau,

this was a highly political moment, characterized by extremely active cultural work as different groupings wrestled to define issues, events and actions according to their interests, when subject positions were dislocated from the certainties that had fixed them, and new subjectivities were beginning to be shaped.

This chapter examines the way in which the white imagination was attempting to provide meaning content to the dislocated, transitional moment in the nation's political and social life for white South Africans. It does this through an analysis of two films that were screened on the popular film circuit at the time. A key nodal point in the then prevalent discourses, unsurprising, was "transition," and the chapter considers the attempt in these films to fix the meaning of this signifier. The positioning of whiteness in relation to this nodal point and other related signifiers in representations emanating from the film industry of the time is suggestive of how white society was responding to the prospect of being socially repositioned. The main argument of this chapter is that the white "colonial unconscious" manifested in its drive to power (López, 2001) and distorted knowledge constructions of "other" can be seen to be still dominant in shaping the white imagination. This is illustrated in the inability of either film to move beyond highly ambivalent, conflictual meaning content for "transition," and their ultimate failure to provide representations that convincingly enact support for transition to a democracy that would relativize white dominance, despite their apparently forward-looking stance. The implications of this internal contradiction are explored, especially in respect of how it shapes the preconditions for *white talk*.

Selection of the Films

In developing the argument for this chapter, the two films were viewed several times and notes were taken, scene for scene, of images, dialogues, and narrative threads. These were then analysed to identify the implications of the choices made in representing salient features in each film, bearing in mind the questions, "Why would transition be represented in this way?" and "What does this say about how whiteness is being signified?" In writing up this chapter, an attempt has been made to recreate the main narrative line of the films, but also to suggest something of the artistic texture of the film, in order to substantiate the conclusions drawn.

In respect of valorizing white experience, the two films analysed in this chapter conform to the canon as it has been for the full 100 years of the South African film industry (Blignaut & Botha, 1992; Tomaselli, 1997). Through most of this history, the

South African film industry has been almost entirely in the hands of white producers, usually screened for segregated white audiences, and generally funded by government capital (M. P. Botha, 1995; Tomaselli, 1997). Consequently, it has reflected, largely uncritically, the worldview and ideological agendas of mainstream white population, particularly Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans (M. P. Botha, 1995; Prinsloo, 1996; Tomaselli & Van Zyl, 1992). Films which interrogated white realities, and/or reflected the real life experiences of black South Africans have been few and far between, usually have been funded from elsewhere, and generally have not been screened in mainstream South African cinemas (M. P. Botha, 1995; Tomaselli, 1997). In contrast to this historical background, a development of the early 1990s, according to M. P. Botha (1995), was the consensus "from all sectors of the industry that cinema has a vital role in the forging of social cohesion and the process of democratization and development that so urgently need[ed] to take place" (p. 10). Cinema was seen to be potentially "a liberating medium of mass communication" (p. 2) and "vital in South Africa's transition" (p. 1).

Both films analysed in this chapter can be situated within this democratizing moment in the development of the South African film industry. Both take as their subject matter the turmoil experienced within the white psyche at the time of transition. The first film is *Taxi to Soweto*. A human drama, *Taxi to Soweto* is the work of director Manie van Rensburg, producer of award-winning television dramas, as well as the internationally acclaimed film, *The Fourth Reich* (1990). Van Rensburg's work belongs to the against-the-grain, minority genre of domestic anti-apartheid films that have examined white racial attitudes (Tomaselli, 1997), his portrayal of their internal conflicts earning him the reputation of "chronicler of the Afrikaner psyche" (M. P. Botha, 1995, p.12). *Taxi to Soweto* can be firmly placed within Van Rensburg's revisionist genre, and participates in the transformative/facilitating agenda to which M. P. Botha (1995) refers:

[A]s forms of popular fiction, films and videos such as *Taxi to Soweto* can explore the changes taking place in South Africa in a way that helps people to make sense of these dramatic changes (p. 2).

The second film, *Panic Mechanic*, was released in 1996, two years into the "New" South Africa. Directed by David Lister, this film belongs squarely in the tradition of "cheap-shot filming," and uses the *Candid Camera* formula—a formula that has been successful in mainstream white cinemas since the 1960s (Feldman, 1996). Leon Schuster, the

Afrikaans comedian who wrote the narrative and acts the main role, is well known for his outrageous radio and television shows that mostly operate within this *Candid Camera* genre. The tenor of his work is reflected in the name of his television series, *Hanky Pranky*. An all-time South African box-office hit, *Panic Mechanic* purportedly held up a comic mirror to the country, reflecting the way in which it was coping with change with a view to relieving some of the tension that accompanied the transitional processes.

Although very differently textured in their responses to the changes they depict, both films show the emerging South Africa to be a radical disjuncture from the “old order.” As products of white South African consciousness, the films portray transition in terms of inversion of the logics that structured the past. The old white certainties around which life had been built, while not equally problematized in these films, are shown in both to be decentred and destabilized. The advent of the new order is accompanied by psychological stress in the form of loss of potency, diminished control and agency, confusion of roles and lines of authority, and a sense of the collapse of order, of knowledge and even of a coherent self.

As post-colonial theorists remind us, the construction of white identity has depended largely on bifurcation (Bhabha, 1994; López, 2001; Memmi, 1990; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Steyn, 1999, 2001b; Werbner & Ranger, 1996). Certainly in white South Africa, “Africa,” and everything it was constructed to represent, was split off from the “European” and what that was constructed to represent: the cultured, the ordered, the rational, the centre of progress, the measure of cleanliness, of civilization. As a signifier, “Africa” carried “otherness,” everything not-“European” (Memmi, 1990; Mudimbe, 1994; Nederveen Pieterse, 1992). One could argue that apartheid was a territorial and legal enactment of the psychological dynamic that attempted to keep Africa split off, separate, and to leave whiteness pure. For whites in this country the transition to the New South Africa can be understood as an encounter with Africa, with the “other” that they did not want to know except in terms of knowledge constructions that facilitated control. The fear of a reversal of position with the repressed “other” has always dominated the psyche of white South Africa, achieving apocalyptic proportions in the white imagination (Danziger, 1963; Thornton, 1996). As has been argued in the introduction, the fear of a “black take-over,” of the “black peril,” has been the bogey that informed much of policy and action in white-controlled South Africa. The New South Africa, then, which empowers this “other,” heralds the return of the repressed (Steyn, 1999,

2001b). In effect, both films deal with how white South Africans are coping with the encounter with Africa they had previously pushed away both psychologically and physically. This chapter argues that both films, despite their attempts in different ways to perspectivize white South Africa's responses to this challenge nevertheless affirm the ideological underpinnings of white South Africa, carried in the "dominant memory" of whiteness and submerged "secondary levels of meaning, operating connotatively and symbolically" in the films (Tomaselli & Van Zyl, 1992, p. 401).¹ And it is this "dominant memory" that continues, unabated, to nourish those discursive constructions that refuse change, and inform what this dissertation calls *white talk*.

The Old Order Slips Away: *Taxi to Soweto*

The first film, *Taxi to Soweto*, has as its main character a white woman, Jessica, from a privileged white suburban area of Johannesburg. In the context of her protected white background, her only extended contact with the "other" is with servants, "tamed" Africa. She is forced to take a crowded "black taxi" after her car breaks down en route to the airport where she is to meet her husband with whom she shares a tired marriage. The taxi is highjacked, and instructed to reroute to Soweto, the heart of "otherness." Soweto—the sprawling "black township" outside Johannesburg—may be characterized as Johannesburg's alter city, its "black" counterpart. Whereas Johannesburg, built on gold mining, has been the seat of white wealth and establishment, Soweto is a psychic hub from which resistance and struggle against the system emanated.

The scenes that follow portray her sense of bewilderment and alienation when she finds herself "dumped" in the township. The camera identifies with her white gaze as scene succeeds scene—poverty, chaos, criminality, overcrowding, filth, and strange "primitive" customs. Totally out of her milieu, she is frightened and shocked at this different reality. The taxi driver, Richard, evincing a measure of disdain for her effiteness, provides some protection but not much guidance. Her encounter with the "other" turns out to be, in fact, an encounter with herself. She is confronted by her ignor(e)ance,² and the local people do not spare her, participating in this confrontation. As one puts it: "You people know nothing about us; you couldn't care less about us."³ For the first time, she starts to see herself as the "other" sees her, or rather, as the "other" sees *through* her. Tauntingly, they continue calling her *Miss Jessica*, underscoring her vulnerability and the uselessness of the false dignity of whiteness in this context. Her

discomfort is acute, as she increasingly has to acknowledge her dependence on the "other."

In a scene that carries a great deal of the symbolism of the film, she finds herself caught up in the middle of a mass demonstration. Alarmed and terrified, she has no option but to blend in with the toyi-toyiing⁴ mass as she is propelled along, raising her hand in a black power salute. At this crucial point in the plot, Richard loses her in the crowd and she has to deal with feelings of abandonment as well as genuine danger.

Richard calls her home to see if she has managed to find her way back, and her husband, confused at her absence, interprets the message on the answering machine to mean that she has left him for a black man. The emasculating factor is the blackness of her assumed lover. It is an assault upon the entire construction of his identity, premised upon the illusion fostered by the old order of white male unassailability. He is thrown into distraction by the challenge the New South Africa presents to the white male phallus: once seemingly certain knowledge constructed from the position of, and in the service of, white male domination, can be, and is being, deposed. In a state of severe psychological disorientation, Jessica's husband seeks to make sense of her desertion, desperate to find her.

In the meantime, Jessica has been drawn into the "life" and vitality of Soweto, where (again stereotypically) she finds the corrective to the sterility of her proper life in white South Africa. A turning point in her development occurs in a jazz club, where township energy is clearly at its most concentrated. She drinks excessively and passes out on the stage after making a fool of herself. This is her leveling experience. The loss of control and of pretences at superiority amount to the loss of her old self. She breaks through white defenses and denials, and emerges with a sense of solidarity with black Africans, a growing identification with their world and its hardships. Carried forward by events, she stands up to her husband's racist employer in solidarity with his striking workers, an act that gets her into confrontation with the legal system that has protected her white life. Her husband's name is disgraced by her behaviour, and he loses his job, further destabilizing his "old" world.

Her husband, Du Toit, has been going through his own dark night of the soul. The law, he has been informed by the police, no longer prohibits interracial relationships. Demented with pain, he drowns his sorrows in a bar. His tortured mind transforms the images appearing on the television screen into those of his wife and a

black man (acted by Richard), kissing passionately. The man breaks off kissing Jessica, turns to him, and says, "Welcome to the New South Africa. Peace, brother."

"He's pitch black," Du Toit repeats senselessly to the barman, his worst imaginings now "confirmed" by his hallucination.

Eventually he traces Jessica to Soweto. They are romantically reunited, both now having emerged from the abyss as more integrated selves. They spend a happy evening in the jazz club, the place of healing, harmoniously integrated with the Sowetan folk. The film ends as we see them leaving Soweto, this time in the back seat of a white taxi. They are the only passengers, in love again. A smiling Richard is driving.

Taxi to Soweto presents Jessica as having undergone a "hero's journey." She has ventured into the world of the "other," a kind of underworld, and has returned healed and wiser, reconciled with her psychic opposite. Her black taxi driver/chauffeur, in the role of a familiar, has acted as her guide through the dangerous territory, bringing her safely back to herself. And she has done all this for the good of her society—she brings healing wisdom to the sterility of her marriage and culture, which had become severed from the wellsprings of life. The film, it seems, intends us to see her courage in crossing boundaries and moving beyond her whiteness as holding the key to personal healing and social reconciliation, the way through the damage wrought by apartheid. "In many ways this film is the first filmic presentation of the dawn of a post-apartheid South Africa" (M. P. Botha, 1992, p. 176).

Yet the resolution of the story undermines this intention. Ironically, the most important thing about the film is the taxi *from* Soweto. The contrast between the entry into Soweto and the exit from the city reflects an underlying white desire that the New South Africa, while temporarily uncomfortable, will not really require much permanent personal and material adjustment. The encounter with Africa that the New South Africa necessitates may be no more than a cathartic journey that ends, thankfully, back at "home." The fundamentals of the white world may yet remain intact. Jessica did not stay in Soweto; she did not really get involved with the black man, who is once again in his proper service role; she returns to her privileged white suburb in her husband's arms. The white phallus, though reprimanded, has been reinstated.

Taxi to Soweto is a white fantasy at the end of an era. In the face of acute anxiety about what the future may hold, the fantasy is that the disruption to the old way of life and the troubling of its certainties will be no more than a temporary disturbance. The threat to old realities may be no more than a bad dream with a happy ending. In its

failure to carry through the creative impulse of the film, *Taxi to Soweto* repeats a similar loss of poetic integrity that L. Marx (1991) observed in Van Rensburg's acclaimed *The Fourth Reich*. L. Marx writes that the film betrays its own material, in particular in the manner in which the portrayal of the right wing Afrikaners (and their language) lapses into the very stereotypes the film purports to problematize:

It is to render the right-wing extremism that continues to rear its head merely another mad aberration of a rather odd lot of people. It is to make them safe, exotic, other, unintelligible, thus repeating the mistakes of the colonial enterprise in its confrontation with dark continents, and subverting, precisely, the impact that the film . . . was meant to have
(pp. 72-3)

What is represented in these films, therefore, is the limitation of the white social imaginary. Implicit in L. Marx's critique is the accusation that the exoticizing tactics of *The Fourth Reich* reinstate "normal," unmarked whiteness. In *Taxi to Soweto* the limit of the white social imaginary is evidenced in the inability, even in the work of a well-meaning cultural activist, to be able to "unthink" whiteness. The reinstatement of the coordinates of whiteness in the resolution of the film is not so much an admission of Van Rensburg's cussedness as evidence of the ideological power of whiteness, and its resistance to deconstruction. The logic of the representation of "transition" in this work is that white social identity can move through/intersect with discourses of change, without being changed by them in any essential manner that would fundamentally affect the comfort of selfhood. Whiteness resists fragmentation. With the signifier "transition" understood in this manner, white social identification can be "refixed/fixed up" within post-apartheid society.

A Bizarre World is Born: *Panic Mechanic*

The Leon Schuster film, *Panic Mechanic*, appearing two years after the formal inauguration of the New South Africa, portrays whites responding to their new circumstances that were by then a political fact. The film has a very thin story line and, as "fun," would probably affect an apolitical status. Schuster himself is the main character. He loses what he regards as a secure position with the South African state-owned television network, and ends up working for a dishonest, opportunistic foreigner, making a film for the New South African president, a black woman.⁵ The film he is commissioned to make is supposed to help South Africans deal with the stress of

transformation by laughing at themselves and the anxiety occasioned by change, and consists of several *Candid Camera* pranks. *Panic Mechanic* then loosely interweaves the fortunes of "Schuster" dealing with his own encounter with transformation in the narrative thread, and staged episodes that he sets up in order to film his fellow South Africans' unguarded reactions to exaggerated, stereotypical spoofs of change.

The most salient feature of the film is that it concretizes what is already present in the white imagination in the society, presenting these fantasies as achieved reality in unsubtle, "in-your-face" scenarios. Schuster then confronts people with these situations unexpectedly. The result is that their immediate reactions tend to be visceral, revealing a great deal about their emotional and psychological assumptions. The parallels between the experiences of Schuster, the character in the film, and the traumas of his "victims" in the "film within the film" then further correspond to topical situations and issues in the real society to which the film alludes. The effect of this internal and external intertextuality is to present the uncertainty and shock of transition as ubiquitous and inescapable—every which way we turn, we witness the same sense of confusion and social unravelling. The film takes us into a hall of mirrors in which the repetition and consistency of images of disorientation accumulate into what can rightly be called a portrayal of a pervasive and profound sense of panic, as the title of the film suggests.

The opening scene of the film aptly provides a metaphor for the loss of white political control. Within the Union Buildings in Pretoria, Schuster, disguised as a furniture trucker, is supervising the removal of an enormous (fake) portrait of the cabinet of the former Nationalist President, P. W. Botha (F. W. de Klerk's predecessor). With the Old South African anthem playing in the background, Schuster cautions the workers carrying the portrait to the removal van about the value of their charge. In addition to its monetary value, he reminds them, the portrait represents "our past," and its removal from the corridors of power is "sad, sad but very true." The portrait is to be taken to the Wilderness, the residential area where ex-president P. W. Botha now resides. As they are carrying the portrait across the street, a motorcyclist, primed by Schuster, roars down the road and smashes through the canvass. The image speaks of the demise, or even demolition, of an era, the falling into disarray of a once seemingly invincible regime, and the reversal of the fates of the powerful. It is an objective correlative for the feelings amongst many white South Africans at the time of being "dethroned," stripped of the authority and privilege that had once been regarded as their "normal" heritage and birthright.

Shots of Schuster driving in the streets of Johannesburg with his car radio blaring follow. Both visually and aurally, the viewer is confronted with signification for the "transition" to the "New South Africa." The news bulletin carries report after report of corruption, financial decline, labour unrest, and the deleterious effects of affirmative action and of crime. The streets are lined with (yes, white) people holding placards announcing their unemployment and begging alms. Flea markets selling the goods of whites that have emigrated are flourishing. The implication is clear: South Africa has become "third world." No longer kept at bay by white rule, Africa is "out." An expression of gratitude for his job at the broadcasting corporation scarcely off his lips, Schuster arrives at his office and sits down absentmindedly in his chair, and quite literally onto the lap of a black man. He has been ousted overnight, as has his boss to whom he appeals in his distress. The complacent new manager exhorts them to be mature. When Schuster finally manages to express what he now realizes ("I'm fired") the new boss confirms his worst fear, using the dreaded word, "affirmative." In what approaches a psychodrama of white male paranoia, the scene portrays in literal terms what white men subjectively believe is happening to them.

Images of the "rainbow nation" accentuate the extremes of disparity within the population and by implication the bizarreness of notions of current or potential unity. The queue outside the president's office consists of overtly right wing militants, an African in traditional dress, a be-turbaned man, people in loincloths bearing placards demanding "higher prices for Khoisans and other 'interest groups'." The emerging rainbow nation is an absurd nation. Disrepair and disintegration are evident everywhere, symbolically captured in the prank where a minibus pulls away, leaving the chassis behind, the bewildered schoolchildren still seated. The incapacity of the government to stem the acceleration of chaos is reflected in the reaction of the "minister of transport" when confronted with the news of further taxi violence. Harassed and out of his depth, he instructs, "Call in the army." The New South Africa is plummeting into a state of emergency. Violence and crime have become culturally normalized. For example, when a dinner party in a restaurant pops champagne, the entire restaurant clientele rises in unison, their response conditioned by the sound. They all simultaneously fire the guns they are carrying and sit down to continue eating as if nothing has happened.

It is in the context of this spiralling stress that the President recognizes the "genius" of the Schuster approach, which claims to heal through outrageous exposure of the underlying conflict and disorder, rather than an attempt to placate: "Use the root of

your stress as the route to recovery." The president then initiates the thread of the narrative that carries the "redemptive" strain in the film: the proceeds from the film to be made by the company for which Schuster now works will establish a Children's Fund. This allows for the development of a clichéd and unconvincing story line that shows Schuster acquiring some appreciation for the lot of impoverished children, and engineering a slapstick vindication over his crooked employer.

The analytically interesting material in the film is contained in the scenarios that Schuster assiduously creates for the film within the film, all of which draw on the stereotypical discursive repertoire that this thesis shows underwrites *white talk*, even as it develops in finesse. Culturally and artistically cavalier, Schuster taps into highly contested areas within in the process of South African reconciliation and nation building in these scenarios. Two examples follow:

In the first scenario, a shabbily erected tollgate across a country dirt road in the heart of a conservative white farming area is guarded by Schuster, disguised as a black man. The slogan, "Better roads for a better future" on a billboard poster announces that this a Reconstruction and Development Fund project. He demands R50 from the aggressive Afrikaner farmers who wish to continue along the road, whereas he allows a black man who speaks to him in an African language to proceed. When challenged by one of the irate farmers, he explains the unequal treatment: "He's black, sir." After much altercation, they finally pay him the R50, whereupon he immediately calls a young child standing at the roadside and instructs him to "go and buy four litres of coke and some smokes." He responds to their fury by candidly confirming the assumption that had informed all their angry reactions: "I've taken the money for myself, sir."

The scenario acts out the white belief that money used for reconstruction disappears into a bottomless pit of corruption within the ranks of the "newly advantaged." It surfaces a resentment against the intention on the part of the new Government to "redistribute" wealth, and reveals a belief that disempowerment has simply been reversed under the new regime.

The second scenario draws on the highly sensitive and contested area of land redistribution. Schuster, again disguised as what he refers to as "rainbow person," has set up "his own place in the sun" on a golf course in a wealthy area of Johannesburg. He explains to the indignant English-speaking golfers that this is his ancestral ground, and that his grandfather was buried under the nearby tree. When he stirs his porridge with one of the golf flags, the challenge as the white golfers would interpret it is clear: when

signifiers that belong within the discourse of golf are (dis)articulated as porridge spoons, the “illogicality” of Africa is reasserting itself, and threatening to disrupt the logic that came with European “improvement.” In answer to their protestations about legal land ownership, he invokes the powers of the new state, “My president says the land belongs to everyone.” His further embellishments bring into the fray more of the European stereotypes that abound about what Africanization entails: his brother is coming with the goats and kids (capitalist cultivation effected by European influence will regress into “primitive” subsistence practices, modern social organization, characterized by the distinction between urban and rural, will roll back), he is accumulating trash (the country will become increasingly “Third World”, over-populated and run down), he has cut a hole in the fence to get onto the fairways (Africa can no longer be contained through “normal” methods, hallowed notions like private ownership will be rendered meaningless, “land grabs” have begun).

Scenarios such as those above act out the deep-seated belief, still unproblematized in the colonial unconscious, that loss of European control inevitably ushers in the chaos, stagnation, poverty, and irrationality that is the “essence” of Africa. The white imagination that is exposed in these encounters is structured by a profound Afro-pessimism, a pervasive negativity which would lead one to expect high levels of stress for those who hold such views in a country dominated politically by black Africans.

The rationale expressed in the film is that viewing these provoked conflictual situations would be cathartic for South Africans during the time of transition, and somehow contribute towards more relaxed attitudes and therefore reconciliation. The problem, however, rests with Schuster’s gaze and voice as scriptwriter and commentator. He presents an uncritical, ludic(rous) celebration of the interactions the scenes provoke. An element of collusion with the stereotypes of Africa and Africans out of which his dupes react, exposes his close identification with the sense making that develops, as this dissertation will show, into fully-fledged *white talk*. While the film presents itself as too frivolous to be political, it is, on the contrary, a deeply ideological piece of cultural production. At the rhetorical level—the level at which the representation competes with other constructions—the film suggests, firstly, that trenchant intercultural conflict centred on serious issues of competing interests can be reduced to benign fun, thus undercutting through ridicule the extreme earnestness of transformation. Most particularly, it suggests that this conflict arises from the incompatibility of the groups

themselves, that the absurdity is inherent in the attempt to create a new order, that it is doomed before it even starts. Secondly, the socially constructed frames of reference that the white "victims" bring to the incidents, particularly pertaining to Africa, are not presented critically, so that the white imagination is not problematized, and no further self-reflexivity is required of the (sympathetic) white viewer. Fundamentally, the film acts to re-inscribe the colonial ideological trope that the self-appointed ownership of the land and domination of the indigenous people is justified by European "improvement," and in the interests of all, including the people disenfranchised and impoverished by white oppression, as the alternative is just crazy.

In sum, therefore, the film itself ends up being one more example of what it portrays. In the manner in which it attempts to fix the meaning of "transition," it contributes to the white discourses of anomie and dislocation that accompany the displacement of the old centre, old certainties. Indeed, rather than showing the cathartic way to reconciliation, as it purports, Schuster has produced a celebration of the problems faced by a society that is battling to cope with profound social and psychological reorientation, implicitly predicting failure. The element of vindication at being able to reflect difficulties under non-racial government, as if whites could have "told you so," suggests that the deeper thrust of the film is to sabotage, rather than to further, reconciliation. "Transition" is framed as a comic disaster; whites are victims of irrational grabs for power and land by those ill-equipped to handle it; constructive change is a contradiction in terms; everybody is going to be worse off as society inevitably collapses. The white controlled past is the ideological centre of this cultural activism, representing normality, stability, order. Prinsloo (1996) has argued that a representation of reconciliation in South African film that does not propose transformation, cannot "contribute in any significant way as custodian of popular memory" (p. 46).⁶ In this film there is "transition" aplenty, but little sign of transformation.

Conclusion

Both films analysed in this chapter engaged the new realities of white existence in South Africa, as they were being processed at the time of political transition. Both films purport to affirm the change that removed the legalized and enforced privilege of the old order. Yet Van Rensburg's representation of a white woman's journey, while in all probability having earnest and progressive intent, finally reinstates the coordinates of the white order it sets out to displace; Schuster's "nod in the direction of political change"

(Feldman, 1996) is plainly unconvincing, and emerges from analysis as bullying white supremacy in transformational drag. While they come from different positions within the historical development of the South African film industry, they finally converge in their difficulty of envisioning a transformed, yet successful, white positionality. Taken together, then, these films reflect a deep-seated ambivalence in white society in relation to the changes to which they were being asked to adjust. The impulse towards escapism, denial, withdrawal, and even passive aggression is evident, creating a tension that pulls against the need, whether idealistic or pragmatic in inspiration, to be reconciled with new realities. Both of these films demonstrate closeted fantasies of a future in which the status quo of white privilege would endure in essential ways, showing the naked desire to foreclose alternative possibilities which imagine differently—exactly the challenge which post-colonial societies face, i.e. for people of European descent to depart from cultures of entitlement and transform fantasies of perpetual privilege into imaginaries of creative engagement in building a more truly equal world (López, 2001).

In attempting to fill the signifier, “transition” in ways that refuse genuine transformation, the films reveal the colonial unconscious manoeuvring to create materials for *white talk*, materials that hold in tension the need to be overtly embracing of transition, while covertly subverting the establishment of democracy at any but the most formal legal level of citizenship, and that advance representations that keep established social identities fixed:

the final and most damaging obstacle to the psychic maturation of a postcolonial whiteness remains its own will-to-mastery—the lasting legacy, in short, of a colonialism that has left its ineffaceable mark on the postcolonial world, which continues even now to function as unacknowledged ideology. (López, 2001, p. 118)

The implications of the representations in these two films, however, are even more far-reaching. The retention of these fantasies in an environment being changed by social agendas driven from other, emerging ideological centres in the youthful stages of democracy also links to the evolution of the tendency to infuse signification of their dislocation with *diasporic* innuendo.⁷ “Transition” is the rendering *strange* of their environment. The lodestar that provides the bearings for the white sense of self belongs to a social order that drifts further away as the Old South Africa becomes submerged by the waters of time. The inclination, even at these early stages of the new social order is to

see themselves as displaced people, shifted from their rightful place by an illegitimate twist of history. The experience of the New South Africa is conditioned by a remembering of the time when their "Europeanness" still delivered on its expectations in an uncomplicated way, the collective memory of the home that has been left behind—the kind of remembering that is foundational to the distinct identity of diaspora. (Tölölyan, 1991, 1996).

As the transition gives way to a new order finding itself, the tendency for some whites to see themselves as "other" to the burgeoning nation also becomes more established. Active cultural work is needed to maintain such a "ghettoized identity," to service the boundaries between the "strangers in a strange land" (Tölölyan, 1991) and the majority groups who are "at home." The next chapter analyses the argumentative texture of this cultural enterprise.

NOTES

1. Tomaselli and Van Zyl (1992) show the continuities that have underpinned popular Afrikaans expression for the bulk of the twentieth century. The underlying colonial "structure of mind" which casts Africa as the anarchic, primitivistic "other" of white, European order and rationality is shown to be still central, still serving a hegemonic function.
2. Frye (1983) points out the embeddedness of the word, "ignore," within "ignorance," and relates this to the myriad of more, or less, conscious acts of choosing "not to know" that accompany privilege.
3. In the original (colloquial) Afrikaans dialogue of the film, "*Julle weet niks van ons nie; julle mense worrie nie van ons nie.*"
4. A dance typically performed at protest gatherings and marches, of isiNdebele and Shona origin. (Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 2002) *Toyi-toyi* was used as energizers in the camps of freedom fighters during the liberation struggles of southern Africa.
5. South Africans will recognize two conflated allusions. The first is to President Mandela's Children's Fund; the second to the financial controversy surrounding the film, *Sarafina*, commissioned by the minister of Health (a woman) for Aids awareness education.
6. Prinsloo (1996) makes this comment in the context of her analysis of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which she maintains does not serve to "illuminate and transform the present." (p. 47)
7. Laclau (1990) and Norval (1994b) indicate that there is no necessary connection between social dislocation and the way in which it is articulated in discourses:

It is necessary to retain an analytical distinction between the *event* of the crisis, and the *discursive articulation* of that event as a crisis. Theoretically, this involves a logic of articulation premised on the notion that there is no necessary logic creating a correspondence between the "experience" of a radical rupture and the interpretation of that rupture as a crisis. Thus, it is held (i) that a

NOTES (cont.)

rupture may be articulated such that it does not appear a crisis, and (b) an interpretation or construction of a crisis may take more than one form, depending on the particular discursive horizon dislocated by the rupture. (Norval, 1994b, p. 134-5)

Those white South Africans who construct their location within the New South Africa in this kind of way are therefore making a choice, which, like all choices is subject to explanation.

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5

TWO NATIONS TALK

The constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy, peaceful coexistence, and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, creed or sex. The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society.

The adoption of this constitution lays the foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge.

(Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993)

Reconciliation was the task to which South African society nervously set itself as transition firmed into the post-apartheid dispensation, which aimed to overcome the pathological divisions of a society structured by systems of racial inequality and endemic violence (Foster, 2000; Marais, 1985; Schutte, 1995; F. Wilson, 2000; Zegeye & Kriger,

2001). The vision for the new social order was to bridge chasms brought about by three centuries of colonial rule and forty years of legally institutionalized segregation, and to create a national culture that would “decrease the barriers between different identities, language groups and cultures” (Zegeye, 2001c, p. 337). This chapter therefore, moves on from examining the construction by white South Africa of the signifier, “transition,” to another key signifier of the first decade of democracy, namely “reconciliation.”

In reality, alliance across class, race and ethnic divides, inspired by a vision of a united society, was far from new—it was embedded within the previously subjugated liberation struggle movement both as an ideal and a practice (Gerwel, 2000; Ware & Back, 2002; Zegeye & Kriger, 2001). Drawing diverse activists into a common identification, the movement saw itself as “an exercise in nation building at the same time as it represented an opposition to a racially based system” (Gerwel, 2000, p. 227). The challenge for the early stages of nation building was to encourage this ethos to infuse the society, for the general population to ally themselves across historical divides and reconstruct themselves as the reconciled nation envisaged by those who wrote the constitution (Bell, 2001; Chabedi, 2001), given that social identities and group allegiances had been unsettled by the political changes (Bekker, 1996; Dolby, 2001; Morrell, 2001; Ndebele, 2000b; Steyn, 2001b; Zegeye, 2001c).

Laclau (1994) reminds us that group identification is settled within the argumentative terrain of society. This chapter analyses discursive boundary work, necessary for group construction, that was active in the society in the period 1998 to 1999. The analysis shows *white talk* developing as a complex set of strategic choices, activated, and needing therefore to be understood, in terms of how it “kicks against” antagonistic discourses emanating from centres that valorize other interests. It also shows boundary work establishing white South Africa as a distinct and visible minority group, being constructed, certainly in the short term, as unassimilable. This consolidates one important element of the diasporic moment that, as the previous chapter has shown, was in the early stages of construction already at the time of transition. The chapter shows *white talk* resisting the processes of dismantling the boundaries of “us” and “them,” and, in fact, putting considerable effort into extending past alignments into the present where it is perceived to be in group interests to do so.

By way of contextualizing the analysis, the first section of this chapter summarizes current commentary and research on intercultural and interracial relations in South Africa, which point to the enduring existence of separate life-worlds. Lotman’s

(1991) concept of the “semiosphere” is drawn on as an explanatory framework. The second section presents a close analysis of the discourse used by callers participating in two radio talk shows. The shows were broadcast on the national radio station, SAfm, which serves the English-speaking community in South Africa. Its listenership has been predominantly white in the past but is increasingly more diverse. At the time, the mix of programs on SAfm was similar to that of National Public Radio in the United States, and its motto was “the station for the well-informed.” The two talk shows chosen for analysis were *Microphone-in* and *The Tim Modise Show*. The former was broadcast weekly in the evening, and the latter every weekday in the morning.

Two key questions that are the source of on-going debate and that have bearing on issues of reconciliation between white and black South Africans and on nation building were chosen for analysis, namely: Can white South Africans be regarded as Africans? and Do white South Africans owe black South Africans financial restitution? These themes, variously formulated, reach back into the colonial past of the country, and have been recurrently revisited within the political, public, and academic domains in South Africa, helping to shape both the liberation struggle and the dominant white position.¹ As such, the still active debates in the society around these themes are part of the ongoing struggle for reconciliation.

The comments were analysed according to a conceptual framework suggested by Baumann (1997). Baumann argues that the two discursive competencies employed in cross cultural alliance building are dominant and demotic discourses. Dominant discourses attempt to hold extant boundaries intact; demotic discourses provide transgressive opportunities that disrupt dominant cultural closures.

The “Rainbow Nation”?

The debate on just how well the nation is achieving the goal of reconciliation is charged with contestation. At base, the contestation is about what is to count as “reconciliation”: just *what*, and *how much*, *who* will have to give (up) or stands to gain, depends on the meaning content for the term that gains greatest acceptance. Under the presidency of the Nobel Peace Prize recipient and internationally acclaimed icon of reconciliation, Nelson Mandela, South African society readily adopted the self-label of the “Rainbow Nation.”² The term was used by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, at the first session of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, when he spoke of “we, this rainbow people of God” (Chabedi, 2001). It signified bringing together the many distinct groupings within the

country into an inclusive whole through the promise of reconciliation; a multicultural people allied to a common destiny, belonging to a common home, and sharing a common nationhood.

The “rainbow” characterization played such a prominent role in structuring the cultural politics of the 1990s (Nuttall & Michael, 2000a) that the “rainbow nation” became synonymous with South Africa itself (Gqola, 2001). But the metaphor has been vigorously criticized for obscuring too much (Chabedi, 2001; Gqola, 2001; Ramphele, 2000) and for being “about polite proximities, about containment” (Nuttall & Michael, 2000a, p. 6).

One stream of objection to the aspirational “rainbow nation” symbol can be traced back to the negotiated settlement that laid the foundations for national reconciliation. The political process that forged the provisional constitution had come about as a result of the recognition that a military stalemate had been reached in a context where there was no clear victor (J. de Lange, 2000), leaving a sense of an incomplete resolution of the power struggle and an unfinished process of decolonization. Masrui³ has characterized this kind of compromise as the division of labour between black political power and white economic privilege: “The white man said to the black man: ‘You take the crown, and I will keep the jewels’.” By this analysis, the rainbow metaphor may mask the realities of the inequities and social injustices that still eat away at the heart of the society.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was charged with the task of laying the foundations for an inclusive future (Asmal, Asmal, & Roberts, 1997; Chabedi, 2001; James & Van der Vijver, 2000; Nuttall & Coetzee, 1998; Villa-Vicencio & Verwoerd, 2000). The commission was to deal with the past in such a way that an honest footing could be established on which the nation could stand as it stepped into the future. This purpose necessitated that the reality of the suffering and victimization of the black majority be acknowledged. It also required that the gross violations of human rights that had occurred during the apartheid years, and the people who had performed these deeds, be “outed” and shamed publicly (J. de Lange, 2000). The task of the commission could also be seen as creating common frameworks of understandings and shared discourses through which white and black realities could be drawn closer together. “The exercise of facing the South African past, no mere horror story or exercise in historical voyeurism, is rather, in multiple ways . . . the cornerstone of reconstruction” (Asmal et al., 1997,

p. 11). Its work has been generally regarded as groundbreaking, and is often seen as helping to avoid a civil war in South Africa (Hayner, 2000; Shea, 2000).

A body of criticism within the country, however, maintains that the Commission focused too much on reconciliation and not enough on the righting of wrongs; that it was, in fact, a perpetrator-friendly process that short-changed victims and neglected the deeper structural injury inflicted by colonialism and apartheid, to the advantage of the beneficiaries (Bell, 2001; N. Biko, 2000; Bundy, 2000; Henry, 2000; Mamdani, 2000; Mandaza, 1999). In this view, black people were once again doing the emotional work required for reconciliation and freely extending forgiveness, whereas white South Africans were not being honest enough about their complicity with the past system, and were not approaching the process with sufficient humility or even interest⁴ (N. Biko, 2000; Henry, 2000). More radical critics believe that in taking an excessively “gentle” approach toward the apartheid past, the process actually exacerbated divisions across racial lines in South Africa (Gibson & Macdonald, 2001). Future generations, in this view, have been endowed with “a poison chalice” in the form of unfinished business, which will inevitably resurface at a later stage in the country’s history (Bell, 2001).

Several studies have attempted to ascertain the extent to which the groupings within the country have in reality drawn closer together. While the society has made progress toward developing a sense of nationhood, marked differences persist in the ways in which white and black South Africans react to key issues in the life of the nation. A survey conducted in 1999 by the Independent Newspaper Group and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, “Reality Check: South Africans’ Views of the New South Africa” (Brodie, Altman, & Sinclair, 1999), found notable differences between the perceptions of the New South Africa of white and black South Africans. The reporters found that the black population, while overwhelmingly poor, believed that the future would be better and were appreciative of the changes that had taken place. The white population, by contrast, who more logically could be regarded as the “winners” in the process of reconciliation, were disgruntled, and seemed to view everything through a veil of negativity (Brodie et al., 1999; MacGregor, 1999). The Coloured and Indian groups positioned themselves between these two poles.⁵

Other significant research conducted by independent civic institutes notes similar attitudinal fault-lines persisting in post-apartheid South Africa. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2001), established as an internationally-funded, non-governmental organization that seeks to continue the work of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission (Shea, 2000), published a report titled "Truth—Yes, Reconciliation—Maybe: South Africans Judge the Truth and Reconciliation Process" (Gibson & Macdonald, 2001). The report found the evidence of reconciliation mixed, and concluded that "South Africa is far from being a contented 'Rainbow Nation,' but it is also a country in which many seem to reject the intense racial animosity of the past" (p. 19).⁶ The researchers commented:

The survey results are not surprising but rather disappointing. . . . White South Africans appear negative and unwilling to contribute to the process of national reconciliation. This is in stark contrast to black and coloured attitudes. Perhaps this is the reason why South Africa was able to undergo peaceful political transition, as black South Africans seem far more willing to embrace the notion and responsibility of reconciliation than white South Africans. (p. 4)

Finally, national leaders have raised pointed questions about the commitment of all South Africans to forming alliances across racial barriers. In his final report as the leader of the African National Congress, then-president Nelson Mandela chastised white South Africans for exploiting national reconciliation in such a way that the goal of social transformation was obscured (Mandela, 1997). A year later, in an even more outspoken, and highly contentious speech, the then deputy-president, Thabo Mbeki (Mbeki, 1998), spoke against the "rainbow" grain by arguing that the material conditions of the society resulted in the persistent division of the country into two nations: one rich, and predominantly white, and one poor, and predominantly black. He maintained that South Africans had not created a sense of common destiny:

The longer this situation persists, in spite of the gift of hope delivered to the people by the birth of democracy, the more entrenched will be the conviction that the concept of nation building is a mere mirage and that no basis exists, or will ever exist, to enable national reconciliation to take place. (p. 188)

His words contained a clear statement of disappointment in, and an implied reprimand of, white South Africans for a lack of integrity regarding the process of reconciliation and nation building. As he put it: "Those who were responsible for, or were the beneficiaries of, the past, absolve themselves from any obligation to help do away with an unacceptable legacy" (p. 192).

In pointing to the different experiences occasioned by the unequal material conditions of sections of the population, and the marked divergence in understanding of these inequalities, Mbeki was insisting that the continuing existence of unreconciled interpretive communities in relation to the process of societal reconciliation and reconstruction be acknowledged. And in linking the projects of nation building and democratization to social justice, to dismantling gross inequity, and to deracializing the nation, he was indicating his sensitivity to the voices of the African majority. While heavily criticized, the view has nonetheless been supported by some prominent South African academics (Bundy, 2000; Lever & James, 2000; F. Wilson, 2000).

Two Nations?

The apartheid ideology that the new order seeks to transcend was premised upon notions of culture as static and exclusive, and based at heart on a belief in the “fundamental irreconcilability of peoples” (Asmal et al., 1997, p. 51). Maintaining culturally distinct and constructed communities was also part of the “project of gaining political hegemony” (Zegeye & Liebenberg, 2001, p. 316). People were taught to fear those who were not part of “their” social entity, and to reject the cultural manifestations of the “other.” As Zegeye and Liebenberg put it: “Although apartheid failed to create viable self-sufficient nations for the majority of people in society, it did create the cultural ethos associated with defending those nationals and groups” (p. 317). Starkly opposed to this view of culture, cultural theorists, influenced by post-structuralism, now generally acknowledge that all cultures are hybrid (Nuttall & Michael, 2000a, 2000b; Werbner & Modood, 1997). “Culture . . . exists only in its variations and transitions. Culture in itself, then, is the result of past, present, and future processes of creolisation” (Wicker, 1997, p. 38). Conceptions of culture as a coherent, homogeneous, reified “thing” that people “have” are increasingly regarded as extensions of racist conceptualizing and as simply inaccurate, especially in the age of globalization (Friedman, 1997).

The same kind of debate has emphasized de-essentialized notions of identity. Current conceptions theorize identity as complex, fluid, multiple, palimpsestic, and hybrid, and as constructed by drawing on available symbolic systems within the social realm. Melucci (1997), for example, sees identity as a *field* defined by sets of relations and suggests that we should think of it in terms of *identitisation*, a term that communicates the dynamic processes by which individuals construct their identities (p. 64) and resonates with Laclau’s insight that identity formation is an act of power.

The more interesting question, as Werbner (1997) points out, is not why creolization occurs but why actors in a “negotiated field of meaning constantly attempt to deny and defy these processes of hybridisation” (p. 8). As has been argued, the current flux in the social and political organization within South Africa, occasioned by the moment of dislocation, accentuates the fluidity inherent in the nature of all social processes. The context necessitates that individuals and collectivities undertake a certain amount of self-redefinition (Bekker, 1996; Morrell, 2001; Steyn, 2001b; Wicomb, 2001). At the same time, the society offers increased choice and new possibilities for *identitisation*, greater opportunities for breaking down clearly demarcated notions of “self” and “other,” and exerts new pressures towards blurring cultural boundaries.

It may be useful to draw on Lotman’s (1991) concept of the *semiosphere* in seeking to understand the tenacious character of the largely incommensurate life-worlds of black and white South Africans implicit in the findings cited above. The semiosphere is “the whole semiotic space of culture,” the cultural analogy to the *biosphere* in environmental theory (p. 125). Papastergiades (1997) characterizes it as the “dynamic process of influence, transformation and coexistence within the space of culture,” (p. 268) the heterogeneous totality of cultural space.

One could argue that, historically, black South Africans have inhabited a semiosphere infused with suffering and abject poverty, steeped in discourses of struggle, hope, and resistance held in tension with discourses of endurance, despair, and internalized oppression. White South Africans, by contrast, have lived in privileged conditions, largely unaware of, even indifferent to, the world in which black South Africans lived. Their semiosphere has been infused with the centuries-old racist discourses of Eurocentric colonialism, recycled into the logic of apartheid (Magubane, 1999; Ndebele, 1998, 2000a; Steyn, 2001b; Wicomb, 2001). The blindnesses that accompany whiteness (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Gabriel, 1998; McIntyre, 1997; Nakayama & Martin, 1999), and the discursive resources that circulate in this life-world, encourage notions of entitlement and provide scant wherewithal for understanding the sense-making that shaped the experience of being black in South Africa. Through its position of privileged power, the “white world” was largely able to subjugate the free expression of the categories, tropes, and definitions emerging from the subordinated majority. Where internal contestation existed within this life-world, it occurred primarily along the deeply entrenched English-Afrikaans ethnic divide, which, while providing different stances toward the Afrikaner nationalist government and Anglo tradition of

liberalism, was nevertheless allied in terms of constructing a white identity with the African majority as the “other” (Fredrickson, 1981; Steyn, 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Wicomb, 2001).⁷

A situation of such polarized interpretive communities clearly presents particular difficulties to effective intercultural rapprochement. Lotman (1991) argues that every culture begins by dividing the world into “its own” internal space and “their” external space, which are separated by boundaries that “control, filter and adapt the external into the internal” (p. 140). In the South African context, a great deal of “border work” was done to maintain worlds that were in great measure closed along political as well as social lines. Yet the process by which cultural transformation occurs, according to Lotman, begins at the boundaries between semiospheres, where “creolized semiotic systems come into being” (p. 142). Working back through the cultural space toward the centre, a kind of semiotic convection current is set in motion, which works through to the centre. The “strangeness” of the “other” is gradually dissolved within the receiving culture, which is transformed in the process (p. 147). A precondition for this process to occur is that both groups are interested in overcoming the barriers that inevitably arise in this process of dialogue (p. 143).

Applied to the South African context, forging a different, inclusive South African society would require a concerted, dedicated project of culture-making at the boundaries of the semiospheres, creating sufficient shared symbolic resources to begin the process of mutual transformation. Received sense-making would have to be sufficiently disrupted to allow for revision of past understandings, for discursive practice to draw more individuals across the interpretive borders, enabling a significant measure of cultural creolization. At the same time, sufficient continuity for social groups, with their multiplicity of memories (De Kok, 1998) would have to be preserved to prevent complete disintegration of social identities. “Culture-making,” in the words of Gerd Baumann, “is not an extempore improvisation but a project of social continuity placed within, and contending with, moments of social change” (Baumann, 1997, p. 214). At the level of social identity formation, this would require the creation of much more complex selves, selves based less on simple dichotomies that dehumanize the “other” and trade on enemy images. Simply put, both the culture-making and identity-forming dimensions of generating new meanings of, and for, the nation depend on transgressive acts to blur the borders of the semiospheres and open up possibilities of alliance building across hitherto entrenched divides. Such realignments may take multiple forms:

recognition of existing sites of disruption; complex processes of making connections; developing commonly shared, hybridized, multiple identities; synergistic, third culture building, and movement toward greater social integration (Kriger & Zegeye, 2001; Nuttall & Michael, 2000b; Steyn & Motshabi, 1996). This kind of cultural work would also, of course, militate against the development of a diasporic framework for self-understanding.

“The Daily Plebiscite of Many National Voices”

Discursive activity plays a major constitutive role in shaping social identity. Foster (1999) explains: “Categories are not given, but are debated and argued over: they are constantly reconstructed in everyday discursive patterns. . . . Social positionings are due to active arguments, rhetorical positions, and discursive construction of categories” (p. 342). All of these are constantly being reworked through “the quotidian daily plebiscite of many national voices” (Werbner, 1997, p. 14). Two popular talk shows on the national English radio station, SAfm—*Microphone-in* and *The Tim Modise Show*—were chosen as sites that provide occasions during which “the nation talks with the nation,” where discursive jockeying can be caught “in the act,” and provide the material that is analysed below. Two themes were selected for analysis: (1) the issue of whether white South Africans can legitimately call themselves “African,” and (2) whether they owe black South Africans financial restitution. The themes are hotly contested precisely because they affect the boundaries between the two semiospheres: the retention of current alignments and identifications, the separation of interests, and the differentiation of realities.

The programmes were recorded and transcribed during 1998 and 1999. A note was made of whether the caller was male or female and whether the caller’s “race” was identifiable on the basis of accent, language or family name, or self-identification. Given the historical segregation of groups in South Africa, such distinctions can usually be made with a great deal of accuracy, and generally, callers did self-identify wherever there was any doubt, given the racially charged topics under discussion. Where the categorization was regarded as unsure, the comments were not included in the analysis. Each caller’s comments were closely analysed to identify how each comment fits in with the broader culturally shared interpretive frames of reference (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). The analysis focused on what the comment did as opposed to merely what it said, i.e. it attempted to situate the comments within the broad social context (Billig, 1988a).

After the first phase of analysis, the comments were further analysed using the conceptual framework suggested by Baumann (1997), who argues that in working cultural terrain in order to (deconstruct or re)construct boundaries of collective identification, people draw on at least two discursive competences: dominant discourses that attempt to hold reified boundaries intact and demotic discourses that attempt to dislocate community and culture, and thereby provide transgressive opportunities that may change identification.

The sample obviously is, in a sense, self-selected in that it consists of people who have voluntarily contributed their opinions to a public forum. Although it cannot be assumed that these voices necessarily articulate a generalizable “mass” opinion (if there is such a thing), it can safely be assumed that these voices were representative to some degree of various strains of sense-making among the population at the time. The callers are identified in terms of sex for the reader’s interest, but no attempt has been made to infer generalizations on gender from the data in this sample.

Dominant and Demotic Discourses in the Theme:

Can Whites Be Regarded as Africans?

The majority of black Africans who commented on this topic used dominant discourses, evincing a sense of ownership of the identification of African through an emotional and historical claim. They clearly felt that they should be the ones to determine who belongs to this category, and who does not. Callers communicated the belief that there is some kind of “real,” authentic, essential African quality, trait, or heritage by which Africanness can be identified.

You are an African if you have only one ancestry. This is what we have always called ourselves. A European person remains European. Whites are at best European-African, but only one out of ten would qualify for that. The rest are simply European. [female]

Their [white people’s] ancestors are from Europe. [male]

There is an undertone of distancing, even rejection, that runs through the above quotations, and it seems to be driven by scepticism about the “good faith” in which whites are now claiming to be African. The fact that whites have based their identities and behaviour on a sense of European superiority to black South Africans is illustrated in the comments below:

*Some whites take umbrage at being called African. They see it as an insult.
[male]*

The people from Europe see themselves as having a common destiny. [male]

A question mark hangs over the motives of those who previously benefited from the exploitation of the black majority, largely indifferent to their suffering, now claiming to be one of them. For the callers below, there is a suggestion that whites don't want to pay the costs bequeathed to the New South Africa by the system they previously supported, and that they again want to appropriate the most advantageous subject position.

Whites are looking for justification now. [male]

Now that it suits whites they want to be African. They didn't want to before 1990. [male]

Yet for some black callers, it appears to be less the fact of white pigmentation that militates against inclusion of whites as Africans than the whiteness ideology to which they subscribe. Comments pointed to chauvinism, participation in the denigration of the continent, and superficiality of engagement with the issues of the continent. Attitudes of mind such as these disqualify white South Africans from being accepted as Africans.

They don't know Africa. If they go on holiday it's to Europe or America.

They've never travelled north of the Limpopo river. They even talk about South Africa as if its separate from Africa. [male]

They always make as if it is only African countries that fight wars. [male]

Making a pointed jibe at this perceived lack of integrity, the question was asked by the next caller whether whites would share not only the new recognition of black Africans' legitimacy which has come with democracy, but also the insults that have been inflicted on them historically:

If Europeans can be Africans, can there be European kaffirs?⁸ [male]

Conditionality therefore enters the discourse of some of these callers. Being African is something that whites will have to earn through a change of heart and by dint of commitment.

Few whites feel that they are genuinely African. Being African has to do with where your heart lies, where your loyalties are. It is something which whites will have to earn. Some are now becoming African. [male]

One can judge whether whites are African by their actions. [male]

The above quotation shows that while most callers who identified as black African used dominant discourses, some callers to this program were prepared to use discourses that can be described as conditionally demotic: the boundary that defends Africanness can be redrawn, but only if there is convincing evidence of an authentic will to be allied with black South Africans in working toward a better life for all the people of the country.

In summary, the responses of black African callers to the question of whether whites can be African tended to be resistant, emphasizing the contradictions in the position of white South Africans who claim Africanness. The arguments lie along a continuum from outright rejection, through scepticism, to conditional acceptance based on perceived authenticity and genuine solidarity on the part of whites.

By contrast with the dominant discourses employed by black African callers on this topic, the whites who commented on the topic used only demotic discourses—they expressed a strong desire to see the boundaries that have been used to draw the distinction between “us” and “them,” regarding the basis for being accepted as African, dismantled. The arguments presented provide the very broadest, unconditional definition of “African”:

All those people who are born in Africa should be regarded as African.

[female]

The term African should be applied to all the people of this continent. It is a continental name, which they are entitled to by birth. [male]

It's where you live that matters. For people anywhere it's the state they live in that matters. [male]

White callers challenged the “ownership” of Africanness that black South Africans callers seemed to feel, some claiming that it is inherently racist to use an ethnic term of identification that could be understood to exclude whites. Often these objections drew on power-evasive discourses (Frankenberg, 1993) of colour-blindness:

The only way one can decide on the issue is through looking at history. It is not only black people who have been called African in earlier times. [male]

Only in racial terms does European or African mean something. It means nothing to me. [male]

Alternatively, callers defused the controversy by deflecting the question onto other inclusive terms that can provide common identification, but to which white South Africans have stronger historical claim:

Europeans don't identify themselves that way. Albanians don't think of themselves as Europeans, but as Albanians. Continental identification is not important. The important thing is our South Africanness. [male]

Most of the arguments from white callers depended on formal definitions of the term *African*. A few, however, made their claim to Africanness on the basis of the emotional bond they feel with the continent:

I've been to the village in Europe where my people come from. It means nothing to me. [male]

I get upset when people exclude white-skinned Africans like myself. I cheer for African soccer teams, and miss hearing African languages when I am overseas. [male]

In sum, then, white callers stressed their historical, legal, and emotional claim on the continent to counter exclusionary uses of the term *African* by black South Africans. The use of demotic discourses indicates the desire to be included, but the use of formal, minimalistic definitions of *African* indicates they want this inclusion as a matter of entitlement rather than because they identify with the issues facing those who have inherited the enduring legacies of conquest, slave trade, colonialism, and exploitation of the continent. This act of identity construction, the shift in positioning towards Africa, can, on the one hand, be read as a strategic recognition of the changes in the power balance in the country, and a need to align with the new centres of political power, i.e. a tacit recognition of a minority status previously obscured by the power of the white supremacist state. The analysis that follows, however, shows how a position taken up on one topic is qualified by the position taken up on another, creating levels of complexity. This layeredness illustrates not only the dynamic processes of “struggle involved in forging identities” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 24) nor only the “multiple, incomplete, and/or fragmented” (p. 24) nature of identity, nor only, indeed, the tolerance for contradictory ideological stances within one subjectivity (Billig, 1991), but actually points to the reason *why* the (contradictory) layeredness is constituted within collective identities. With many arrows in its quiver, *white talk* acquires versatility and deftness through the maintenance of such discursive layers.

**Dominant and Demotic Discourses in the Theme:
Do Whites Owe Blacks Extra Financial Restitution?**

The arguments black South Africans put forward on this topic were all unequivocally demotic, in that they presented an unambivalent case for dismantling the historically inherited economic support base for the different life-worlds of whites and blacks in South Africa.

The black callers drew attention to a pervasive white denial. Their discourse indicated that they were looking for acknowledgement of past injustice, inequity, suffering, and of the enduring effects of dispossession in the present.

You are not looking at how you benefited from the apartheid. [male]

You are missing the point. The majority of young people are not graduating at all—they have no funds to complete their studies. We need to put money into things like providing equal education. [male]

There is an urgent need for land redistribution. [male]

This challenge to white denial was accompanied by a strong call for recognition of the moral dimensions of the issue. The callers seemed to be prompting a sense of social responsibility toward those disadvantaged by the past, and appealing to a sense of fair play:

This is a colonial debt, it's a legacy of colonialism and its exploitative system. [male]

We need to level the playing fields. [male]

The black South African callers characterized the white response to the question of reparations with an implicit reproach for the white callers' self-serving attitudes, self-indulgently negative attitude to the possibilities of the future, and one-sided emphasis on the worst aspects of the present. In the examples below, there appears to be an implied imputation of a lack of generosity in their compatriots, who seem to be withholding the benefit of their expertise, education and technical advantage.

Instead of looking at how they can assist, they are talking of running away to other countries. [male]

You are not looking for ways to reduce the crime, poverty, and the problems you are always worrying about. [male]

In the past you were the ones who used to sing "Ons sal lewe ons sal sterwe, ons vir jou Suid-Afrika."⁹ Now you are not saying "We will build together, we will work hand in glove." [male]

The appeal is to fairness, to an honest acknowledgement of how the odds are still stacked and of the difficulties with which the black community is grappling. The black Africans who called in on this topic were demanding respect and confidence in their ability to take their rightful place as contributing members of the society:

This sort of tax is not giving handouts; it will enable people to get tractors; it will assist them to move forward. [male]

The demotic nature of these comments emerges strongly in the appeals to a commitment to a spirit of community, to a cooperative approach to the problems facing the country, as is evident in the comment below.

If we put our heads together, we will be in a position to find ways to deal with our problems. [female]

Also important, the callers emphasized that reconstructing the society was a long-term undertaking that would require a great deal of effort, and that the structural, systemic, and institutional factors that need to be addressed cannot merely be glossed over. For this to happen, the arguments suggest, the boundary between those who have and those who are in want needs to be rendered less secure. Callers argued that people need to reach across the separation, emotionally as well as in deed, and align themselves against the issues that divided them in the past:

We're not yet a society; we need to build a society through our actions. [male]

In contrast to these demotic arguments, the rhetorical force of arguments offered by white South Africans were dominant in tenor, fighting for the status quo, though not always openly. Callers presented a catalogue of the dire consequences that would flow from the attempt to tax wealth acquired during the apartheid era. The withdrawal of white skills and capital, seen as inevitably following from restitutive measures, was repeatedly mentioned as a threat to the economy.

Money goes where the profit flows. . . . In our global world, where the barriers that prevented movement in the past are falling, we'll see a huge financial drain out of the country. [male]

*The people whom we need will leave, we'll chase away those that produce.
[male]*

Young people can get jobs anywhere in the world. We have to make the choice to stay in South Africa attractive to them. [male]

The increased flow of capital into the country will create inflation. [male]

Some comments suggested that restitution not only was foolish but actually couldn't be done, either because the idea is inherently unworkable or because the new government cannot be trusted to administer it effectively.

Such a tax has not been efficient anywhere in the world. [male]

How practically would it be redistributed to the deserving poor? [male]

With so much corruption in the government, who would administer it? How can it be done? Money just gets frittered away. [male]

Whites, in the overall discourse, present themselves as having no obligation beyond the simple legal requirements of citizenship. They are, it is argued by these callers, morally in the clear. The impact of the unequal past on the present is minimized, and the current contribution of white business, in particular, and the white population in general, is regarded as sufficient, even generous:

We already pay tax. The Minister of Finance assesses the priorities and pays out for education, crime, housing etc. [male]

We are already overtaxed. This would be the final nail in the coffin. We are taxed like no other nation on earth. [male]

We have the most socially responsible business sector anywhere in the world. [male]

*The so-called underprivileged get their slice of the budget through welfare, hospital services, and so on. They can't say they don't receive benefits.
[male]*

Denial of the depth of the inequity of the past manifests itself in many ways. The attempt to introduce racial cognizance into the argument is simply equated with racism. Africa is seen to be intrinsically prone to poverty; Africans are the cause of their own misery:

The government is just bringing in the race card again, just like in the apartheid days. [female]

Is all the poverty of black people the result of white people's actions? Go to the rest of Africa, and see the poverty there. When Jan van Riebeeck first arrived here, there was abject poverty. [male]

Talk about exploitation! In the Old South Africa we couldn't keep all the blacks who were streaming into the country out. [male]

There is no such thing as human equality. Poverty is a measure of individual productivity. [male]

A tax on wealth accumulated during apartheid is construed as punishment. Whites are seen to have become wealthy through their own moral endeavour, which renders wealth an entitlement, and using it to benefit anyone but oneself purely a matter of individual altruism. The interrelationship between white wealth and black poverty is unacknowledged, and therefore restorative measures are uncalled for.

This is a punishment to the individual for having accumulated wealth through hard endeavour. [male]

You cannot punish people who have sacrificed for having invested wisely. [male]

What about all those of us who worked hard to put together something for our retirement, only to find that now most of it goes to the poor? [female]

People worked for their money; they should be allowed to pass it on to their children. [male]

Individual companies should have the right to decide where they want to pay extra towards social welfare. [male]

Where participation in the apartheid racial economy is acknowledged, it is minimized or individualized, and declared no longer relevant. The focus is transferred to the future.

Those who participated in apartheid have already apologized. We must look forward, and train a new generation of employees. [male]

Business is now colourless. We want to make the economy succeed. [male]

Apartheid was unequal, but now that is all over. [male]

The hypothetical cases that callers cited to emphasize the unfairness of the concept evoked marginal or the most vulnerable situations, or referred to the more exceptional

situation of people who are wealthy but not white. These tactics divert attention away from the economic centre—white, middle-class South Africa—to the least representative scenarios.

What about a widow with six children? [male]

What about an immigrant who arrived just before 1994? [male]

What about those who became wealthy after 1994? [female]

Alternatively, the definition of the problem was shifted:

Our real problem is unemployment. The devil finds work for idle hands.

[male]

In all of the above arguments, as well as those that space does not permit me to analyse here, the effect is to minimize the obligation of the historically privileged group toward the less privileged, and to keep the economic boundaries watertight enough to prevent unwanted seepage into the coffers of all who are “not-us.”

White callers who supported the proposal represented lone voices in the face of such powerful expressions of dominant discourse. In the mode of demotic discourse, they advocated reaching out to their black compatriots. Some, however, added qualifiers and hedges.

Surely we all benefited, and we should all make amends. This is about reconciliation. We should show our willingness and be prepared to share.

[female]

There are people in this country who have obscene wealth. There should be a wealth tax, but it should not be racially based. [female]

On the issue of restitution, therefore, it is clear that black callers were working to dismantle extant borders. They tended (1) to focus on the local, (2) to use appeals to conscience, (3) to raise social and/or moral issues, (4) to insist on taking history seriously, (5) to regard questions of group accountability a natural corollary to historical group victimization, and (6) to show a marked scepticism about the prospects of the capitalist, free market system changing class and economic disparities. The pervasive sentiment that seemed to permeate this cultural terrain was a feeling of disappointment.

By contrast, white callers, who phoned in prolifically, tended to construe the proposal as punishment. They based arguments to maintain the status quo on liberal

*what makes this
poor description?*

values of entitlement to private wealth and notions of individual worth, retaining a sacrosanct status for the private capital system. They weighted their participation in the welfare of the nation by maximizing, even exaggerating, their part in contributing to change, and minimizing their collusion in the historical processes where gain was based on group positioning; they also individualized the issues. The sheer amount of discourse defending this boundary indicates its emotional salience to white South Africa.

Conclusion: Some Implications

The above analysis shows high levels of discursive activity at the boundaries between the two semiopheres, where the cultural work for transformation takes place. The analysis also goes some way toward explaining how the continuing phenomenon of “Two Nations” maintains itself. On both of the contentious issues chosen for analysis, white and black callers tended to push in opposite directions: the one group wants to dismantle the boundaries that the other defends. The conclusion has to be drawn that the borders of the respective groups were being carefully patrolled to protect perceived group interests. White callers used whatever discursive means were available to them to deflect attention away from the continuities of their privilege, choosing “rainbowism” whenever it served this purpose. Black South Africans argued vigorously to expose such strategies, but they also protected their own “cultural capital.” The analysis shows unaligned interpretive worlds coexisting parallel to each other—a still uneasy alliance in the interests of national reconciliation. This conclusion accords with that of Ansell (2001), who analysed the written submissions leading up to the National Conference on Racism in 2000. She concludes:

Although the submissions reveal a variety of perspectives on racism within each self-identified group, a significant racial dimension—even bifurcation—is clearly manifest. Black and white South Africans approach the questions that were the topic of the National Conference on Racism in meaningfully different ways, suggesting the existence of “two nations of discourse.” (p. 1)

For genuine reconciliation to be advanced, the question “What constitutes reconciliation for you?” would need to be addressed, and antagonistic meaning content, arising from deep-seated interests that shape the respective worlds, would need to be faced up to. As can be seen from the above analysis, a crucial disparity permeating the “cultural territories of race” (Lamont, 1999) in South Africa concerns the appropriate relationship

to the past, and how it should inform present attitudes and shape solutions for and in the future. For black African callers in these programmes, reconciliation required that the past be acknowledged, and its legacy actively factored into the nation's ideologies, policies, and actions. Privileged white callers (and increasingly, the semi-privileged groups that ally themselves with this discursive world), on the other hand, were working hard to deflect attention away from cleavages in the society resulting from the past. The Truth and Reconciliation process itself became a site where the two worlds wrestled over the meaning of the past (Zegeye, 2001a, 2001b).

It is clear that reconciliation does not take place in a uniform manner, but rather, tends to be patchy, tends to progress unevenly, and may be issue specific. In this case, the willingness to reach out on one theme through demotic discourses did not imply a willingness to ally on another. Tortoiselike, groups may reach out on one issue and then pull back on the next. Intercultural alliances, reconciliations, are achieved by complex cross-stitching, with many a slipped stitch. However, the analysis demonstrates the importance of not taking all discursive practice at face value. The strategic nature of discursive practices has to be fully grasped. The roles played by, for example, demotic and dominant discourses need to be carefully scrutinized. The fact that both groups desire to break down some boundaries, while simultaneously entrenching others, indicates complex motivations at play. Some nifty footwork is taking place here as layers of discourse run counter to each other and perform different functions in the overall objective of maximizing the group's perceived interests in the struggle to define the situation. For example, one can read the white South African callers' demotic discourses on the issue of *Africanness* as essentially positive self-presentation, serving to ameliorate, even obfuscate, an intransigence demonstrated in the discourses relating to economic matters, and clearly undercut by the negative typifications of Africa and *Africanness* which surface in the second debate. Similarly, further scrutiny of the strategic deployment of discourses uncovers that the apparent demotic discourses may not, in fact, indicate an intention to build intercultural alliance. The contours of *white talk* that start to emerge in this chapter suggest that they may, rather, serve to effect co-optation or containment, a dynamic which ensuing chapters will show in full operation.

Elsewhere, I have argued that Baumann's framework of demotic and dominant discourses may need to be supplemented by the notions of *discourses of rapprochement* and *discourses of alienation* (2003). Whether discourses actually do lead to closer alliance may ultimately depend on what underlying relational meaning is communicated.

The crucial element here is not just whether boundaries are being dismantled or defended, but how the intention in doing so is perceived by the other party. For example, demotic discourses, if experienced as strategically self-serving, superficial or insincere, may in fact constitute discourses of alienation and form a barrier to alliance building. Discourses of rapprochement would signal a kind of emotional work that affirms the other's experience and communicates integrity. The analysis in this chapter shows that for the black African callers demotic discourses that do not signal relational rapprochement run the risk of being perceived as "a desire for cheap and painless reconciliation amounting in fact to an acceptance of the past as normal rather than a renunciation of it." (Asmal et al., 1997, p. 48). As the chapters that follow demonstrate, *white talk* abounds with demotic strategies that do not represent genuine attempts at rapprochement, but rather point to the obfuscation of other motivations.

Finally, the analysis of this chapter raises the question whether, in a situation where antagonistic discourses are vying to secure the articulation of a nodal point such as "reconciliation," both groups have equal claim to the right to "fix" the meaning. Although this chapter clearly cannot pursue the topic in any detail, the moral prerogative is surely unequally apportioned to different groups¹⁰ (De Gruchy, 2000; Ndebele, 2000a, 2000b). In a context of profound injury committed by one group upon the other "reconciliation cannot be a symmetrical process of mutual absolution" (Asmal et al., 1997, p. 49). In the words of Desmond Tutu (1985):

It is the victims, not the perpetrators, who must say whether things are better or not. When you are throttling me you can't really tell me that things are better, that you are not choking me quite so badly."(cited in Asmal et al., 1997, p. 49)

This chapter has re-presented a snapshot of a particular moment in a highly dynamic context. It shows *white talk* beginning to take shape as a flexible, resistant set of discursive strategies, flexing its muscles to position itself as a rival option of sense-making for the nation moving into "normal" "reconciled" day-to-day living. It plays the intersections within the social location of post-colonial whites settled in South Africa: they can claim enough Africanness to secure their footing on the continent, but at the same time use all the Eurocentric cultural, economic, philosophical and political tools available to them to secure themselves as a separate group which continues to enjoy the

privileged positions institutionalized by their whiteness through generations. *White talk* is beginning to show its colours.

The ensuing chapters explore such dimensions of the maturing *white talk* in greater depth. Chapter Six continues the exploration of discursive border-work, but specifically that of English-speaking white South Africans, showing more fully the transnational identification that is so typical of diasporic subjectivities. The chapter also broaches the crucial issue of ideology.

NOTES

1. The following quotation from the Manifesto of the ANC (African National Congress) Youth League, issued in March 1944, shows how the issues of the relationship of white people to the continent, and the material compensation on which reconciliation would be built, are part of the discourse of struggle:

Africa was, has been and still is the Black man's Continent. The Europeans, who have carved up and divided Africa among themselves, dispossessed, by force of arms, the rightful owners of the land—the children of the soil. . . . Although conquered and subjugated, the Africans have not given up, and they will never give up their claim and title to Africa. The fact that their land has been taken and their rights whittled down, does not take away their right to the land of their forefathers. They will suffer white oppression, and tolerate European domination, only as long as they have not got the material force to overthrow it. There is, however, a possibility of a compromise, by which the Africans could admit the Europeans to a share of the fruits of Africa, and this is *inter alia*:

that the Europeans completely abandon their domination of Africa;

that they agree to an equitable and proportionate re-division of land;

that they assist in establishing a free people's democracy in South Africa in particular and Africa in general.

We . . . realise that the different racial groups have come to stay. But we insist that a condition for inter-racial peace and progress is the abandonment of white domination, and such a change in the basic structure of South African society that those relations which breed exploitation and human misery will disappear. (Mandela, 1994, p. 25)

2. In the President's own words:

To give impetus to our nation-building efforts, we have sought to promote the idea of South Africa as a rainbow nation. This expresses the ideal of pursuing unity while recognising diversity. It affirms that South Africans are able to, and want to, create a non-racial harmony which transcends apartheid's legacy of bitterness and division. (Mandela, 1995)

3. Quoted in Mandaza (1999, p. 81).

4. Some of the comments are worth quoting in full. Nkosinathi Biko (2000) comments on the pain of the Biko family:

NOTES (cont.)

Bluntly put, white South Africa, by virtue of acts of commission or omission, prolonged the existence of discrimination in general and Apartheid in particular. In this context, the single most painful aspect concerning transition has been the obvious disinterest of many white South Africans in the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] hearings. Apart from those applying for amnesty, few chose to attend the hearings. For many whites the victim hearings were a non-event. Under Apartheid some possibly “did not know”, but when the occasion presented itself for the nation to face the truth in order to effect reconciliation, few were prepared to do so. The question is whether the process was about truth and reconciliation at all. For some it was about amnesty—as a basis for ensuring that those directly implicated in the atrocities of the past were able to join the ranks of the indifferent. (p. 196)

5. I have not attempted to analyse in detail how the Coloured and Indian groups position themselves in the New South Africa. However, data gathered in KwaZulu-Natal in 1999 showed these communities—the Coloured and Indians communities—moving closer to the Afrikaans and English white communities, respectively. Their attitudes toward black South Africans had deteriorated. Among white South Africans, English-speaking South Africans, particularly, showed a more negative attitude toward black South Africans (Mynhardt, 1999). Similarly, Finchilescu and Dawes (1999) found Coloured adolescents and Indian adolescents moving closer to white adolescents in terms of their ideological constructions of the future. It seems that an alliance of whites and a growing number of Coloureds and Indians has been forming, in contradistinction from the majority black African population (Lever & James, 2000). This process of reconfiguring its boundaries to draw in previously excluded groups in order to secure privilege has been documented as a strategy of whiteness in other contexts (Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 1998; Warren & Twine, 1997). What this research points to is that the old divides have not been bridged so much as realigned. Gans (1999) predicts a similar dynamic in racial alignments in the United States, where a polarization seems to be developing in which all nonblacks could be increasingly categorized as whites, pitted against blacks, who remain the stigmatized group.

6. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (Gibson & Macdonald, 2001) found that disparities in attitudes toward and perceptions of the TRC, in particular, and of the process of reconciliation, in general, were deep, and coincident with the racial divide. Some of the findings included: Only 50% of white South Africans feel some responsibility to contribute to the process of national reconciliation, compared with 77% of black South Africans. Only 29% of white South Africans believe that the TRC was necessary to build a united South Africa, compared with 77% of black South Africans. Only 20% of white South Africans feel that material compensation is a necessary part of national reconciliation, compared with 70% of black South Africans.

7. To argue that these two predominating, disparate symbolic systems continue to exist in large measure is not to argue for an essentialist reading of the South African intercultural context. These life-worlds have never been homogenous, nor did coherent meaning systems arise endogenously from within the social

NOTES (cont.)

groups. Rather, both interpretive communities were a consequence of, and material for, the continual and interlocking processes of culture making and social identity formation, which took place within the broad contours of the political, economic, cultural, and historical domains operating within the country. These semiospheres each contained diverse, and shifting, subject positionalities, influenced by such factors as historical events, ethnic affiliations, sex/gender, class, and language. Moreover, the semiopheres were deeply imbricated with, and implicated in each other, being largely constructed in relation and/or reaction to each other through processes of alterity (Wicomb, 2001).

⁸ The word *kaffir* is a derogatory term used to refer to black Africans. It has the same emotional resonance in South Africa as the term *nigger* has in the United States. Derived from an Arabic term for “nonbeliever,” it was imported along with the slave trade from East Africa.

9. These words are from the national anthem of the Old South Africa. The English version was: “At thy will to live or perish, oh, South Africa, dear land!”

10. Ndebele (2000a) spells the argument out more fully:

On balance, though, white South Africa will be called upon to make greater adjustments to black needs than the other way round . . . whiteness has a responsibility to demonstrate its bona fides in this regard. Where is the primary locus of responsibility for white capital, built over centuries with black labour and unjust laws? A failure to come to terms with the morality of this question ensures the continuation of the culture of insensitivity and debilitating guilt. (p. 52)

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6

ELITE PREFORMULATIONS: AN IDEOLOGICAL MANICURE

The previous two chapters have argued (a) that at the time of political transition, a central fantasy of white South Africa was that the white world would remain essentially intact, and (b) that a few years into the new dispensation, a great deal of discursive energy was still being put into maintaining the borders that separate the lifeworld of whiteness from black South Africa, clearly discernible in the competing articulations of “floating signifiers,” key discursive nodal points that are available for (re)definition. The preceding chapter has also shown how layers of these discourses pull in different directions; some act to dismantle historical barriers, others reinforce existing divisions. Both impulses co-exist in the discursive terrain. Which impulse dominates on a particular topic, or in a particular context, depends on what is perceived to be in the strategic interests of the group.

This chapter now zooms in on the important issue of the ideology which underpins the complex, but clearly distinguishable, strand of discourse operating within the white semiosphere, *white talk*.¹ As has been argued, *white talk* seeks to perpetuate whiteness in South Africa, and as with all discourses, the meaning it seeks to invest in signifiers emerges in relation to other possible articulations. The previous chapter has therefore shown it to be one discursive formation among many, functioning rhetorically in contestation with discursive formations promoting other ideological agendas (Billig,

1991, 1996; Dickens & Fontana, 1994; Guillaumin, 1995; Hall, 1985), in a context where there is fundamental competition between social groups for scarce social, economic, political and cultural resources (Oktar, 2001; Van Dijk, 1988, 1995a, 1995b, 1998; Van Dijk & Wodak, 1988). *White talk* predominantly pits itself against those discourses coming from black South Africans who seek to maximize their gains from political change, and to shape the young democracy according to the principles for which the struggle was fought. It also contends, however, with discursive pressure from those white South Africans who align themselves with the societal objectives of levelling disparities and creating an inclusive national culture.

Although this rhetorical drive is usually implicit and often not fully conscious, the fact that *white talk* is trying to “win” over other possible interpretive frames for organizing South African society does at times become quite apparent. The following passage is a case in point, where the introduction of competing voices that challenge received ideology in the print media is cast as deterioration in journalistic standards:

It's a worry to observe the odd tenor of comment in The Star, that worthy edifice in Sauer Street, Johannesburg, which has long been regarded as SA's leading daily broadsheet.

Recently I had cause to comment on remarks by The Star's senior political writer, Khathu Mamaila, who insulted the collective intelligence of readers with this statement: "it is economic logic that capitalism thrives on unemployment." This Marxist drivel was long ago consigned to the dustbin of history.

There was also an unsourced report suggesting that unnamed, sinister elements in Sandton were financing and conducting the Movement for Democratic Change's election campaign in Zimbabwe. . . . Another article, by Sipho Ngcobo, used the insulting phrase "house nigger" to attack Transnet executives.

Then we had Mathatha Tsedu, acting editor of The Star, apparently suggesting that the DP, the NNP and the UDM wish to see more people out of work. . . . Then comes the conspiracy theory. . . (Mulholland, Hotbed of Conspiracies Sniffed out in Sauer Street, 30 July)

The *white talk* that this chapter and the next examine, is taken from texts published several years after the films and the radio talk programmes discussed in the preceding

chapters. The analysis shows the contours *white talk* was acquiring by 2000, exemplified by columns in one of the national English-speaking newspapers. The discursive accomplishment of *white talk* in these texts reflects the agency exercised, the active choices made, even the inventiveness displayed, by these South Africans in relation to both the changes and the continuities in their circumstances.

The aims of *white talk* are essentially ideological, geared towards perpetuating a particular arrangement of social and economic capital that has benefited those who have been grouped together as white over those who have been grouped outside the magic circle. This perpetuation depends in large measure on resisting dis-closure—the rendering thinkable—of the possibility of articulations other than those that have been dominant in the past and whose original contingencies have been systematically faded out, “the sedimented forms of a power that has blurred the traces of its own contingency” (Laclau, 1996, p. 103).

Van Dijk (1998)² comments on the “routine” of beginning studies relating to ideology with remarks about the vagueness of the notion, and the confusion of its analysis (p. 1). As the understanding of ideology that informs this discussion has been spelt out in Chapter Three, I don’t intend adding to this rap, other than to confirm that this dissertation does not use the term in the classical Marxist sense of false beliefs, determined by the economic base, which dominate society and serve the interests of the ruling class, but rather follows contemporary post-structuralist uses of the term,³ which focus on discursive practices, but maintain the connection between ideology and self-serving group interests. Powerful groups that control the means by which ideas are circulated within societies are likely to establish hegemonic dominance over the society as conceived by Gramsci. What is of concern here is how these discursive practices “seek to foreclose the indefinite possibilities of signifying elements and their relations, in determinate ways” (Clegg, 1993, p. 26).

While whiteness itself can be conceptualized as an ideology (see, for example, McIntyre, 1997), this dissertation takes the view that it is better understood as an *ideologically supported and reproduced social positioning*, which has psychological, performative, cultural, economic, rhetorical, institutional, political, and other, dimensions. *White talk* is the discursive link between the ideology of white entitlement and the reproduction of whiteness in a transforming South Africa; it seeks to continue sense-making whereby those social arrangements which suit privileged white sectional interests are presented as inevitable, natural, and in the interests of the entire population.

As such, it is a crucial part of the everyday practice of making, and re-making, whiteness in the South African society.

Elucidating the ideological embeddedness of discourse in various contexts has become one of the main undertakings of discourse analysis, though particularly the stream known as Critical Discourse Analysis (see Billig, 1991, 1996; Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995c; Oktar, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Van Dijk, 1987, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1998; Van Dijk & Wodak, 1988). In other words, this chapter and the next fall in line with the commitment to make “more explicit the ways power abuse, dominance and inequality are being (re)produced by ideologically based discourse” (Van Dijk, 1995a, p. 243). Methodologically, the analysis accords with what can be called an *interpretation* or *recipient* theory of ideology, in that the readings offered of these columns suggest how the ideological embeddedness can be discerned by the reader (Van Dijk, 1995a). This embeddedness is exposed by drawing out the implications of the texts, exploring the underlying assumptions, examining inferences and making visible the values, beliefs and models that have shaped the discursive choices of the writers, particularly in constructing the ideologically opposed in-group and out-group. Ideology involves the continued suppression of other possibilities. It is therefore part of this methodology to suggest other possible interpretations or choices, in order (a) to show up the strategies that keep the ideological work of the text concealed, and (b) to demonstrate that the articulations in *white talk* are sedimented sense makings that are not in any way inevitable, but in fact contingent choices that have been backed by the historical power of white dominance, and that would suit the white minority to have accepted as simply objective reality by the entire population.

Elite Discourse

The role that media play in reproducing ideology, and in particular racist ideology, through their position as transmitters of symbolic forms of social life has been the subject of an enormous body of research. (See, for example, Brooks, 1995; Campbell, 1995; Cortes, 2000; De Goede, 1996; Domke, 2001; Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Erjavec, 2001; Fair & Astroff, 1991; R. Ferguson, 1998; Gabriel, 1998; Oktar, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Thompson, 1990; Torck, 2001; Twitchin, 1988; Van Dijk, 1992; C. C. Wilson & Gutiérrez, 1995). Predictably, a growing body of research looks at the more specific relationships between media representations and the ideologies of whiteness (Dreher, 2000; Fair & Astroff, 1991;

Patton, 2001; Shome, 2000) as vehicles for the construction of social identity and social relations. Van Dijk's (1992; 1993; 1995b) work identifies the western media, along with political, corporate and academic institutions, as sites that generate what he calls "elite discourse." Characteristically, elite discourse "preformulates" (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 9) the everyday racist discourses that circulate in the broader communities it influences, legitimating and enacting racism while at the same time concealing this activity. Through their privileged access to the means of reproduction of symbolic capital (p.47), writers and speakers act as representatives of the white group, rallying ethnic consensus around key issues and reproducing a sense of group solidarity and identity (p.20). The manner in which they define the issues, set the agendas, and present themselves as moral leaders, enables them to project the impression of being tolerant and enlightened, while yet condoning, even causing, the inequities they purport to lament (p.6). In sum, elite discourse presents the socially respectable face of white supremacist ideology, carefully managing its self-presentation while actively supporting the continuation of a hierarchical society.

White talk and elite discourse are not isomorphic, yet it is clear that the elite discourses operationalized by the white-dominated media in South Africa function as the "think-tank" for more broadly-based, popular discursive activity of *white talk* in South Africa. The challenge that confronts elite white discourse in the current South African scenario is to reground the ideology that maintained white advantage in the past, ensuring that it has the same effect, but in ways that are able to operate in new circumstances, and are not too obvious. While the need for greater subtlety in advocating sectional advantage is common throughout the contemporary world, given the norm that has developed against the overt expression of bigoted or prejudiced sentiments (Billig, 1988b; Kleiner, 1998; Van Dijk, 1992), unusual constraints, as well as exigencies, apply in post-apartheid South Africa.

The elite discourse analysed in other contexts (Van Dijk, 1987, 1993, 1995b, 1998; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) operates from a very powerfully dominant position, contending with ideological challenges coming mainly from advocates of multiculturalism and anti-racism. The strategic aim and effect is to retain the balance of power and to prevent darker people—immigrants and minority groups—from growing power bases. Characteristically, elite discourse is careful not to lay itself open to charges of racism, doing a delicate balancing act through techniques of linguistic and discursive indirection. By contrast, the examples of *white talk* analysed here originate in a context

where the power balance has indeed been realigned, and where, in the immediate context of the African continent, white people no longer have uncomplicated dominance. The rhetorical aim of *white talk* is therefore to do damage control in the face of increasing black empowerment. It attempts to come to grips with this central predicament: how can power in black people's hands, or, alternatively, black people with power, be managed through the symbolic resources in the society, which are still predominantly in white hands (McKoy, 2001; Van Dijk, 1993)? It therefore asserts, and seeks to retain, the power that is invested in the white voice—the voice of authority, reason, experience—bearing the self-assurance that comes from being in charge, accumulated over centuries. It capitalizes on the credibility conferred upon it by the established power of the West that it represents. Because it is ideologically driven, *white talk* is not always consistent, using whatever discursive resources are at hand to ensure advancement of the group whose interests it serves. While it does not generally extend into the politically extreme, fascist and militant territory occupied by ultra-right discourses also active in certain segments of the white population, the analysis shows that *white talk* contains characteristics not only of elite discourse as described by Van Dijk, but also characteristics more usually associated with positions that are further to the right.

The question of whether the media in South Africa, particularly the print media, are indeed perpetuating racist ideology into the new democracy has provoked a good deal of debate and commentary (Barrell, 2000; Boloka, 2000; Graybill, 2000; Jacobs, 2000a; Monyae & Ndumo, 2001; Pillay, 2000; Vanderhaeghen, 2000; Woods, 2000). One of the most trenchant criticisms is voiced by McKoy (2001). Following Parenti (1978), she argues that the South African liberal press (“trapped in the anachronism of ‘liberalism’”) fits the pattern of all hegemonic press in that it practises self-censorship in honouring its commitment to supporting the empowered (p. 81). McKoy analyses how the South African press has been part of an institutionalized racial system that constructs black bodies in such a way that they require forceful control, sanctions the reinscription of racial hierarchies, and yet keeps the white violence this entails unremarkable.

The most highly publicized forum dealing with the issue of racism in the South African media was the Inquiry into Racism in the Media undertaken by the Human Rights Commission⁴ (HRC). The inquiry was occasioned by a request submitted in 1998 to the HRC by two organizations, the Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa, to investigate racist reporting in two newspapers, the *Sunday Times* and the *Weekly Mail and Guardian*. Unsurprisingly, the entire process of

the inquiry was highly controversial. It included hearings to which the editors of prominent media were subpoenaed, as well as submissions by journalists, academics, concerned Non Governmental Organizations (Pollecutt, 2000), and political parties (African National Congress, 2000; Nzimande, 2000). Two independent research projects were commissioned by the HRC, one by Claudia Braude (Braude, 1999), and one by the Media Monitoring Project (Media Monitoring Project, 1999). Both research projects focused on the prevalence of stereotyping as the indicator of racism; both found a good deal of evidence to support the accusation of racial bias. The reports were greatly criticized— particularly on methodological grounds—when they were published in the HRC’s interim report in 1999. The notion of “subliminal racism” introduced into the debate by the Braude (1999) report led to particularly acrimonious wrangling. The final report, published in 2000 (Pityana, Nkeli, McClain, Legum, & Thloloe, 2000), was firm in its findings that the media did indeed propound a racist view of the world:⁵

To the extent that that expressions in the South African media “reflect a persistent pattern” of racist expressions and content of writing that could have been avoided, and given that we take seriously the fact that many submissions complained that such expressions cause or have the effect of causing hurt or pain, South African media can be characterized as racist institutions. . . . This finding holds regardless as to whether there is conscious or unconscious racism, direct or indirect. The cumulative effect of persistent racist stereotypes, racial insensitivity and at times reckless disregard for the effect of racist expressions on others, amounts to racism. (Pityana et al., 2000, p. 89)

Three Voices

The *Sunday Times*, the national weekly newspaper in which the columns under discussion are published, belongs to the Times Media⁶ group. The newspaper boasts the largest circulation in the country⁷ (Msomi, 2001), which means that it is very powerful in terms of its penetration into the society. Historically, its editors have wielded a fair measure of influence on public opinion, particularly in the white community. The *Sunday Times* positions itself at the more popular end of the weekly newspaper spectrum. Like most English newspapers in the country, the *Sunday Times* has prided itself in recent South African history on being opposed to the apartheid policies of the

previous government,⁸ and as a representative voice of English-speaking white South Africa, still regards itself as being in the liberal tradition of media reporting.

Three regular columns in the *Sunday Times* were chosen for analysis in this chapter and the next. All the texts of each of the columns for 2000 were downloaded from the archives on the *Sunday Times* web page (<http://sundaytimes.co.za>). The columns appear in different sections of the paper: *Hogarth* is published in the *Insight* (political analysis) section, Stephen Mulholland's *Another Voice* is in the business pages, whereas Barry Ronge's *Spit and Polish* is part of the entertainment section, published in magazine format. The reason for choosing a distribution across the news pages is to trace *white talk* across different domains, and to illustrate the sustained presence of the ideological patterning. Entman and Rojecki (2000) argue that

The overall patterns of images and information establish the mental associations, the schemas used to process the social world. The most relevant differentiation is not between genres but between different patterns of communicated information and the prototypes they construct. Whether in news or any other mediated communication, these patterns involve the overt associations between concepts, the repeated joint appearances. (p. 208)

Unlike news reports, which purport to be recording accurately and informing the public of facts without allowing personal bias to shape the contents, regular columns with by-lines quite specifically reflect a personal viewpoint. The selected journalists are regarded as opinion leaders and are expected to express personal perspectives and provide quality analysis to the readers. Successful columnists create a characteristic persona, a presence that comes from establishing an identifiable viewpoint and a recognizable style, so that regular readers come to feel a sense of personal acquaintance with the writer. This familiar persona becomes part of the message, an element in the influence the column exerts.

The three columnists selected for this analysis clearly position themselves within white, English-speaking South Africa, and re-present this positionality. Most of the time this is implicit in their writing, but at times is articulated quite explicitly. Barry Ronge, for example, characterizes his readers as those who are likely to spend time commiserating about "the general collapse of 'standards' across the board." In the

following extract he uses telling direct speech to invoke what he portrays as a typical response of those for whom he writes:

*You might well say: "Bloody typical! This new South Africa is like a zoo. I don't know how these people get their jobs." (Ronge, *The Sleaze Factor*, 5 November)*

Before this chapter moves into a detailed analysis of the ideological embeddedness of the columns, a section follows which briefly describes each of the three column(ist)s, depicts how they present themselves, and highlights some typical aspects of the style of each.

Hogarth

Of the three columns analysed, Hogarth's persona is the most obviously a stylish ploy. The column runs down the right hand side of the leader page, alongside the weekly editorial, the weekly cartoon, opinion-editorial (op-ed) political analysis and the letters to the editor. Taking the form of short snippets, each introduced by a pertinent sub-heading, the column provides satirical snapshots of events that took place in the preceding week. The brief comments focus on the powerful—mostly politicians and public figures. The name, Hogarth, of course, is a *nom de plume* taken from the 16th century British satirical artist, Hogarth.⁹ The Sunday Times columnist uses his persona as a literary device, creating what are in effect verbal cartoons—one-dimensional, outline sketches with a humorous point. The voice that carries the satire purports to belong to a busy-body who naively observes, and then retells exactly, all he sees, hears, or reads through serendipitous access to the inside dealings of the powerful. He feigns gormless perplexity as he tries to make sense of it all. The tone created is often deliberately gossipy, as if he is divulging secrets to a consensual in-group with whom he can share his observations of the folly of those he encounters in high places:

*A quick update on the behind-the-scenes skirmishes in US-SA diplomacy
(Hogarth, *Caricatures Can Be So Cruel, Can't They*, 21 May)*

As a literary device, the tongue-in-cheek style gives him license to pronounce damning judgment from a position of feigned innocence. His adoption of the third person in his writing, while reinforcing this sense of childlike innocence, is also the classic liberal positioning of the subject outside the discourse. Hogarth creates the guise of a dazed scout, an ingénue, watching in amazement as the nation self-destructs because of the

flawed natures and injudicious acts of human beings incapable of handling power. The following quotation illustrates the jibing nature of his humour:

A Racist Stitch in Time

Hogarth hears that the first lady, Zanele Mbeki, recently needed some new clothes and arranged to see her favourite Italian dressmaker in a suburb in Gauteng.

“Don’t worry about your safety, Mrs. Mbeki, this suburb is perfectly safe. There aren’t many blacks around here,” the kind dressmaker assured her. Hogarth has been assured that Zanele Mbeki definitely did not inform Pityana¹⁰ of the incident. (3 September)

A feature of the Hogarth column is the concluding section, *Mampara of the Week*. Here Hogarth singles out a person whom he feels is the most deserving of ridicule or censure.

SO MANY Mamparas, so little time. (Hogarth, 23 January)

Johnny de Lange, MP. (Mampara of Parliament) (Hogarth, 5 March)

The term, *mampara*, is defined in Van Schaik’s Afrikaans-English dictionary as “raw Native; stupid person; worthless one” (Krtizinger, Schoonees, & Cronjé, 1981). The racist connotations stated openly in Van Schaik’s dictionary have been edited out more carefully in the Reader’s Digest Afrikaans-English dictionary, which gives the meaning as “ass, fool, clot, numskull, dolt, duffer, clumsy one” (Reader’s Digest, 1984). The newly published (2002) South African Concise Oxford English dictionary characterizes the word as “South African derogatory or humorous” and traces it to Fanagalo, the patois developed for communication on the mines, where it meant “a fool, waste material.” South Africans are perfectly aware of the fact that the insulting term has been mostly applied to black Africans.

Who would contest that a mampara is a South African thing? Uniquely so. (Hogarth, Mampara of the Week, 9 January)

Stephen Mulholland

The opinion-editorial (op-ed) is pre-eminently a vehicle for ideological expression, given its function to provide detailed arguments and opinions about current events, situations, people and places (Oktar, 2001). The second column analysed for this chapter is Stephen Mulholland’s opinion-editorial, *Another Voice*. Mulholland writes the column as an

expert commentator on financial and business affairs. One of the stylistic characteristics of his column is the frequency with which he establishes his authoritativeness and credibility on such matters through mentioning positions he has held in his career, his associations,¹¹ and his erudition. The testimonials are generally drawn from a fairly narrow range of conservative politicians, economists and writers. Often the column begins with an extended story of an experience from his past, or an account of something he has read, which performs the rhetorical function of *exemplum*—illustrating “good” behaviour, the “proper” approach, or a “disastrous” error—leading into the moral of the story which then actually pertains to some current issue or event. The stories recounted are, of course, already filtered through his ideological lens; the “models” therefore already presuppose what he is purporting to prove, rendering a kind of circularity to the argument. Often the story is an extended form of “apparent praise” or “apparent concession,” well-documented face-presentation strategies in modern racism (Kleiner, 1998; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Van Dijk, 1993, 1998). In such cases, self-portrayed open-mindedness and generosity in the introductory anecdote serve as a warrant of his fairness, pre-empting criticism of bias or bigotry. Yet the anecdotes are invariably prefaces to his profoundly conservative analysis of some current concern—the real direction of his sentiment—which often chastises what he sees as ideological miscreants. His persona is that of the experienced, well-connected wise old man of business and economic journalism. As a “virulently anti-communist” (Mulholland, 19 March) capitalist, his column is stridently pro free market economics.

Mulholland’s persona blends the tones of moral certainty with the voice of economic authority. Of the columnists analysed in this chapter, Mulholland’s discourse has the strongest resemblance to right wing discourses as described in the literature on discourse analysis. To paraphrase Reisigl and Wodak’s (2001) terms, his discourse contains a large measure of “whiteness for beginners”¹² in that his ideological interest is quite explicit and direct. An example is the recurring construction of “saying it as it is”: claiming to break the taboos of Political Correctness, being forthright and unafraid in the face of left wing “censorship” and doing it in the service of integrity and truth.

Many, indeed most, of his examples are modelled on conservative US discourses, and present fierce attacks on policies that address questions of inequity and redress. Significant in his writing is the creation of what one could call the “eternal Marxist-Leninist,” rather along the lines of the “eternal Jew” in right wing anti-Semitic discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).¹³ Mulholland jousts with Communism as if the

Berlin wall were still solidly in place. He keeps the old bogey alive to argue his case, and presents the “internal enemy” in a distorted, vilifiable form to provide justification for his attack. This discursive strategy serves as a conduit for racism in the South African context, given that communism has been identified with black politics, and that white South Africa positioned itself as part of the West’s capitalist project, particularly through the cold war era (Seidel, 1988). As a keen admirer of American economics, his heart beats in time with the pulse of the free market economy:

The US has, for practical purposes, no unemployment, almost no inflation, falling crime rates, and the world’s strongest currency. (Mulholland, Parents Must Be Vigilant Over What Kids Are Being Taught, 23 July)

Barry Ronge

The third columnist, Barry Ronge, is a popular film critic. His contributions to the Magazine section of the *Sunday Times* are copious; his weekly critiques of films released onto the circuit and of the week’s offerings on television are additional to the full-page introductory article analysed here, which is always accompanied by a thematically associated cartoon. This weekly lead article, *Spit and Polish*, is written in a crisp, witty style. The topics tend to be light-hearted, and are often taken from his personal life—encounters with a new parking meter system, the death of his cat, the frustrations of his swimming pool. In the main, his focus is on the arts world and its related social(ite) scene. His influence is in the cultural, rather than the overtly political or economic, domain. A characteristic of Ronge’s column is his strong aesthetic interest, expressed in frequent criticism on questions of taste and presentation. His deepest opprobrium is reserved for what he pronounces to be “inelegant.” Bookish, his faith is in literature and established artistic tradition:

I turned, as I always do, to my books, which have the virtue of never changing their minds or betraying their promise. . . . I believe in books, in their creation and existence. (Ronge, The Last Word, 29 October)

A proponent of the very “best” of culture, his chauvinism extends to regarding American influence as corrupting:

South Africa is virtually an American state anyway. . . . (Ronge, Lost In Space, 7 May)

Ronge's persona is that of an amiable, personal friend, who is deeply worldly yet a trifle bored with it all, and who enjoys delighting his audience with his capacity for clever argumentation. On the surface, *Spit and Polish* is merely chatty and anecdotal—Ronge's musings on wryly humorous, somewhat wickedly irreverent, slices of his life, thoughts, and responses. His self-presentation as a generally open-minded, informed, urbane, occasionally crotchety, reflector on his society is certified through the stand he takes on such matters as gay rights and prostitution. Yet his writings draw on, and link into, the underlying semiotic field, the semiosphere, of the white world. His humour, and its impact, depends on the white ethnic consensus that it helps to maintain. Through an aside, an allusion, a coded word, a pertinent dig, he taps into the deep veins of whiteness without having to declare it. Like a talented gardener, his skillful sense of exactly what should go where, and how much nutrient is needed on each occasion, he nurtures and tends the interpretations of the society he lives in, reproducing and refining its assumptions. As a self-styled cultural purist, he reinforces, and provides an eminently respectable face to, the cultural hegemony of whiteness, reproducing the notions of cultural superiority which are a hallmark of modern racism (see, for example, De Goede, 1996). Despite some lapses into "whiteness for beginners," Ronge's writing is a good example of the "preformulation" service that the media elite provide to the general public, modelling how to graduate into "whiteness for advanced users."¹⁴

Any Change for a Paradigm?

"Us"

Ideological work becomes visible in times of dislocation, of crisis (Laclau, 1990). Whiteness in South Africa is beset by new circumstances, yet the whiteness of many English-speaking South Africans, as reflected in these columns, seems to have remained quite confident. The crisis is seen to be out there in the political and social developments of the country, but is not experienced as casting doubt on the validity of the ideological order that has framed reality for the social group. With the ideology fundamentally intact, the main discursive task is to recast it, to draw on and polish up the tradition of liberal whiteness that has been part of the discursive repertoire of English-speaking white South Africans for many decades, through their web of international links to other English-speaking whitenesses, particularly within the British Commonwealth. This connectivity appears to be a valuable resource under current circumstances. The analysis

which follows shows vigorous borrowing of discursive trends coming from overseas, clearly perceived to be greatly in demand, and helpful for the task at hand. Whiteness is fighting back. Upon close analysis it is impossible not to conclude that the columns are unmistakably characterized by those elite discourses that can render whiteness so difficult to pin down, albeit that indeed, the markers of racist ideology are not always subtle or disguised. While never stated overtly, the psychological demarcation of English vs. Afrikaans is still quite active, and one of the ways in which English whiteness deflects attention away from the more urbane form of whiteness which operates in this discourse is through playing off their form of whiteness against the “other” more “outed” whitenesses (Gabriel, 1998).

The writers of the three columns all assume a reasonably affluent, educated readership as their “normal” audience. The very sense of the ordinariness of their lives and the expectations which permeate this, centring on a deeply entrenched hierarchical value system, consolidates and strengthens the group’s cohesiveness. The “normalness” of the frame of reference within which they operate is something they never question, although when it is problematized by others the worldview is vigorously defended. An example is Ronge’s response to being challenged by a member of the public, which caricatures his critic:

An irate man recently reproached me about what I write in this column, brandishing words like “cynical” “supercilious” and “destructive.” I was, according to him a “whiner” who complained about everything but offered nothing positive in place of what I “attacked.”

“Do you respect anything?” he asked sneeringly. “Do you believe in anything, because I see no sign of it in your writing. It is all so negative.” He went on to list my many sins, which include having no moral standards, scepticism about the African Renaissance, a lack of respect for leaders, and an irreligious ignorance of common human decency.

It was a brisk encounter that cheered up my trip through that dreary parking lot, but it did get me wondering about how I would define what I believe without getting bogged down in specifics.

...

And so, Mr Purple-Faced Man in a parking garage who imagines himself entitled to demand that other people justify their existence to him, that's what I believe, for this week, at least. (Ronge, The Last Word, 29 October)

For those who are caught up in this worldview, a low level of insight into their own social paradigm is accompanied by a concomitantly underdeveloped analysis of the "other's" perspective, which is simply out of awareness. All of this is sustained by reality filters that presuppose that the cultures of the affluent West act as "normal" reference societies, and are the measure for what happens in South Africa. This plays itself out despite the fact that readers of the newspaper are increasingly found among the black population. The unrippled confidence in the rightness of this worldview, the insensitivity to how it excludes "others," and the unspoken assumption that these "others" should immediately recognize the logicity of this ideology shows how powerfully it holds sway (Essed, 1991).

In the columns analysed here, it is clear that the ideological in-group is white English-speaking South Africa. The following extract shows distancing from both the current black leadership, who are patronizingly presented as learning surprisingly well, as well as Afrikaner leadership, who are dismissed as intellectually feeble in addition to being ideologically unacceptable. Either way, these people are clearly "not us":

There are encouraging signs that our leaders have a grasp of these great issues, which were well beyond the ken of the likes of John Vorster and PW Botha. (Mulholland, By Hook Or By Crook. . . That's Politics, 10 September)

In the extract below Ronge comments on a pre-1994 TV series, called *Squad Cars*. As in the above extract, a process of dual "othering" is evident. White South Africa is distinguished from black South Africa; "normal" whiteness is distinguished from the extreme, which is carried by the Afrikaner.

With hindsight we can see that this was bland but pretty blatant propaganda, which lulled white South Africa into the belief that the cops were looking after us. But behind that façade the foundations of Vlakplaas¹⁵ and its death squads were being laid. (Ronge, Wrong Arm of the Law, January)

The first person plural indicates an identification with an essentially unchanged in-group, as well as the sense of an undefined, dangerous "other," suggested by the need to have

“cops” “looking after *us*.” The fact that the façade of protection for white privilege through the law is described as “bland”—even while at the same recognizing the criminal proclivity of a supremacist system—diminishes the ethical implications of the everyday whiteness that benefited from the legally-enforced system. The following extract similarly shows slippage in the use of the first person plural from a purportedly inclusive nation, to the exclusive white in-group, those who faced the “total onslaught”¹⁶:

Next on my list is the military and munitions conglomerate who, at a time when we are nominally at peace, are spending more money on weapons and military matters than we ever did when we were facing the “total onslaught.” (Ronge, Filthy Lucre, 3 September)

While such quotations show how the lines of identification are drawn around the in-group within the country, it is also clear as one examines the columns that the ideological epicentre for this grouping actually lies outside this country’s borders. In the manner that characterizes the diasporic orientation, there is a continual psychological reference back to the centres of ethnic identification, which in some ways may play a more pivotal role in self-construction than the immediate surroundings. While Britain occupies a place of acknowledged primacy in the ideological map, the sphere of identification spreads to those places where (white) European, but particularly English, peoples dispersed during the colonial era. White South Africa is seen as a subset of this world. There is an investment in the interests of western capitalism, a bond with the cultural world and its self-understandings of the civilization it believes it represents. The arteries of identification are channels for imaginative, cultural and discursive flows:

I was a first-time tourist in London and was making that obligatory stop at Harrods. Everybody does it, even though 90% of the visitors can afford very little of the fabulous merchandise on sale. . . . (Ronge, Small Change, 23 April)

The whiteness of his “everybody”, this ideological “we,” operates within the well-established field of white global domination, white privilege and economic advantage, and western cultural capital. This broad field is its comfort zone. The beliefs of which the ideology is comprised, while often variable and not necessarily consistent, cluster around certain core values (Van Dijk, 1998). One of these values is the pre-eminence of

western, particularly English, cultural constructions. For example, the dominant religion of the West, Christianity, carries a preferred status:

Christianity . . . sold . . . monotheism with its message of forgiveness and redemption and its injunction to love one's neighbour, to societies as far apart as China and South America. . . . There are, Mr President, no "foreign" religions, only the clash of ideas and the battle for minds. (Mulholland, Content of Heads is the Issue, Mr Mbeki, Not Colour or Shape, 3 September)

It demonstrated that old lesson that most of us were taught in Sunday school namely, that when you point a finger of accusation at anyone there are three accusing fingers pointing back at you. (Ronge, Call Back the Past, 12 November)

The quotations used to liven up the texts, the allusions to, references from, and examples of literature, politics and history—all relate to this world. The icons are people like Henry Kissinger, Winston Churchill, William Shakespeare, Henry Ford. The jokes and satire in this discursive repertoire depend on familiarity with a set of assumptions that come from this background, and they only become funny through acceptance of these assumptions. In the following extract from Hogarth, the humour comes from a common attitude to African politics, a shared sense of who are the enemies (Hitler, Stalin, the Mau Mau), and also mutual amusement at cultural practices that are seen to be quaint (at best), such a naming practices (Peace, Jesus, Innocent):

What's in a name?

Last week, Zimbabwe's ruling Zanu-PF party released its list of candidates for the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

The candidate for Harare East is one Stalin Mau Mau. (His campaign slogan? "I won't let you down." Honest.)

How fitting, Hogarth feels. Comrade Mau Mau is in good company, what with war veterans leader Chenjerai Hitler Hunzvi and his two henchmen, Peace and Jesus, roaming the political landscape.

On the other hand, the party's candidate for the Midlands Chirumanzi district is Innocent Chikiyi. Which may or may not be the case. (Hogarth, 28 May)

Unsurprisingly, command of English and the quality of language use becomes one of clearest indicators of someone's general ability, the criterion according to which credibility is assigned. This is true even though many South Africans speak English as a second, third, or even fourth language, and were subjected to apartheid schooling that did not have in mind educating black people for active participation in a modern economy. In South Africa less than nine percent of the population speaks English. The illegitimate power move that lies behind the highly questionable demand that the language should be used as the gatekeeper that determines a person's access, performance evaluation and advancement in the course of normal economic activity, remains invisible. The position of English is unassailable. Flaws in the use of English language discredit the speaker, and overrule all other assets:

Sitole Spells It Out

Hogarth has discovered that Khulekani Sitole, the former Director-General of Correctional Services, does not know how to spell "government." In court papers submitted this week (and later withdrawn), he spelled the name of his erstwhile employer "gorvenment" throughout. . . . Needless to say, his legall effot flailed. (Hogarth, 6 February)

Perhaps I did not understand the letter. I must confess that the spelling and grammar were truly appalling. (Ronge, Save Our Souls, 15 April)

What's That Word Again?

Full-page ads by the Department of Healyh (sic) in KwaZulul-Natal newspapers this week advised readers about the dangers and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. To make the list of warning signs easy to remember, the department said a "pneumatic" had been compiled from the word "Alzheimer." Hogarth consulted the dictionary, only to find that "pneumatic" means "filled with air or wind." Perhaps the department meant "mnemonic," something used to aid one's memory. (Hogarth, 24 September)

[Politically correct people] . . . make the longest, ugliest sentences in the world but they show empathy and compassion towards every nuance of human deprivation. (Ronge, Holier Than Thou, January)

At the centre of this value system is a faith in capitalism, the profit motive, and market dynamics. To deviate from this mantra is to court disaster:¹⁷

China . . . is a vast dust bowl because when the communists came to power they took over the forests, plundered them and did no re-planting. It seems that only foresters who are driven by the profit motive look to the long-term replacement of their product. (Mulholland, Inevitable Chaos of Social Engineers' Unrealistic Dream, January)

The above conclusion that only the profit motive ensures sustainability is dubious, to say the least. The quotation that follows similarly invokes a world of “rational” “economic man” that is far removed from the people who make employment decisions based on conscious and unconscious motives, perceptions and attitudes that tend to advantage people that they perceive to be “like themselves”:

All rational economic players will eagerly employ those who bring to the task at hand skill and commitment, no matter what their creed, colour, sex or race might be.

Leave the labour market alone. It will sort itself out without the benefit of the vast wisdom of political incompetents who have never had to meet a payroll. (Mulholland, Politicians Should Stop Interfering with Labour, 9 April)

The established and continuing bias in employment practices is denied, and the question needs to be asked: if government—consisting of many who have been on the receiving end of unfair payroll practices in the past system, stays out of matters pertaining to labour, who is left with the power? Evading the issue of whose agency brings about social stratification is a characteristic of *white talk* in South Africa, as it is of dominant power-invested discourses elsewhere (Gabriel, 1998). The presentation of “market forces” in the next quotation is a case in point:

The private security industry has mushroomed to the point where it is larger than the police force. This is how markets work: a need arises and it is met. In addition, numerous communities in the former townships have taken the law into their own hands, dealing quite drastically with suspected wrongdoers. . . . Vigilante organizations, which charge for protection, have sprung up with enthusiastic community support. Again, this is the market at

work. (Mulholland, State Needs to Recognise Crime as Greatest Challenge, 6 August)

The telling phrase “former townships” indicates the tendency to underplay the continuation of the effects of racial discrimination after the abolition of institutionalized apartheid, as if formal equality is sufficient to end the social responsibility towards the poor by those who benefited; after 1994, these things should simply be left to market forces to work out. Here *white talk* presents market dynamics as functioning in a completely neutral manner, as if the decisions that drive the dynamics are not made by people with vested interests that tie into ideological systems. Mulholland actually does raise the question of this kind of deeper alliance, but only to deny its actual operation:

Cynics will claim that TML and other newspapers were beholden to the mining interests which controlled them.

All I can say to that is that in more than 40 years of reporting for, editing and publishing such newspapers I was never once asked to do, or not to do, anything of an editorial nature by any controlling shareholder or interests connected with them. (Mulholland, Independent Press Vital for Survival of a Free Society, 21 May)

Ironically, his comment neatly illustrates the profound interconnectedness of the ideological system—when the newspapers are aligned seamlessly with the dominant ideology in business and politics, the ideology functions through an unconscious pact of cooperation between people who only see the system working “correctly,” and without active interference. It is only when the seam starts unravelling that the stitching that holds the fabric together becomes visible, requiring discursive repair.

Closely allied to the core value of market capitalism is the sacrosanct liberal belief in the individual as the basic building block of society. That this is a cultural value is rarely recognized, and when it is, is still portrayed as a moral good in itself which all people would be well advised to adopt (Boloka, 2000). The comment below shows how deeply the writer is immersed in this thinking—if the core values are observed, the entire social ecosystem is held in balance:

Those who seek their own improvement achieve an end, the general betterment of society, which was never their intention. (Mulholland, Serve Yourself and You Will Serve Society, 29 October)

In other words, the social is always seen as a by-product of the individual. Those who put the social/collective first as the result of cultural, political or ideological persuasion are identified with dictators; individual freedom is valued above social accountability:

How a country treats those who succeed even if they prefer to live somewhere else tells one something about its priorities. And a country without successful people cannot be successful. (Mulholland, See You in the Court Chaps, and We'll All Foot the Bill. 26 March)

The column from which this comment is taken, argues against the introduction of Capital Wealth Tax.¹⁸ The definition of success in the above article is suitably narrow for an argument that prioritizes the rich, legitimizing the greater range of choice that wealth brings by contending that the entire nation is better off if this lifestyle is valorized. Why the interests of the highly mobile wealthy few should be prioritized above those of the poor majority, who are not in a position to leave the country and are being disadvantaged by the outflow of capital and skills through white emigration, is moot.

Around such ideological hubs a network of "liberal" values and hegemonic beliefs branch out, some more generally espoused than others, though any of them can be brought to the fore when needed to make a case against competing discourses. A principal example in these columns is the belief in the sacrosanctity of freedom of speech. In *white talk* freedom of speech becomes elevated above other freedoms, such as the right of marginalized people to freedom from injurious representations. In response to an advertisement that was withdrawn after public outrage at the insensitive portrayal of an elderly blind woman, Ronge argues that:

The ad agency is not to blame here. They were simply doing their job. Freedom of expression means they are entitled to have their say. Bad taste is not a crime, it is just bad taste. (Ronge, Blind Leading the Blind, 26 March).

In *white talk* discrimination is not seen as criminal (Clegg, 1993), despite the fact that the quality of people's lives may be curtailed, and life opportunities may be stolen from them. An absolute value is placed on the freedom of the media, which is held out as the cornerstone of democracy. Yet all values are in competition with others, even within the same ideological system. The South African constitution enshrines human dignity and equality along with freedom, and it is by no means settled how this freedom should be balanced against the indignity and personal harm of racist and other discriminatory representations (Pollecutt, 2000; Steenveld, 2000). Ideological claims for *freedom* are

usually claims for *power* (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 162), and the power dynamics that drive the media in South Africa exist in a skewed system. It is far from democratic and fair in terms of people's ability to be represented fairly, to gain access, to put their case without it being filtered through a lens that does not have their interests at heart, or of being listened to, and heard, in the same way as the in-group (Nzimande, 2000; Seleokane, 2000; Steenveld, 2000). As Van Dijk (1993) has put it,

White elites in Western countries usually self-servingly opt for freedom of speech, that is, for the rights of in-group members, and against the right of out-group members to be free from racism. . . . the news media basically reproduce opinions within the boundaries of a consensus manufactured by a white elite. (Van Dijk, 1993, pp. 281-282)

White talk is committed to retaining the South African media within these boundaries, where freedom of speech becomes the freedom to reproduce inequalities.

A Click of the Fingers

Talking of presidential power, Hogarth was most impressed with how the media jumped to attention after Mbeki clicked his fingers on Thursday.

The president mentioned how disappointed he was with the failure of the media to cover his every word on the Zimbabwean crisis.

The next morning, three Johannesburg newspapers ran verbatim extracts or full copies of his speech in their pages.

Good dogs. Now can you roll over and play dead? (Hogarth, 7 May)

[The media is the] infallible whipping boy when everyone else is too lazy or scared to shoulder their responsibility. (Ronge, Between The Lines, 30 April)

To be free, the press must survive commercially. A press which has to be subsidized by the state, or by any other source, will clearly be beholden and, therefore, not independent. . . . Without credibility a newspaper will not attract readers in the numbers and of the quality that advertisers and their agencies seek. If a newspaper becomes the voice of special interests, it will lose its credibility and probably go broke. (Mulholland, Independent Press Vital for Survival of a Free Society, 21 May)

Mulholland suggests that backing from a commercial source is without vested interests, a highly fraught contention (See, for example, Kuzwayo, 2000). Apparently without any sense of irony, Mulholland equates “independence” to being aligned to business viewpoints; only if it champions labour or the poor is it seen to be lacking objectivity.¹⁹

The belief in the importance of private property is similarly upheld as sacrosanct:
Well, comrade [Mugabe], the law of trespass is a cornerstone of private property which, in turn is a cornerstone of freedom and democracy.
 (Mulholland, *Unable to Govern, Despot Mugabe Sends in His Thugs*, 30 April)

White talk prioritizes private ownership of property. It does not place the same emphasis on the right of access to property. This of necessity advantages those who benefited from past acquisitions, no matter how unfair the means of acquisition—even violent conquest, as in the case of Africa’s land.²⁰ Typically, *white talk* mystifies the processes by which land was acquired,²¹ emphasizing such issues as current farming expertise and “improvement” of the land. Rights of ownership thus become more important than the right to a basic means of survival or income, or the basic democratic principle that the resources of the nation should be shared amongst its citizens.

The world of the “ideological we” is the taken-for-granted; white beliefs, assumptions, models, cultural practices and values act as the warrants, the topoi, which keep the sense of “normal” intact. The histories, experiences, beliefs and values of black compatriots are refracted through this white lens—a powerful mechanism of containment (Gabriel, 1998). Often there is an insensitivity, even indifference, to what matters to most black people,²² especially where these are issues of symbolic value and therefore more difficult to justify to people who do not wish to empathize:

Frankly, I don't give a stuff what the place is called. But for heaven's sake, there are surely hundreds of greater issues to be dealt with than a cosmetic matter like the name of a town. No doubt councillors will be eager to gather day after day in panelled conference rooms sipping tea, nibbling on cakes and debating whether to call Africa's most vibrant city eGoli or Imali or Gauteng or whatever. . . . It certainly does not seem to have done Zimbabwe much good to ditch the colonial heritage of Salisbury for Harare.

(Mulholland, *Jo'burg Mayor's Very Fine Sense of Priorities*, 17 December)

Black Africans should be comfortable living in cities named after their conquerors; whites should not have to live with the symbolism that reflects the cultures of the majority African people. Bringing the environment more in line with this “other” reality is covetous, merely self-indulgent and luxury-loving (as blacks in power are). Many place names are reverting to their pre-colonial names. Mulholland reveals the lack of memory that incribes ignore-ance in colonial whiteness.

The above quotation also shows this predictable ignorance in relation to the larger African continent: it is simply stated as a matter of fact that Johannesburg is the most vibrant city on the continent. Similarly, if sources of authority on this foreign realm are sought, *white talk* turns to the trusted experts:

I saw that marvellous Belgian documentary about the Congo leader Mobutu Sese Seko. He too loved fine things. . . .(Ronge, Small Change, 23 April)

I read in The Economist how Nigeria's former ruler, Sani Obacha, as he approached the end of his corrupt regime, issued a standing instruction to the state bank . . . (Ronge, Small Change, 23 April)

When the ethnocentric nature of the discourse, or the insensitivity to the African context is brought to attention, challenging the discourses that clothe the ideology, *white talk* goes on the attack. A typical move—one that is actually characteristic of right wing discourses (Gabriel, 1998, p. 157; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001)—is to construct those who challenge whiteness as extreme bigots or hypocrites. In South Africa, as elsewhere, those who challenge inequity are the enemy of whiteness and a prime target of attack. The strategy is to put anti-racists on the defensive for raising what is essentially a question of one's ethical response to the existence of the “other.”

Ronge allocates such people to the “Moral High Ground,” caricaturing them as “blaz[ing] with indignation and drip[ping] with contempt.” He describes a letter he received that accused him of insensitivity:

There followed a positively Dickensian portrait of illiterate people clinging to survival in squatter camps, of street children for whom a magazine is only useful as insulation from the cold, and miners toiling in the dangerous bowels of the earth (this was a nice touch) and so on.

This was the lot of “most South Africans” said the writer. . . .(Ronge, Holier Than Thou, January)

Further on in the same article, he justifies the exclusionary stylistic features of his writing because “real life and the media require us to make such assumptions if we are not to drown in a sea of words.”

Discourses that prioritize other interests, or seek to mobilize other interpretations, are dismissed as exaggerated, self-seeking and sentimental.

And when he did come before the court . . . he might be able to plead that he was drinking to overcome his depression at being previously disadvantaged as well as being presently disadvantaged, a plea that carries a lot of weight in our courts. (Ronge, Wrong Arm of the Law, January)

Later in the same text Ronge continues with characteristic sensitivity:

the story must have left so much egg on so many faces that you could feed the hungry of five cities if you scraped it off and made an omelette with it.

Writing such as this is able to conceal its assumptions of privilege, even while enacting them. Nestled within the womb of western hegemony, *white talk* is ordinary, neutral, merely expressing the accepted. There is little understanding of how power operates as a shaper of such ideological “consensuses”—it simply “happens”:

It simply happens that most of the world's countries have settled upon as single system of time measurement for the sake of clarity and uniformity, but that does not make it “right” in any absolute sense. (Ronge, Time for a Change, 31 December).

The power of whiteness moves invisibly; only the workings of power that try to exert pressure against the grain are obvious—which facilitates their being construed as abuses of power:

Making a commonplace and entirely legal purchase allows no one the opportunity to flaunt either their weapons or their authority, and what's the good of having power if you don't flaunt it. (Ronge, Call Back the Past, 12 November)

The image is maintained that power in the hands of liberals upholds civil liberties, maintains standards, bears culture. Black Africans who attain power are portrayed as achieving this because they are power hungry; it goes to their heads and they become ostentatious. The above passage shows, as do numerous others in the sample, that the writers are unaware of how the dailiness of power functions in the hands of whiteness, where it is so fully accepted as to be simply life. The myriad of everyday abuses of

power is out of awareness, as if power ever were safe in hands of whites, particularly white men.

In a patriarchal world, black men are the chief rivals for a system controlled by white men, especially if one takes into account that darker skinned people comprise about 70% of the world's population. *White talk* portrays power in the hands of black men in a fashion that undermines confidence in such an order. In this way it "fights back" in the immediate context where white power has been dealt a severe blow by democracy, but also connects with pre-emptive discourses effective in the rest of the white world intent of retaining hegemony. Power is presented as having gone awry, out of control. Black men exercising power are unpredictable, abusive, unreliable. The vision of apocalypse, which is characteristic of the racist imagination, is kept alive and active in the white mind; the construction of Africa as a place that is inimical to white rationality, order, even permanent habitation is perpetuated. Such lack of confidence is constantly reproduced, the paranoia cultivated:

What happens, everyone once wanted to know, when Mandela goes. This question begged visions of civil unrest, the collapse of law and order, a leadership vacuum, and so on. . . . But perhaps now we should be asking ourselves another question—what happens when Mbeki goes? (Mulholland, Mbeki Risks Becoming a Victim of His Office, 2 April)

The speaker clearly positions himself as a spokesperson for white South Africans, ethnocentrically referred to as "everyone." However, in this discourse, as in other elite discourses where speakers want to contain such an inference, a great deal is made of the concurrence of a small group of highly unrepresentative black people who are used to legitimate white interests:

It is ironic that events in another country have caused so much fear and anxiety among those South Africans who worry about futures and those of their families. . . .

These people are not all white and not all property-owners, although many are. (Mulholland, Mad Bob Creating the Marxist Land of His Dreams, 11 June)

An important aspect of how the ideology informing *white talk* functions in this particular context is that the distinction between English and Afrikaner South Africans is rolled into, and becomes conflated with, the distinction between the New South Africa and the

Old South Africa. In Baumann's (1997) terms, this strategy of identifying apartheid South Africa almost exclusively with Afrikaners can be seen as a demotic strategy in relation to black South Africans, ostensibly demonstrating psychological closeness. In relation to Afrikaners, it can be interpreted as a dominant discourse, dissociating the English grouping from any complicity in the past, for which the Afrikaner carries the full blame. It is apparent that "Afrikaner whiteness" acts as a foil to English whiteness in this discourse. Racism resides with them, particularly as they were the open supporters of Nationalist policies in the past.²³ This past of Afrikaner power is epitomized by B.J. Vorster and P. W. Botha.

If the tantrums of PW Botha taught us nothing else, it was that irritation is an obstacle to clarity of thought and expression. (Ronge, Theatre for the Masses, 15 October).

It is telling that in this *white talk* Afrikaners are simply not present in any other guise than that described above, or as extremists who are depicted as belonging to the past, rather than as another dissenting stream promoting ongoing white advantage:

A Case of Racial Dementia

White supremacist Eugene Terre Blanche did not have to fall off his horse to prove his mamparadom when he rode to jail this week.

Apart from his absurd statement that he would return to further the betterment of South Africa, he also said: " My special thanks to my people, the Zulu and Tswana people who love me." Right. (Hogarth, 2 April)

The primary function of presenting such extreme cases of racial bigotry or hard-line apartheid perpetrators is to detract attention away from everyday whiteness both in the past, and in the present.

Mampara of the Week

Confessed mass murderer Johan Theron makes a rather brutal and gruesome mampara, but mampara he certainly is.

This week, after admitting to killing hundreds of South West African People's Organisation activists, Theron said he had killed people with drugs. . . .

He then explained why he had not gone to the Truth Commission to confess all.

He said he did not want to experience "the humiliation of being questioned and hissed at in front of people."

Well, to make up for this most unfortunate omission, Hogarth would like to invite the public to compensate by humiliating and hissing at the mampara right now. (Hogarth, 7 May)

Just Say Thanks

The Freedom Front's Corné Mulder emerged from obscurity this week to launch a blistering attack on President Mbeki for daring to suggest that whites are ashamed of speaking about racism.

Mulder charged that Mbeki should be grateful for the fact that "in 1994 the ANC government inherited a modern country with the best infrastructure on the continent of Africa from whites." Said Mulder: "The fact that blacks are today a clear majority in South Africa unlike other indigenous communities in Canada, US, Australia and Nieu-Zeeland [sic] who were majorities in their countries before the arrival of whites underlines a completely different reality as the one that President Mbeki clings to."

Ungrateful louts! (Hogarth, 26 November)

Our level of crime is a direct legacy of apartheid's destruction of family life. People who would otherwise have urbanized gradually were forced to stay on land that could barely support life while their providers laboured in isolation from their loved ones. (Mulholland, State Needs to Recognise Crime as Greatest Challenge, 6 August)

It was all hard labour

Former President FW de Klerk managed to drag himself away from the golf course to make an incisive contribution to the racism debate.

In a statement this week, he said the notion that the distribution of wealth remained skewed in favour of whites was an example of black defensiveness. "Many black South Africans see the relative wealth of whites not as a result of hard work and enterprise, but as the ill-gotten fruits of apartheid."

Well, FW, there was the small matter of forced removals, and job reservation, and the homeland system, and the Group Areas Act, and unequal education, and . . . (Hogarth, 3 September)

The above two passages offer a nod to political-historical factors as the causes of current racial problems, but crucially, these remain limited to factors in the past, to policies of the previous Afrikaner Nationalist government, as opposed to the enduring maldistribution and retention of assets gained in the past, which whiteness seeks to disguise. This strategy of transferral, which in this case pushes the analysis both into the past and onto another, takes attention away from on-going causes such as subversive discourse, preferential employment practices, withdrawal of capital, and lack of investment in development. This strategy of equating racism with its extreme form and setting it apart from the dominant voices of whiteness is essentially a strategy of containment, arguably the defining attribute of liberal whiteness (Gabriel, 1998).

It is often pointed out that the power of whiteness is protected through its invisibility. There is, in *white talk* as in other white discourse formations, an investment in maintaining this invisibility, protecting the ideology from scrutiny.

I don't usually moon about defining what I believe. There's too much to do in the garden to allow myself that luxury. . . . (Ronge, The Last Word, 29 October)

The luxury of not having to understand how one's discourse positions oneself and others is a happy function of seeing one's own ideological position just simply as "normal" and "neutral." A remarkably uncritical articulation of this is given by Mulholland, below:

What inference are we to draw from these changes in emphasis? That a government or leaders of a party are now on the path to eternal truth? Hardly. That a major political party has moved from left to right from a labour to a business orientation, simply substituting a new dogma for an old? On the contrary, it is an escape from dogma. It is a realization that, in President Kennedy's words, "What is at stake in our economic decisions today is not some grand warfare of rival ideologies which will sweep the country with passion but the practical management of a modern economy. (Mulholland, Budget a Symbol of Mbeki's Support for Impressive Manuel, 27 February)

The "modern economy," by definition, a capitalist economy, is seen to be the dogma-free position. It is what is left once economics has been depoliticized and freed of emotional content. A corollary of this is that when ideological "others" point out the ideology at work, drawing attention to how its power is experienced by those differently

positioned than in the centre, it is brushed aside as superstition, or attributed to paranoia, persecution complexes, or a belief in irrational conspiracy theories.

Then comes the conspiracy theory. The "profiteers" who run the drug companies are conspiring to besmirch the image of the President and force government to adopt a "drugs based solution" to the epidemic. . . . All this, he tells us, is an orchestrated campaign for profit. (Mulholland, Hotbed of Conspiracies Sniffed Out in Sauer Street, 30 July)

Triggering the well-established stereotype of black people as generally superstitious, irrational, and gullible enables critique to be discredited, detractors condemned. The ideological blind spots of whiteness remain secure, complacency and all.

The first thing Zondi did once seconded was to act on his sixth sense that the fourth estate was the fifth column behind the third move. . . . It was the evil media that was to blame. (Hogarth, A Sad Case of Mistaken Identity, 23 January)

The tactic pre-empts mobilization of oppositional discourses and actions by predefining them in such a way that they look like phantoms of over-active imaginations. The purpose is intimidation, discouraging incursion into established terrain by branding criticism as early signs of "discursive police," thought control, and censoring.

A Classy Contribution

The list of imperialist proxy forces determined to smash the power of the working masses lengthened this week with the addition of the name of the SABC.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions accused the public broadcaster of deliberately underplaying its national strike for job creation. Cosatu went further, saying the Human Rights Commission inquiry into racism in the media had not gone far enough.

"We believe our media institutions are characterized by clear bias and obvious class interests." Is an inquiry into classism in the media on the way? (Hogarth, 19 March)

“Them”

Identification with the wider world of whiteness is both a cause of, and a consequence of, a diminished sense of identification with the local situation where whiteness is in some trouble.

Our new democracy has littered the calendar with such a bewildering avalanche of public holidays and commemorative days that, for the sake of convenience, I've gone back to observing Easter and Christmas and treating all the others as gardening days. (Ronge, Call Back the Past, 12 November)

There is no resonance with the emotional centres of the new democracy. For all intents and purposes an existence that acknowledges only Easter and Christmas could be anywhere in the world that has a western-dominated value system and uses the Christian calendar. Ronge decontextualizes his life, taking it outside of the specifics of this country, into a kind of bland, westernised, generic identification. It is with this generic whiteness that diasporic whiteness can reunite, slipping seamlessly back into the centre:

*Why should they stay where they will always be the second or third choice?
When US or European companies are constantly head-hunting South Africans because they like their work ethic and their educational fitness, why should these kids stay where doors are closing on them? (Ronge, Defending the Right to Whine, January)*

As integral to any ideology as the “we,” is the ideological “other” (Van Dijk, 1998). This construct consists of that which challenges the power and resources of the in-group, and offers alternative sense-making that may threaten its position or advancement. So, for example, Van Dijk (1992) argues that anti-racist writings “provide a fully incompatible definition of the ethnic situation” to dominant western ideologies.

It is this symbolic competition for the definition of the situation and the intellectual struggle over the definition of society’s morals, that pitches the right wing press against left wing, anti-racist intellectuals, teachers, writers and action groups. (p. 102)

In the *white talk* analysed in these columns the most immediate form the ideological “other” takes is the political grouping of the Tripartite Alliance: the African National Congress, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and the South African Communist Party.²⁴ The centre of otherness ripples out to take in other representatives/adherents of ideologies inimical to white control at an international level:

Cuba, Palestine, the People's Republic of China, the Old Soviet Union, which is discursively activated and kept alive for this purpose. The "failure" of the New South Africa is largely explained through its flirting with the ideological "other," and its historical ties to the enemy.

One of the problems is this business of revolution. Unlike their hero, the despot Fidel Castro, our comrades did not come thundering out of the hills in a blaze of gunpowder. They flew back first class to take over their heritage. Now some of them seek to have their revolution, their cataclysmic change, through the political process. To the extent they succeed, so our society will fail in the gradual improvement of education, health, housing, personal security, work and other human needs. (Mulholland, Inevitable Chaos of Social Engineers' Unrealistic Dream, 23 January)

There is an attempt to cast doubt on the integrity of the leaders of the ideologically "other" position. The distortion prevalent in this claim is extreme, given that the current dispensation is the outcome of political compromise on both sides. Moreover, the new government has been widely criticized by the international and local left for espousing cautious economic policies, for introducing an economic system that is neo-colonial and quite strongly market oriented, and for not implementing change fast enough. The import of the use of the ideological "other" in the next extract is to keep the odds in favour of institutionalized discrimination, the systemic weighting of opportunity that arises out of, and caters for, those who are already beneficiaries. By this argument, discrimination becomes reasonable, practical and sensible, and the operations of the market economy (once again) become the only option for solving social problems.

Actuarial science is basically the science of discrimination on objective bases. It doesn't exist in communist societies because in those heavenly places everyone is equal, although some are more equal than others, of course. . . . (Mulholland, Don't Outlaw Betting on the Uncertainties of Life, 30 January)

The next extract, from the same article, is even more virulent in its attack:

Why don't neo-communists such as Mohseen Moosa, who infest the ANC, have the courage to admit that they don't believe in market approaches to life's uncertainties, but want the state to provide for all from the cradle to

the grave, even if the grave is in the Gulag? (Mulholland, Don't Outlaw Betting on the Uncertainties of Life, 30 January)

Here we even see the pestilence imagery (“infest”) that is typical of how hateful discourse creates enemy-images, and found in hard-line right wing and white supremacist discourse to vilify the ideological “other.” Reform by the current government is associated with the worst excesses of Stalinist practice. Such heavy-handed rhetoric represents an attempt to paralyse those who work to further “other” interests.

An important ideological tenet of *white talk* is the sacrosanct independence of the sectors of society that fall outside the direct ambit of government. Ronge insists on this for art, Mulholland for business. However, it is not only a tenet, but also a strategy to curb the ideological “other.” Unassailability renders business unaccountable to anything but the profit motive, and allows for the unproblematized continuation of belief systems that obfuscate the ways in which capital and the profit motive impact on broader society.

It is not the job of business to create jobs. It is the job of business to make profits. Jobs are the by-product of the desire of men and women to better themselves or, to put it more simply, get rich. . . . Ford's gift to mankind, which came not from the goodness of his heart but from his pursuit of his own ends, also generated untold millions of new jobs. . . . But all this is of no interest to the Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu), their communist buddies and their neo-communist allies within the ANC. (Mulholland, Companies Cannot Be Ordered to Create Jobs, 6 February)

Mulholland claims that the profit motive is able to regulate everything to everyone's advantage; the need for organizations to engage in socially responsible policies is thereby obviated. In a move that is also typical of right wing discourse, Mulholland converts the powerful into the victimized, who then need to be defended. In this case he claims capitalism is “misunderstood”:

A capitalist, one of that much-despised species who are willing to put their money at risk in order to increase their wealth. . . . (Mulholland, Companies Cannot Be Ordered to Create Jobs, 6 February)

Our left-wing utopians want to be the architects of a new society in which everyone will be equal. We will all run the 100 metres in 10 seconds, every horse at the races will be even money, no-one will fail matric and so on.

There is an eerie similarity between government's approach to the implementation of some of its utopia-seeking legislation and the methods employed by those mass murderers, Lenin and Stalin. There are all sorts of thought police, examiners and endless forms to be filled in showing how organizations are heeding government's plans for equality and the demographic spread of everything from places on sports teams to the boy scouts.

Our rulers must choose what they want us to be: a collectivist gulag or a free society. (Mulholland, Companies Cannot Be Ordered to Create Jobs, 6 February)

The rhetorical techniques of exaggerated “straw man” misrepresentation, association with extremes that discredit the position of opponents, ridicule, setting up either-or dichotomies: the presence of all these indicate that this is bullying rhetoric, rather than careful, logical argumentation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The antonym of “equality” is “inequality,” the antonym of “difference” is “sameness”—a blurring of these semantics serves the purpose of erasing the possibility of coupling difference with equality, which is implicit in the notion of equity in social organization. This bulldozing rhetoric is *white talk* at its most strident, when it starts shading into the right wing white supremacist discourse with which it would deny any connection.

Perhaps the most disturbing of all the discursive techniques employed by *white talk* to protect its ideology is the constant presence of threats, verging on blackmail, which attempt to hold the entire process of reconstruction to ransom. Money, resources, expertise—all these are mostly in the hands of the white minority and can be withdrawn if too much power lands in antithetical hands. And they do not let this be forgotten:

[A capitalist] might be encouraged. . . to move away from labour intensity so as to avoid the costly, time-consuming, never-ending battle with unions, self-defeating labour. . . . He might even be encouraged to withdraw from business altogether, live off his capital or perhaps emigrate to somewhere friendlier to risk-takers. (Mulholland, Companies Cannot Be Ordered to Create Jobs, 6 February)

Given its partnership with the SA Communist Party and labour and its raft of rabid socialist members, who learn nothing from history, the ANC naturally saw a capital gains tax as a sop to the left, a tax on the rich, a

statement rather than an effective revenue-raising move. (Mulholland, Capital Gains Tax Makes Us All Losers, Mr Manuel, 5 March)

In fact, *white talk* is selective regarding which lessons we should learn from history, and silent on whose version of history we should learn from. For example, the lesson that social inequities breed crime and instability is not highlighted. These social ills are attributed to a lack of political will, and the failure of the criminal system. Moreover, the actions of the ideological “other” are attributed to many motives—greed, cowardice, incompetence, revenge—but never to principle.

In the urge to placate its left-wing partners our usually competent treasury has allowed itself to be dragged into the Capital Gains Tax quagmire. . . . (Mulholland, Justifying Policy by Harking Back to a Disastrous Era, 12 March)

The ideological “other” takes in all those systems, institutions, philosophies that oppose established cultural practice, dominant political, social and economic systems, wherever these rear their heads:

[Harold Wilson's Chancellor of the Exchequer] was a disastrous chancellor in a disastrous administration which reduced Britain to the condition of Europe's sick man, held to ransom by rapacious trade union leaders and in the grip of rampant inflation. (Mulholland, Justifying Policy by Harking Back to a Disastrous Era, 12 March)

Socialism is particularly targeted. Typically, it is a very one-dimensional, distorted version of socialism that is presented. Mulholland simply equates it with the atrocities of Communism, and in same breath, with Nazism:

All this will, of course, be dismissed as the rantings of a virulently anti-communist, right-wing ideologue. I plead guilty to be virulently anti-communist. I am also virulently anti-Nazi. In fact, one cannot be too virulent in one's hate of Nazism, the epitome of evil. . . . Similarly one cannot be too virulent in one's hatred of communism. Both Nazism and Communism, aside from perpetrating mass murder, also robbed people of their freedom of association, religion, movement, speech and even thought.

The Equality Bill requires, by force of law, that we all promote equality. . . . Aside from being nonsensical and illogical, this is as Leninist-Marxist as it gets. Outcomes simply cannot be equal. Such a goal is a denial of human

nature, which is, of course what communism is all about and why it had to kill 100-million before the penny dropped. (Mulholland, Justifying Policy by Harking Back to a Disastrous Era, 12 March)

In the above extract Mulholland claims the right to be dogmatic, rationalizing his extreme position by the rhetorically opportunistic and superficial lumping together of greatly different, even ideologically antithetical, enemy systems that are both generally condemned. Multiplying such logical slippage, he glibly equates attempts at creating a more equitable society with these extremes, and therefore, with “evil.” The insistence that inequality is a simple function of human nature obscures the causes of gross inequalities that lie in economic, political and social systems, and renders all attempts to create greater equality, by definition, violent to humanity. Needless to say, the ideological base for his position remains unchallenged, invisible. The roles of increasing global apartheid and the spread of poverty and diseases related to concomitant socio-economic conditions that take millions of lives—these are not even brought onto the radar screen.

Another strategy whereby the ideological “other” is presented in a manner that discredits it is by highlighting discord, implying that the “other” is incapable of concerted, organized action, too slapstick to be taken seriously. This technique is part of a broader strategy of general ridicule of the “other world”

Rolling Misdirection

Motlatsi also took a shot at Cosatu’s attempts to campaign against joblessness by disrupting production and going on marches.

“Is it correct to use the term rolling mass action when this is our government?” he questioned. Or perhaps he was just irritated by the failure of Cosatu’s leadership to attend the opening of his congress. (Hogarth, 30 April)

An “Enemy” in Our Midst

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa’s leadership nearly had a revolution on its hands during its congress in Mafikeng, North West, this week.

Amid all the rhetoric about building socialism and strengthening the SA Communist Party, one of the leaders took the podium to announce the presence of "a comrade from the IMF" in the hall.

Confused workers failed to understand what a representative of a "Class enemy," the IMF, was doing in their midst. It later transpired the comrade was an observer from the International Metalworkers Federation, to which Numsa is affiliated. Phew! (Hogarth, 27 August)

In all of this there is mockery of the discursive and symbolic tools of the "other": their lexicon, their beliefs, their "false" ideology. And this is epitomized in their apparent stupidity in not even being able to communicate with their own allies or to create a vision that unifies them.

Ideologically driven discourse is capable of taking in highly variable and even contradictory arguments and beliefs, depending on the perceived contextual imperatives at the moment of utterance. It is therefore not surprising that contradictory standpoints exist side by side on the question of the past, to be used as the opportunity requires. Whenever competing discursive formations draw attention to how the legacy of the past continues into the present through ongoing inequities, a constant appeal in *white talk* is that the nation should not keep harping on the past. The change to democracy is presented as a distinct break necessitating a completely different social and political analysis. This is sometimes simply a refusal to analyse ongoing privilege, the accumulation of assets and the thorny issue of the collusion and culpability of ordinary white South Africans within the past system. Usually the question of the past is dealt with in the way discussed earlier in this chapter whereby moral failure is presented as stemming from the perversity of excessive Afrikaner nationalism—a strategy that is intended to signal the writer's solidarity with the new dispensation. Afrikaners are presented as the section of the population suffering from amnesia, which again deflects attention away from the extent to which English South Africans are part of the dynamic of denial:

Federal Alliance leader Louis Luyt:

*"He vowed to bring back apartheid, now he swears he can't even spell it."
(Hogarth, And Now for the Evita Awards, 6 February)*

Yet a particular spin on the past is nursed. Continuities are stressed to present a constant image of sustained liberal behaviour and attitudes. This line of positive self-presentation

sees liberals as the upholders of civil liberties, maintainers of standards, the preservers of culture in the face of bungling, power-hungry, undemocratic, even fascist, behaviour on the part of *both past and present* regimes:

I wish I had felt a deep surge of moral indignation as yet another cornerstone of democracy got pissed on. I wanted to feel outrage . . . but I didn't feel that way at all. My real response was to say to myself: "Oh, so we're back to business as usual", and to shake my head at the shoddy workmanship on this new set of jackboots as it marches over our civil liberties. (Ronge, Call Back the Past, 12 November)

The construction of the new order as different merely in cosmetic terms from the old order, and essentially a continuation of repressive, corrupt incompetence to which the moral response is either opposition or withdrawal, puts *white talk* in a comfort zone. More significantly, however, it allows for a very powerful ideological strategy, which is to "fix" both centres of enemy power in the same psychological and moral niche. By this means the general consensus on the evils of apartheid, and the accompanying emotional outrage and rejection, are transferred onto the new order without careful comparison and contrast:

What he was asking for carried ominous echoes of the bad old apartheid days when detention without legal representation and trial was one of the cornerstones of the old oppressive regime. (Ronge, Wrong Arm of the Law, January)

Once again we are moving into a society in which journalists and media bosses are anxious and guarded about what "they" might do if "they" don't like what they see or read. It's as if our old apartheid buddy BOSS were back in business. (Ronge, Truth or Dare, 1 October)

The raid on the SABC was a carbon copy of similar raids conducted in the 1969s when the ANC, and especially Nelson Mandela, was deemed to be one of the bad guys. He spent 27 years in prison, and he was put there because his goals were damaging to the economy as it was then and would have provoked violence on the streets. (Ronge, Call Back the Past, 12 November)

The present is simply a repetition of the past. In this article, *Call Back the Past*, Ronge elides the fundamental ways in which the old and new dispensations are utterly unlike

each other, and whimsically mourns the façades of the past. The tone is obviously meant to be ironic; nevertheless, Ronge taps into a fissure of nostalgia that often is detectable in *white talk*. The humour is profoundly “white,” and lets the pervasive sense slip out that in some ways it was the past that was more “normal” and satisfactory than the present:

In a sense, the old regime did these things more neatly. They infiltrated police spies into every newspaper and broadcasting unit in the country, many of them as crime correspondents. (Ronge, Call Back the Past, 12 November)

What intrigues me a great deal about all this is that both the African National Congress and the remnants of the old apartheid military seem to share a romantic devotion to war, or at least to the trappings of it. (Mulholland, Time for SA to Say Farewell to Arms, 26 November)

Even bullying requires a little skill if it is to be effective, and the present regime would do well to learn that and take some lessons. There are lots of retired security branch officers and police informers knocking around, and I'm sure they'd be most willing to conduct seminars for the new government officials. (Ronge, Call Back the Past, 12 November)

The parallels drawn between the old and the new governments are extremely expedient in providing the soil for one of the most widely spread tropes of white resistant discourses internationally, the accusation of “reverse discrimination”:

Now he [the Labour Minister] is about to send his job cops around the country to see how industry is doing in the new race game of demographics in which all the hated apartheid classifications come into play. (Mulholland, Politicians Should Stop Interfering with Labour, 9 April)

Given the sensitivity about apartheid, this trope is particularly geared to incapacitate those who recognize the need to redress past injustices, but who also subscribe to a philosophy of non-racialism.

If diversity is to be enforced upon every organization it becomes . . . no different from enforced conformity, which is exactly the kind of latent fascism that the current infatuation with diversity was designed to oppose. (Ronge, A World of Difference, 21 May)

Hogarth gives an ironic twist to this theme, implying that such perceived similarities indicate that the government has sold out. By becoming like those they fought, the liberation struggle has been tamed:

A Not-So-Hidden Agenda

Since President Thabo Mbeki will today be meeting the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Pretoria, Hogarth would like to propose some topics for discussion on which the two are likely to agree:

- 1. Aren't those European Union bureaucrats a pain in the behind?*
- 2. Aren't those militant trade unionists a pesky nuisance?*
- 3. Aren't those large, unprofitable state corporations a frightful indulgence?*
- 4. Aren't those power-mad African dictators a serious irritant?*

(Hogarth, 9 January)

This theme of sell-out can also be worked as a strategy to redirect the critical gaze from the substantive issue onto what is more open to critique, and will not affect white ease of mind if exposed:

The Conference on Racism held in Sandton about 10 weeks ago produced . . . an irritating degree of puffing and posturing. . . [it] taught us a great deal about how politics operates in our brave, new country. . . . I particularly enjoyed the choice of location in the Sandton Convention Centre, a costly marvel of luxury and ostentatious consumerism. (Ronge, Theatre for the Masses, 15 October)

In the same way the past is a site of active (re)construction to fit within the ideological patterning that shapes *white talk*, the representation of the future is equally consigned a functional role. Under the control of the ideological "other" the future is certain to be disastrous. The vision is one of doom, anarchy, corruption, conflict, economic hardship and chaos:

Are we drifting into anarchy, sliding into anarchy, or hurtling into anarchy? It is, of course, merely a matter of degree. There can be no doubt that we are heading for a state of anarchy. (Mulholland, Time for SA to Say Farewell to Arms, 26 November)

There's a sentence that could work like a live hand grenade in the forthcoming battles about land ownership in this country, or even in the next

election when ordinary South Africans measure what they own against the wealth and possessions of the ruling politicians. . . . (Ronge, Feasting on the Written Word, 13 Aug)

Van Dijk (1998) allows for a refinement of the notion of the “other,” by distinguishing between the *ideological* “other” against whom the in-group is starkly polarized in terms of power struggle, and the *social* “other,” where the focus is more particularly on cultural struggle. In the *white talk* analysed in this chapter, two groups carry the social “other.” The primary social “other” is broadly the Third World, but particularly Africa. As has been shown in the analysis on how the past is presented, it should be clear that the Afrikaner also acts in a secondary manner as a social “other.”

As the principal bearers of the ideological role of the social “other,” there is a concentration of negative cultural representations of Africa and Africans in *white talk*. Africa is separate, distant, “other.”²⁵ It is that from which “we” must distinguish ourselves as the civilized centre, and with whom there can be no common identity, no community (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). The inherent characteristics of the social “other” are seen in a great measure to explain their unequal position in the society. Such cultural explanations have been extensively documented in modern racism (De Goede, 1996) and (interrelatedly) also in neo-colonial racist representations of Africa and Africans (Brooks, 1995). Hegemonic systems that are permeated with such understandings exert powerful social control through the buy-in they achieve by those represented so negatively. The dominant tone about the New South Africa is infused with the taint of the African social “other,” which helps to explain the “failure” of the New South Africa—if not actually in the present, then certainly in the future:

The point [in Tim Modise’s talk show] was that in our conversation and public utterances, there is a tone of negativity about the future. Instead of being upbeat, people keep drizzling on about how South Africa is going to become another Zimbabwe or, even worse, another Congo. They complain about crime and taxes, about schools and unemployment and that, concluded Tim’s guest, was actually hindering the country’s progress. . . . It took about a minute for an outside caller to make the point that “talking down the nation” was pretty much a white phenomenon. (Ronge, Don’t Outlaw Betting on the Uncertainties in Life, n.d.)

The worst-case scenario is for the country to become like Africa; it represents the dissolution of the white “self.” The trope of blaming the victim enables explanations that ascribe the problems of the continent to some sort of inherent, and intrinsically disastrous, Africanness. Such oversimplification ignores the complex interplay of factors that include, beside opportunism on the part of leaders, colonialism, underdevelopment, neocolonialism and, significantly, Afro-pessimism/racism on the part of the global community.²⁶ As the representatives of the west “on the spot” in Africa, white South Africans are able to keep stereotypical representations of Africa activated, thus continually “renewing” their connection with the dominant powers of the West through displaying psychological and ideological affinity.²⁷

Open sewers, garbage everywhere, goats and skinny cows staggering about, snot-nosed kids crawling about in the mud, tsotsies strutting menacingly between the shacks, chickens crawling out of car wrecks. And so on. I am not in possession of any data but anecdotal evidence suggests that the bounty flowing from supposedly affluent Sandtonites is not making its way to the deserving poor. (Mulholland, By Hook or By Crook, That's Politics, 10 September)

Mulholland even comes close to advocating a less sophisticated education system to meet the needs of “backward” children, echoing the rationale of apartheid education policies:

There is no point in exposing barefoot kids in remote rural areas to totally inappropriate, complex and, ultimately, unaffordable educational techniques, however trendy these might be in left-wing circles in Scotland, New Zealand and Canada. No. These kids are entitled to be taught reading, writing and arithmetic so that they can function in a market economy. They need to have command of these priceless basics rather than to be specimens in some exotic social experiment. (Mulholland, Inevitable Chaos of Social Engineers' Unrealistic Dream, 23 January)

The cultural practices of the social “other” are an endless source of material for humour:

The Evils of Aromat

The [Zulu] king then proceeded to extol the virtues of traditional cooking and explained how Aromat spice and mayonnaise spoil the authentic taste of food. (Hogarth, 13 August)

Guarding the Harem

Part of the elaborate security requirements for the Zulu royal family's visit to Newcastle included providing armed escorts and a luxury German vehicle for each of the king's wives. This seemed a bit over the top, until it emerged that the security arrangements included the deployment of six armed police women to guard 15 "virgins" who had to dance for the king. Apparently, the guards received strict instructions that no man was allowed within a 190m radius of the girls. (Hogarth, 13 August)

Significantly, while the social "other" is marked, corporate, white middle class society remains completely out of view. The practices of the "norm" are neither subjected to scrutiny, nor the butt of humour. At no time is this social and cultural world made "strange."

Both the ideological and the social "other" come together in black people who wield power in the New South Africa. All African people in leadership positions, particularly those political leaders who consciously and deliberately challenge any of the ideological core values of West-centrism therefore become the objects of particularly powerful discursive and psychological energy. Black people with power are tirelessly constructed in ways that undermine confidence in them, delegitimize what they stand for, and subvert their goals for the society. The tropes used are often standard enemy images (Keen, 1991): they are petty tyrants, dictatorial, untrustworthy, criminally prone, corrupt, rapists, self-seeking, misguided, trifling, incompetent, self-serving, selfish, unreliable, self-absorbed, power-hungry, inconsistent, unreliable, foolish—the list goes on.

Such noble work beats finding ways to provide Alexandra with tarred roads and underground sewers, or ensuring that the great golden goose, the Sandton CBD—the nation's financial and commercial centre—doesn't sink into a sea of faeces as its villagey infrastructure crumbles under the weight of massive development for which little or no town planning was provided. Our worthy councillors will not concern themselves with the weeds sprouting out of pavements, blocked stormwater drains and such like. No, they will be busy making history changing the name of a city in which the traffic lights don't work and even when they do, nobody bothers to obey

them because there are no traffic cops around. (Mulholland, Jo'burg Mayor's Very Fine Sense of Priorities, 17 December)

We Are Above The Law

Remember all those wonderful labour laws about working hours that were designed to protect the exploited working masses from the mean and stingy bosses?

Well, it seems the government has decided that its own laws are so unworkable that the public service should be exempt from them. (Hogarth, 13 February)

The logic that serves the ideology is that as blacks cannot be trusted with power it should therefore best be withheld from them, or their means to exercise it should be curtailed.

At least some of the critique directed against Thabo Mbeki in *white talk* fits onto this template of undermining the credibility of the social and ideological "other."

Sweeping Denials

It's no coincidence that Parliament was swept for bugs this week, two weeks after newspapers revealed the astonishing goings on in the ANC's confidential caucus, including President Thabo Mbeki's conspiracy theory on the CIA's plot to discredit him. Since the reports appeared, several ANC MP's have pointed their paranoid fingers at journalists, claiming that their reports were so accurate that they must have bugged the caucus room—which can only mean that the claims by the ANC that the reports were unfounded are untrue. (Hogarth, 15 October)

It is time our President stopped dividing us and started uniting us. (Mulholland, Content of Heads is the Issue, Mr Mbeki, Not Colour or Shape, 3 September)

Perhaps Mbeki should make this demand to the parliamentary medical aid, of which he is a compulsory member. It boasts proudly of providing AZT, as a matter of course, to rape victims. (Hogarth, Sauce for the Goose, 8 October)

The extract below is telling, because it suggests that despite the adoption of more careful language in the New South Africa, *white talk* still conforms to the dichotomous representation of "good blacks" and "bad blacks" which is central to oppressive rhetoric.

“Good blacks” are those who do not challenge dominant ideology, “bad blacks” do. The extract reveals that black access to power is regarded as dangerous, because it can, at any moment, revert, revealing the “terrorist” that hides underneath the clothings of respectable power. The Old South African worldview has not been worked through as much as disguised:

Will a special floral branch of MK be constituted to drive these foreign oppressors from our land? (Ronge, The Big Stick, 26 November)

This interpretation is supported by the next passage from the same article, which shows flippancy about the “pressing social needs” of reconstructing a nation that has to turn around centuries of oppression and exploitation. Ronge puts the most unfavourable interpretation—that of self-indulgence in new-found affluence—on those in power. Tellingly, *white talk*, like the elite discourse analysed elsewhere, does not see such indifference and lack of engagement as a social problem; only the behaviour of those who are trying to change the distribution of social assets is identified for comment. The problem that the established power base presents to the society is not visible:

Let government do an accurate analysis of the amount of money spent on the luxury cars and jet planes in which politicians rush to and from every pressing social need. Let them do a similar analysis of the amount spent redecorating the offices and official residences of elected officials. (Ronge, The Big Stick, 26 November)

While a good deal of this discourse singles out the South African government, the most concentrated crystallization of the composite ideological and social other comes in the form of Robert Mugabe, who represents the most unacceptable face of the not-us:

Something Rotten

Hogarth noticed the other day that the headquarters of Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF party is in a street called Rotten Row in Harare. No kidding. (Hogarth, A Colony of Legal Penguins at Play, 26 March)

[W]e have witnessed what will surely be the final messy stage of Robert Mugabe's nasty little career. . . . [a]s I watch Mugabe as he tries to cling to power in a country that seemingly no longer wants or needs him, I can only reflect once that there is no more doleful transformation than the one that turns a popular liberator into a greedy tyrant.

It is by no means an African phenomenon. It seems, ironically, to be an almost inevitable aftermath of a socialist or communist revolution designed to liberate people from poverty and bourgeois oppression. . . . but Africa has had its fair share of liberators who turned into emperors. . . .

*So one can only light a candle and say a prayer for President Thabo Mbeki as he pursues his noble ideal of an African Renaissance. It is a dream worth dreaming but making it work in the hungry, desperate strife-torn continent we see stretching beyond our borders is not going to be easy. (Ronge, *Small Change*, 23 April)*

*What we are now seeing are the storm troopers of an embattled despot. . . . For two decades this ethnic cleansing megalomaniac has failed to govern. . . . He reverts to Marxist-Leninist type, demonizing 0.5% of the population, a dwindling band of currency-trapped and land-trapped farmers. He falls back on the sick communist belief in class struggle as the “violent midwife of history,” as Marx famously put it. (Mulholland, *Unable to Govern, Despot Mugabe Sends in His Thugs*, 30 April)*

Mugabe is seen as the carrier of ideological excesses. The reaction to the manner in which the question of land is dealt with in Zimbabwe²⁸ follows a well-worn ideological path that has mobilized white reactions to decolonization throughout the history of Africa (Monyae & Ndumo, 2001). Contrasting this ready interpretation with the response to the behaviour of another actor, also generally recognized to have behaved in a morally flawed manner, reveals that Mugabe’s actions are indeed typecast. Mulholland gives Hansie Cronje’s corrupt acts²⁹ a complicated psychological rationalization—he is a “tragic hero” whose character has a classical “flaw” explained in terms of psychiatry as a subconscious need to escape the “enormous and unrelenting” pressures of leadership:

Deep within the psyche there could be a voice urging that the burden be removed, that escape be gained, no matter what the consequences.

Mulholland concludes:

*We should now remember Alexander Pope: To err is human, to forgive, divine. (Mulholland, *The Self-destruction of Successful Leaders*, 16 April)*

No such empathetic energy is extended on the much graver issue of Mugabe and redistribution of land in Zimbabwe, despite the fact that psychological explanations

would not be too difficult to access. There is, for example, the notion of “standing rage” which has been used to describe the condition which African Americans feel after years of contending with institutionalized racism (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Parallels could be drawn with Africans facing the ongoing effects of colonial and neo-colonial power. The issue here is not the factual correctness of the explanation, but rather the way in which discourse follows a clear ideological chain:

Mad Bob will have what he has always pined for, a Marxist enclave in which his word is law and God help anyone who steps out of line.

(Mulholland, Mad Bob Creating the Marxist Land of His Dreams, 11 June)

The links in the chain are soldered with names and lexical terms that are calculated to have predictable emotional associations: “Crazed Idi Amin”; “Pol Pot’s mass murder”; “Russian and Chinese collectivist brainwashing”; “Mobutu Sese Seko”; “egomaniacal dictator”; “tortured imagination.” In contrast to this, there is an under-problematization of the role of the West in Zimbabwe, particularly the British, who are seen to be the most reliable critics of their own behaviour:

Mad Bob blamed the Brits. . . . No one can accuse London's left wing Guardian newspaper of sympathizing with colonialism or propertied whites and Indians. (Mulholland, Mad Bob Creating the Marxist Land of His Dreams, 11 June)

For this mindset, it is particularly worrying when blacks with power have access to weapons. They cease to be governors and relapse to being tribal warriors, terrorists or revolutionaries—a threat to themselves and everyone else.

It is well not to forget that our ruling party perceive themselves as revolutionaries and many still yearn to march on the apartheid Parliament and take it by force much as Castro did to Batista. But, thanks to the wisdom and generosity of the great Mandela, they were denied their moment of military glory and many innocent lives were spared. (Mulholland, Time for SA to Say Farewell to Arms, 26 November)

Mention of Mad Bob brings to mind the havoc, having armed forces at the command of the government of the day can cause to the national treasury, not to mention to the welfare of starving millions. (Mulholland, Time for SA to Say Farewell to Arms, 26 November)

Military might should stay in the hands of those who know how to manage power, who are in touch with “reality” and can deal with the responsibility of arms:

In the Alice in Wonderland world of our military planners, it is of course, no concern. . . (Mulholland, Time for SA to Say Farewell to Arms, 26 November)

The gendered dimension of this ideology is apparent when the representation of black women is examined. Within this scheme, black women with power come in for especially denigratory treatment as being ludicrous, difficult, even primitive, very certainly out of their depth:

If these scurrilous rumours are true, it would mean that Zuma³⁰ has alienated two ANC-leaning director-generals. (Hogarth, More Ministerial Sulking in Pretoria, 9 January)

One Promise at a Time Will Do

KwaZulu-Natal’s “spirited” Education MEC, Faith Gaza, re-emerged from her Ulundi sanctuary this week to “motivate” the province’s matric pupils, who start writing exams on Tuesday. Gaza abandoned her office for three weeks as she believed that her axed predecessor, Eileen kaNkosi Shandu, had bewitched her.

But having exorcised the evil spirits from her office with a splash of paint and new furnishings, Gaza returned to the land of the living. (Hogarth, One Promise at a Time Will Do, 22 October)

Hogarth hears that Gaza has been complaining to her colleagues that she was disturbed at the way some newspapers portrayed her in their cartoons as they always made her wear “ugly” shoes. . . . But then you can’t blame her. After all, Gaza is so used to putting her foot in it that her shoes should be of primary concern. (Hogarth, Where a Hard Time Is All in a Day’s Work, 29 October)

Black women in powerful positions are a joke.

Quite obviously, given the tenor of its portrayals, *white talk* has to pre-empt the almost certain criticism that it is biased and one-directional in its representation of black people with power. One important technique by which this is achieved is to direct enough criticism across the board to all those who wield power, including politicians

from points of view sympathetic to *white talk*—white elites and politicians—so that an impression of fairness is created, as if there is a comprehensive cynicism of public figures. However, in this discourse as in other elite discourse, the accumulated burden in the writing is such that the weight of condemnation falls heavily onto powerful black people. The inclusiveness of such criticism should rather be seen as falling into the category of impression management, a wide-spread feature of modern prejudicial discourse. Moreover, the slighter evidence against these “good” actors, as opposed to those who are ideologically other, suggests that one should recognize that poor performance or culpable acts on their part are slips, deviations from the norm, rather than illustrations of expected outward expressions of the inherent and reprehensible qualities of the group they represent:

Remember when Democratic Party leader Tony Leon used to lambaste President Thabo Mbeki for his obsessive centralization of power? Ah, those were the days.

*Obviously the old saying “If you can’t beat them, join them” now applies.
(Hogarth, Look Who’s Talking Centralism Now, 5 March)*

Conclusion

Through a detailed analysis of three press columns written over a period of a full year, this chapter has shown the unmistakable polarized patterning of ideology at work in these elite versions of *white talk*, where a complimentary version of “us” is pitted against a disparaging construction of “them.” As texts which are read weekly by thousands of South Africans, these writings serve the purpose of elite discourse, which is to provide and refine culturally acceptable beliefs that can defend social advantage for whiteness, and maintain its location within the system, despite the change in political power away from the white population. *White talk* is the discursive element in the mobilization of social forces to prevent the erosion of white privilege. It is not, however *mere talk*. The power of ideology is such that legitimation is provided for the perpetuation of racial and ethnic inequality in the country, undercutting other attempts to bring the experience of life on the ground more closely in line with the vision of a democratic, non-racist, non-sexist society.

But is it not only for relations between social groups within the country that *white talk* provides strategies of legitimation. The important point about the ideology examined in this chapter is that the ideological epicentre of identification is not within

the country, as much as with the core beliefs, values, norms, social models, attitudes that are part and parcel of the people who have been constructed as the (particularly English-speaking section of the) “white race” through the modern age of European global domination. Unlike in the time of apartheid, when white South Africans were the pariahs of the world, the changes in 1994 have ironically opened up possibilities for reconnection with whiteness elsewhere, especially where whiteness is sustained by “respectable” modern racism, and the “same language” is spoken. In other words, *white talk* helps to reconstruct the affinities between the scatterings of whiteness at the tip of Africa, and the mainlands of whiteness. As a discursive stream operating within the local white social world, it gains affirmation from its international family resemblances.

White talk therefore is simultaneously (a) the voice of the dispersed white settlers in South Africa, who use the international and historical dominance of western ideology to help retain their position as elevated Westerners in a Third World setting where the tables of power have turned, as well as (b) the voice of the dominant western ideology disciplining an attack from a potentially powerful resistant voice in Africa, acting through its representatives in the local situation which it can do with impunity now that this country is formally free.³¹ White talk protects the ideological interests of the “civilized” West, as it digs in to protect its global hegemony in an increasingly “post-colonial” world.

NOTES

1. Discourse analysis has been viewed as “an analysis of society that aims at disentangling the net of the entire discourse of a society by bringing out the single discourse strands at the single discourse levels.” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001)

2. Van Dijk (1992) defines ideologies as “political or social systems of ideas, values or prescriptions of groups or other collectives, and have the function of organizing or legitimating the actions of the group” (p.3). Taking a multidisciplinary approach, Van Dijk (1998) suggests that ideologies should be seen as the *basis* of the social representations shared by members of a group. Ideologies provide the foundations on which social beliefs are organized and social practices are regulated—usually in self-serving ways to optimize the group’s material and symbolic interests in relation to other groups. The theoretical framework offered by Van Dijk (1998) conceptualizes ideology as operating within a triangle composed of discourse-cognition-society.

3. For example, (Guillaumin, 1995) sees ideologies as “the complete set of meanings, whether empirical or doctrinal, which direct social behaviour” (p. 32).

NOTES (cont.)

4. A body established by provision in Chapter 9 of the Constitution of the New South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) charged with the task of investigating and reporting on the observance of human rights in the country.
5. Some critics have maintained that the HRC commission investigation did not go far enough, especially in limiting its scope to the concerns of elite (male) voices, white and increasingly also black. (See, for example, Monyae & Ndumo, 2001; Mthala, 2000). Most criticism has focused more on questions of methodology and process. (See, for example, Bertelsen, 2000; Jacobs, 2000b)
6. Now owned by Johnnic Publishing. Times Media has a publishing history going back to 1902 in South Africa. The *Sunday Times* was the “offspring of the Rand Daily Mail, and launched in February 1906 with an initial print order of 15 000 copies.” (<http://www.johnnic.co.za/communication/publishing/publish.asp?link2=publish>)
7. The circulation was 504 845 in 2000, and 504 232 in 2001 (Msomi, 2001). Msomi describes the *Sunday Times* as Johnnic’s “flagship.” The *Mail & Guardian*, which is pitched at a more sophisticated market, sold an average of 42 649.
8. As part of the mainstream white media, its position was often ambivalent. For example, editorial position favoured the proposal for a Tricameral Parliament, and urged the paper’s readers to vote “yes” in the referendum which tested (white) public opinion in 1983. The system, which excluded the majority black Africans from the political system, formalized the divisions of a three-tiered parliament (for a four-tiered society!) based on racial classification. The ensuing rage led directly to the situation in the 1980s when the country became increasingly ungovernable.
9. William Hogarth (1697-1764) was an English painter and printmaker whose art was characterized by biting political and moral satire. See http://www.artelino.co.uk/articles/william_hogarth.asp.
10. Barney Pityana, a black consciousness student leader and close friend of Steve Biko during apartheid, was chair of the Human Rights Commission. The National Conference on Racism held in Johannesburg during the week that this column appeared was arranged under the auspices of the HRC.
11. Examples of this “name-dropping” are:

When I ran the Fairfax group for Black in Australia I was often asked by the Prime Minister, Paul Keating, to persuade editors to adopt a particular approach. (Mulholland, Independent Press Vital for Survival of a Free Society, 21 May).

As I was then the executive officer of TML, I was invited to meet with Madiba to discuss the issue. (Mulholland, Independent Press Vital for Survival of a Free Society, 21 May).

It was forty years ago when I first met Harry Oppenheimer. (Mulholland, Harry Imbued his Vision with Loyalty and Friendship, 27 August).

This brings to mind a meeting I had (to name drop) with Kissinger in Australia. . . . (Mulholland, Unlike Gore, Cheated Nixon Let It Be, 19 November)

NOTES (cont.)

12. I'm paraphrasing Reisigl & Wodak (2001), who talk of "racism for beginners" and "racism for advanced users" to draw a similar distinction between "old racism" and "new racism."
13. An analogous situation to what has been characterized as "Anti-Semitism without Jews and without anti-Semites," a phrase coined by Bernd Marin and cited in Reisigl & Wodak (2001) to describe the post-war Austrian situation where anti-Semitism was functionalized as a political tool, but where no one would call him- or herself an anti-Semite. (p. 94)
14. See note 12, above.
15. The top secret farm of the later apartheid era, exposed during the Truth and Reconciliation hearings as the site of terrible crimes against humanity perpetrated by the state.
16. The phrase used by the apartheid government to describe the comprehensive nature of the threat to white South Africa.
17. De Goede (1995) describes this neo-liberal world view as:
 plac[ing] overwhelming emphasis on individualism, self-reliance and the free market as organizer of all aspects of life . . . accord[ing] the pursuit of profit something akin to the quest for the holy grail. . . . Neo-liberalism is the champion of this individualism in which the wealthy and the business world do not need to feel public responsibility towards the poor and excluded. (p.349)
18. Three columns in March 2000 (5, 12, 26 March) deal directly with this topic.
19. Nzimande (2000) comments:
 The so-called market still embodies and reproduces the same class, race and gender stereotypes we are trying to eradicate. There is a link between the "market" and the continued reproduction of racism and racial inequalities and gender stereotypes. The interests and needs of the market have become the convenient explanation for newspaper bosses to deny and defuse issues of black people, women and the black working class in their publications. This is the heart of the issue. (p.7)
20. Gabriel (1998) maintains that it is a characteristic of particularly colonial whiteness to show amnesia around such issues.
21. For example, the 1913 Land Act in South Africa limited the rights of black South Africans (67.5% of the population) to own land to less than 8% of the country's area. (This was extended to 13% in 1936). Whites were not allowed to sell land to black people. The system of share-cropping was outlawed, reducing millions of Africans to forced labour on the farms and mines, to desperate poverty, and to humiliation.
22. Again, this is well described as an attribute of whiteness elsewhere. In the United States, (Entman & Rojecki, 2000) comment that
 [the absence of empathetic understanding, and] the frequent White ignorance and obliviousness to a larger vision of racial justice, variously disappoints and enrages many Blacks, further compounding mutual alienation, the opposite of racial comity. (p. 12)

NOTES (cont.)

23. Billig (1988) argues that the contrast with the construction of the “irrational prejudiced racist” is essential to the self-construction of the “rational liberal” whose racism is folded into liberal commonplaces and empirical or rational justifications.

24. Ronge, whose ideological “we” has a very pronounced cultural/artistic/intellectual orientation, also spars against an ideological “other” in the form of an approach to life that prioritizes sports, a characteristic of Afrikaner South Africans:

*Nothing has ever revealed the structure of this nation's ethics and values more clearly than the sight of a country going into shock, a government leaping into action and the powerbrokers rallying around to save face. . . . South Africans are willing to believe that sport is more important than anything else on earth and that sportsmen differ from God only in the sense that we see God less often than we see sportsmen and God doesn't sell hamburgers—at least not yet. (Ronge, *The Death of Decency*, 14 May)*

25. Such representations are in fact constituent of white identity. (See, for example, Nederveen Pieterse, 1992; Steyn, 2001).

26. Brooks (1995) characterizes this Afro-pessimism as discerned in the British press:

Africa is portrayed as a homogenous block with violence, helplessness, human rights abuses and lack of democracy as its main characteristics. The cumulative effect of a homogenous selection of regularly occurring subjects is the construction of a stereotypical representation of Africa in the minds of readers. (p. 465)

27. In his analysis of the representation of South Africa in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Morris (2001) comments:

The overwhelming representation is that the business leaders (white) are competent whereas the political leaders (black) concerned are incompetent, corrupt, not very intelligent and ultimately not suitable for leadership positions. . . . Rarely, are the gains made by South Africans post-apartheid covered. The focus is on the woes. (p. 12)

28. I am not by any means justifying Mugabe's excesses and human rights abuses in the country, only pointing out that the interpretation of these events in *white talk* follows an ideologically predictable logic, and therefore lacks the capacity to think “otherwise.” Mandaza (2000) makes a similar point about how the media representations fit western historiographic accounts of “an [indispensable] white minority under persecution from a black majority.”

29. The South African cricket captain found guilty of accepting payment for alleged match fixing. Fischer (2000) makes a similar point in contrasting the treatment of Cronjé with Alan Boesak, the disgraced struggle leader, as does Mokoe (2000) of Cronjé and another cricketer, Ntini.

30. Nkosazana Zuma, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

31. Van Dijk (1992) points out that cultural claims of the West:

NOTES (cont.)

. . . are closely linked with the management of world politics, as was also shown during the Gulf War. . . . The same is true, more generally, in the management of relations between North and South, e.g. through strategies of denying neo-colonialism or imperialism, self-interest in international aid and by affirming the "leading" role of the western world. In sum, the western denial of racism and ethnocentrism, and its social, political and cultural implication, plays a role from the level of interpersonal relations, to the global level of intercultural and international relations. At all levels, such denial functions essentially to manage resistance, dissent and opposition and hence as a strategy in the reproduction of hegemony. (p.97)

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7

SAVING FACE, CALLING THE RACE: REPERTOIRES FOR TALKING WHITE

The previous chapter examined the ideological contours of *white talk* as it deals with the central question for whiteness in the New South Africa: how to manage a situation in which black people have legally and legitimately achieved political power. It examined the discursive construction of the ideological categories of “us” and “them” as whiteness re-energizes, and where necessary, reconfigures the ideological underpinnings of its advantaged social location for the group it simultaneously constructs. This chapter shifts the focus of the discussion onto how *white talk* represents the *New South Africa* in such a way as to define the terms by which (not only white) people will understand it, and relate to it. This ideologically-informed discursive activity presents itself as evaluating the New South Africa simply as it is “out there,” as if the evaluative aspects of *white talk* emanate from the “objective” character of the political and national life of the country. What this chapter shows is that the representation is already pre-evaluated, refracted through an ideological lens, and that it constitutes a version of New South Africa after its own image (see Potter & Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In other words, the signifier “The New South Africa” itself has become a trope over which battles of representation are fought and through which interests are contested. A great deal is at

international community and as the local formation of whiteness has been reconnecting to mainstream whiteness, it has to do so as a respectable member of the family. *White talk* therefore has to conform to the international injunction against openly prejudiced discourse (Ansell, 1998a, 2001b; Billig, 1988b; Griffen, 1999; Kleiner, 1998; Van Dijk, 1993).

In other words, *New South Africa Speak* provides the spin that presents culturally acceptable arguments both locally and abroad to protect the advantaged social location of white South Africa (Makgoba, 1998; also see Wellman, 1993). Drawing on this repertoire, *white talk* can help to secure the position of privilege for those who do not want their commitment to the new democracy, nor their opposition to apartheid in the past, to be called into question. Acting as a social group, they can be critical of policies that threaten their advantage without giving up their claim to support the principles that mark them as a respectable post-apartheid diaspora of the broad community of fair-minded western individuals.

It is not easy to determine the extent to which the values of *New South Africa Speak* have been internalized and reflect genuinely positive intentions towards the other (see Entman & Rojecki, 2000), or emerge in contradiction to *White Ululation* as the consequence of internal dilemmas between conflicting “common senses” held by people who believe in their own decency as discussed by Billig (1991; 1996), or whether the values are simply seized upon opportunistically, even cynically (Griffen, 1999) by people who actually care little about such things. As Spears et al. put it: “It is notoriously difficult to distinguish internalized and intrapsychic from self-presentational or strategic dimension of expressed behavior” (Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001, p. 334). Jackman (2001) provides a view that seems an adequate working hypothesis in this case. She argues that humans behave like “implicit strategists, selecting modes of action and thought that appear efficacious with a minimal investment of cognitive resources” (p. 450). In reality, combinations of all such motivations probably go into making the presentable face of *white talk*.

New South Africa Speak clusters around certain “safe” tropes that put the best foot forward and rhetorical/discursive devices that carry no risk to whiteness. The next section of this chapter deals with some of these features and shows how they operate when articulated into *white talk*. The ameliorating tropes are: non-racialism and democratic principles; concern for poverty; and Good Blacks.

Safe Tropes: Non-racialism and Democratic Principles

If any value were to be at the core of *New South Africa Speak*, it would certainly be non-racialism. *White talk* capitalizes on the official policy of non-racialism, but also takes advantage of the lack of specificity of the concept by transmuted it into the liberal notion of power evasive colour blindness, which has become ubiquitous in white discourses internationally. As a form of denial of the effects of racialization, colour blindness is a powerful mechanism in building white consensus and enabling the reproduction of racism (Essed, 1991; Frankenberg, 1993, p. 14; Van Dijk, 1992 p. 96).

Now I have no idea, nor do I care, about the racial make-up of the hockey team. (Mulholland, The Little Dictator Who Must Be Stopped, 24 September)

When, however, race is acknowledged as an ongoing factor in the society, *white talk* draws on other key democratic values in *New South Africa Speak*, such as fairness and non-discrimination to hold the status quo. Rhetorically this is often managed by flattening out the issue to conceal profound, ongoing inequalities that need to be acknowledged and redressed if one's intention is to bring about a fairer situation. Morally unequal positions are treated as if all parties carry equal accountability. *White talk* declares the measures equivalent before the scales have even weighed them. The following extract states this quite explicitly, by claiming that "black" and white spaces can simply be reversed to reveal parallel, even identical experiences and emotions.

For many people of all races it [the National Conference on Racism] did nothing but harden the shell of prejudice they have carried with them out of the old South Africa. But for many other people that shell was cracked open a little and stayed that way.

Instead of just slamming it shut and wondering if they could still get into New Zealand, there were those who took the trouble to walk towards their fears only to find that they were the same fears as those held by the people on the other side. Only the placement of the black and white spaces was reversed. (Ronge, Theatre Of The Masses, 15 October)

Rewriting the personal and social consequences of racialization in this decontextualized way, *white talk* is able to define racism as those overt acts of blatant discrimination, vicious oppression or hate crimes in comparison with which the everyday exercise of privilege and perpetuation of advantage pales into insignificance (Wellman, 1993).⁴ Care

is taken to keep distinctions between cause and effect vague so that accountability is difficult to pinpoint:

There is not a single perceptive and informed South African who could deny that racism flourishes in their country, that there are brutal farmers who commit hideous racist crimes against their workers or that there are gangs of ruthless killers who target white farmers and tourists simply because they are white. (Ronge, Theatre of the Masses, 15 October)

Such rhetorical devices that equalize issues are highly prevalent in *white talk*.

Significantly, these often take the form of appeals to place the issue contested within the New South Africa in a broader perspective. This is particularly true, as the ideological square would lead us to expect, where the matter of contention could reflect poorly on white motivation:

Just as so many young black people chose to go to other countries in the '60s and '70s because they saw no immediate possibilities for themselves in South Africa, so these young people want to go where they will find their best opportunities.

To stigmatise them, to accuse them of "talking down the nation", and to speak of them as if they are unpatriotic quislings who grab a privileged education and then zip off overseas for some selfish profit motive is unfair and, more dangerously, untrue. (Ronge, Defending the Right to Whine, January)

The above argument, while purporting to broaden the perspective on the issue of the "brain drain" of young professionals from South Africa, treats two highly incomparable situations as if they are isomorphic. This argument is either mischievous, or an expression of a naivety so extreme as to be difficult to credit. The notion of "choice," presented as "the same" in both cases, requires problematization. In the case of young black people who chose to leave the country during the apartheid era, black youths were in dire circumstances, legally barred from self-development and from participating in the economic life of the country. Most of them left to get away from situations of extreme degradation, constraint and oppression, more often than not to further the cause of the struggle movement at great personal risk. Such a "choice" is not equivalent to the freedom of movement which privileged people claim as a right. The young white South Africans leaving under current circumstances have had the very best opportunities the

country can offer, and choose to move away from a situation where they will no longer get the automatic privilege of whiteness in competing for employment. The argument depends on such an ideological privileging of the individual that it lets slip from sight the extent to which each individual is a site of considerable investment in its future on the part of society. Moreover, once these young people settle in other parts of the western world, they are automatically part of the privileged white class where they enjoy advantage over the black people in those societies (Schönfeldt-Aultman, 2001b), once again in stark contrast to the young black people with whom Ronge so lightly compares them.

Equalizing strategies depend on the formal appearance of democratic even-handedness for their effectiveness. Such fair-mindedness is, however, selectively applied, and is not in evidence where underlying ideological assumptions could be exposed. Crime, corruption, conflict between ethnic groups, laziness, pretentiousness—these are seldom carefully put in context by highlighting the forms they take in white society, or in the international arena. When they are, the rhetorical balance of the argument still serves to mark the “other” as qualitatively and quantitatively more reprehensible or dangerous.

Ronge, who is arguing against what he regards as “enforced” diversity, offers an interesting variation of equalizing rhetoric. His argument is essentially a “straw man” fallacy, where the version of the “other” position presented is so misrepresentative and bizarre as to be obviously nonsensical:

*Would the US supreme court take up the case, for example, of an African-American who is refused permission to join the Ku Klux Klan, or a white supremacist who is denied membership of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People? Or a Jew who wanted to join a new-Nazi movement, or a Hizbillah-trained Muslim who wants to join the American army? . . . Can we afford to lose organizations based on a narrow commitment to a certain ideal, language or belief? Does not their unique character provide the very element of difference that makes diversity so attractive? (Ronge, *A World of Difference*, 21 May)*

Ronge’s argument is instructive because of the extreme to which he takes the strategy. Arguments for inclusive organizations stem from the exact opposite impulse and motivation as supremacist and separatist organizations. An organization whose *raison*

d'être is to discriminate, cannot appeal to the principles of open democracy for legitimation. The argument rests on the fallacious claim that oppression and exclusion are just another option that should be allowed to play on equal terms with other differences in a free society. He is therefore using the formal features of discourses used to promote social democracy and justice most superficially, even in bad faith, as his use of the word “attractive” in such a context illustrates.

Another permutation of such equalizing strategy comes in the form of universalizing issues. Culpability on the part of whiteness, for example, is played down by appeals to our common human nature. An example is taken from Mulholland, who is responding to a speech made by President Thabo Mbeki on the effects of colonization on the psyches of the people of Africa. The president said this had “perhaps no equivalent anywhere except among the slave population in the US.” Mulholland rejoins:

Perhaps those Koreans colonized, exploited and brutalized by the Japanese might dispute this claim as might the assorted people conquered by Rome or Alexander the Great. There is also, of course, Moscow's dispossession, massacre and exploitation of the masses of Eastern Europe. Man's inhumanity to man knows no bounds, and has been—and will be—with us forever.

*Slavery, a despicable practice, was not invented by the colonial West.
(Mulholland, Content of Heads is the Issue, Mr Mbeki, Not Colour or Shape,
3 September)*

Here the approach is to spread the blame, glossing over the particularities of western slavery. Through emphasizing the ubiquity of human conquest and oppression, the relativist argument makes such practices seem unremarkable, and diverts attention away from the scope and effects of western colonialism on African people. Taking such a broad philosophical stance plays down the trauma of the experience, blunts the specifics of this context, blurs the roles of actual actors and the consequences of particular actions, and excises questions of moral accountability in the cases of relevance to the present and local situation in South Africa (Seidel, 1988). Significantly, such an argument also cuts white people off from an empathetic engagement with the experience from which Africans are attempting to rehabilitate themselves, a necessary part of their own journey towards reconciliation (L. Clark, 2003).

Frequently, the technique is not so much to place the contentious issue in a broader perspective as to divert attention away completely to another context. In this way the analytical gaze is fixed on those who purportedly are blameworthy, while the manner in which whiteness and systemic privilege operate in the current local context is deleted from the screen. Ronge below is an ardent, but comfortable, advocate of racial cognizance in the United States, where he supports affirmative action and anti-racism in a context where it cannot hurt his ilk here:

72 Years Later, Hollywood Is Still White and White: The Oscars may be gold-plated, but underneath they are as white as the American president's residence. . . . They are the most trivial reflection of seriously entrenched racial values and attitudes that Hollywood seems unable to change. . . .

[W]hat I am looking for is some affirmative action from the Oscar voters.

(Ronge, 72 Years Later, Hollywood Is Still White and White, 2 April)

Inserting elements of *New South Africa Speak* into *white talk* in an appropriately tinkered form as discussed above enables the writers to maintain their face-presentation as spokespeople for the values of democracy and racial fairness, articulated as colour-blindness. They are able to present themselves as the true advocates for tolerance and rationality, the hallmarks of the western liberal value system:

[D]emons do exist and they stalk the earth in a kind of terrifying trinity.

They are called Ignorance, Malice and Intolerance. . . (Ronge, Save Our Souls, 15 April)

There are, Mr President, no "foreign" religions, only the clash of ideas and the battle for minds. In his Clash of Civilizations, Samuel Huntington writes:

"The crucial distinctions among human groups concern their values, beliefs, institutions, and social structures, not their physical size, head shapes, and skin colours." (Mulholland, Content of Heads is the Issue, Mr Mbeki, Not Colour or Shape, 3 September)

Displaying his broadmindedness, Mulholland (above) presents what purports to be a culturally relativist, even anti-racist position. Once again, however the point of his argument actually runs in the counter direction. He uses the credit that accrues to "enlightened" rejection of biological explanations of race to shortchange the necessary implications always insisted upon by those who take a genuinely anti-racist position, namely that socially constructed categories have real material consequences in people's

lives, and that questions of oppression that operate along lines of racialization need to be factored into any analysis of intergroup relations. The fact of social construction does not make these social effects any less “real.” In other words, his “tolerant” position turns out to be protectionist. It obscures the causes of ongoing inequities and represses an examination of the actual processes of constructing hierarchical social divisions—of whiteness in action (Lerner, 1997; Levine-Rasky, 2002a).

It is important to recognize the extreme selectivity of *white talk* in its appeals to democratic rights and principles, however. The next extract shows an example, taken again from Ronge, arguing that the discourse of human rights, which is one of the core constituent currents of constructive energy in the society, is “overworked.” Contrary to almost every other aspect of post-apartheid South Africa, when it comes to the deracialization of the society, it appears, things are coming together splendidly:

There are real problems in certain schools, but if they were as bad as some politicians try to suggest, the recent rash of matric farewell dances would have been a series of bloody riots—yet they were not. (Ronge, Theatre for the Masses, 15 October)

The rhetoric attempts to diminish the potency of human rights discourse in the society, to undercut the legitimate need to raise the level of insight into these rights and how these should form the foundations of relationships and interactions. Rights resurface, needless to say, in the talk of individual rights that emphasize property ownership, freedom of speech, rights to freedom from state intervention, and generally talk that promotes “hands-off” social arrangements, some of which were discussed in the previous chapter. *White talk*, if left unchecked, would undermine the process of establishing the psychological and discursive structures for an equitable democratic society.

The next safe trope to be discussed deals with one of the consequences of racialization, but without addressing the processes by which the country comes to be skewed in such a way that poverty, overwhelmingly, remains the lot of black people alone.

Safe Trope: Concern for Poverty

A show of concern for poverty and the need for greater social responsibility—tropes that are at the heart of a “New South African consciousness”—can be mobilized to demonstrate personal worth, and also alignment with nation building. Ronge’s writing is permeated with a celebration of affluence and elitism;⁵ the admonition to be cognizant of

discrepancies in wealth perches uncomfortably upon his monuments to upper middle class life:

What kind of social morality can we claim to uphold when four individuals are offered that sum of money at a time when we are surrounded by constant images of human need and desolation so devastating that you hardly want to turn on your TV or open your newspaper any more? (Ronge, Money for Nothing, 27 February)

The telltale phrase, of course, is “any more.” The words once more give away one of the defining characteristics of *white talk*, the covert belief that things were actually better, or more “normal,” in the old white dispensation. The reference to “constant” and “devastating” “images of human need and desolation” serves here to reinforce the idea of *current* neglect and decay, in contrast to a time when people’s lives were apparently more hopeful. Most importantly, though, the quotation shows psychological distance between the images of poverty mediated through the newspapers and TV, and nature of the gaze—securely middle class—that emanates from an armchair. Significantly, this gaze invariably defines crime, not poverty, as the country’s greatest problem.

The material that can be used for face work is plentiful in *New South Africa Speak*. The following extract can be regarded as an example of *apparent concession*. The role of the past, the need for corrective actions—these are acknowledged. However, as with all these strategies, the deference to the values of the new democracy is in reality a defensive device, an insurance against the negative inferences that the actual point of his statement would generate:

Given our history in South Africa, we know why a commitment to diversity has value. . . . However, it seems equally clear that if diversity is to be enforced upon every organization it becomes, as the scouts claim, no different from enforced conformity, which is exactly the kind of latent fascism that the current infatuation with diversity was designed to oppose. (Ronge, A World of Difference, 21 May)

The apparent insight into and recognition of socio-economic circumstances in the country in the following extract are used slightly differently—the concern for the socially vulnerable is ammunition for the critique of those in power:

Every day, millions of impoverished people witness our prosperous First World society with its expensive cars. . . . Future historians will wonder how

these worlds lived side by side without the onset of bloody civil war. . . . And they will surely be aghast that a government placed in power by these same folk foisted on them the ruinous temptations of gambling. (Mulholland, Tata Ma Chance, Tata Their Shame, 15 October)

Hogarth's jab below can be categorized as apparent praise, and functions in a similar way:

Donations Welcome

KwaZulu-Natal Premier Lionel Mtshali lent his support to the drive to combat blood shortages in this province by donating a pint of his own to the blood bank this week.

Hogarth would like to commend the premier for taking the time to make this noble gesture.

However, KwaZulu-Natal does appear to have some other dire shortages—starting with principled politicians. (Hogarth, Diplomacy, The Art of Saying Nothing, 19 November)

A similar rhetorical device to *apparent concession* and *apparent praise* is *apparent concurrence*. The intention is to defuse any criticism for not being supportive of the changes, especially where these could be ascribed to persisting traces of racism:

It makes one weep to think of how the multi-faceted talents of a man like Danny Jordaan, chief executive of our brilliant bid, would have been lost to SA under the yoke of Apartheid. He is a reminder of the vast and irredeemable waste of human talent for which the National Party and its followers will forever stand guilty before the court of history. (Mulholland, Danny Jordaan Can Hold His Head High, 16 July)

The next trope also seemingly provides evidence of the speaker's support for non-racialism and progressive change, but is actually deeply subversive, once it is examined more closely.

Safe Trope: Good Blacks (Revisited)

One of the key tropes of *New South Africa Speak* is the former president of the country, Nelson Mandela. Even quite conservative white South Africans are lavish in their praise for him. He is revered as the man who rescued the country from near-certain doom,

reversing all expectations of black retribution and revenge through his compassionate humanity, deep wisdom and vision for an inclusive society:

One was proud to be a citizen of a nation led by one of the world's iconic statesmen, known and admired by everyone from bankers in the City of London to New York taxi drivers. We were the hope of the world, a symbol of how humankind can overcome near-insurmountable obstacles to achieve a peaceful resolution in a situation of conflict.

Mandela led us out of the sewer of apartheid and, for a brief and shining moment, united us as a nation. (Mulholland, Mbeki Cannot Escape History's Judgment, 22 October)

In the context of *white talk*, however, the praise for Madiba⁶ is almost invariably used in contrast with criticism of either his successor, Thabo Mbeki, who has adopted a much more challenging position towards white South Africans, or of other black leaders who are less amenable to them:

It is time our President stopped dividing us and started uniting us.

(Mulholland, Content of Heads is the Issue, Mr Mbeki, Not Colour or Shape, 3 September)

The different positions taken up by these two leaders clearly have to do with the distinct historical imperatives that fell upon them, as discussed in Chapter Four. Nelson Mandela needed to shepherd the nation through the highly charged period immediately post-1994, whereas Thabo Mbeki has taken his task as delivering “a better life” to the African majority (Mbeki, 2001), which has necessitated contesting the deep erosion of the dream of an equitable nation by historical and ongoing racial discrimination in many of its guises. The considered use of Nelson Mandela in *white talk* enables Thabo Mbeki to be rhetorically positioned as even further away from the “nice” position. Sadly, Mandela’s reconciliatory stance is thus appropriated and co-opted to contain African leaders who are more challenging to white interests.

What will history say about Mbeki? How will he be ranked? Does he uplift the national mood? Does he inspire us and make us feel good about ourselves and our futures? Are we safe? Does he protect us and deliver us from evil? No matter how much his sycophantic advisers rail against critics, he will be judged, not by them, but by history, against whose verdict there is

no appeal. (Mulholland, Mbeki Cannot Escape History's Judgment, 22 October)

It is assumed that a Eurocentric historiography will be the judge.

In other words, this often turns out to be a specific example of the strategy, mentioned in the previous chapter, which pits "good blacks" against "bad blacks." The ideologically more accommodating "other" is used to discredit and hopefully reprimand the ideologically more confrontational position of other "others."⁷

At the time I wrote that it was a travesty that our revered Madiba would grace such a distasteful exhibition with his stately presence. (Mulholland, Unable to Govern, Despot Mugabe Sends in His Thugs, 30 April)

White talk generally rewards those whose policies, attitudes and actions do not offend whiteness. They are used to "show up" those who do and to make their approach seem more unreasonable and less credible. In Foucauldian terminology it is a disciplinary technique that can, if successful, foreclose closer consideration of the challenging position:

Former President Nelson Mandela remarked that tyrants are often loathe to give up power. . . .

. . .

Archbishop Desmond Tutu charged Mugabe with being . . . (Mulholland, Mad Bob Creating the Marxist Land of His Dreams, 11 June)

When Uncle Sam Comes Knocking

Holbrooke apparently also mentioned that the US may have been over-hasty in backing Mbeki as a successor to President Nelson Mandela.

Hogarth hears that Mbeki's planned state visit to Washington teetered once more on the brink of cancellation, but it was again rescued by weary officialdom. Phew! (Hogarth, 7 May)

Another leader used in this way is Trevor Manuel, the Minister of Finance, whose policies have run counter to the predictions of radical socialist interventions inimical to business:

Manuel, by far and away the most impressive finance minister in modern history [has] fashioned what is essentially a supply-side budget and a

respectable example of the management of a modern economy. (Mulholland, Budget A Symbol Of Mbeki's Support For Impressive Manuel, 27 February)

The representation of Manuel falls into a subset of *New South Africa Speak* that extols the “sound economic principles” adopted by the government, and which, while not popular across the whole spectrum of the society, are seen to draw approval from a wide range of South Africans, not only whites, and certainly not only those who talk *white*.

Taking on Trevor's Blue-eyed Boys

Just a few weeks ago, we were led to believe that all-round good cheer had been restored to the relationship between the ANC and its trade union ally Cosatu after a “fruitful” meeting.

But the web woven by the public bout of bonhomie unravelled somewhat when Zwelinzima Vavi, the Cosatu general secretary, took on what he called “capital's blue-eyed boys operating from the Ministry of Finance.”

Said he of the evil empire: “The latest in their series of working-class bashing tactics has been to signal the decentralisation of the orderly system of collective bargaining.”

Translation: These Guys Are All Over Us Like Rats in A Corn Basket. (Hogarth, 30 January)

It is part of the orientation of *New South Africa Speak* to give recognition to black South Africans, and indeed to all people who were marginalized before the adoption of the new constitution, who rise through the ranks against odds. When folded into *white talk*, however, praise is more or less reserved for those black South Africans who adopt positions amenable to whiteness. It is actually also, if not primarily, a form of favourable self-presentation as it offers proof that the speaker is fair-minded and unbiased, and cannot be racist:

Union officials are not risk-takers; otherwise they would be out there making money. Some, of course are dedicated servants of their members. Others, such as Cyril Ramaphosa, given the opportunity, turn out to be skilled risk-takers. (Mulholland, There Can Be No Rewards without Taking Some Risks, 13 August)

As an extension of this strategy, black people are often used as fronts to make a point. If black people can be shown to hold similar views on an issue, then it cannot be ascribed to racism, or an unwillingness to adjust:

So, please, spare me this drivel spouted by Thabo Mbeki in an interview with Time magazine that it is only among the privileged whites of affluent suburbs that the perception rules that law and order is breaking down. (Mulholland, Anarchy Stalks the Country's Street of Shame, 3 December)

The favoured ones are jealously protected from criticism—as much as anti-racist whites that work against the interests of whiteness are zealously attacked.

Hogarth hopes [De Lange's] colleagues in the ANC will see to the re-education of this mampara. Then again, perhaps he should be preserved as a living example of subliminal racism in drag. (Hogarth, Mampara of the Week, 5 March)

Someone called Michael Sutcliffe, apparently a doctor but, presumably, not of town planning, says he finds it exciting to engage in this large-scale social engineering. (Mulholland, Inevitable Chaos of Social Engineers' Unrealistic Dream. 23 January)

In all the above, the use of themes, images, and arguments from the discourses of the new democracy in order to undercut that very vision has been demonstrated. The next section shows how *white talk* also makes use of a completely different source of discursive reserves as it sets about constituting reality for white South Africans by helping itself to new discursive resources, tossing out useless approaches from the past, and respinning that which it can still use. *White Ululation*, which the chapter now addresses, is helping to coalesce the new shape of whiteness post-1994: reconfiguring, redefining, recreating its contours through symbolic activism.

White Ululation

The other discursive repertoire that *white talk* draws on primarily carries the ideological work of moves two and three in the ideological square (i.e. emphasizing information that is “negative” about *them*, and suppressing information that is “positive” about *them*) as outlined in the introduction to this chapter. This is the discursive repertoire that rallies white consciousness through heightening emotion, and provides a great deal of the legitimation for promoting sectarian self-interest of the grouping and prolonging the

effects of white privilege into the New South Africa. It presents any change to the status quo as a threat to the established good that operates in the best interests of all. Although mitigated, facilitated, and window-dressed by elements of *New South Africa Speak* as discussed above, it is essentially hostile to the new social order, and encourages alienation from, rather than rapprochement with, the “others” in the nation.

Fundamentally hierarchical, this discourse is replete with tropes that emerge from the racist imagination, tropes which sap power from black people and the mechanisms that are being put into place to promote social transformation. It is the wherewithal for *white talk* on the offensive.

This discursive repertoire takes its name from what McKoy (2001) has called *racial ululation*—a “ritualized process of vocalizing a response to threats to white supremacist order” in order to “maintain racial stratification and the disproportionate distribution of power that accompanies it” (pp. 24, 25). Through judicious borrowing from *white ululation*, established arguments for supremacy and newer backlash rhetoric are articulated into a collective response to transformation, which is incorporated into the respectable mainstream versions of *white talk*. What *ululation* allows for is a construction of the New South Africa that makes a white response seem a necessary and reasonable/rational reaction to the changes taking place. It does this mostly through presenting the black social and political body in such terms that white reactionary discourse is seen to be an outflow of that. Its own aggressive impulses which initiate the dynamic are underplayed.⁸

In this ululatory trend of giving what is essentially right wing discourse a respectable spin, *white talk* is in line with what is being observed internationally, where backlash white rhetoric, recoded for everyday discourse, is being adopted and legitimized in the fabric of mainstream culture (De Goede, 1996; Gabriel, 1998; Griffen, 1999; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Rothenberg, 1999; Van Dijk, 1992). The process has been a manifestation of discursive resourcefulness in contexts where white people do not want to lose the advantage of whiteness, but where at the same time it has become increasingly difficult to be overtly supremacist.⁹ Griffen, (1999) puts it bluntly:

From the mid-1980s to the present, these [liberal] white Americans have found it less embarrassing to state their objections to blacks, or—and this has become a more attractive option—to disguise their capitulation to racist ideas by adopting the subterfuge of what is called multiculturalism.

(p. 95)

This dissertation argues that it is one of the characteristics of the language of current South African *white talk* to take cues, through processes of racial identification, from the countries where whiteness is centred and powerful. While it is possible that a small measure of organizational interchange occurs with the extreme right in other countries, the discursive borrowing at issue here takes the form of adopting the conservative rhetoric that wafts over the Atlantic and repackaging it for the local consumption of the white diaspora. It is highly unlikely that most white South Africans who employ these tropes and rhetorical strategies have any real idea of the contextual promptings in the lands from which they originate; the material is simply useful for the task at hand:

A case which recently came before the American Supreme Court reminds us, however, that diversity is a dangerously fuzzy concept. (Ronge, A World of Difference, 21 May)

If they [the United States Boy Scouts] don't want gay people in their movement they should just say so loud and clear, but in the current liberal climate they lack the guts to spell it out. (Ronge, A World of Difference, 21 May)

Ronge's interpellation into the conservative discourse of the white right in the United States is given away by the standard sideswipe at the "current liberal climate" and the backlash rhetoric that presents multiculturalism as a form of censorship, both of which are typical of contemporary reactionary discourse in (particularly) the United States. Apparently, then, elite discourse in these white centres preformulates white social cognitions and discourses not only for their own societies, but also for outlying margins of whiteness—such as whiteness in the New South Africa—providing the lead on a global level as whiteness consolidates itself against resistant formations that are growing in power at various sites on the globe. *White talk* does not need to depend on these more recent imports as it attempts to rally and consolidate solidarity. As Glick and Fiske (2001) observe, members of a dominant group have a long history of wealth and privilege that spawns accompanying legitimizing ideologies, which are likely to have shaped the cultural beliefs in their home territories (p. 296). The established repertoire of conservative rhetorical tropes and devices within the country is rich (needless to say), well suited to local conditions, and can be reinvigorated through developing sentiments of backlash. Operating within a fundamentally different dynamic from countries such as the United States, where overtly racist attitudes have been frowned upon and therefore

marginalized for several decades, the South African dynamic for *white ululation* is rather to learn how to bring widely circulated linguistic material into *white talk* in suitably mitigated form.

The analysis which follows examines several strategies used to spin the trope of the “New South Africa” into hierarchy-enhancing legitimation, providing moral and intellectual support for on-going group-based inequality (Sidanuis, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001). Negative white reaction is presented as just and fair because the New South Africa, in *white talk* construal, is creating an illegitimate environment where the worthy are punished and the unworthy disproportionately rewarded, and where the white group is undervalued and not fully respected (see Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001). The legitimizing strategies are: the stacking of negative tropes, topics and debates; the injustices of reconstruction; the unsuitability of elite blacks; the expendability of moral discourse; the dire consequences for the society; and the necessity to regroup.

Legitimizing Strategy: Stacking Up Negativity

The dominant ideology defended by the media has the advantage of having already set the primary definitions of the social problems in the national debates. It is extremely difficult to change the terms of an argument once these have been established, as they acquire weight and credibility, and the status of “common sense” (De Goede, 1996). In the columns analysed here, the selective choice of negative topics, the reiteration of negative sentiment, the sheer accumulation of tropes of dissolution, decay, corruption, falling apart, the stacking of images and examples of problems, errors, corruption—this relentless heaping of pessimism, more than any single argument, creates a powerful case for the conclusion that the New South Africa is a fiasco. The sedimented mass of cultural baggage backing this conventional “take” on what it means to be an African country makes it extremely tough to counter. It often amounts to a celebration of faultfinding.

Remember that Mpumalanga¹⁰ scam that was exposed last year? No, not that one. Or that one, silly. (Hogarath, Back in the Real World, 2 January)

So, in glaring contrast to the value of the rand, the I-economy [Intersection economy] is booming at your local traffic lights, where you can find anything except a traffic officer on point duty when the lights don't work, patrolling cops to foil the hijackers and someone to repair the hole in the road that has been there since the last storm. (Ronge, Free Enterprise, 22 October)

The next few pages provide examples from Ronge's column *Spit and Polish*, showing how insistently the challenges facing South Africa are defined in terms that make a strong negative emotional reaction on the part of white South Africans seem highly justified, while not recognizing this kind of discourse as a form of white violence that helps to bring about the conditions it needs for self-justification. "Count your blessings" (Ronge, 23 July) lists a catalogue of inverted blessings, told in an ironic tone and meant to be humorous. The irony carries the gist of the article, which is to reinforce how bad things are, and to build consensus around tropes of deterioration and the erosion of the "normal" world. These "blessings" include:

You do not live in the Democratic Republic of Congo;

Cosatu does not run the country, although they give no sign of having noticed that fact. This blessing is somewhat counterbalanced by the fact that the taxi associations do rule this country but at least they occasionally run out of fuel, something Cosatu never does;

You are not an employee of the Zimbabwean Tourist Authority. . . only the travel authorities in Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of Congo have a tougher job—if they still have jobs;

You are not a white farmer in Zimbabwe;

You can no longer afford to travel overseas. Why should that make you feel better? Because you will never be placed at risk by a pilot who bought his licence in the way other people hire fancy-dress outfits for Halloween. You are at risk from corruption and fraud in so many other ways in this country that being able to dismiss at least one of them is a small but real comfort;

You haven't been hijacked—yet;

You did not renew your subscription to the opera and ballet season at the Spoornet State Theatre in Pretoria, a building that is now as dead and pointless a piece of fascist architecture as Lenin's tomb;

You are not 15 anymore. According to the United Nations report on AIDS in Africa, 15 is the most lethal age for AIDS infection. . . ;

You are not a member of an arts and culture organization that was counting on getting financial assistance from the lottery bonanza. . . ;

...

*I hope you are feeling a little better and I did not even get into issues like the importations of soccer hooligans for the World Cup, the blameless impartiality of Dullah Omar or the ecological watchdogs who give permission for a leaking oil tanker to be towed into Table Bay. So count your blessings, put a smile on your face and remember that Tunisia is one of the few countries on the planet that still offers relatively easy immigration procedures to would-be settlers. That should really make your day. (Ronge, *Count Your Blessings*, 23 July).*

The humour implies a long-suffering “advanced” group of people good-naturedly enduring the hardships and tribulations of living in what has, despite European efforts to stem the inevitable, joined the rest of the continent in becoming “an African country” and can no longer be quarantined to prevent contamination of “normal” standards.

Showing what is downplayed can expose the distortion introduced by this unbalanced portrayal of the developing society. In the following extract, for example, none of the concerted efforts being made to address problems is ever mentioned. There is no acknowledgement of the considerable achievements of the young democracy—in the face of enormous challenges left by the old order (not the least of which is under-education and lack of enskilling the majority of the people), and despite a lack of experience in governing, and the presence of resistant, even subversive influences. A slight on those who apply their minds and creativity to building the nation and developing a sustainable resource base for the entire population is straightforwardly rendered as if it is an accurate description of the intent and accomplishment of new leaders. The extract reveals a repetition of tropes straight from the collective imaginary rather than carefully considered evaluations and thoughtful critique of shortcomings, which indicates deliberate avoidance of genuine engagement with the realities of the New South Africa. It is apparent that the target audience excludes those who struggled under conditions of harsh oppression for freedom and justice, but privileges the prejudices of those who enjoyed the profitable, skewed economy of the past and generally delayed or opposed the realization of the vision of dismantling racial hierarchy. That past is trivialized while the one-sided depiction plays down the extent to which a just and free, economically open, society has been established of which they themselves are beneficiaries. The objectives of nation building and community upliftment are not “vague and inclusive” to those who are earnest about them and actively engaged in

trying to find ways to realize these goals. The passage is therefore more of a reflection of Ronge's lack of grasp of what is at stake than an accurate portrayal of how development is being tackled. The implication is that what was needed to right the wrongs of the past was simply a vote, but not a real change in the hearts and minds and pockets of society. After the election, life should just have gone on—business as usual—since the struggle was peacefully laid to rest.

We are, in general, living in a society in which the only clear sign of concentrated intellectual activity has been the variety and complexity of the scams it has produced.

False academic qualifications, bogus passports, auctions of Matric exam results, fake licences for driving cars, buses and planes, pensions rip-offs. Struggle accounting and pyramid schemes have been the most visible but you could go on and on.

For a culture so uniquely skilled, a vast sum of money set aside for the deliciously vague and inconclusive purpose of nation building and community upliftment must offer attractive possibilities. . . .

In a country as needy as ours, in crucial areas like housing, education, HIV-Aids issues and poverty relief, it can't be too difficult to identify a set of organizations that could benefit from these amassed funds. Yet our government is stymied. They just don't know where to start, which is, in itself, a mystery. . . . How hard is it to distribute a hoard of cash that grows larger each week to a country that grows poorer every week? Yet nothing is being done, and I firmly believe the devil makes work for idle hands.

(Ronge, Filthy Lucre, 3 September)

Anyone who critiques this humour could expect to be accused of over-sensitivity, "political correctness," or nationalistic fervour, but it is extremely important to note the direction of the humour in *white ululation*. The butt of the ridicule is not racism, discrimination, or those who fail to change, but rather the attempts to address these manifestations of social deformation. The putdown does not target those who are beneficiaries of the old order, but those who are trying to remove it.

In a similar vein, the following quotation shows a lack of identification with what the nation is trying to achieve:

. . . Then comes that amorphous government agency, headed by no one in particular, which, nonetheless, conjures up millions to spend on public celebrations for Freedom Day, Women's Day, May Day, and any other public holiday, which seems to have some vague community connection. The source of that money is mysterious, which makes it a good fit with the equally mysterious Lotto cache.

*And what about the aged, the arts, the disabled, our national parks and heritage conservation issues? They have been assigned their role in this scenario. They have been cast as the victims, the acceptable losses that exist in any war of survival and liberation. (Ronge, *Filthy Lucre*, 3 September)*

The passage contains inaccuracies: it is simply untrue that the source of money for national celebrations is unknown, and the status of elderly people and people with disabilities has in fact improved since democracy. Significantly, the discourse communicates a great deal of distance from the emotional issues close to the hearts of the ordinary people of the country—commemorations which dignify their suffering and have important symbolic significance for the nation are imputed as mindless extravagance. Intense collective experiences recognized by such national holidays are fopped off as some “vague community connection.” The “vagueness” in this analysis stems rather from the ignorance and indifference of the historical white world, which “did not know” the lived experience of black people, and has not taken much trouble to find out. In another stance typical of *white talk* the demands of art and animals are regarded as requiring precedence over the needs of the majority of black people. They are cast as victims that need to be protected from the scourges of democratization in the hands of grasping people who have no appreciation of finer culture or humane sensibility.

One further example is taken from Ronge's *People's Poet* (17 September) where he tries his hand at writing haikus as he “explored its other applications to our modern South African culture.” The humour acts as “in-joking” which both presupposes consensus and helps to build it:

A gun clicks.

Your money flies with the thief.

No more fear of overspending.

*The eagle soars high,
 But falls back weary.
 Petrol's price has won again.
 Few criminals are caught.
 Fear not.
 We can always blame the past again.
 Fertile land lies barren.
 Wise traders leave.
 How well Mugabe rights wrongs.
 Justice gives her blindfold
 to a leader who wears it
 while he wields her sharp swords.
 Like wild moths rounds a flame
 Politicians court the future.
 But who burns?*

The “modern South African culture” which receives the benefit of Ronge’s lyricism is in fact a litany of woes—crime, financial decline, incompetence, politicians’ foolishness, despotism and greed. The familiar insinuation at all times is that South Africa is in decline, moving from better to worse. The accumulation of images fixes this as the dominant definition, maintaining a clear boundary between those who resist such degeneration (us) and those who hasten it (them). The discursive energy is directed towards preventing erosion of the status quo, justifying dissatisfaction and resentment within the white community. White entitlements have been confiscated. At the same time, it leads to the inference that the current attempts to right the wrongs of the past are somehow worse than the original faults of the society. 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. This unrelieved refrain of *white talk* gives away the unconscious consent that white South Africa gave to the past system, a fact which is now vehemently denied, often through the face-saving devices discussed in the previous section. The denigration of the present confers an indirect veil of

respectability on the—systemically and systematically wrought—unjust past. Yet, whereas the new situation may fail in some implementation, it brings access to political participation, justice, education, economic activity and better basic living conditions for the population as a whole, and this is what is underplayed and avoided in the lopsided world of *white talk*.

Ronge's final turn of the screw is to discredit competing discourses that use the kinds of arguments presented in the above analysis, i.e. arguments that factor in the enduring effects of the past. The past, it suggests, is used as an excuse that has little explanatory value for present conditions:

and then, dear hearts, when we look for someone on whom to blame our crime rate we blame apartheid and violence in Hollywood films. (Ronge, Back to Front, 4 June)

A final example of how the terms for understanding the New South Africa are set by *white talk* through stacking negative signifiers is the following extract from Hogarth. The passage contains the stereotypes one has come to expect in *white talk*—the black people who exercise power are foolish bullies—misguided at best, but more probably just stupid and grabbing, demanding what is in no one's interests to give. The mockery implied by putting "stakeholders" in inverted commas, shows that the object of ideological attack is extended to all those who participate in the process of transformation. The implied prophesy is that the capacity for implementing change in South African systems just does not exist in the ranks of those who are pushing for it.

Cosatu's Dazzling Financial Wizardry

Amid the boring job creation strategies trundled out by South Africa's verbose "stakeholders," only one stands out for its sheer originality.

It is the plan by the Great Left Economist, Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, to grind the economy to a halt by mass action to spur on job creation.

After some deep reflection, Hogarth has concluded that jobs will indeed be created by the Cosatu action.

Here are some examples:

- *Security guards will have to be hired to protect the property of storekeepers along the protest routes;*

- *More passport-processing officials will be needed at airports for the greater numbers of departing businessmen;*
- *Paper mills will have to increase production to keep up with the demand for placards and pamphlets;*
- *Scab labourers will have to be taken on in industries which cannot afford to close down during the protests; and, last but not least*
- *Hordes of new economists will have to be hired to dish out sound bites on how the economy is suffering.*

Bravo, chaps. Keep up the good, er, work. (Hogarth, 27 February)

The reiteration of such pre-evaluated negativity is a form of aggression. The constant pulling down helps to preformulate, and trigger, the very sentiments within the society that facilitate the realization of the pessimistic scenarios put out in these fantasies of the New South Africa. Where it is effective, *white talk* rallies White South Africans into feelings of depression and alienation, resentment and indignation. In the manner of elite discourse, the journalists *help to create* these negative attitudes in the society, and then use them as further evidence of the miserable state of the society. The relentless stereotyping indicates a great deal of discursive work being put into justifying differential credibility, and consequently into maintaining status positions within the society (see Glick & Fiske, 2001).

The preceding section has discussed the effect of the pervasiveness of negative signifiers—strikes, bribes, inefficiency, travesty of law and order, moral flaccidness, tyranny, decay, disintegration—for the emerging society. The cumulative effect of these semiotics, drawn from the repertoire common to extremist white sentiment, cements the interpretation that the New South Africa *is* the problem, rather than that the New South Africa *has* problems¹¹ and, implicitly, that blacks are “the cause of every negative development . . . from the rapid decay of the housing stock to economic recessions and the general decline of morality” (Griffen, 1999). The centrality of such tropes in the examples given above of *white talk* as it draws on essentially conservative, reactionary discourse is quite obvious.

Two tropes most salient to rallying white consensus are now discussed in more detail below. These have become crucial in *white talk* quite specifically because they are consistent with the stereotypes it prioritizes (Brooks, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993).

Crime

The first, and probably most important, example is how *white talk* belabours the prevalence of crime—an emphasis that is common in right wing rhetoric, where the implication that black people are criminogenic is stressed to justify the need for strict police and criminal justice systems. The race/crime link is a mainstay of white identity here, as elsewhere¹² (Gabriel, 1998 p. 131), and is being greatly energized in this context where whiteness is perceived to be under threat:

[Crime is]. . . the single most important issue facing this nation. (Ronge, Wrong Arm of the Law, January)

The biggest problem facing our nation is crime. It is the constant theme of our every conversation. . . (Ronge, Back to Front, 4 June)

No doubt the ministers concerned are sincere and determined. What they lack is a coherent plan of action properly funded with the full backing of the President and an acknowledgement from him that the fight against crime is our single greatest challenge. (Mulholland, State Needs to Recognise Crime as Greatest Challenge, 6 August)

Not all South Africans would agree with the formulation, repeated endlessly in *white talk*, that crime is the country's single most important issue/problem/challenge. Many who support contesting discourses would argue that racially inflected poverty, for example, is the underlying cause, and that this is what needs to be addressed. Such a position would promote interventions that develop the socio-economic conditions and opportunities that are prerequisite for a stable and civic-minded society. The quotation from Mulholland (above) shows once again how a topic becomes a vehicle for pointing a finger at black people with power, attributing a difference in approach to negligence or misplaced priorities on the part of the President.

Predictably, the kinds of publicity that different forms of crime get are also related to whether the crime affects the propertied (almost entirely white) population, such as highjackings and burglary, or people in townships, such as gang warfare. Even more profoundly ingrained is the representation of crime in general as a black phenomenon. Whiteness is associated with being law-abiding, but vulnerable to attacks from racialized criminals:

Visions of an AK47 spitting bullets into her brain flew before my terrified spouse and she implored me to put up the window and get the hell out of

there. (Mulholland, Anarchy Stalks the Country's Streets of Shame, 3 December)

The corollary of the criminal inclination of the New South Africa is the need for, but failure of, enforcement of law and order:

Hogarth has always suspected the cops in the Western Cape of being among the most incompetent in the world, what with no convictions in the almost monthly bomb blasts in Cape Town, a perennial gangland war that claims lives almost daily on the Cape Flats and the general soaring crime rate. But this week they proved themselves worthy of the title by actually doing something. (Hogarth, The Wild, Wild West, 20 August)

The double failure—an unacceptably high crime rate coupled with an ineffective justice system—reinforces the underlying implication that the country is unsafe in the hands of the ideological and social “other.” While this is not actually stated in these examples of *white talk*, it is not necessary. The field of “common sense” knowledge built up through generations of ideological dominance provides the necessary cues, just as each utterance like this once again feeds into a cultural context replete with ideologically charged assumptions (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 214; Gabriel, 1998). Here, as elsewhere, the “race card” can be played “face down” through the coded discourse of law and order (Gabriel, 1998, p. 107). This discourse, centring on policing, rallies white consensus by defending not only material privileges, but also the symbolic order and white identities (Gabriel, 1998, p. 131).

Decline

If there is any single trope that has become a symbol for the retrogressive condition of the New South Africa in its *white talk* construal, it is the “black” minibus taxi:

[B]eing in the moment also means being in a traffic jam, being late for an appointment and being behind a minibus taxi that is driving so erratically that if your attention lapses for a moment you could end up being in a coffin. (Ronge, Living for the Moment, 9 July)

*The wheels have come off—but it still hurtles down the highway.
That's the new turbocharged Mamparavette V8 for you.
Behind the wheel of this out-of-control beast is Themba Mghabi, chief mouth*

of the National Taxi Drivers' Organisation. (Hogarth, The Pointing Finger of the Law, 20 February)

Semiotically, the “black taxi” carries the Africanization of the society, the out-of-control, entropic quality of black people with power, and the loss of regulatory effect of whiteness. In white backlash discourses, the perceived threat to the white order and the expected dissolution of white norms finds expression in such images which communicate disintegration, decay, corruption, disease and perversion (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). *White ululation* is replete with such images that readily find their way into *white talk* as it represents the New South Africa in the grip of social, economic and moral degeneration. The inevitable teething troubles of transition, coupled with the more fundamental problems of restructuring the delivery of services to ensure that what had previously been geared towards less than one tenth of the population now reaches the entire population, as well as genuine problems of underdeveloped capacity, poverty and lack of development, are taken as evidence of an inevitable, steadily progressing collapse. In the absence of genuine examination, explanation or contextualization of the problems evidenced in the society, the causal factors are filled in by the ready assumptions that saturate the white semiosphere.

. . . kilometers of rusted and degenerating water pipes that periodically break and send fountains of water cascading down suburban streets, sometimes for days on end. . . (Ronge, The Big Stick, 26 November)

Trust Johannesburg's Northern Metropolitan Council (still leading contender for Worst Bureaucracy of All Time Award) to be ahead of the times. Its computer system went haywire before Y2K on Friday night. (Hogarth, Ahead Of The Times, 2 January)

It was always predictable that education in this country would lurch into crisis, that there would be weeping and wailing and the gnashing of teeth over disastrous matric results and other symptoms of decay and disorder.

This was all easy to predict when government embarked on its mad affirmative action policies, spending billions to rid itself of skilled and seasoned educators because they were white. Such predictions were made even easier when we were conned into adopting outcomes based education. . . . Egged on by an array of trendy social engineers and

sociologists, we rushed headlong into a mess which will take years to sort out. . . .

Education is, of course, not the only casualty of this frenetic pace of change. Our labour market, in which the price rises prohibitively while unemployment soars, is another example of the damage caused by frantic social engineering based on the belief that society can instantly be transformed by edict. . . .

*Then there is our local government scenario, scheduled to worsen as massive, unmanageable, Lagos-like metropolises are created. . . . This forthcoming cock-up is as predictable as the education debacle was. (Mulholland, *Inevitable Chaos of Social Engineers' Unrealistic Dream*, 23 January)*

The process of decline is an inevitable consequence of not upholding the established ideology: any deviation from the old white way is going to bring disaster. The rhetorical impact of depicting worst-case scenarios is illustrative of the media as part of disciplinary technology of whiteness, those institutions that hold the erosion of white dominance at bay. Mulholland's one-dimensional accounts present the difficulties of transformation as terminal; the expected and on-going problems of social, economic, and political life which need to be addressed in all social organization—especially fledgling organization—are given as exceptional and unique to the African context. At the same time, these genuine problems are under-analysed, especially as the analysis would cast a different perspective on the achievements of the transforming society in the areas he identifies: an education system which strives to give all forty million South Africans an equal education, labour laws which protect workers from exploitation, and local government which serves all communities and spreads resources more evenly amongst apartheid-engineered areas. Most tellingly, the interventions that drive change are presented as social engineering, whereas the policies that created the problems which social transformation has to address are not highlighted, indeed, nor are the dangers of continuing such policies, or of delaying reform. *White talk* shares this characteristic with whiteness elsewhere of establishing complacency with systems that do not address the needs of others. For example, the writer assumes that his readers will share his assumption that “seasoned” white educators are the best. Yet there is also a cost to having education in the hands of died-in-the-wool educators who are steeped in a culture

of entitlement, and who inculcate attitudes and values that perpetuate social deformation. Similarly, questions such as who it is that is not employing the people who are without work, or who it is that generates the negative sentiment and lack of confidence in the currency, are not brought into focus. Agency, in such cases, is suppressed.

Decline, of course, can manifest in many guises. In another article, Ronge employs an interesting rhetorical technique to discount the social issues that *white talk* chooses not to take seriously. Writing about the National Conference on Racism, he implies that attempts to address issues of redress are all just so much posturing, theatricality and charades:

[W]e need the dramatic theatricality of productions like this conference on racism. . . . They existed in the old days, of course, but mainly as plays in venues like the Market Theatre and the Baxter. . . . Let us hear no more about the theatre being dead. Between the conference on racism and the HIV/Aids debate the theatrical masks of comedy and tragedy have never worked so hard. (Ronge, Theatre for the Masses, 15 October)

The theatre metaphor facilitates the interpretation that change is an exercise in the farcical. Not only is the country a joke and a mess, but the current attempts to improve the society are misplaced and wrongheaded, which is what the next strategy seeks to prove.

Legitimizing Strategy: The Injustices of Reconstruction

The notion of the African Renaissance, introduced into the lexicon of post-apartheid South Africa by President Thabo Mbeki, can be seen as the trope around which his presidential term is assembled. It denotes a deliberate act of de— and re-narrating the European discourses of the African “other” to which, and through which, Africa has been subject-ed for several hundreds of years.¹³ The ideological positioning of Africa as the inferior social “other,” discussed in the previous chapter, is clearly challenged by this notion. Elsewhere, I have argued that the trope of the African Renaissance challenges the foundations of whiteness in Africa, and can be understood as the “return of the repressed” in white identity in South Africa (Steyn, 1999; 2001). It presents a “deliberate act of talking back” by the “other,” a spectre of Africa defining itself on its own terms.¹⁴ Understandably, therefore, *white talk* has an investment in containing the trope, preventing it from becoming too powerful, and reinterpreting it in ways that can better suit the agenda of whiteness. A good deal of energy in the process of *white ululation* is

expended on framing the notion in such a way that it is seen to be unworkable, dangerous, nonsensical, and certainly positions white South Africans in ways that are unfair and oppressive:

So the first official, legally enforced pogrom of the African Renaissance begins in the garden.

Just the familiar jackboot-in-the-door technique of "Do as I say or we'll lock you away" that seems to be the standard fallback of the present regime.

(Ronge, The Big Stick, 26 November)

Presented as persecutory, the African Renaissance that emerges from the spin given to it in the *white talk* above is far from a vision and strategy for opening up a future of opportunity for the whole population. Rather, it is cast as punishment, an excuse for hounding ordinary peace-loving citizens going about their daily business. Underlying this reaction is the zero-sum mentality on which racial thinking rests: it's either us or them. If they win, we must be losing. The logic shows an inability to imagine a nation in which all citizens are of concern, and given respectful opportunity. Yet again such a comment evades the most crucial aspect about the current context in which the concept is being propounded: the constitutional rights of the population have never been more protected, government can be, and has been, challenged on the constitutionality of some laws it has passed and actions it has taken, and has had to comply. Makgoba (1997) has strong words on this issue. Discussing the attitude of the media towards the concept, he says:

It sees transformation, African identity and the African renaissance as political agendas of the ANC rather than agendas for the nation.

Therefore, these issues are portrayed in political rather than in national terms. (p. 5)

Mulholland comes at the concept from a different angle. He attacks the fact that it has been construed as an agenda that has a continental scope, in that proponents argue that South Africa cannot advance by promoting itself as an exception, and that there has to be a rehabilitation of the whole region from the effects of how Africa as a continent has been constructed through colonial domination.

Ensuring that there is law and order at home is a great deal less glamorous than jetting about the world promoting the African Renaissance. But when our president and his colleagues opted to run for office, they committed

themselves to providing, not for Africa, but for the peoples of South Africa, those basic rights of citizenship which begin with law and order—and without which all other rights are meaningless. That is what we pay taxes for. We are being robbed. (Mulholland, Anarchy Stalks the Country's Street of Shame, 3 December)

Besides the obvious distortion in the passage, it is also clear that this *white talk* has a strong investment in preventing a discourse that promotes a united, empowered Africa. It needs to keep South Africa thinking of itself as separate from the rest of the continent, exceptional. The passage also provides yet more examples of many of the rhetorical devices already examined which are part of *white ululation*, such as the trope of law and order and the one-sided presentation that privileges white interests above basic rights such as water, food and sanitation. And it misses completely the fundamental human right, enshrined in the constitution along with the right to equality and freedom—the right to human dignity—which is what the vision of an African Renaissance aims to restore.¹⁵

White talk resists the discourses of Renaissance that put Africans in the centre of their own world. In fact, it works quite hard to retain the impression that white South Africans are, in reality, driving whatever change is happening for the betterment of black South Africans, and that if they aren't, they would certainly be the right ones to be doing so. Gabriel (1998) points out that a characteristic of liberal whiteness is to present liberal whites as solving the problems of racism (Gabriel, 1998 p. 61). It is part of positive self-presentation that whites are depicted as providing the most rational, sensible and reliable programmes of change. In other words, whites solve problems; blacks are, or create the problems. Makgoba (1999) comments that in the context of transformation, “white South Africa wants Africans to suffer total amnesia about racism” while “white South Africans must define and educate [them] about what racism is and how to handle and cope with it in order not to rock the boat” (p.4). He continues:

A very curious feature of our society and its transformation, is that those who were recently our oppressors, have now suddenly become experts and our saviours in transformation. (p. 6)

In *Back to Front* Ronge tells a story which neatly illustrates Makgoba's point. He pays tribute to a woman who has been teaching fifty children from Diepkloof, Soweto, to play

the violin and other stringed instruments. They have progressed to the point where they have “played with top British musicians and conductors”:

Through their joint efforts they are tackling three of the biggest problems facing South Africa today—the creation of a culture of learning, the upliftment of township youth and the creation of careers for young learners.
(Ronge, *Back to Front*, 4 June)

The narrative establishes the sensible nature of having whites define what should be counted as success in transformation, to set the pace of change, and to manage the process. This arrangement will be to everybody’s advantage, as white authority is safe and trustworthy. A great deal is at stake in keeping the “Eurofication” of Africans as the objective of transformation—the demands of transformation need to be contained. Cultural and linguistic dominance is very much part of the mould of modern racism (Campbell, 1995): assimilation into white ways is advanced and tropes of “progress” and “upliftment” continue to oppress marginalized people. In transforming South Africa the onus of adaptation still falls on the black African people, minimizing the amount of adjustment required of white South Africans.

There are few themes around which the white response to what is experienced as eroding dominance is more consolidated—internationally—than that of affirmative action (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, pp. 209-211; Van Dijk, 1993, p. 128). The New South Africa is no exception:

You might not be able to account for a couple of million rands in your department budget. The addresses of the charities you support may look suspiciously like the addresses of your closest relatives. Your ties to organised crime may be closer than most auditors would like, but you’d probably get away with it. Yet, if your set-up is not sufficiently diverse, you are in deep dwang. (Ronge, *A World of Difference*, 21 May)

Once again we can see the tendency to define criminality in such a way that the injurious nature of discrimination is excluded from the definition; the “right” to choose not to transform employment practices, for example, is constructed entirely as a matter of individual preference, rather than deeply anti-social behaviour. The white-centred nature of the following comment needs no further comment—“your” business, obviously refers to a white business, and the introduction of “others” is seen as pulling down the standards to such an extent that the very existence of the business is threatened:

Diversity, also known as “being fully representative” or “displaying an affirmative empowerment strategy” can make or break your business.
(Ronge, *A World of Difference*, 21 May)

The logic is clear: either one has efficiency, excellence, productivity, or one has inclusivity. With diversity and prosperity set up as mutually exclusive, Ronge’s argument shows up how whiteness operates in action—mobilizing beliefs and attitudes that predispose people to continue to make decisions that keep the Magic Circle drawn around the favoured race—not necessarily out of malice, but because problems are constructed so that it seems the rational and sensible thing to do. The ideological workings of this kind of performance of whiteness is quite apparent: presenting self-interested social arrangements as universally beneficial; portray current arrangements as normal, natural and inevitable as opposed to alternative social arrangements which are constructed as unworkable, impossible, dangerous and undesirable (Giddens, 1979).¹⁶ The goal of a diverse organization is presented as the fervent, unrealistic dream of a few converted moral zealots:

... diversity, that Holy Grail of modern democracy ...

Yet, ironically, it is exactly an appeal to the (im)morality of affirmative action that is offered as a counter-offensive when needed:

What no-one pointed out is the additional factor of affirmative action. It is expected of all South African employers that when they are faced with candidates of equal merit, they should choose a person of colour. When there is a trainee position to be filled, they should do likewise.

*That’s an unalterable fact of life in South Africa. It’s not going to change and, as the pace of the African Renaissance picks up, it is going to intensify. It’s logical; it has both history and morality on its side. In fact, I would say that for any African nation it is the right and practical thing to do, but think what it does for young white job seekers. (Ronge, *Defending the Right to Whine*, January)*

As part of the transformative programme,¹⁷ affirmative action is newer in South Africa than in many other white settler countries, but *white talk* has very quickly adopted the international lexicon to deal with it through terms such as “reverse racism.” In the above passage, Ronge is careful to present his case (and his face) carefully, drawing on *New South Africa Speak* in the manner analysed earlier in this chapter to avert criticism.

Cleverly, he does not oppose affirmative action, rather using the rhetorical device of *apparent concurrence*—expressing what appears to be support for the project of the African Renaissance. He does this, however, because that position makes the case stronger for his real motivation, namely to provide support for “white flight.” This combination of concurrence and yet distancing allows the rhetor to feel good about himself as being morally in the clear: persuaded that the New South Africa is antithetical to their interests, walking away is the rational thing to do, and has nothing to do with a capacity to respond to the ethical demands of reconstructing the nation, or with shortcomings in their own responses to the challenges facing the country. They can retain the moral high ground. This is *white ululation* at its most sophisticated.

The repertoire of white reactionary discourses is well known for its portmanteau of rhetorical techniques of reversal. *Blaming the victim*, whereby those who are negatively affected by racism are stereotyped as being responsible for their own situation is one such reversal. Casting whiteness in the role of the victimized is another:

*But the realities of finding a job, making a living, and raising a family are what count and, as a dwindling minority in a nation in which the economic and health problems are enormous and pressing, isn't it natural for the white community to wonder out loud where its destiny lies? But if their anxiety is perpetually met with irritation and dismissed as just another “white whine” the balance of South African racism will indeed have turned. If we truly reach a place where “talking down the nation” is discouraged and silenced then all of us, irrespective of race, will be in trouble. (Ronge, *Defending the Right to Whine*, January)*

The familiar trope of reversed racism is deployed in the above passage. It is clear from his argument that there is no feeling of “being in it together” with black South Africa, of helping to deal creatively with a situation that is the consequence of earlier white policies. Rather, the interests of the one group are pitted against those of the other, and “they” are seen to be oversensitive and ominously censorial—all of which are standard items in the *ululation* toolbox. In a neat bit of rhetorical footwork, Ronge has achieved the impression that the racial power dynamic has been reversed. The discourse of oppression, *white talk*, has been recast as the language of the victim, who needs to be defended. We find ourselves now squarely within the realm of white backlash discourse:

the feelings of victimization and threat created by *white ululation* “necessitate” that whites “fight back”:

Ah, I was told, this is redistribution. You see, you rich whites (what about my black neighbour?) must now subsidise the poor areas. . . . And how about those idle rich in the suburbs, battling to pay their mortgages, borrowing to meet escalating school fees, battling to meet fees for private security protection, fearful of rising medical costs and of a bereft old age in a hostile society? (Mulholland, By Hook or By Crook, That's Politics, 10 September)

People are, in effect, taking the law into their own hands. And this can only be because their experience tells them that the state is unable to protect them. While it is true that most of those involved in this trend are whites, there are growing numbers of black homeowners, including my neighbours, who are party to such decisions and contribute to the considerable costs involved. (Mulholland, State Needs to Recognise Crime as Greatest Challenge, 6 August)

There are several familiar strategies in the passage above. “People’s” reactions (above) are taken simply as responses to a racially unfair environment, rather than responses that were already conditioned by prior ethnically shared interpretations. The problems the privileged populations contend with are seen as the consequences of failures of the state, or even state-induced, and not as attributable to deeper socio-economic circumstances that have their roots in historically inequitable social organization. Mulholland uses the strategy of drawing attention to the small group of recently upward mobile blacks who have been able to move into the suburbs to forestall the accusation that backlash discourse is a white thing. He uses this unrepresentative group to buttress his claims and to legitimize white attitudes and actions, which yet again makes it possible to present them as rational and universal, rather than self-interested and sectional (Gabriel, 1998). Most pertinently, though, these strategies are employed to serve the major rhetorical purpose of representing whites as besieged, endangered and fearful in the face of the advance of the African Renaissance, which the next strategy shows, could never find the right people for leadership, anyway.

Legitimizing Strategy: The Unsuitability of Elite Blacks

While elite blacks may be rhetorically useful as allies in defending white interests on certain issues, they are more typically targeted in an indignant, even resentful, manner.¹⁸ Their success and advancement into privileged spaces is under a veil of suspicion, often construed as the consequence of affirmative action and tokenism, and perhaps corruption; their ascribed incapacity to handle their new status demonstrates the folly of transformation. In those cases where the high status “other” is not perceived as particularly competitive or threatening, the person is presented as a joke:

Deputy President Jacob ZZZZZZZZuma last week delivered what will surely be remembered as the most boring [speech] in living memory. (Hogarth, Ethnic Cleansing or Just Dirty Politics? 2 January)

Deputy President Jacob Zuma's speeches were quoted at such great length that household plants wilted in living rooms across the country. (Hogarth, Fraser Moleketi Is Saved by the Bell, 2 April)

In South African *white talk*, as elsewhere, black politics tends to be equated with extremism and/or corruption (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 209; Gabriel, 1998, p. 61) or with incompetence, empty showmanship and bluster:

It was such a refreshing reminder to us all that big public debates involving politicians are never real debates. They are all about obtaining media exposure and reminding the party hierarchy that you are still there and kicking. (Ronge, Theatre for the Masses, 15 October)

The existence of wealthy black people is used to prove that something is going wrong with transformation. As if there is something inherently outrageous about being black and wealthy, the rising number of wealthy black people is seen to be shocking, even obscene.¹⁹ Moreover, different standards are applied for white and black elites: white elites are regarded as showing exceptional character if they pay attention to the plight of the poor. The essentializing and oppressive logic of *white talk* demands that black elites remain one unit along with other black people, rich or poor. The passage below contains a commonly expressed slur: if black people become comfortably middle class and out of touch with the working classes, they are seen as self-serving opportunists, who are betraying their people. The underlying assumption seems to be that when black people are poor, they are in their “proper” place, and if they happen to break out of poverty, they should at least go on *living poor*. It is important to note this as a variation of a

discursive technique that is common in modern racism—scapegoating. In effect black elites are scapegoats, and the projected illegitimacy of their wealth draws attention away from where the major beneficiaries of the country's wealth are still to be found: white, middle class South Africa.

We've all heard the persistent rumours about the growing distaste of certain senior figures in the ANC leadership for trips to the townships and places like the Johannesburg CBD. (Ronge, Theatre for the Masses, 15 October)

The imminent switch to tyranny and corruption among black people who achieve social or economic status, a firm expectation within the white worldview, is always kept active in the hostile collective imagination:

The idea that a leader is one who must be respected and supported is, for me, the culture in which the infection of corruption grows. The leaders who insist on that respect are mere terrorists whose demand for respect clearly demonstrates why they no longer deserve it. (Ronge, The Last Word, 29 October)

But the fantasy of their fall, which is required by a “just” world,²⁰ is also stoked within the collective imagination.

Sudden wealth is a destructive force. Most people and particularly the poor, do not, and cannot, know how to handle it. It is like feeding whisky to babies. (Mulholland, Tata Ma Chance, Tata Their Shame, 15 October)

The rise to position is by definition incongruent, and therefore doomed:

Mampara of the Week

Enoch Sithole, the former security guard at Shiba gold mine who rose to the exalted rank of Chief Executive News Operations, finally bit the dust this week. . . .

Now the question on everyone's lips is: how long will Phil and Snuki hold out for?

Hogarth hears the answer will come very soon. (Hogarth, 2 April)

And of course, because there certainly are cases of corruption and mismanagement, these become the focus of a great deal of attention.

It's Not Just Sports

The Africa Aerospace and Defence 2000 exhibition held at Waterkloof airbase in Pretoria this week attracted more MPs than most sessions of the National Assembly. Word must have got out about how lucrative the defence industry has turned out to be for the select few who've swapped their soft seats in Parliament for even cushier jobs in the industry of constant intrigue. (Hogarth, 13 August)

The Right Car for the Job

He of Merc 4X4 fame, Tony Yengeni, also had tongues wagging. The ANC Chief Whip, despite his denials that he is on the lookout for lusher pastures, is rumoured to be in the running to take over from Tony Haywood as chairman of Armscor. (Hogarth, 10 September)

A Rare Sighting

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela visited Parliament this week, much to the surprise of those who recognized her. Her last attempt to visit Parliament, to which she was elected as an MP in June, was derailed when she got stuck in the traffic on Budget Day. On Thursday, she made it into the chamber, where she sat for at least 40 minutes before signing her attendance form and rising to leave. (Hogarth, 16 April)

These extracts show that *white talk* uses the most "attackable" examples, but presents them as if they are the norm for all successful black people. Despite their convictions that there is an abundance of black leadership lacking in moral fibre, the next strategy shows that moral discourse is not necessarily what *white talk* wants top of the agenda.

Legitimizing Strategy: The Expendability of Moral Discourse

One of the most useful gains for *white talk* from the repertoire of conservative white discourse is the means to attack the symbolic resources of the New South Africa.

It's the old abuse excuse which all seasoned villains like to have in their pockets. Almost every convicted criminal, exposed politician or captured Mafia boss immediately claims that in some way his human rights and dignity have been abused. How often do you hear ordinary, hard-working honest people doing that?

The abuse excuse has become the most effective shelter for wrongdoers that our society has ever devised. (Ronge, Telling It Like It Isn't, 25 June).

In its tussle with competing discourses to control the minds of the citizens, *white talk* polices the symbolic domain, pouring ridicule on concepts, predicting doom for agendas, instilling fear of visions.

Hogarth has been brushing up on political correctness (highly recommended to all South Africans, regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation). (Hogarth, Doing It The Right Way, 9 January)

[It's] a bit like chopping down an entire forest because one tree has grown crooked, or demanding the extermination of all dogs because one dog is a biter, or insisting that people be silenced because you do not agree with one of the things they said. (Ronge, Shooting the Messenger, 2 April)

That statement would ordinarily bring the vigilantes of political correctness swarming down from the moral high ground to read him little lessons and smack his hands with their rulers of self-righteousness. (Ronge, The Real Thing, 20 August)

The passages above are familiar put-downs aimed at “political correctness.” These are disciplinary strategies, but because the white world is so powerful in the symbolic realm, such policing is almost always invisible—it is merely experienced as affirming what is “normal.” When one is protecting a hierarchical order, those discourses and people who promote egalitarian policies are the enemy. Van Dijk (1993, 1998) has argued that anti-racism and multiculturalism are often the prime enemies against whom attack is targeted in racist discourses. While it is also true in *white talk* that the overt targets are those who attempt to dismantle the privilege base of whiteness, it would be a mistake to think that the aim is the “loony left” only, or even primarily. Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001) suggests that dominant groups tend to act in a more self-interested manner and more uniformly and consensually than subordinated groups. One implication of this is that those who step out of line are more isolated. The effect of disciplinary discourses against “race traitors” is to keep the *mainstream* white community in line, by instilling fear of incurring ridicule or ostracism on themselves.²¹ When the opprobrium visited upon those who transgress is severe enough, people who may be marginally inclined to court challenging views are likely to rather play it safe.

Issues such as the social distribution of resources, human dignity, and freedom are fundamentally moral/ethical issues. Any system that legitimizes inequity, indignity and oppression has to contend with matters of conscience. One fairly frequent strategy employed in these columns is to caricature those who raise such issues as lacking in humour and as excessively self-righteous. All socially cognizant criticism seems to be vulnerable to such treatment in *white talk*:

One woman . . . approached me . . . wearing that zealous glint one sees in the eyes of a fervent missionary who spots an unbaptised heathen. (Ronge, Shooting The Messenger, 2 April)

By casting those who raise such issues as over-zealous, dogmatic, crusading, illiberal and illogical, *white talk* is able to “de-moralize” issues,²² claiming to represent value-free rationality that does not impose its own version of morality onto the interpretation of issues. With ethics thus defined out of any topic, it can be dealt with on a level that suits the writer. In Ronge’s case it is aesthetics, in Mulholland’s it is the market. Justifications for hierarchical thinking can circulate unabated:

[Harry Oppenheimer] told me that companies needed what he called “monkeys” who could restlessly scramble and climb, and workhorses, who could provide stability. (Mulholland, Harry Imbued His Vision with Loyalty and Friendship, 27 August)

Contesting discourses are defused by “evidence” of their unworkability, or misguidedness.

I have not laughed as much since I read the draft proposal on outcomes based education. (Ronge, Free Enterprise, 22 October)

It’s a Crime

Still at the judicial interviews, judge candidate Tussel Madlanga was burnt for trying too hard to be gender sensitive.

Determined to get it right, Madlanga kept referring to a hypothetical accused person as “she.” Amanda Scheepers, one of only four female commissioners, interrupted his exposition. “You keep referring to “her,” she said. “ Do you think it is only women who can be criminals? (Hogarth, 29 October)

[C]hoosing a colour scheme for a wedding is a little like defining the racial policy for an emerging democracy—no one agrees. (Ronge, War of the Roses, 3 December)

Those interventions undertaken within the conceptual framework of discourses that challenge whiteness backfire. They are doomed to fail, a sentiment that the next strategy seeks to underscore.

Legitimizing Strategy: The Dire Consequences for the Society

White talk reveals its right wing aspect very clearly when it enters the mode of issuing warnings, threats and dire predictions for the transforming society.

You have to ask yourself, if they are prepared to be this rough about what's growing in our gardens, you have to wonder how they are likely to act when they start getting rough about what they think we may be growing in our hearts and minds. (Ronge, The Big Stick, 26 November)

Fear-inducing discourse, which pervades the backlash aspect of *white talk*, becomes abundant in the passage just cited. In a discourse that reacts against black people with power, the fear is of complete powerlessness at the hands of this "other." Because this aspect of the discourse is essentially motivated by a reaction to what is experienced as coming from the outside, it does not require a great leap to the inverted argument that it is black advancement that *causes* whiteness. *White talk* thus becomes legitimated as a response that needs to be understood, respected, even valued:

So Viva, Tim Modise, Viva. Keep those lines open and let the whiners whine. You may just be the valve that keeps the pressure pot from exploding. (Ronge, Defending the Right to Whine, January)

So, it is in the interests of all South Africans that *white talk* be allowed to continue unabated. The role of elite discourse in preformulating the conceptual tools for the white community is once more apparent; here the well worn technique of warning of the possibility of white backlash is a means to make the challenging forces back off. The effect of this is to disguise the fact that this warning itself is, already, a manifestation of backlash discourse.

As *white talk* hardens in this emotionally charged mode of incorporating *white ululation* into its lexicon, it becomes more blatant and less indirect. Other qualities of right wing discourse enter the strategic inventory. One is the claim, already mentioned,

to be breaking the taboo of “political correctness,” which is constructed as part of the tyranny of the new order. At this point *white talk* claims to be dispensing with the requirement of face-management in the interests of honesty—acting in the interests of society as a whole:

Maybe I'm empathy-challenged. (Ronge, Living for the Moment, 9 July)

I must say, I am rather pissed off . . . (Mulholland, By Hook or By Crook, That's Politics, 10 September)

“Sensitivity” becomes weak-mindedness, fake, lacking in integrity and incomprehensible and socially irresponsible, given the weightiness of the circumstances.

The first section of this chapter showed how *white talk* draws on *New South Africa Speak* as its main resource for positive self-presentation, a key constituent of ideologically informed discourse (Rothenberg, 1999; Van Dijk, 1998). As shown in this section, however, *white talk* is also able to draw on conservative white *ululatory* discourse to put on a good face. Whites are presented as overly generous, falling over backwards to accommodate the new circumstances of their lives, but they are unappreciated. The feelings of indignation which inform this strategy, and which this strategy evokes, are unquestionably ululatory in that they arouse white-centred emotions, and provide legitimation for antagonistic responses to the transforming society. It prepares people for fight or flight:

Translate that into basic English and the sentence reads like this: Do good deeds and you will stay largely unnoticed and ignored. Steal and lie and you'll get star treatment, as if you were some kind of untouchable folk hero . . .

As the Americans say, go figure. (Ronge, Back to Front, 4 June)

It is well to remember that the risk taker can lose all his capital, be ruined and have to start again. His or her gains are won at great effort and cost in the business arena against fierce competition with no guarantee of success. (Mulholland, Justifying Policy by Harking Back to a Disastrous Era, 12 March)

In such narratives told of the New South Africa, white South Africans are unrecognized, undervalued heroes. The next strategy arises out of such feelings of injustice.

Legitimizing Strategy: The Necessity to “Regroup”

It becomes clear that where *white talk* accesses highly reactionary strategies to counter competing discourses of transformation, a re-assertion in the face of what it rejects is taking place. In the *white talk* that emerges from an analysis of these columns, the regrouping to a marked extent takes the form reaching back, away from the diasporic margins of whiteness, back towards the centres, where whiteness is still more secure.

That was when the conversation took a turn that really interested me. There was this subtle suggestion that any complaint about the way things are in South Africa is a form of racist attack and the chief culprits are the whites. It is indisputably true that whites are the most vociferous complainers and it is also true that the young people who leave this country are mainly white, but to call that the result of a lingering and unaltered racism is a dangerous error. (Ronge, Defending the Right to Whine, January)

The phrase “the way things are in South Africa,” needs no further analysis at this stage. It draws on a host of assumptions and shared ideological constructions that are simply experienced as the “real truth” about the country. There is no sense that this “reality” is the product of one of two worlds, one of two different moral universes, constructed out of dysfunctional social relations. The unwillingness to connect with the reality of the “other” is not raised as one of the key problems facing the New South Africa; *ignorance* is innocuous, innocent, reasonable. Rather, the discourse pushes identification in another direction. As the tide turns against whiteness in the local context, the writer makes available rhetorical and social strategies that render acceptable and attractive reconnection with the white mainlands for the members of the broader white South African community as they restlessly try out different subject positions. One such framing is that whites no have “no option” but to leave:

No one will invest unless there is law and order. Qualified people will, quite naturally, seek societies where they perceive they will be safe. (Mulholland, Anarchy Stalks the Country’s Street of Shame, 3 December)

How does one go about “redistributing” wealth and what is the outcome of it?

If you take away from a person what he or she has built up over a lifetime you will destroy that person. That person will stop trying or be driven away

*to some place where he or she will be encouraged to create wealth.
(Mulholland, Create Wealth, Don't Just Transfer It, 5 November)*

Disinvestment and emigration are normalized through ululation that pulls the white race together. Nowhere does ululation operate more powerfully than in the everyday stories people tell about being white in South Africa, which tend to be cast within a shared ideological model (Mumby, 1993; Van Dijk, 1998). In the columns analysed in this chapter, the rhetorical import of a story often seems to depend upon a conclusion that takes the form of a fantasy of impending tyranny, or an implicit calling for consensus on the intolerability of conditions in SA for whites, or an invocation to disengage from a context that is unsafe and unattractive to whites.²³

A story of two elderly ladies in a parking lot presents them as victims of a society gone wrong. We are told that one “granny” has been “pushed over the edge”:

With the calm resolution of someone who has lived in Johannesburg through the '76 riots, Cosatu's rolling mass action, hijackings, Rugby World Cup matches and cash-in-transit heists, Granny B said: “So shoot already. My husband's dead. I live alone. My children live in Canada. I see my grandchildren once every two years, and living in this town I know that sooner or later I'm going to be shot, so it might as well be by you. (Ronge, Gunning for Trouble, 2 July)

Analysis of her purported words shows that her reaction to the society that has “done this to her” is a function of her ideological interpellation into whiteness. The blackness of the New South Africa is a hazard that whites have to live with, and hopefully, through. Endowed with the liberal value of tolerance, the tone of the catalogue of tribulations that have unseated her mind reads unmistakably like the proverbial colonial lament, “the natives are noisy tonight.”

What we witness in this story is in fact a closed psychological loop. The ideological structures that hold everything in place in her world have not been humanized through critical engagement with the social conditions shaping the anti-social behaviour that she understands as setting the conditions of her life. A victim of *white talk*, she is actually experiencing her own ideological world acting itself out. Cause and effect are impossible to extricate from each other in this psychological system. Yet with her irrational outburst constructed as an expected, even rational, outcome of the adverse, stressful situation of living in South Africa, Ronge's narrative communicates the sense

that there is little to live for in this society, which is inexorably moving along a predetermined course of events, succumbing to the inevitability of its entropic energy. As a narrative, the story itself is a reflection of an ideological system working to reproduce itself, rather than attempting to produce new meaning through relation to other realities, on their own terms. The explanation of the scene emerges straight out of the same collective imaginary as the scenes from *Panic Mechanic*, described in Chapter Three, where shell-shocked white South Africans reach for their guns in unison in the restaurant at the sound of a popping champagne cork. The interpretative model has not become any more complex through the intervening years. Deetz (1992) describes such closed communication systems:

They respond to shadows of themselves cast on the events around them.

In this form they translate back to their own conceptual relations, thus precluding alternative discourses or conflicts with contrary institutional interpretive schemes. Such systems largely fool themselves in presuming to be referential and purposively directed to an actual outside. (p. 187)

It would be difficult to find a more unambiguous example of racial ululation—calling the race to consensus, stirring emotion at the injustice of a new system that reduces the most vulnerable, such as the elderly, to jittering gun-toters, energizing feelings that safety is only found where the “other” is not.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that a characteristic of *white talk* in the New South Africa is the interdiscursivity of old and new forms of race talk, providing both continuity and adaptation. This interdiscursivity produces a layered effect as well-established understandings rise through the hot-from-the-oven “pro-New South Africa” discourses. Yet the apparent support for the transformation of the country which typifies one aspect of *white talk* holds little danger of tipping the scales away from the underlying conservatism in this discursive chain, given the much more powerful and established field of negativity, and ready understandings that operate in the white world.²⁴

Ironically, in this connection, the political situation in the country actually provides the most powerful source of legitimation for *white talk*, and the rise of black empowerment becomes a *resource* for whiteness. In the first place, it is more difficult to express open opposition to transformation, and to dismiss notions such as non-racism and democracy and still hold the moral high ground when in the presence of the “other”

who is now empowered to talk back. *White talk* has had to undertake a major overhaul from Old South African white discourse and incorporate elements of modern racist discourse. Face-presentation has never before been a factor for white South Africans within the borders of the country, but now many are learning to hone the skills of prolonging inequities without openly owning supremacist positions. Conservative white South Africans are therefore acquiring a new lexicon and discursive strategic repertoire that has currency internationally.

More significantly, though, by overplaying the dominance of the African presence in political and organizational contexts, and stoking, even reactivating, many of the constructions of the inimical nature of Africa and Africans to whiteness, white South Africa is able to underplay the dominance of their whiteness in the larger scheme of past and present global dynamics, and how they are able to “hook” that power through racial solidarity, sympathy and support. Liberal discourse is able to connect through Eurocentric notions such as the “disregard” that Africanization holds for liberal values, and through institutional connections such as a shared white, liberal press and a shared business ethos. Right wing discourses, on the other hand, are often gripped by talk of threats to themselves. These are more difficult to justify discursively in contexts where whites hold demographic and political power. Such siege mentalities can be presented as having more justification here, where whiteness really is under threat, and many of the horrors of the white imagination are playing themselves out: blacks have indeed “taken over.” As a diaspora living in this dislocated situation, white South Africans can reach out to their racial kin in the white mainlands through the ideological allegiances of whiteness, which are taking on new levels of importance as whites deal with loss of dominance in the local context.

The crucial implication of this discussion is that it is important to *white talking* white South Africans both for managing their position internally within the local South African context, as well as for keeping the powerful international dynamic of white solidarity operational, to contain the representations of the emerging society in post-1994 South Africa. The discursive strategies discussed in this chapter are, above all else, a means of controlling dissensus from the internationally dominant white-centric view of African societies and politics. Through suppression of other possibilities of meaning-making that would challenge and problematize the (re)labelling of a country in African hands as pathological and hopeless, discursive closure is attempted even before fully open, participative, and productive meanings have had a chance to develop, particularly

in the international arena. Pre-eminently, then, *white talk* is an attempt to limit the possibilities of thinking outside of the confines of the old constructions. This holds at bay the processes of creativity, enrichment and growth that can occur when “self” enters into genuine dialogue with the “other,” and attempts to suffocate the voice of an Africa that is just beginning to reassert itself.

This chapter and the preceding one have unpacked some of the internal workings of the *white talk* that has the dominant influence on the flows of signification within South Africa, especially mediated South African society through the role of English and its international credibility. The next chapter considers the specific constellation of *white talk* within the Afrikaner community, which has always constructed itself as a self-contained, self-sufficient, white minority group.

NOTES

1. Variability has been identified as a characteristic of situated discourse in action (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). What this chapter does is to explain something of how that variability comes about in *white talk* through utilizing different streams of sense-making and combining them within one discursive formation. As such it can also be seen as a kind of intertextuality (Fairclough, 1992, 1995b).

² Glick and Fiske (2001), contend that

ambivalent prejudice, not hostility alone, often legitimizes the most extreme forms of discrimination (such as slavery and genocide) and. . . the form discrimination takes is predictable from the type of ambivalent prejudice involved. (p.280)

3. In this respect an affinity may be discerned with what (Griffen, 1999) in the United States calls “compensating desegregationists.” He describes the position thus:

Compensating desegregationists are pseudoliberals who are eager to portray themselves as having once and for all broken with racism. Publicly they desire to find some way to compensate for its injustices, so they will defend vigorously the merits of mandated social, economic, and political desegregation. But, on close examination, such compensation comes mainly through cosmetic and superficial adjustments in the status quo. Compensating desegregationists are opposed to complete and holistic racial integration—understood as the total transformation of the American mind in a way that would change our way of relating to each other in private and public and would move the nation toward racial reconciliation and equality. (pp. 84-85)

4. Welman (1993) calls such strategies “relatively successful accommodations to the problem of how to cope with the existence of racial inequality without thinking of oneself as a ‘son of a bitch.’” (p. 208)

5. For a blatant example, see Ronge, *Outrageous Fortune*, 16 April.

NOTES (cont.)

6. The Xhosa clan name of Nelson Mandela. Following the African tradition for respectfully addressing elders, it is used affectionately by the nation to refer to the former president.
- 7 The African National Congress (2000) made a similar point in their submission to the Human Rights Commission.
8. I am adapting McKoy's (2001) logic. Her book deals with white violence that is legitimated by particular constructions of the physical black body as riotous. Also see Major and Schmader (2001) for an account of the legitimation of social disadvantage.
9. The flow of rhetorical and discursive tools has in fact been reciprocal. While acceptable mainstream whiteness has absorbed what has previously been marginal and confined to the right fringe in order to shore up defences, the fringe has also adopted material from the respectable center to mitigate its offensiveness. Gabriel (1998) gives the example of how Martin Luther King's notion of a society in which people are not judged by the colour of the skin has been used in justifications of reactionary white backlash.
10. A province in the north-eastern part of the country.
11. Van Dijk (1993, p. 218) uses this formulation in describing how problems experienced by black people are represented in elite discourse.
12. Paul Gilroy (1987) has argued that the obsessive concern with black law-breaking is at the centre of contemporary racism.
13. The following quotation illustrates the point:
- I speak of this long-held dogma because it continues still to weigh down the African mind and spirit, like the ton of lead that the African slave carries on her own shoulders, producing in her and the rest a condition which, in itself, contests any assertion that she is capable of initiative, creativity, individuality, and entrepreneurship. Its weight dictates that she will never straighten her back and thus discover that she is as tall as the slave master who carries the whip. Neither will she have the opportunity to question why the master has legal title both to the commodity she transports on the back and the labour she must make available to ensure that the burden on her shoulders translates into dollars and yen. . . .
- An essential and necessary element of the African Renaissance is that we all must take it as our task to encourage she who carries this leaden weight, to rebel, to assert the principality of her humanity—the fact that she, in the first instance, is not a beast of burden but a human and African being. (Mbeki, 1999, p. 173)
14. See, for example, the quotation below:
- The African Renaissance, in all its parts, can only succeed if its aims and objectives are defined by the Africans themselves, if its programmes are designed by ourselves and if we take responsibility for the success or failure of our policies. (Mbeki, 1999, p. 175)
15. An extract from the same speech:

NOTES (cont.)

We are convinced that such a people has the legitimate right to expect of itself that it has the capacity to set itself free from the oppressive historical legacy of poverty, hunger, backwardness and marginalisation in the struggle to order world affairs, so that all human civilization puts as the principal objective of its existence the humane existence of all that is human! (Mbeki, 1999, p. 174)

16. Deetz (1992) offers an excellent discussion of “systematically distorted communication” showing how such discursive closure is achieved.

17. Cock and Bernstein (2002) discuss some salient differences in context between South Africa and the United States where affirmative action is being applied. The most important is that in South Africa AA is part of a deep-seated transformation process, whereas in the United States it is about racial inclusion in the mainstream (p. 28).

18. Glick and Fiske (2001) argue that the nature of prejudices likely to be held between groups can be predicted according to the structural relations between them. They comment, for example, about a scenario that would be characterized by what they call “envious prejudice”:

Dominant groups whose status is slipping . . . may experience especially intense resentment toward successful minority groups . . . feeling entitled to a desired object or outcome exacerbates resentment produced by relative deprivation. When once-privileged groups start to lose status (as Germans did in the 1920s and 1930s), a strong sense of entitlement to their former status and privileges may create fierce envy and resentment toward successful minority groups. (p. 298)

19. In a society in which the ratio of black people to white people is about 30:1, one would surely expect the ratio of black to white wealthy people to be the same if the society were “normal.”

20. Following Lerner (1980) the belief in a just world has been shown to link to the tendency to legitimize an unequal status quo. The logic is, crudely put, that people get what they deserve, and so must have deserved what they got in terms of social distribution. (See Olson & Hafer, 2001, p. 159)

21. This is the same strategy that is in operation in homophobic discourses, for example. The effect is to keep mainstream masculinity/femininity in line, through the fear of being identified with the unacceptable “other.”

22. Unwillingness to grapple with the morality of white racialization, which is pervasive in white society, is exactly what critical whiteness studies attempt to challenge. Inequitable social relations are not so much the product of this diminished sense of social relationship, as actually the conditions for its development and perpetuation (see Guillaumin, 1995). Whiteness, whether in its urbane liberal form, or in its more explicit, reactionary forms, resists engaging in discourses of ethics and morality more than any other form of challenge. (See Giroux, 1997b; Jost & Major, 2001; Levine-Rasky, 2002b)

23. For discussion of similar dynamics of “white flight,” see Griffen (1999) who points out that white Americans who moved out of mixed neighbourhoods were fleeing integration with middle class black

NOTES (cont.)

people, not poor blacks. They “rationalize their flight from the cities by pointing to the urban rioting and crime. . . . Others have pointed to various prudent family concerns.” (p. 94)

24. See Entman & Rojecki (2000) for an analysis of a similar dynamic in the United States.

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8

REHABILITATING A WHITENESS DISGRACED: AFRIKANER *WHITE TALK*

The previous two chapters focused on the *white talk* that has been developing amongst white South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa, reflected in the discourse of journalists writing opinion editorials for a national English language Sunday newspaper. This chapter shifts its gaze to discursive production specifically in Afrikaans-speaking South Africa, thereby deepening the exploration of the complexity and variation within *white talk*. While both English and Afrikaans white South Africans share many common identifications and assumptions of privilege, there are also significant differences in how their whiteness is being reframed in post-apartheid South Africa. This chapter seeks to explore these particularities in greater detail.

Some measure of contextualization is needed in order to interpret the manner in which Afrikaners are positioning themselves in the scramble for optimal location in post-apartheid South Africa. The first part of this chapter therefore provides a brief account of salient factors in the construction of Afrikanerness within the broader semiosphere of white South Africa. It describes the import of the current dislocation for the Afrikaner, particularly as this concept has been applied to the South African situation by Norval (1996). The method of analysis is then outlined. Certain anxieties are pervasive as a consequence of the disruption of Afrikaner ideology, and these are the subject matter of

the third section of this chapter. Any attempt to re-suture Afrikaner whiteness needs to assuage these anxieties and provide recontextualizations for the underlying beliefs that have been disrupted. A detailed analysis of the letters to the editor of *Rapport* newspaper, a national Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, follows, which indicates the different strategies that are being mobilized to undertake this task.

The chapter contends that Afrikaner *white talk*, like that analysed in the two preceding chapters, involves the strategic management of intersectionality, but operates from a different epicentre and attaches importance to different objectives. English-speaking white talk plays to connections with the international, sedimented advantage of Anglo ethnicity at a global level. Afrikaner whiteness works more with the fault-lines that construct domestic ethnicity. Like its English counterpart, current Afrikaner *white talk* undertakes ideological boundary work to minimize damage to privilege and maximize group advantage, but it also performs profound existential work in the context of the experience of dislocation, to an extent that involves *resignification* and *delimitation* of “us” and “them,” as well as remedial functions of self rehabilitation and public relations tasks of selling Afrikanerness as compatible with the New South Africa. The chapter shows that Afrikaner whiteness cannot be understood outside its co-construction with the more powerful normative whiteness of English-speaking South Africa discussed in the preceding chapters.

Dislocations and Entanglements

The Co-construction of Two Whitenesses

Historically, whiteness has ensured a privileged existence for both English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. As chapter one argued, long before the apartheid era, they shared their primary identification as “European” in contradistinction from those who were not regarded as such (Hendricks, 2001; Steyn, 2001b) so that “a common early pattern of discrimination and exploitation was established, whether by British liberalism or Afrikaner conservatism” (A. Marx, 1998, p. 39). Early colonial rivalry for command of the Cape was bound up in competition for the power to determine the appropriate relation to the colonized and enslaved “other,” so that the two groups mutually defined their particular brand of whiteness on the basis of policy and attitude towards subordinated people. (A. Marx, 1998; Steyn, 2001b).¹ In South Africa, whiteness itself has been defined in terms of the struggle between English and Afrikaans

subjectivities, which have often been regarded as so different as to be untranslatable—the Afrikaans language is seen as having a privileged relationship with the land arising from the deep bond of a farming people to the soil (Norval, 1996; Steyn, 2001b; Wicomb, 2001).

It is common knowledge that the Afrikaner government that came into power in 1948 was responsible for the introduction of the policy of apartheid, which legalized abuse of state power and implemented extreme racial oppression. Yet, ironically, it would be a mistake to read the racial domination thus entrenched as emanating from a group that felt secure in their ability to enforce their entitlement to social advantage—which they did not question—over the black population. Afrikaners contended with the more powerful forces of the British empire throughout a history that was experienced as a long and bitter struggle for freedom from white-on-white overlordship. In the course of this tempestuous history the British availed themselves of all the discursive tools of racialization—as Lord Kitchener’s reference to Afrikaners as “uncivilized . . . savages with a thin white veneer” (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992, p. 104), shows.² The self-esteem, indeed the very self-image, of Afrikaner nationhood was forged within a mythology that celebrated the courage of a people who refused to be subordinated to the British empire on more than one occasion in their history. The rise of extreme Afrikaner nationalism in the early part of the twentieth century is generally understood as a reaction to the defeat of the Boer forces in the second South African (Anglo-Boer) War of 1899-1902 (Dubow, 1992; Fredrickson, 1981; Porter, 2000; Schönsteich & Boshoff, 2003; Vail, 1989).

Shönsteich and Boshoff sum it up:

The courageous manner in which the outnumbered Republican Boers fought the war against the might of the British Empire, the suffering of non-combatants in British concentration camps (leading to the death of 28,000 Boer women and children) the aggressive post-war Anglicisation policy, and the resultant poverty and loss of freedom, left an indelible mark on the national consciousness of the Afrikaner. (p. 1, Chapter 2)

The Afrikaner nationalists’ assumption of political power through the (skewed) electoral process of 1948, in turn, left English-speaking South Africans feeling alienated and insecure. Giliomee (2001), cites Patrick Duncan’s comment of 1953: “English South Africans are today in the power of their adversaries. They are the only English group of any size in the world today that is, and will remain for some time, a ruled, subordinated

minority” (p. 12). To the extent that coherence was achieved within white South Africa after the establishment of a republic in 1961, it was through a deliberate attempt by the apartheid government to build white solidarity. This was largely achieved through using a fear psychosis constellated around a “black peril” complex (Fredrickson, 1981; Norval, 1996; Steyn, 2001b); in which the “colonial terms European and native, inappropriate to the new project, came to be replaced by white and non-white, as whiteness assumed native status in the promised homeland” (Wicomb, 2001, p. 169). Opposition from those Afrikaner nationalists who retained their distrust of any identification with English liberalism always accompanied the process of creating a unified white South African nationalism.³

Looked at from within a longer time frame, Afrikaner whiteness has an affinity with what has been described as *subaltern whiteness*—whiteness that “may have shifted over time,” but has generally “remained prey” (Gabriel, 1998, p. 184) to another dominant white discourse. There certainly always has been an element of defiance in Afrikaner whiteness against the more secure, powerful, whiteness of the English who had the culture of Empire backing them (Giliomee, 2001, 2003). An indication that this is indeed a non-normative whiteness is that from time to time a book has emerged that takes the Afrikaners as its object, often construing them as a “white tribe” (See, for example, February, 1991; Goodwin & Schiff, 1995). The notion was popularized by a BBC television documentary on the Afrikaners during the 1950s called *The White Tribe of Africa*. By contrast, English-speaking South African whiteness has remained largely unexamined (Salisbury, 2003), just “normal” and unspecific. The whiteness of the Afrikaner has been always already marked.

As a resistant whiteness, the constellation of the victim has been highly salient in the discourses of Afrikaner whiteness. They saw themselves as besieged, having to fight for the “right” to their own brand of white supremacy, in which claiming the land for themselves and appropriating black labour have featured prominently.⁴ The role of such feelings of prior, and even continuing, victimization of the Afrikaner by the British in bringing about the mindset that enacted the brutal racism of apartheid fits a pattern that has been recognized in other perpetrator groups:

It is important to remember that virtually all perpetrators of great evil in the world. . . believed that they were victims of some longstanding prior outrage that justified their militancy. A group’s self-perception of victimization should never be taken as evidence of actual victimization.

And even when there has been real mistreatment in the past, we should not assume that it always, or even generally, originates with those who are targeted for retribution. Psychologists have long understood that anger is often directed toward scapegoats who are chosen because they are deemed less able to resist than the actual offenders. (Kressel, 2002, p. xx)

In its fiercely reactionary nature, Afrikaner whiteness has long shown characteristics which are being identified in contemporary reactive white identities in countries undergoing a process of “conservative restoration” (Apple, 1998, p. ix), such as the United States, where certain whites position themselves as victims of a changing racial order.

Intersections and the Elusive Essence

The early settlers of mixed European, though primarily Dutch ancestry unified in a common identification as *Afrikaners*, people of Africa, and retained little actual or sentimental attachment to their European homelands. Along with the coloured community that has internalized a mixture of slave, indigenous and European ancestry and culture, the Afrikaners can certainly be considered Creole.⁵ In addition to cultural capital—most notably the Creole language, Afrikaans (which they jointly developed, though were unequally credited for)—these two groups share a good percentage of their genetic pool, weighted differentially towards “white” and “brown” (De Klerk, 2000; Findlay, 1936; Fredrickson, 1981; H. F. Heese, 1984; J. A. Heese, 1971; Hendricks, 2001).⁶ White South Africans chose to attempt to fade these entanglements out of memory as racial boundaries became more tightly differentiated and hierarchical. The extent of early intermixing, along with the fact that mixed relationships have continued to be part of the South African social terrain, particularly among working class whites, has meant, however, that the knowledge of “blood bonding” has never been truly successfully repressed. The incomplete amnesia has been troubled in periodic bouts of public contestation which flare up, such as with the publication of a book in 1971 which traced the mixed origins of a number of prominent Afrikaner families (J. A. Heese, 1971).

Intersectionality, contradiction and hybridity are therefore an integral part of the formation of Afrikaner selfhood: Europe knotted into Africa, slave ancestry buried within white supremacist ideology, segregation along ambiguous, racially structured formations cleaved within a single linguistic community, unstable gluing together with

English-speaking South Africans into white South Africanism, internal tensions riven along ideological lines. Yet it seems that intersectionality is what the discourses of Afrikaner identity have sought most to exorcise. Norval (1996) has shown how the construction of apartheid discourses relied on generalizing to all South African groups the “impossible” quest for the *volkseie*⁷, the “pure” identity that would be left when all “others” had been exteriorized:

An exclusive Afrikanerdom was what was left once communists, English-speakers, imperialists, natives, Asians, coloureds, Jews, traitors, are all shown to be foreign, alien. (p. 54)

The pursuit of “true” Afrikanerness has been central to Afrikaner ethnicism, and sought to hegemonize this version of whiteness in competition to other discursive possibilities (Norval, 1996). Afrikaner ideologues placed a great deal of emphasis on the organic link between culture and nationhood, suggesting that the *volk* was “a natural, pure and integrated entity” (Dubow, 1992, p. 12). Constructing an essentialist ethnicity—incorporating a resolute whiteness—out of the thoroughly inessentializable reality of their positioning and history has involved Afrikaners in on-going, self-conscious, and contested discursive activity for more than a century—the quest for the holy grail of “originary unity and racial purity” (Coombes & Brah, p. 4):

If Afrikaners lie down on their couches and talk about what it means to be an Afrikaner, one thing leads to another, until they contradict each other and start pointing fingers at who is and who isn't. Discussing their identity has been an Afrikaner predilection for decades. (Goodwin & Schiff, 1995, p. 46)

The whiteness of the Afrikaner has historically been rolled into this ethnic/nationalistic discourse (L. Botha, 2001; Dubow, 1992; Kinghorn, 1994). Wicomb (2001) points out that it was this ethnicity, not only the racial axis of black-white, against which black South Africans defined themselves and that they sought to defeat.

The categories of race, language and culture were used as functionally interdependent variables, and the boundaries between them fluid. In practice, the essentialist view of culture which lay at the heart of Christian-nationalism was no less powerful as a means of dividing people than an approach based on racial determination. (Dubow, p. 13)

An hierarchical arrangement was intrinsically part of the ethnic ordering within this worldview, carried as an article of faith through the notion of a special destiny in the country for the white Afrikaners as a chosen people amongst heathen black races. The racial and ethnic in this constellation become difficult to distinguish,⁸ complicating the application of the tools offered by critical theorists of whiteness unless with major qualifications.⁹ Interiorization of the racial into the ethnic is of course not unique to Afrikaner discourse, as Coombes and Brah (2000) point out, “. . . anxieties about miscegenation and the preservation of racial purity have often underpinned discussions about cultural and social intermixing (p. 5).” Wicomb (2001) is correct, therefore, in arguing that with whiteness so fully bound up in the meaning of an ethnic group, it can only be deconstructed through the redefinition of that ethnicity (p. 159).

The Fall

The current moment in South African history presents a crisis to Afrikaner identity similar to the time of dislocation that saw the original discursive suturing of Afrikaner identity into nationalism (see Norval, 1996). Such acute dislocation can be understood to occur when social changes result in the previously unseen or denied being made forcibly visible, when the representations and constructions that shaped identities are recognized, and the boundaries of the accepted social groupings are questioned to such an extent that new horizons for the social imaginary have to be forged (L. Botha, 2001; Norval, 1994b, 1996; Steyn, 2001b). Numerous studies are charting how Afrikaners are navigating these new waters (L. Botha, 2001; Grobbelaar, 1998; Heaven, Wollogong, Stones, Simbayi, & Le Roux, 2000; Korf & Malan, 2002; Van Niekerk, 2000; Vestergaard, 2001). Of course any new definition of Afrikanerdom inevitably has to be tied discursively to the conception of the New South Africa that develops within Afrikaner circles. From an identity point of view this is complicated by the demise of the system that had been put in place by them—the Afrikaner’s moment in the sun had attempted to secure their model of whiteness, a model which had in fact provided the policies and conditions for enormous social and economic advances on the part of the previously impoverished white Afrikaners.¹⁰ For Afrikaners—whatever the ethical issues may be—the end of the Old South Africa cannot but be accompanied by feelings of loss. And because the immorality (indeed, criminality) of that systematic sectional advancement has now been thoroughly exposed through, amongst other processes, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there is certainly an element of shame and guilt that attaches to the social

positioning of the Afrikaner. Norval (1996) argues, correctly, that the policy of non-racialism that energizes the vision for the society that must replace the apartheid state was framed specifically to counter and transcend its ideological, and logical, grammar. Apartheid is the “other” of the New South Africa (Norval, p. 299); the future of the new democratic government “is premised on the demise of everything [Afrikaner Nationalism] has always stood for” (Coombes, 2000, p. 174). Whereas English-speaking South Africans can adopt a more equivocal position in relation to the policy that they supported in increasing numbers through the apartheid years, Afrikaners cannot escape the fact that the system was put in place *in their name*. They are therefore the people seen to be most in need of “rehabilitation” (Wicomb, 2001). The particularities of the moment of dislocation are therefore such that it is not only accompanied by the collapse of the old conditions of identification, but that it also constitutes a deep disjuncture in the sense of the honour of the entire worldview that had fixed Afrikaner realities, including, and perhaps particularly, its faith in patriarchal religious foundationalism.

The depth of this ideological crisis became apparent in the passionate debate that erupted in all the Afrikaans newspapers following an open letter by the journalist, Chris Louw, in which he responded to Professor W. A. de Klerk’s book, *Afrikaners: Kroes, kras, kordaat*. The letter was published on 5 May 2000 in *Beeld* newspaper, and later in *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*. De Klerk,¹¹ brother to ex-president F. W. de Klerk, was one of the organic intellectuals who provided leadership in Afrikaner thinking, particularly in the later apartheid years of “reform.” In his book, de Klerk (2000) urged Afrikaners to take collective responsibility for the mistakes of the past but at the same time to take pride in their brave history and resourcefulness as Afrikaners. He advised young Afrikaners to become part of the new dispensation and to help make it work. Louw’s ire was directed at the fact that de Klerk’s generation had conceptualized and implemented apartheid, but had sent their sons, whom they taught never to question authority, to fight for an unjust cause that they were now trying to rationalize as having been well intentioned, or at least devoid of deliberate malice. Political reconciliation had negotiated away the guarantees the younger generation had been sent to die for, leaving them carrying shame and guilt, and maladjusted through the hypermasculinity inculcated by a culture of war—a war that they now feel they cannot talk about:

The irony is that at an intellectual level I agree with so much that you write, but that doesn’t drive away the fury. I am pissed off (*die bliksem in*), Willem de Klerk, pissed off at your arrogance, your self-justifications,

your rationalizations, your denials, and your lies. I am incensed (*die moer in*) at the whiff of gloating in your snotty writing. If we follow your advice we will survive, certainly. But if we follow your advice we will be exactly where we would have been if you and your whole damned generation had never deceived us with apartheid, and then at least we would not have had the burden of guilt. (Louw, 2001, p. 21, my translation)¹²

A deluge of letters to the editor, articles, literary works and theatre,¹³ as well as discussions in the electronic media, followed the publication of the letter. It represented an enormous range of feelings, and produced the “semantic creations of the honest, naked, real struggle of a whole community” (G. de Lange, 2001, p. 347, my translation). De Lange characterizes the debate as an intense, radical juncture in the history of the Afrikaner:

A turning point or watershed in the course of a community’s history: a son has dared to question his father’s authority; a member of a congregation has dared to question his minister’s impunity; a citizen has dared to name his government’s shenanigans (*geknoei*); a wife has dared to defy her husband; a black man has dared to call his master (*baas*) “mister”; a pupil has dared to challenge her school system and has let her voice be heard on the forum provided by the Boetman-discussion. (G. de Lange, 2001, p. 46, my translation)

The comprehensive indeterminacy of this moment of dislocation is evident. The mythology which narrativized Afrikaner ideology has imploded. The elements of social organization within patriarchal Afrikanerdom have been radically disarticulated, and are free to be rearticulated, signifiers in search of new content, a new imaginary context (Laclau, 1994). This is the creative social moment, *par excellence*; it is also, as Norval (1996) points out, the political moment *par excellence*, the moment at which new frontiers are drawn “through which ‘others’ are excluded from the domain of the legitimate, the self, the inside” (p. 54).

For Afrikaners, the strategic management of their new situation depends on how they choose to draw these frontiers, and re-suture themselves within the social organization of the country. *White talk* in this context takes the form of different degrees of trying to reinscribe elements of the Afrikaner mythology that secured a special place

for the Afrikaner in the political, economic, and social life of the country, so that the ground gained through the apartheid era of systematic Afrikaner advancement is not lost in the new social order. As the discussion above has intimated, one needs to look for the Afrikaner's *white talk* within ethnic discourse—questions of “groupness,” language, religion, history, arts, “own” sports—in other words the symbolic currency that has the power to keep the white Afrikaner (hierarchical) worldview in tact, and sustain high levels of material, psychological and emotional comfort in the community. This discourse pits itself against other discursive options that see Afrikaners as integrated, constructively engaged people of equal status within the transforming and adjusting broader society:

Let it go, now. Afrikaners are in good shape

South Africa is full of potential for conflict, mainly as a consequence of poverty and unemployment. There are countless issues that beg urgent solutions and in which the press and other media can play an important role.

But so often one gets the impression, as one did again reading the Rapport of 21 October, that there is virtually a paranoid obsession with the state of Afrikaans and Afrikaners. The focus continually gets redirected towards one or other aspect of the population group's affairs. . . .

Forget it now. On the whole, things are going amazingly well with the Afrikaner. They are thinking broadly and globally, they are doing their own thing, they have discarded the socialistic protection of the old dispensation. Internationally there is recognition for their contribution to this country's development. So why the endless diagnosis and heavy-going introspection and retrospection about the Afrikaner? It's enough to make one sick. (Gert Kotze, Elardus Park, 28 October)

As the previous chapters have shown, the concepts of dislocation and subsequent re-suturing that are used to frame the analysis in the rest of this chapter apply to all South Africans to a varying extent in the immediate post-apartheid period. This chapter argues, along with others (see L. Botha, 2001; Norval, 1996), that they apply with particular acuteness in the case of the Afrikaner.

Method

The study on which this chapter is based analysed letters to the editor in *Rapport*, a leading Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, and a member of the group, *Nasionale Pers* (*Naspers*). In its editorial mission statement, the newspaper commits itself, among other goals, to championing the cause of Afrikaans and envisions becoming indispensable to the New South Africa.¹⁴ The material was accessed from the archives on the website.¹⁵ The letters for the entire year of 2001 were retrieved—in all a total 437 letters—and all were read.

As a first stage of analysis, the letters were content analysed into categories (n=102) that were arrived at through the emergent methodology of grounded theory. This was done to provide a sense of frequency of topics, demonstrate the preponderance of issues, and identify dominant discursive themes. Those letters that dealt with issues that were deemed truly irrelevant to the issues under discussion, like lost persons, were discarded (n=65). The data from this content analysis is used purely as supporting material to the critical discourse analysis of the letters, and only in those instances where it is regarded as illuminating to indicate the amount of discussion that a particular issue elicited.

A first level of discourse analysis was undertaken to establish the general contours of how the *white talk* was being constructed. Letters were then selected for inclusion in this chapter on the basis of their demonstrating a particular point; they were translated by the author, and further analysed in greater detail. The analysis follows the general methodology of the preceding chapters, which attempts to show how the discourse operates to achieve a strategic function within the social space out of which, and into which, it speaks.

The genre of *letters to the editor* as a source of discourse for analysis has been theorized as a site of intersection between mediated and everyday discourse (Richardson, 2001). The individual observations of the readership are edited in accordance with editorial policy, which determines the selection of letters to be published, adaptation of text, wording of headings, and placement of the letters in relation to other letters. In this way the newspaper's editors are able to set topics, provide emphasis, and shape opinion through constructing debates and signalling the pertinence of individual contributions, "thereby legitimating their contents" (Richardson, 2001, p. 148). The forum is a joint, interactive venture in the discursive evolution of a social domain. Equally importantly, though, the forum "confers prestige" on the opinions published, and is therefore

extensively used by the “elite strata of society” to influence, and to attempt to manage, power “in other social fields” (Bourdieu, 1991; Richardson, 2001, pp. 144-145, following Bourdieu). As such it also performs some of the functions of elite discourse, as discussed in Chapter Six. In the letters to *Rapport* this was evident in the number of letters from leaders of political parties, academic departments, religious denominations and other Afrikaner organizations. These letters attempted to win the hearts and minds of Afrikaners, preformulating opinions for the broader community, competing for turf in the Afrikaner discursive terrain, and trying to bring the community into a particular political alignment.

The topics that come up for discussion in the letters section of any newspaper are obviously set to some extent by current events in the life of the nation in general, or the reading community in particular. For the analyst the interest lies in how these events are framed by the interpretive community and which discursive repertoires are employed to do this, which issues are picked up on and debated, and how much energy is vested in contestation. For example, events that stirred the blood of the *Rapport* readership in 2001 were: the political upheaval in opposition party politics, the publication of a report on language policy for the historically Afrikaans Universities, the International Conference on Racism held in Durban and the terror attacks of 11 September. A precedent for using letters to the editor to analyse how white South Africans are constructing political resistance to transformation exists in the work of a group of scholars from the University of Cape Town, who analysed the discourses around the “squatter crisis” in a suburb outside the city (Dixon, Foster, Durrheim & Wilbraham, 1994; Dixon, Reicher & Foster, 1997).

The chapter now turns to some of the most salient aspects of the Afrikaner *white talk* that permeated the letters that readers wrote to *Rapport* during 2001.

Afrikaners Talk White

The good old days of way back then . . .

Where are the days when you could walk through the streets of our cities peacefully and go window-shopping late at night? When Sunday was a day of rest and a holy day as God instituted it; when all businesses were closed so that workers could rest?

Where are the days when you could sleep peacefully with your windows and doors open; when Mother stayed at home to care for the family without any domestic help?

Where are the days when white and black trusted and respected each other; when white and black lived without fear? (Liz Bester, Durban, 22 April)

In its blend of nostalgia, confusion, self-pity, racism, self-delusion, self-righteousness, and tenacious faith in a discredited worldview, the above letter reads as a self-parody of Afrikaner *white talk*. This discursive terrain is highly conflictual; it reflects a community that is at odds with how to insert itself into the evolving society. The terrain is traversed by fears and anxieties that were not discernable in the *white talk* analysed in the previous chapters. Each anxiety is linked to a certain core notion of the Afrikaner mythology that narrativized, communicated and maintained the nationalist ideology of the special position for the Afrikaner in South African society, and which is now in crisis. Each of these also presents challenges that any discursive option attempting to re-suture Afrikaner whiteness will have to confront successfully and present skillfully if it is to gain ground over competing options.

Loss of Self

Deep-seated anxieties about identity and loss of self are discernable in the letters. Unlike English South Africans, however, whose sense of their in-group, the “we/us,” has been shown in previous chapters to have a stable continuity through positioning as international go-betweens, Afrikaners are contending with a profound existential crisis (De Klerk, 2000; G. de Lange, 2001; Slabbert, 1999), grappling with the question “Who are we?” Answering this question was the dominant discursive preoccupation of the letters to the editor of *Rapport* during 2001, and formed the subtext to almost all the topics that were discussed in the public forum, even those that apparently were quite unrelated. The answer would have to reassure the deepest fear that activates the soul searching: “Will we—our language, our religion, our identity—disappear?”¹⁶

The stakes in this *white talk*, therefore, are much higher; it is experienced not simply as a matter of preserving privilege, but as a fight for a sustaining sense of selfhood. It seems that many of the correspondents are searching for an image, a new narrative, a metaphor that would encapsulate in some symbolic form the answer to the community’s angst:

Afrikaner baggage now in perspective

. . . Somewhere there may be a spark of hope: if we can understand the collective myth, our baggage becomes a precious inheritance that can be preserved; an inalienable part of ourselves; acceptable, given insight and love; communicable as the narrative of the nation (volksnarratief). (Ria Greaves, Grahamstown, 28 October)

Different ships needed for this journey

. . . Tim du Plessis one day said that Afrikaners have all emigrated, and that is to the New South Africa. He is right. But in the uncertainty of the post-modern world there is no place to form a laager¹⁷ or scratch a nest. . . . To survive in a developing world and in our own unsteady and uncertain society is to be like the swallow let loose from Noah's ark, to have no rest for the soles of your feet. In a certain sense we are like the nomads of old. . . . One thing that is becoming clearer to all of us is that to bundle us all together, like in a Big Brother house, is not going to work. We are too different. That is why we will need different boats travelling in a fleet towards the same destination. The boats represent the organizing principle for the society's future—the diversity of identities of this country's people. A person needs shelter from the wind and weather. . . This safety is provided by the familiarity and togetherness of a native language, culture, and religious community. . . . (Marthie Richter, Pretoria, 21 October)

The writers suggest that a collective narrative could explain why Afrikaners supported apartheid, providing the insight needed for self-forgiveness; a metaphor would help to contain the painful emotional and psychological experience of being “at sea.” Some such suggestions for new symbolic resources clearly struck a chord with readers and were followed up in subsequent letters. At an even more basic level, however, a pervasive search is on for a name for the community that is struggling to define itself anew. Each proffered name indicates a subject position that is opening up, possibilities that can be (re)inscribed: Afrikaner, Afrikaan, Afrikaanses, Suid-Afrikaan, Boer, boer, Wit Suid-Afrikaners, even Angloboere/Pomfrikaners (for those who have emigrated to England). Importantly, each name also fixes a different alignment of the intersectionalities that make up the totality of Afrikaner cultural/social/political/economic gear.

As the above quotations illustrate, the self-examination entailed in this moment of crisis inevitably draws the conversation back into Afrikaner history (n=47)—self-repair requires some creative remembering, reinterpreting, re-spinning the mythology that shaped the meaning of *Afrikanerdom* into the material for a recontextualized, reinvented identity. A. Marx (1998) comments about early Afrikaner historiography: “[I]t was not historical facts per se that predetermined subsequent racial orderings, but purposeful interpretations of those facts” (p. 27). The relationship of the Afrikaner community to the apartheid past is therefore significantly different than that of English-speaking South Africans. There is a strong need to preserve something of value, rehabilitate some element of Afrikaner idealism, rescue some aspect of the old faith in Afrikaner righteousness, not to see everything that the Afrikaner stood for dismantled. The process of reconstructing a sense of self is therefore deeply bound up in the politics of memory and forgetting:

“Can’t we [South Africa] just take from the past what is good, and build on it?” (Ben Herselman, Potchefstroom, 21 January)

A precipitating factor in this crisis is the fact that the selfhood that is in disarray was structured into an ideological system that inculcated beliefs of Afrikaner exceptionalism, a group with special needs and entitlements in the South African society. This means that one can only be “oneself” if there are “others” in less promoted positionalities. The loss of the special dispensation, indeed the fact that *black* Africans are now seen to be in need of a special deal, is therefore experienced as antithetical to the construction of Afrikaner wholeness.¹⁸ This complex is further compounded by the fact that the old self is now disgraced. *White talk* therefore needs to recontextualize Afrikaner exceptionalism and recuperate some of the losses Afrikaners have experienced in regard to issues of self-esteem, of credibility, of significance, of legitimacy, of acceptability, in other words, dealing with the experience of being those whose ideological creation is the “other” of post-apartheid South Africa.

Loss of Power; Alienation

There is almost complete consensus in the letter writers that Afrikaners are grappling with “a problem.” The nationalist ideology that shaped the Old South Africa, like all ethnocentric narratives, placed the Afrikaner in the centre. They were the most important population group; they were in charge. The change in this status to that of a minority group, in line with its demographic position, is experienced as being sidelined, ousted.

Some level of alienation from the developing society is present in many of the letters; others address this disaffected response in their compatriots. In its most acute form, the geographical, historical and psychological map of the Afrikaner is felt to be disregarded by the new society in acts that desecrate sacrosanct truths:

New names abuse country's history

Cape Town became part of the world map three centuries ago. . . . Now Wale Street and Adderley Street are getting the names of controversial politicians¹⁹ whom not everybody likes, and who also brought an alien democracy to the southern part of this continent. You [the mayor] are abusing our country's history and doing it dishonour. (Henk Dippenaar, Strand, 20 May)

Dippenaar's letter rages with hostility towards the new order. The rejection of the "alien democracy" is extreme; it is as if he is living in an unreality, a nightmare. While this level of denial is unusual, the tendency to present the outcome of the negotiated settlement and the results of two national democratic elections as somehow tentative and still open to revision is quite common. Some of the damage, it seems, should still be possible to reverse, through concerted, unified action, through creative political manoeuvres, through resistance:

[The divisions amongst the Afrikaners] led to a situation where, during the negotiation process, the ANC triumphed and we are left with a simple majority regime. The ANC takeover, with all its implications, has shocked all of us in South Africa into realizing how meaningless and destructive that arrangement was. (Corné Mulder, Freedom Front, 11 November)

Usually, the feelings of alienation are cast as emanating from "objective" assessments of the unacceptability of the emerging society, not from the writer's own choice to disassociate from it, to regard it as a perpetual "other":

In SA with its barbarians the death penalty is justified

How many murders, how many rapes, how many violent crimes, hijackings, and in transit robberies must it still take to bring the government to its senses? South Africa glories in its modern and exemplary constitution, but does this constitution suit this country's people? . . . A modern constitution will work appropriately in a first world country, but not in a third world

country where people have no respect for life. . . . A person can only lay claim to rights once you have developed a level of moral ethics whereby you respect the rights of others. . . . I think the time is more than ripe for a referendum on the reintroduction of the death sentence. For many people the reintroduction of the death sentence is a barbaric thought, but as long as a country has to deal with barbaric criminals, it is justified. (Dr. Mauritz H. Vorster, Port Elizabeth, 5 August)

The tropes employed to construct the New South Africa in this *white talk* are not significantly different from those employed by their English-speaking compatriots, but they are generally employed more explicitly and bluntly, and certainly would qualify for Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) label "racism for beginners" as opposed to the more indirect strategies described in the previous chapter. Crime is the most common of the tropes (n=58); letters utilized this as a means to define the ills of the society, almost without fail linking it to the need for harsher treatment of "them." The toughness and diminished sensitivity of this deeply masculinist purchase on the situation is typically encountered in situations of mass hate (Kressel, 2002).

Conference on crime has become a necessity in South Africa

I am writing in connection with the conference on racism that is currently being held in Durban. It is indeed high time that the government gets its priorities right. The biggest problems facing South Africa today are crime, unemployment, and illegal immigration. Everyday law-abiding citizens are raped cruelly, robbed and gruesomely murdered. Lawlessness has set in and everywhere criminals stand at the street corners and look out for their next victim, while the police are no threat to them at all. Add to this the millions of illegal aliens and unemployed immigrants from neighbouring countries and you have a perfect recipe for chaos. And it is precisely these illegals that add to our crime problem. As long as the government delays doing something real about the crime factor, unemployment and illegal immigrants, racism will always remain a problem in this country. We need a conference on crime in South Africa. (Objective, 2 September)

The refrain does not need to be resung in this chapter: crime, Zimbabwe, falling standards in education and health care, economic decline—and so on and on:

Disused stations along railway lines no more than rubbish dumps

Is South Africa's economic decline so bad that we have to display our dirty, tatty underwear? (Willa Hefer, Standerton, 4 February)

While the crime problem in South Africa is real enough, the choice to cast the Afrikaner as deliberately singled out for persecution is a rhetorical option. Aliens in a now foreign and disintegrating land, exiles within their own land—these are acute constructions of a tendency that is highly pervasive in the correspondence, namely, to (re)cast the Afrikaner as a victim: a victim of unfair historical processes, of botched political strategies, of deliberate and vindictive targeting, of unjust policies, of traitorous behaviour:

White Afrikaners are the victims yet again, as always

History has repeated itself like in the days of the Anglo-boer war, and we, the white Afrikaners, remain the victims of traitors.

Marthinus van Schalkwyk has betrayed us, the third generation of Nationalist Party supporters.

The victim appropriates innocence, averting the gaze of accusers, allowing blame to be shifted, generating guilt, smudging lines of accountability, and, especially, transferring responsibility for the emotions generated within this resistant section of the community onto the broader society. The victim stance both justifies, and stokes, feelings of outrage, indignation, and self-pity, allowing disclaimed violent impulses to be projected onto the perceived victimizers. And the more disgraceful the victimization can be shown to be, the more justified the powerfully antagonistic sentiments expressed are rendered, and the more the backlash mentality is vindicated. The package is both a reflection of, and a justification for a militaristic stance:

These laws, quotas will lead to rebellion

Everyone is sick and tired of affirmative action. Everyday we have to do with people who have been appointed to positions that they are quite incapable of managing. They simply do not have the training or knowledge to behave remotely professionally. I believe the contemporary white person has no illusions about the permanence of true democracy. I also believe that whites will accept and even support the ANC if only law and order were maintained. I believe many non-whites whose children are murdered,

kidnapped and raped on a daily basis also want law and order to return and that this should happen by means of a system of punishment that demands respect. I am sure all races in South Africa will work together and hatred will disappear if we could live in a society and environment where everyone is safe and the government isn't privileging certain races through laws and quotas. Should this fail to happen, I believe that some or other group of informed, educated and fed-up whites, as well as non-whites, will rise up and say: This far and no further! (Fed-up, V. 11 February)

The lexicon is harsher, more hard-line than that of English *white talk* analysed in the previous two chapters. Nevertheless, the same care to employ face-saving devices is present, a concession to the reality of the changed political system. The problem, we are made to understand in the previous letter, is not that the writer rejects democracy—on the contrary, it is the violation of democratic practice that causes such extreme emotion. The writer, we are assured, speaks out of concern for all racial groups. The following letter takes this logic of overt racism coupled to self-absolution further, in that “the problem” is cast as deliberate perversity on the part of the ungrateful society that irks and provokes well-meaning Afrikaners into positions with which they would never otherwise identify:

Barbarism is the cause of racism

. . . To my regret I also voted for change and reconciliation in 1994. What came of it? A country that is rapidly seeing its backside (alie) because there is no effort being made to reconcile, but where there is rather an attempt to see how much corruption, farm murders, in transit robberies, ordinary murder and robbery, rape and so on can be committed. Crime and barbarism reign supreme.

Barbarism is the cause of the surge in racism. First do away with that. . . .
(Z. M. Nieuwenhuizen, *Vryheid*, 11 February)

The white right wing mineworkers' trade union, Solidarity, similarly couches social agitation within the discourse of innocent concern for the well-being of the social fabric:

No party politics for MWU-Solidarity

We are extremely worried about the feelings of alienation, powerlessness, lack of a future, and second-class syndrome amongst Afrikaners, which

leads to people leaving the country in unprecedented numbers, or taking retrenchment packages and withdrawing into privacy.

Through collective power and organization we want to be a vehicle that can ensure that our people take their normal place as first class citizens. . . .

(Flip Buys, MWU Solidarity, 1 April)

The crucial manipulation of discourse here depends on the twist given to the notion of “normal”: equal status to everyone else in the society, guaranteed by the constitution, is pitched as an insulting “second class” position, the cause of Afrikaner buy-out. “Normal” “first class” citizenship would still be based on the illegitimate expectations fostered by the old system of white workers’ preferential treatment in the mining industry. Incitement against democracy is cloaked in the language of democracy.

There is therefore a distinct trend in these letters for the Afrikaner to try to compete with the black African for the powerful position of victim. The strategy recentres the Afrikaner, and the Afrikaner’s position within the society, as the focus of attention, not as the aggressor, but as the group in dire need of special attention, concessions, exceptions.²⁰

Fear of Disappearance of “Volkseie”

Afrikaner mythology put a great deal of store on essences of Afrikanerness, the “volkseie.” The fear of these essential attributes disappearing, of being annihilated, swamped or eroded was noticeable throughout the sample. The overwhelmingly disempowered feeling that pervades these letters is largely communicated through a search to find the Afrikaner’s source of power in navigating the new terrain. This in turn is connected to re-launching the question of the “essences” of Afrikaansness (see De Klerk, 2000). What is it that binds those who belong together as Afrikaners; what is the core from which Afrikaners should start as they rebuild themselves? By far the strongest sense of a unifying, defining “essence” is the language, Afrikaans. Letters (n=56) commented on its preservation, its “marginalization”; its corruption; its artistic capacity; its development; its modernization. Afrikaans is valued as the repository of Afrikaner heritage, Afrikaner creativity, Afrikaner soul, Afrikaner power; the fate of Afrikaans is seen to be symbolic of the position of Afrikaners:

DO something when Afrikaans gets ousted!

... A person cannot come out strongly enough against [the fact that Afrikaans is now more Anglicized than ever], but how many sentinels are there still guarding against the neo-imperial swords that are drawn against Afrikaans? (Loffie De Beer, Faerie Glen, 4 March)

Apology about Afrikaans doesn't hold water

I refer to the letter of Mr. Martin Williams, chair of the Johannesburg Press Club: "Club did not want to snub Afrikaans." Mr. Williams defends the absence of Afrikaans at the Newsmaker of the Year 2000 award on the grounds of the fact that there were overseas guests who do not speak Afrikaans. What he misses is that a similar event in France, Spain or Germany primarily would have been presented in French, Spanish, or German, whether or not there were foreigners. Mr. Williams's excuse is just another in a string of arguments that neo-imperialists use to turn South Africa into an English state. It is high time that the indigenous languages are allowed to take their rightful place alongside English. (Victor Matfield, Springs, 21 January)

In addition to a lexicon which employs war talk and an image of an invading, conquering force, these letters, and the many beside them that followed a similar pattern, are interesting in that they indicate the extent to which the primary ideological "other" of this community is still, in fact, the historical enemy: the philosophical/political tradition of English liberalism and its language, English. The most humiliating aspect of the "defeat" of apartheid, in the minds of those who subscribe to a narrow Afrikaner worldview, is that the capacity of Afrikaners to defend themselves from this tradition is removed. Once more, they are in a struggle for self-definition against English globalization. But now its power is also exercised, indirectly, through the hegemony it exercises in the minds of the African majority rulers. Afrikaners are delivered into the hands of the predominance of the Anglo world, which has never taken Afrikaners seriously, or afforded them dignity. An interesting dynamic therefore develops, which is also examined in greater detail later in the chapter. Afrikaans is redefined as an indigenous language, along with other African languages. English is constructed as the language of the real oppressor, both historically through colonial adventurism, and currently through neo-liberalism. Through their activism around the issues of their

language, Afrikaners can present themselves as the champions of all the indigenous languages in the face of English domination in the linguistic domain in the New South Africa. Strategically, an attempt is made to forge a unified front through alliances on linguistic grounds: a community of victims consisting of Afrikaners and Africans. While this presents itself as a community of equals, what is obscured in this move is that during the period of apartheid, Afrikaans was the dominant language for four decades, and was developed far beyond any of the indigenous languages. This is anything but a society of linguistic equals: although its Creole roots give it ambiguous status, qualifying it as either a European language or an African language, the extent to which whiteness has been naturalized into Afrikaans remains obscured.²¹

As with any attempt to fix an “essence,” in order to bring about uniformity a process of disciplining those that do not conform gets under way. The greatest approbation is reserved for the “enemy within,” those Afrikaners who do not recognize the danger that the “demotion” of Afrikaans holds to the Afrikaner. Those who leave the narrow confines of this self-definition are self-serving traitors:

Anglophiles damage Afrikaans

. . . As I have said before, the anglophile Afrikaner is a much greater enemy of Afrikaans than people of British descent in South Africa. Many “pukka” English grant us Afrikaans institutions, but not the anglophiles with their pathetic “try for English” inferiority complexes. . . . As we have all often recognized by now, the contemporary definition of “South African” excludes those who speak Afrikaans. One need only look at the new South African passport. (Dan Roodt, Dainfer, 6 May)

Once again the “exile” trope operates; the definition of a South African is unilaterally set as someone whose home language appears on the South African passport, a criterion that would exclude all but a very small number of South Africans. Self-exclusion is disguised as the consequence of rejection.

While language is far and away the most frequent marker of Afrikaans ethnicity that occurs in these letters, others that operate very strongly are Christianity (n=58), Afrikaner history (n=47), rugby (n=33) and literature/art (n=29). As the following two letters show, the different markers often interlock in images of abasement, geared to provoke indignation—the very stuff of backlash:

Afrikaans Protestant Church (APK) sticks to the biblical way

The whole matter of the three people who were debarred from worship in Goodwood APK church is being unnecessarily pulled out of proportion.

The APK is NOT racist and does not discriminate against anybody and recognizes that every nation and language has exactly the same rights. We believe that the Lord made different groups and nations, each with its own language, culture, customs and habits, and that each is equal before God, that each group can serve God best amongst its own people, its own language, culture and customs and that the Lord saves those that believe in Him, from all languages, groups and nations.

We do not cling to apartheid, but we do hold onto the Word of God and to his commandments because we believe and know that our policy is 100% in accord with the biblical way. (Ds.²² Adriaan Swart, Springbok, 22 July)

Apparently only the surnames in rugby are still Afrikaans

English, English, everything in English. That was the story at Ellis Park last Saturday during the rugby test match between the Springboks and the French.

More than 80% of the spectators were Afrikaans speakers. The spectators must have paid between R250 and R600 for the rugby product, which was presented to them in an English package.

No sensitivity in respect to the buying power of Afrikaans, which according to research is the strongest in the country. The nearest that you got to Afrikaans on the official programme was the surnames of the Springboks. All the announcements were also in English.

Rugby is now being marketed to us as a product. Then we surely also have the right to decide whether we want the product in its English packaging or not. I can buy what I want, after all.

Is it that the Ellis Park bosses are on their knees in an attempt to be so-called politically correct, and therefore spurn Afrikaans? Or is the rumour that the South African Rugby and Football Union demands that everything must be in English, true?

In the case of the South African Airlines, I could take my Afrikaans money and fly on another airline that does use Afrikaans on flights (British Airlines!).

Does Ellis Park want me to do the same and watch the rugby at home on television, where I can hear the commentary in Afrikaans? (Dr. Pieter Mulder, Freedom Front, Cape Town)

In all of these markers of ethnicity—language, religion, rugby—race may, or may not, be directly mentioned, depending on the sophistication of the writer and his or her ability to operate through allusion and ambivalence. The point is, however, that there is seldom need to. The discursive terrain that was established and cultivated through the years of apartheid can be activated as the reference field still likely to be most familiar, and probably operative, in the readership. The APK church letter, setting out the apartheid logic explicitly, must surely come across as rather crude to many of the readers, who, judging from the general tenor of the letters, are able to deal quite comfortably with an ethnicist discourse that interiorizes whiteness, rather than openly declares it.

Need for Solidarity

Given the pervasive sense of being a group at risk, in trouble, it is not surprising that the trope of Afrikaner unity, central to the earlier construction of Afrikaner nationalism (Norval, 1996), is being reworked. There is an expectation that Afrikaners need to insert themselves into the social and political life of the nation as a group that sticks together, and a clear anxiety exists that the centre may not hold:

Solution to Afrikaner existence already exists in ACDP

Last week's letters about the need for a political home for Afrikaners reveal two things: The tragic divisiveness in Afrikaner circles, but also the earnest search for greater unity.

One thing stands out like a pole above water: The only effective platform for the protection of minority rights is political power. To seek political might along racial lines is to delude oneself and a waste of time.

Afrikaners (and other minority groups) will have to find some other source of cohesiveness if they want to have anything like a significant political say.

... The one thing that we have in common with many other people, across

all divides, is our Christian conviction. . . . (Johan Kriel, Onrusriver, 15 July)

The inability to decide on the appropriate political home is in many respects a concrete expression of the deeper psychological search for where Afrikaners belong, how they should align themselves, how position themselves, how best serve their interests, how organize, how save what is to be saved, how redeploy their history. The search for the unifying principle/attribute/quality is perceived to be politically crucial. Yet the search accentuates exactly the lack of such a centre, just as in earlier times in Afrikaner history (Norval, 1996):

Valhalla is not just taking each other's hands

Richter's invitation to "come on board" is shrouded in mystery. On which ship, which grouping, organization, or political party? On top of that the English translation of "snoesig" is "dainty" "ducky" "sweet." Which self-respecting Afrikaner wants to be associated with such superficial mumbo-jumbo? No, not everything that involves taking hands and building the future is hunky-dory or leads to Valhalla. Far more thoughtful forums and penetrating thought and action at all levels of life are going to be needed to bring that about. There is a battle to be fought, and it is not going to be sweet. (P.V.D.M. Coetzee, Clubview, 21 October)

Impatience with the divisions within Afrikaner circles and the call for greater unity (n=28), and the need to organize as a political group (n=75)—these were major themes throughout the year of 2001, a year of turmoil in Afrikaner politics. In order to contest the election of 1999, Afrikaners had, in large numbers, followed their leaders in the New National Party and aligned themselves with historically English grouping, the Democratic Party, to form the Democratic Alliance. It was not long before cracks started showing, and in 2001 the Democratic Alliance broke up, and the leaders of the New National Party joined the majority African National Congress in an agreement of cooperation. In what at times became quite a heated debate, they addressed issues of how, with whom, and to what ends Afrikaners should pursue their political interests:

"Solidarity" is the clarion call, and then?

A great deal is made these days of unity in Afrikaner politics. . . . How do the political parties plan to use that sought-after unity to the benefit of the

Afrikaner? . . . [The] idea of launching some or other action along with other self-determined ethnic groups is out of date and unrealistic. The only party at the moment that has an achievable plan is the Freedom Front. This party has read the political milieu correctly, and focuses on interest politics. Through forming pressure groups, appeals to internationally recognized rights, influencing opinion leaders and insisting on the application of constitutional rights, they have achieved much more success than in futilely attempting to beat the ANC at the polls. (Eleanor Lombard, Melkbosstrand, 2 September)

No need for a new party for Afrikaners

How many more political parties do Afrikaners still want to establish in an attempt to regain their earlier political might? . . .

When will Afrikaners learn that the answer to their current problems doesn't lie in creating new political structures, but in using the existing political, cultural and labour organizations better and coordinating them properly? (Leon Louw, Cape Town, 8 July)

Forget the "leader," look to the bigger picture

I am sympathetic towards the Afrikaner's current search for an identity and meaning. I also understand his anxiety and fears about the future in an increasingly violent and corrupt society.

It is therefore gratifying to see that some Afrikaanses are starting to think more broadly about the future than in terms of suffocating, still exclusive, elitist own small white group. And when big words such as "quantum leap" and "paradigm shift" and even individuation and self-actualization are thrown in to applaud the new process, one starts to believe that the Afrikaner is beginning to grow up intellectually and spiritually.

But the hope is short-lived. . . . (Lourens van Schalkwyk, Kempton Park, 25 November)

All the contrariness is nauseating

It is nauseating, all this squabbling amongst Afrikaners. The devil knows, everything is fought about, argued about, squabbled about. . . . The old joke says that if two Brits get together they establish a club, if two Jews get

together, they establish a company, if two Afrikaners get together, they disestablish. (Maritha Kruger, Lydenburg, 19 July)

The intensity of the discursive work being undertaken by Afrikaner *white talk* by comparison with the (relatively) restrained discourse of English-speaking *white talk* also underscores the difference in their function in relation to the international centres of power. For English South Africans *white talk* in many ways serves a maintenance function, attempting to keep the power dynamics operating within the country in equilibrium with the status quo operating outside the country's borders. Afrikaans *white talk*, by contrast, is engaged in a much more active and aggressive constitutive role (see Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 40): (de)(re)constructing a positionality for the Afrikaner in the new society from a position that is experienced as weak, in relation to both the African "other" and the English "other", whose brand of whiteness comes with a powerful global backing.

It is clearly risky to draw a direct correlation between political choices and cultural constructions. Nevertheless, historically, Afrikaners embraced ethnic political organization in order to overcome their collective disadvantage compared with English-speaking South Africans, and to maximize advantage over black Africans. In a group constituted so strongly around ethnicist ideology, the process of (re)drawing ethnic boundaries links into the party political process of consolidating interest blocs. The way in which Afrikaners negotiate the fate of their whiteness is integrally bound up in the outcomes of such processes. The final section of this chapter therefore aims to identify the strategies which Afrikaners are using to re-"narrativize the everyday lifeworld in and through processes of boundary formation" (Brah, 1996, p. 241).

Strategies for Re-suturing Afrikaner Whiteness

Afrikaner *white talk* in the letters to *Rapport* suggested, defended, attacked and generally offered different strategic options for re-suturing the white Afrikaner community within the power play of the evolving society. Many of the positionalities that are being developed through such discursive activity take on "non-pure" elements—intersectionality/hybridity—that Afrikanerdom attempted to exorcise in its past, exchanging purity and/or unity for securing a significant place in the future society and yet regaining a sense of "self." In some ways, it seems to be a choice of which way—onto which "other"—to project the hostile feelings of alienation that, for many, accompany the fall from power, or of which way to turn for alliances. The first option is

the “purest white” Afrikaner option, and emerged as being associated with the self-definition of “Boer.”

Strategy One: Quarantine Whiteness (“Boers”)

The most reactionary of the positionalities that Afrikaners are constructing resolutely hangs onto the notions of the organic volk, signified by a unity of language, race, culture and nation. This position remains doggedly in denial of any intersectionality in Afrikaner blood, social heritage, or psyche. The dynamic is prototypically white in that it attempts both to install the particular chosen group as the centre of humanness (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000, p. 54), as well as to “master and overcome all difference within its boundaries”(p. 55).²³ It still strives, despite radically changed political and historical circumstances, to create a “pure” subjectivity that is sanitized of all traces of (ever-proliferating) “others,” social and ideological, that could bring them down to “their” level. The politics of memory play a crucial role in reactivating historical anger. Ethnic and religious symbols are nostalgically (re)deployed as symbols of righteous struggle; resurrected and reinterpreted Afrikaner lore is the core discursive resource employed to re-energize a white Afrikanerness that keeps the dream alive:

Verwoerd’s policy was in good faith

It is to the credit of Dan Roodt of the Pro-Afrikaner Action Group that he takes apartheid head on, even if it lands him in the cross-fire. . . .

[I]n refusing to recognize apartheid as a crime against humanity, he is in the company of shrewd ex-president P.W. Botha, who also refused to take on guilt. . . .

I truly believe that Dr. H.F. Verwoerd had good intentions with apartheid and his controversial homeland policy, and that he strove for an outcome that would have satisfied the majority of the people of this country.

His idea was right. It did certainly lack a few adjustments, but it was just not meant to be that he would be able to realize his dream of proudly presenting to the world a rare showpiece.

I also believe that there was more to say in favour of apartheid than against it. I get the impression that more and more non-whites (anderskleuriges) are coming round to this point of view, too.

That is probably because in those days there was discipline, prosperity and work for everyone, in spite of international sanctions. (B. G. Peda, George, 6 May)

The central theme in this discursive formation is the plight of the white farmer. The quintessential victim and the absolute supremacist are revealed to be each other's shadow selves:

Pollux²⁴ and co. malign a crushed nation

Pollux writes that the realities of the New South Africa let the worst nightmares of the right wing sound like fairy tales. Does he suggest that the systematic slaughter of white farmers and their spouses without any fear of punishment is his idea of a democracy? Just as the "joiners" in the Second War of Freedom [South African War] participated in the war crimes of the British army in the Boer Republic, . . . Pollux and his "liberal" colleagues are participating in the vilification of a crushed nation. The Afrikaner is the Amalekite of the Boer. (Schalk Jacobsz, Johannesburg, 5 August)

In this highly exclusionary and incendiary discourse, the true Afrikaner is (yet again) at war. The lexicon reinscribes the South African war as a glorious, heroic and principled stand against the criminality of British imperialism, in which those Afrikaners who cooperated with the British played a particularly shameful role. The present is presented as mere repetition of the past, but now the primary enemy lines are redrawn to pit the faithful, the Boers, against those Afrikaners who desert the cause to cooperate with the inevitable. In constructing the present in this way, it becomes an opportunity for well-rehearsed emotional replay of fear and resentment: the script is set, only the actors have changed. Names like F.W. de Klerk, Marthinus Van Schalkwyk, Carl Niehaus and Van Zyl Slabbert are the objects of thinly disguised hatred, a tactic that exerts pressure on "ordinary" readers to choose sides.

A key question remains where such an anxious project will find a safe haven. The notion of a white Afrikaner homeland is still actively tilled (n=10) in this discursive soil in which images of the Great Trek and old Afrikaner heroes thrive.²⁵

Pioneers in Orania²⁶ show they have the right idea

After many visits to Orania in a number of years I cannot but take off my hat to a group of determined Afrikaners.

Here we have to do with a group of Afrikaners that are looking at the realities of South Africa honestly. And I emphasise the word "honestly."

If Afrikaners still think someone can come up with an instant solution, we've lost our way. We have to look again, honestly and directly at our situation.

What amazes one in Orania is the number of young faces that are proof, as far as I am concerned, that it is once again the young Afrikaner that is going to pull the wagon out of the ditch. . . . (Werner Pretorius, Bloemfontein, 4 November)

This discourse is an interesting contraction of the apartheid fantasy of creating a national dispensation that would universalize the Afrikaner's conception of an organic volk (Norval, 1996). The volk becomes very specifically particularized and geographically limited, isolated through self-declared incompatibility with the rest of the country, which is left to its own devices. The internal psychological stance of the exile in the face of real or potential persecution in one's own land is given outward, concrete expression.

Interestingly, the question of land restitution and "land grabs" did not feature in the discussions of the Boerevolk, except indirectly through some references to Zimbabwe. The subtext of resisting change is, however, very evident in this discursive formation, and various threats lurk barely beneath the not-so-subtle surface. These kinds of letters take the Boere resistance about as far into the public domain as it can go. The fantasy of reclaiming power over the whole country, as well as plans for dealing aggressively with Zimbabwe-type "land grabs," can safely be assumed to be versions of this discourse, but these could hardly be aired in a newspaper forum. As Reisigl and Wodak (2001) remind us, the more explicit racism becomes, the less frequently it appears in public spaces. This discursive construction of this positionality shades into discourses that can only operate underground.

Strategy Two: Repatriotize Whiteness ("AngloBoere/Pomfrikaners")

For those who do not choose self-inflicted exile within the borders of the country, there is always exile abroad. For many Afrikaners, living under a black government is simply incompatible with self-respecting Afrikanerness. These people hook into their earliest intersectionality with European stock—the ethnic hybridity the Afrikaner sought to deny through centuries of separation from the European continent, but which is now being reclaimed. The history of their Afrikaner ancestors' migration from Europe to Africa is

re-remembered as a just flight from persecutory political systems, a legitimate option for an ethnic group under threat (Van Rooyen, 2000, p. 135). The preference is for a kind of suicide of Afrikanerness, even in the land of the imperial enemy, if that has to be the cost:

Afrikaner history now in perspective

. . . I belong to the third generation of apartheid Afrikaners. We waved the flags commemorating our language, celebrated Republic Day exuberantly in song and formations, associated Dingaan's Day²⁷ with a red river and proudly learnt and played in our Voortrekker²⁸ and Volkspole²⁹ outfits. We were safely Christian Nationalist, living in a vacuum where no thought was required.

. . . . Breaking away [from Afrikaner apartheid baggage] is a slow, painful process of broken marriages, families, relationships, the severing of religious ties, feelings of guilt, loss of identity, searching, middle aged.

And now the fourth and fifth generations are overseas. Our tears flow at international airports and we wonder, through the pain of our loss: will I ever read Visser's "Snow White" or Ingrid Jonker's poetry to my grandchild in London?

In which language will I communicate our past, the collective Afrikaner story or our own unique family history, to them?

Which values will I leave behind? What will my legacy mean to their identity? In another land, and in another language? . . . (Ria Greaves, Grahamstown, 28 October)

It is clear that these Afrikaners are prepared to give up in another country what they absolutely would not give up in their own; but then their whiteness is not threatened there. Tellingly, the writer of the above letter predictably locates the cause of Afrikaner apartheid miscreance in the trauma of British cruelty in the South African War, and yet, seemingly without any sense of irony, constructs her children's choice to emigrate to England as the tragic, inevitable cost of political change in South Africa:

A few weeks ago I watched a television programme about the Boer War concentration camps, which confirmed my grandmother's accounts from

long ago. I could identify, I was shocked and heartbroken at the losses and the cruelty to women and children. . . .

Only now do I understand the tragic consequences of the Anglo-Boer war for the future generations. (Ria Greaves, Grahamstown, 28 October)

The well-developed discursive themes of the New South Africa, discussed in detail in the previous chapter, are highly energized, converting Afrikaner rejection of the new integrating society into the trope of the exile, fleeing from untenable circumstances in a hostile land. Sixty percent of emigrants cite crime as the main reason for their leaving the country (Van Rooyen, 2000, p. 72). Yet the decision is clearly at least partially the outcome of considerable prior psychological preparation, a preparation, it needs to be emphasized, that was taking place from a position of white supremacy. The peril of living under a prospective black government had been accepted lore in the white South African orientation long before they had experienced the conditions they now specify as driving them away. Van Rooyen³⁰ (2000) cites a survey conducted in 1989 at Stellenbosch university which indicated that 32% of Afrikaner students and 38% of English-speaking white students would emigrate if an African National Congress government came to power. Van Rooyen (2000) sums up the findings as follows:

Combining the two language groups, the survey suggested that one third of white students at South African universities would leave the country under a black government and that they had already made up their minds in 1989 when P.W. Botha was still president and an ANC government was a very remote possibility indeed . . . it appears that the relatively benign nature of the ANC rule has done little to halt the desire of educated whites to leave South Africa. (pp. 117-8)

Kressel (2002) notes that the language of atrocities perpetrated against the group, of persecution—actual and potentially escalating—is rife in aggressive discourses that are fuelled by projections of guilty expectations of revenge. It seems that something of such a dynamic may be operating in the activation of the exile trope: “tens of thousands who were driven out of their beloved country by crime, violence and fear, and who ultimately had to make a hard choice between emigration and living as a virtual prisoner of crime in the country of their birth” (Van Rooyen, 2000, p. 140). The following two letters illustrate the aggression against the new dispensation at work in constructing the “push” factors:

State must listen to this group of young people

Affirmative action in the workplace has become one of the most important issues in the New South Africa, especially amongst whites.

It is important for the government to open its ears to hear what a group of young people who call themselves Jeug On(Bpk)³¹ have to say.

They want to know, amongst other things, why they should have to pay for the "sins" of their fathers.

They maintain that white people are suffering most because of affirmative action, which is truly the case, and they regard it as simply another form of racial discrimination.

If Pres. Mbeki doesn't watch out, our country is going to lose these young people who will go and seek their salvation abroad. (Prof. Ernie Mocke, Pietersburg, 1 April)

Encourages his sons to get out

. . . Tim du Plessis sees a contradiction in those who believe, as I do, that what is currently happening in Zimbabwe is going to happen here, sooner or later. He writes that if you hold that view, "you cannot go on with a normal life." Yes, you can, if you have to. To be able to emigrate, you need either youth or money. I am too old to do that, and being old, it is not of much account what happens to me. If I go, I go. By contrast, for a long time now I have been encouraging my sons to emigrate as soon as possible, even though I will miss them terribly. The one has already left the country; the other is still finishing his graduate studies. He would love to stay, but thinks with his head, and knows that there is no future in this country for a white person. And by the way, not for the black man either, if one is looking for ironies. These days all the white people in Zimbabwe are old, across the board: all the young people have got out. Du Plessis perhaps hasn't noticed yet, but the same situation is rapidly developing here. . . . Anyone who thinks with his head can see that far from this being a contradiction or dilemma, it is all quite logical and makes perfect sense. (Dr. S Bruwer, Lynnwood Ridge, 9 September)

The threat of emigration is perceived to be one of the trump cards of white Afrikaner resistance. In the following letter, remaining in South Africa is portrayed as a favour to the new government, extended on conditional terms:

Farm murders: South Africans suffer just as much as the Americans

The distressing events in America have once again shown how vulnerable civilization is. . . .

[After the events of 11 September] the Americans are all talking about retribution and war. . . . In South Africa 1500 people were murdered, overwhelmingly white South Africans, a minority group of approximately 4,5 million people. . . .

A person doesn't want to compare disasters . . . but the differences make one's blood boil: the American government and all the citizens are in revolt about the events. . . .

How long is the South African public going to stand aside and look as the government plunges the country into embarrassment? How long are we going to just let the farm murders in our midst be? We are here because we want to be here, want to be part of the solution, and want to help build our country along with all the other South Africans. The government owes the South African public an explanation. (Frikkie van Niekerk, Potchefstroom, 23 August)

Those who have left the country form an Afrikaner diaspora, often establishing Afrikaner communities in their adopted countries, conducting special church services in Afrikaans, continuing to follow South African sport—rugby, particularly—and opening speciality food shops which sell traditional (white) South African foods (Van Rooyen, 2000). During 2001 a festival of Afrikaans culture, *Ukkasie*,³² was held in London in which many South African artists participated. Several letters commented on how much they had valued this opportunity to reconnect with their Afrikaner ethnic traditions:

The Volkspeler, particularly, provoked homesickness

I have been here in England for two years now, and I think the Ukkasie was a highlight of the year. . . .

I have a great appreciation for the Afrikaans cultural organizations that came over here.

I think it was fantastic to be able to have volkspele here.

It made one long for home and reminded one of where you came from.

It is probably normal that some of those who attended didn't like them, but they could have stayed away, just as I, for example, didn't go to Koos Kombuis.

To each his own.

I hope and trust that the Volkspele group will be there again next year.

(Nevill Boersma, UK, 12 August)

Some escapees maintain a sense of active connection through reading South African newspapers, and contributing letters to the editor (n=6). “Greetings from the Angloboers, or Pomfrikaners, call us what you will. A protea by any other name will still be as proud!” one such writer greets her “heartland.” Letters express homesickness, comment on events “back home,” offer advice from whiter shores, sometimes even gloat from their position of having exercised better judgment. The following letter also illustrates another feature of this *white talk*, namely to present the decision to leave the country in deracialized, and depoliticized terms. South Africans abroad construct themselves as having had to flee or else as having made a career choice, but are careful to write the racial factor out of their accounts.³³

Be man enough for the death penalty in SA

Herewith I am pleading to Pres. Thabo Mbeki to stand up and like a man bring back the death penalty in South Africa. . . . Dammit, man, it is pathetic that you people are doing nothing about the matter. The world around South Africa is pointing its finger and talking about the country because the government does nothing to the people responsible for all the murders.

Those of us who are outside the country because we are working here are ashamed to hear what people say and think about you people because you don't have the guts to bring back the death penalty. Stand up and wake up and pull yourselves together and do what you have to do. If you people want to rule the country then you must also know what needs to be done and what the public expects of you. (Worried South African, Michigan, United States, 16 December)

These unburnt bridges are not always equally valued by those who no longer regard the writers as authentic Afrikaners, but as people who have weakened the chances of Afrikaner "survival" at home:

Just shut up, mudslingers!

... The nerve of certain "South Africans" who sit abroad and throw mud about things that shouldn't be of any concern to them any more is unbelievable. You people who packed up your stuff out of expedience and now sit outside the country and criticize us here must realize that you don't have any say anymore about what happens in South Africa. You didn't have the courage to stay here and help work on change, because of your everlasting feeble excuse of "I can't bring up my children there!" Shame. There are plenty of other South Africans who are bringing up their children in our country, but we are the people who chose to stay behind and to try and make this country work. Not everything always goes right and sometimes things happen, but we don't sit in foreign places, complaining that we long for South Africa, while finding fault. If South Africa really is your "proud country," then come back and help us make it work. (Marius van Emmenes, Benoni, 23 August)

Strategy Three: Bolster Whiteness ("White South Africans")

Historical accounts of the consolidation of different ethnic groups into a fairly seamless white group are well documented (Allen, 1994; Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 1991, 1994). In the USA, the WASP group has been the high status group that has controlled access to the advantages of whiteness, and by whom aspirant groups of European origin have striven to be integrated, retaining ethnic allegiance more on a symbolic level than as a principle of separate organization (Waters, 1990). Shain (1994) has examined the struggle which South African Jews fought to become fully incorporated as part of the white South African nation.

Given the kind of profound alliance that is forged at the level of white racial identification, it is unsurprising that a sizeable proportion of Afrikaners presume there should be "natural" organizational alliance between all white South Africans. This view of the social and political landscape of South Africa has a long history, from the "smelter" policies of the old segregationist United Party of Jan Smuts, to the latter-day policies of the Nationalist government, the days of the "total onslaught." The

psychological path is well worn; the tropes that bind English and Afrikaans into a common front of privileged whites are well rehearsed. These Afrikaners find it least painful to reach into their white essentialism, locate and accentuate the intersectionality of a shared whiteness, while repressing, bracketing, or eliding other axes of Afrikaner differentiation. English-speaking South Africans, who can position themselves as not sharing the same disgraced political baggage and have historically tended to be held in higher social esteem through their international cultural currency, are perceived to be in a stronger political position to prevent the erosion of white advantage, whether of English or Afrikaans ethnicity.

Afrikaner party is a waste of time

. . . After 1994 Afrikaners lost all political power and therefore starting a new party is a waste of time. The ANC has demonstrated that it takes no notice whatsoever of minority groups or Afrikaner parties.

To oppose the excessive demographic power of the ANC, an effective opposition is needed. The DA is the only party that can do that. . . . History has shown that the Afrikaner has never been able to stand together. The time has now come for Afrikaners to stand together and throw their weight in with the DA. (Objective, Mpumalanga, 19 August)

The major trope in this discursive repertoire is the need for a strong, united opposition in the face of African political power, which is predictably constructed as inherently dangerous and corrupt, and needing to be stemmed. The strategic need is quite simply for greater numbers of “us” as opposed to “them.” From the point of view of an analysis of whiteness, this option is clearly the most transparently concerned with racial solidarity, though, as always, disavowals of racist motives abound to keep the writers in line with current needs of face-saving.

White Afrikaners are the victims yet again, as always

. . . Marthinus van Schalkwyk has betrayed us, the third generation of Nationalist Party supporters.

We would never have capitulated, never have considered an alliance with the ANC. To prevent that, we voted for him. It is shameful behaviour on the part of some of the leaders of the NNP. The same people who fought for you, will now vote you out.

The DA was not a white racist party as far as we are concerned, but the first sign of a uniting opposition. And as Van Schalkwyk knows, a government without a strong opposition is like a wagon without wheels or horses. It stagnates from corruption.

Therefore we, the betrayed, will remain on track (koersvas) and vote for Tony Leon who can keep his word.

We are also hoping that Leon will form a laager with the Freedom Front and Afrikaner Unity Movement because we still have faith in those leaders.

(M.W. Vermeulen, Lamberts Bay, 4 November)

The highly figurative language in the letter above yet again draws on symbols of the Great Trek, (“wagon without wheels or horses,” “remaining on track,” “forming a laager”). The English-speaking leader of the political alliance (Democratic Alliance) between the historically English (Democratic Party) and historically Afrikaans (New National Party) parties is ironically, but most significantly, represented as having the qualities of a reliable—even heroic—Voortrekker who will lead the white defence. The elision of old enmities between white ethnicities is thus effectively achieved through metaphor that depends upon a white essentialism. This writer, who disavows racist sentiment, calls for an even broader based, comprehensive white front, which should draw in right wing ethnic Afrikaners.

While more than half of Afrikaners supported the Democratic Alliance in the 1999 general election, the likelihood of such a united white front seems remote, however, judging from the responses of the right wingers to which Vermeulen refers:

This is the saving of Afrikaans

. . . Unfortunately there are still those that (very naively) continue to hope and pray that English-speaking South Africans will save them from their sorry plight.

Luckily some of us have passed this stage. Experience has taught us that true freedom does not lie in the hands of egotistical English-speaking South Africans. The solution must come from within the Afrikaans community, and for this we need searching minds and firm standpoints like those of Dan Roodt. Our days of groveling and begging are over. (F. G. Kotze, Stellenbosch, 6 May)

Fewer parties with new party

. . . [I] just want to say that there is absolutely no place for me and hundreds of thousands of other Afrikaners in the same party to which Helen Suzman and her likeminded liberals belong. (Johan Kriek, Pretoria, 26 August)

Equally, some Afrikaners refuse this axis as a basis for alignment for entirely different reasons:

DA boikot shows that it believes in apartheid

I believe that any reader will agree with me that racism is still experienced in our society. South Africa can still be characterized as a country deeply divided along our man-made racial lines.

The fact that the DA city council as well as the DA provincial council are boycotting the World Conference on Racism speaks volumes.

. . . The behaviour of the DA is not surprising. Any thinking person knows how this plastic party feels about the majority of our country's citizens, who also happen to be the people most victimized by racism.

. . . For decades South Africans have been divided by race as a consequence of the senseless policies of dictators, but we have one thing in common, and that is a shared history and future. . . .

I call on all South Africans who are serious about our country and its future to reject the DA's policies and to support the rest of the country in its struggle against racism. (Madeleine Brandt, Bellville, 26 August)

Rather a "better government" than a "better opposition"

. . . I think it is time that Louw and the rest of "our people" move away from the notion that all white people, whether they are ice-cold liberals or fiery right wingers, belong in the same party under the same banner. The DA was built on exactly that foundation of sand.

It is impossible for empowered English and Afrikaans speakers that agree with the New South Africa, but still have their own traditions and customs, to function in the same party with a liberal who despises tradition, culture and faith, and that differs on important matters of policy. The lesson to be learnt from the DA fiasco is that alliances between opposition parties on the basis of race will never work. (Cilliers Brink, Phalaborwa, 23 December)

Strategy Four: Embrace Semi-whiteness ("Afrikaanses")

The strategy to be discussed now has been managed as a subsection of the previous strategy, as well as of the last strategy, melanizing whiteness.

A dynamic that became clear very early on in democracy is that the bonds which tie the "other" stream of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans—the majority of the coloured people—to the white Afrikaners had not been completely severed, despite their having been poorly treated by those who were on the privileged side of the colour line.³⁴ The impact of being sutured as the "inbetween" group has made the bloc of "people dispossessed of histories, communities and ancestries under apartheid" (Grunebaum & Robins, 2001, p. 170), who were racialized into an homogenizing definition of coloured, highly vulnerable to manipulation from those essentialized racial groups positioned on "either side" of them.

The interstitial space, occupied by coloured people through the visibility of their bodies/bodies politic which carry the encounter between Europe and Africa (Hendricks, 2001, p. 35), has been "valued for its conferred advantages—gained because of an approximation to whiteness, yet despised for its association with "bastardization/hybridity. . . ." (Hendricks, p. 35). The tendency has been, therefore, for the community to emphasize a closer proximity to whiteness, as "constituting civilized and desirable culture" (Fields, 2001, p. 105), an emphasis that "in many families has been accompanied by a silencing of black African heritage that goes back so many generations that the current generation no longer has memories of this ancestry" (p. 107).³⁵ Because in South Africa black Africans have constituted a majority, whites have, at different times through different arrangements, reinforced the existence of a buffer identity (Hendricks, 2001), exploiting the tendency in coloured society to engage "in a constant battle to prove to whites that they were capable of living up to white standards and that, by virtue of this, they should receive the same kinds of rights and privileges" (Hendricks, 2001, p. 42).

An important strategy for white Afrikaners, therefore, has been to cast off the racial construction through which coloured South Africans have been relegated to the status of "other" and to embrace the intersection of culture, most particularly religion and language, that groups them with this population. The larger grouping of Afrikaans speakers, distinct from Afrikaners, is referred to as "Afrikaanses." Those who advocate this regard it as a self-evident union that should never have been torn asunder by the old

order. The mistake was to define Afrikaansness too narrowly, and to expel kith and kin so hurtfully.

Different vessels needed for this journey

. . . Afrikaners are still sailing in separate boats. White Afrikaners are in their boat hammered together out of bits of wreckage from the past. And then there are the other Afrikaners. We know, in our deepest selves, that we belong together. It is just that we don't quite trust each other yet. And then there is the important question: in whose boat will we undertake this journey? Or should we temporarily drop anchor to knock together a new boat? But first of all we need to lower our drawbridges for each other.
(Marthie Richter, Pretoria, 21 October)

The convergence between white and coloured Afrikaanses does not go without wry commentary from other letter writers, who point to it as a hedging tactic against closer identification with Africans:

Forget the "leader," look to the bigger picture

Like many Afrikaners, Marthie Richter (Rapport, 11 November) is leaderless, directionless, on her way to somewhere in a vaguely sensed future. She seeks urgently, albeit in a sexist manner, to a new Big Leader, who, like in the past, can be followed blindly. . . . Marthie's leader must be a man, because the True Afrikaner has been taught that only men may/can provide leadership. But as a consequence of the traumatic recent past he mustn't be white, and black is unthinkable, so off-white will do the thing nicely. (Lourens Van Schalwyk, Kempton Park, 25 November)

As a strategy, this process of building a larger Afrikaner nation has won considerable favour. De Klerk (2000), for example, advocates a broad-based "Afrikaans community" to replace the racially narrow "Afrikaner." He advises:

White Afrikaners are part of the variety of the Afrikaans community. . . . This Afrikaans community must be the definition for all mother tongue speakers of Afrikaans, as well as those second-language speakers that feel at home and identify with the Afrikaans way of life. . . . Race, religion and history, as well as social status, must not be a factor. White, brown, black, Moor, Greek and Mohammedan that want to be part of the Afrikaans

community, form the community. The hallmark of this community is then exactly its inclusivity, diversity, and variety. (De Klerk, 2000, pp. 88-89, my translation)

The extent to which black Africans who speak Afrikaans will buy into this vision still remains to be seen. In the meantime, there is no doubt that there is talent within the coloured community for *talking white*, even maintaining the minority ethnic spin:

He doesn't know which way to turn any more

I am now desperate and don't know which way to turn! We hear every day that we live in a democratic country and that each resident's culture, language, religion and such like will be protected.

Why are the citizens being kept on a string? My child may not, for example, be educated according to my beliefs (Christian), but must comply with what minister Kadar Asmal prescribes. . . .

How long will the minority allow Asmal to go on like this? . . . I am a brown man and if it goes on like this in our education system, I will also want to take my family out of this country. Luckily I will be able to afford it. . . .

We are afraid to send our children to school. . . . It doesn't worry Asmal, because he gets a fat salary every month while we parents live in fear because of the lack of discipline in the schools. This is not right. (Desperate Brown Man From Port Elizabeth, 22 July)

Strategy Five: Launder Whiteness ("Afrikaners")

The strategy discussed in this section involves bringing the volk together in a more tightly knit (white) Afrikaner front, which can take its place as a coherent entity within the community of South African groups. For this to happen the Afrikaners must stand together, and overcome the internal divisions "caused" by those who dilute the efficacy of the Afrikaner by reaching out to "other" identifications:

Conservatives remain important

Liberally inclined Afrikaners have been at it since the late sixties, diligently trying to rewrite the political scene. They still haven't been able to come up with an answer to the Afrikaner nations's right to existence in a multi-ethnic dynamic.

. . . The DA can offer the Afrikaner no guarantees. There is no place for a new party for liberal minded Afrikaners. . . .

The Afrikaner's solution certainly requires more expansive thinking, which can take on modern challenges. Above all, the Afrikaner must understand that divisiveness and loss of love for our "volk" is our biggest enemy. . . .

*Modern approaches that can bring the conservatives and liberals together will provide the solution. Any front that excludes conservative orientation from the outset, is born still. (Gysbert Kloppers, *Erasmia*, 8 July)*

The strategy is to consolidate a "core" of those most closely identified as Afrikaner, not as much to occupy a separate geographical area (though some certainly do subscribe to this as an aspiration), but to act as the fulcrum from which to leverage various intersectionalities without allowing them to split the ethnic group. Such a stake would allow Afrikaners to swivel in different directions, towards different groups, depending on the issues involved and how their interests are represented. Interestingly, for the letter writers who were positioning themselves in this way, the greatest threat to the "survival" of such a core ethnic group is still represented by the Anglo power bloc:

This is the saving of Afrikaans

I don't mind if Annie Gagiano regards English as a so-called African language, but then the speakers of that language must learn that British linguistic imperialism, just like enforced apartheid, belongs to the past.

If it weren't for the decency of the Afrikaner, our indigenous languages, of which Afrikaans is surely the most important, would have had no status at all today.

*A person just needs to look at the new English-speaking world to realize that cruel cultural genocide is still the order of the day. . . . (Dan Roodt, *Dainfer*, 6 May)*

An important strategic dimension that is built into this option is that the Afrikaners, by virtue of their intersectional position between their whiteness, through its accumulated material and social capital, and their Africanness, through historical positioning and acts of identification, can become the champions of all indigenous interests. To achieve this, the construction of all indigenous peoples as victims of imperialism is being cultivated.

Indeed, the excavation of the history of Afrikaner resistance to imperialism is a key component of this reassertion of Afrikaner value to the people of the country:

We are proud of Paul Kruger for taking on avaricious Britain in 1901.

(P. Erasmus, Kommetjie, 30 December)

At the same time, whiteness is as whiteness does—the rhetoric serves to bury the whiteness of the Afrikaner within anti-imperial discourse:

The Purpose of the Christian National Forum

... The purpose of the Forum is to bring Afrikaners together as an indigenous nation, taking into account the differences that exist on questions such as self-government and freedom.

From a position of unity and self-confidence, cooperation with other groups or indigenous nations can be sought. Problem areas such as safety, education and the economy can be discussed and debated in the interests of achieving ideals and for the benefit of all South Africans.

If the CNF were to consider going into an election on its own, it would indeed be a "a waste of time."

On the other hand to support the DA in the hope that it will pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the Afrikaners reflects of lack of insight. As a consequence of its membership, its leadership, and its liberal humanist policies, the DA, can, as opposition, bark in the interests of individual rights, but cannot and will not "fight back" on behalf of the Afrikaner. (M. Visagie, Pretoria, 26 August)

More than any of the other discursive formations being worked on, this is the most clearly an ethnicist "solution" to the Afrikaner's "problem."³⁶ In this approach the ethnic acquires political meaning in a conceptual framework of pluralism (Essed, 1991, p. 15), where culturally distinct groups secure their future "through constant negotiation with other groups within the overall political arena of the state" (Essed, 1991, p. 15, after Clay, 1989). Crucial to the discussion of how whiteness plays itself out in this scenario is the criticism often levelled against ethnicist discourse, namely, that power differences between groups are ignored, and that by "proclaiming the end of class and race groups" resistance against racism is delegitimized, and fundamental group conflict is denied. The existence of an ethnic or cultural hierarchical order is implicitly presupposed, but is

rendered invisible within the discourse. (See Essed, 1991, and Brah, 1996). Whiteness can be bracketed within the internal spaces of groupness.

The philosophy is to a large extent a laundered³⁷ version of apartheid ideology, which operated primarily around the organizing principle of organic ethnic groups rather than a segregation of “Europeans” and “Natives” understood as homogenous groupings, and sought “reunion” within Afrikanerdom rather than “fusion” with other whites (Norval, 1996). A major difference in the resignification of this notion of Afrikanerdom, however, is that it is rehabilitated into a means to deliver service to the indigenous African people, the discourses of the Afrikaner past are recycled into “discourses of reconciliation” (Wicomb, 2001, p. 168):

Afrikaners want to unite, stand together

Tony Leon's letter in which he mentions that there is no place for a white party deserves support. Simply being "white" will never again be a basis on which to form a party.

Nationalism as the cornerstone of political organization, by contrast, remains relevant.

There is however something that Tony Leon doesn't understand, and probably never will understand as a consequence of the temporary nature of his involvement in our lives. There is a growing desire amongst Afrikaners to unite, not necessarily to take over government, but to say, "Here we are, woe unto him that tries to ignore us, or belittle us, or trample on us."

The past is buried, the Afrikaner has shaken off a lot of the baggage of the past; where he wanted to, he tendered his apologies. A burning desire is detectable amongst Afrikaners to unite in an indestructible minority group that can play a constructive role in politics, and in all facets of society.

. . . To achieve this the Afrikaner will have to be as inclusive as possible. The old will have to include the new, and vice versa. In politics, even in minority politics, every vote counts. The bigger the unit, the greater the power.

One really wants to play a constructive role, this time, to mean something to one's nation. The Afrikaner has a future and anyone who denies this, can go and think again. . . . (Koos Botha, Pretoria, 15 July)

The mode of this strategy is therefore to build alliances, coalitions, pacts, cooperative agreements with other groups, all of which are still held at an arm's length. An array of initiatives was debated within the letters, all of which seek to establish the organizational format that would best accomplish this. The major trope in this discursive formation, unsurprisingly, is minority rights. A great deal of emphasis is laid on operationalizing widely accepted human and constitutional rights to maximum advantage, especially in the context of the opportunity afforded by the greater access and respectability the Afrikaner can muster in the international community since the demise of apartheid:

All Afrikaans parties have failed: Start again

. . . The desire for a modern party that can focus on the interests of the Afrikaner and that does not carry liabilities from the past is growing on the ground. Such a party must have the credibility to be able to form alliances with other ethnic groups that don't want to concentrate on the interests of the individual, as the liberals do, but want to campaign for the collective rights of ethnic groups and cultures of South Africa. (Cassie Aucamp, 8 July)

Afrikaans: A "calm need" is not enough

Recent history has shown that our constitution does not succeed in protecting the unique needs of every cultural sector of our society. . . .

The challenge now is to find ways to get publicity for this need and to get acknowledgement for it. Zimbabwe neglected to do this, and the shocking consequences are playing themselves out on our back veranda. . . .

When ways are found to express this need for proper minority rights in a respectable manner, both locally and internationally, there will be hope. . . .

(Willie Spies, Pretoria, 26 August)

The option to launder whiteness through ethnicity speaks to the feelings of vulnerability and fears of maltreatment, even retribution, that are linked to being a minority in racial terms. The option that folds whiteness into ethnic discourse without advertising it, appeals because it seems to offer a way of managing African nationalism by creating more equal power bases from which to cut (perhaps mutually beneficial) deals.

Strategy Six: Melanize Whiteness ("Afrikaan")

The final strategy is the least amenable to providing the means of perpetuating whiteness.

In 1999 Van Zyl Slabbert published a book entitled *Afrikaner Afrikaan*, in which he poses the question, "Can an Afrikaner be an African, or an African an Afrikaner?" (Slabbert, 1999, p. 81). For some Afrikaners resolving this seeming contradiction—given the past—is the strategy for rehabilitating Afrikanerness that most appeals. In some ways this is the mirror image of the *AngloBoere/Pomfrikaners* as it also operates on the intersectional axis of Europe—Africa, but makes the opposite choice. Whereas the AngloBoere reach into their generic European whiteness, these Afrikaners choose to identify more closely with their Africanness.

Strives to be a genuine Afrikaan

. . . I see again what a unique combination of Euro- and Afro-centrism each one of us is. . . . I am dedicated to my European heritage through my love of serious music. On the other hand, there is my African orientation and loyalty to South African nation building projects. There I learnt to dance with the Africans of Stanza Bopape (a squatter camp east of Pretoria) in spontaneous expression of the boisterous joy of the gift of life, African rhythms and the spirit of African primitivism, deep into the night, singing and dancing till I collapsed. This is the sort of interaction and African dynamic that is to be recommended for an irrevocable rebirth into bone and marrow Afrikaan-ness. (Marthie Richter, Pretoria, 30 December)

It is clear from the description that this writer is assuming some of the locality of "otherness"; this is the *not-Boer*, for whom "amelioration is achieved through the melanization of the Afrikaner" (Wicomb, 2001, p. 177).

In these letters, the strategy was most in evidence after the New National Party leaders had broken with the Democratic Alliance and formed an agreement with the African National Congress, and readers had to grapple with whether or not to follow:

The embryo of a true South African nation

The current agreement between the NNP and the ANC prefigures the embryo of a true South African nation.

New perceptions must be created, and that can only happen through visible and continuous demonstrations of goodwill and humane acceptance of each other's good faith. . . .

It is not necessary for us to be anxious and sulky and to sit and complain in a corner; we can participate with pride and dedication in the weal and the woe of our fatherland, as legitimate citizens.

The scattered and divided "soul" of all South Africans now has the opportunity to come home. To be part, with dignity and mutual respect, of this new pact that is not just a political agreement between the NNP and the ANC, but much rather the symbolic uniting and homecoming of all who regard South Africa and Africa as their only and permanent home. (Johan Killian, Gauteng, 9 December)

As with all the strategies identified in this chapter, the past is actively reclaimed and perspectivized to support the vision of a different Afrikaner community. In the two letters below counter-examples to the often-invoked, narrow Afrikaner nationalism are foregrounded, and the Voortrekker trope is translated into a new mythology of opportunity:

The future of Afrikaans better served by [a government of national]unity . . . the split in the DA is surely not a surprise . . . the new alliance which brings centralist whites and blacks together has been on the cards for some time. . . .

People are conveniently forgetting that the most constructive period in the Old South Africa was the time of coalition between Hertzog and Smuts, when, for all practical purposes, there was no opposition. Even in the old Zuid-Afrikaanse Republic, General Joubert opposed President Kruger in each election, but after the election would be a loyal commander-general in Kruger's government. . . . (L.K. Joubert, Volksrust, 11 November)

New pioneers take the lead once again

It was tragic that last Sunday ten letters were published dealing with the political future of the Afrikaner, and all of them were from right-wingers. . . . I feel ashamed. Surely those hardliners are not representative of the Afrikaner and/or Afrikaanses. The nation in which my roots are, does not

hide away in holes, and has no desire to return to an old order, and is not afraid of the future. The Afrikaners from whose home I come, were pioneers. They are again the ones who are in the forefront of making South Africa a winning society. . . .

These people who are up to petty political games are not my people. I know Afrikaners from all parties, and they don't let politics determine who they are. They are people who are now more relevant than they ever were in the old South Africa.

*Don't let a few lost souls get to determine the path in the letters columns.
(Pieter van Pletzen, Western Cape, 22 July)*

This strategy rewrites the meaning of Afrikanerness most radically, divesting it of a great deal of the negative baggage it acquired through racial oppression and ethnic manipulation. The correspondence in the letters showed that not all those who were taking this direction necessarily were aligning themselves with the dominant party, but that being an *Afrikaan* still left one with legitimate political choices. The writer below envisions an integrated political opposition, not based on sectional race or ethnic interest, which could achieve the goal of curbing the development of an overwhelming power bloc in government.

Alliance will split before the election

. . . A rosy future is on the cards for South Africa if centralist whites and blacks can unite and form a strong opposition. It will bring about a stronger economy and a better life for all the people of South Africa. (Cilliers Brink, Phalaborwa, 16 August)

It would be difficult to find a better example of what it must mean for Afrikaners to deconstruct their whiteness through inserting new meanings into the designation.

The politics behind the historically Afrikaans Universities

. . . Afrikaners are recognized as an integrated part of South African society, and as the first Freedom Fighters, against the British regime. . . . They must thus become part of the freedom movement's historical task, namely to free all South Africa, not just from apartheid, but from poverty and poor social conditions, too.

The Freedom Charter accepts that Afrikaners and Afrikaanses are part of the what is called a national minority, and that they can exercise their language, religion, culture, and communal life freely, but not at the cost of other groups, national unity, or on the basis of racial exclusion.

Expression of Afrikaansness therefore does not mean excluding others, but that Afrikaners should share their knowledge, skill and prosperity with everyone. . . . (Albert Venter, Rand Afrikaans University, 20 May)

As whiteness is a skilled and wily shiftshaper, and because this analysis is concerned with resistant discourse, it needs to be said that it would be naive to think that some Afrikaners would not find a way to use such a positionality to reinscribe some guarantees of privilege, effacing and disguising their whiteness through keeping such close company with blackness, manipulating rights/entitlement by being regarded as a loyal *Afrikaan*. In the letters I analysed, I did not encounter any clear-cut examples of this, although perhaps the following letter indicates how the discourse of birthright could elide into the language of demanding special deals, yet again:

Zim-syndrome is fatal

. . . It has become politically correct to be a prophet of doom. The political apathy amongst so many of our people is fatal. . . . Simple survival must give way to vocation. Sorry, I'm not trekking away from here. This is the country of my roots, my hopes, my future, and most important of all, my responsibility. (Cassie Aucamp, Cape Town, 9 September)

Conclusion

The analysis of letters to *Rapport* has revealed a highly contested field as Afrikaners attempt to re-suture themselves, and their whiteness, into the post-apartheid realities of the country. In doing this, Afrikaners are rearticulating their ethnicist ideology within the framework of the liberal democracy that the constitution guarantees; this is not impossible, but as the analysis has shown, does require compromises to the assumptions of exclusivity and purity that have informed Afrikaner nationalist mythology. Other than for the *Boere's* quest for a return to some originary paradise—psychological and geographical—of *Boeredom*, all of the options that were being discursively constructed in 2001 require some measure of deconstruction of the earlier articulations of Afrikanerdom.

For *white talk* the rhetorical challenge is manifold. It has to present these options as meeting the psychological needs of Afrikaners for continuity and/or reconstruction of selfhood and self-esteem, a challenge that is largely accomplished through reframing the historical lore of the Afrikaner nation. In relation to the rest of South Africa, this *white talk* has to persuade both Afrikaners and the population as a whole that the option is functional and even desirable. With apartheid ideology as the “other” of the New South African vision, the rhetoric has to provide a complexion that testifies to “rehabilitation” of blatant racist organizing. As Wicomb (2001) puts it:

Commitment to the demise of apartheid does not mean an abandonment of ethnic tags, but it does . . . require a disaffiliation from whiteness.

(p. 180)

At the same time, being *white talk*, it also has the objective of preserving as many of the ethnic entitlements gained through the apartheid era as possible, and to continue—even if need be through a vigorous construction of the victim position—a special dispensation for Afrikaner ethnic issues so that Afrikaners are not treated just like any other group in terms of such matters as language, minority group rights, and land.

This chapter has further explored not only the co-construction of two whitenesses through mutual processes of “othering,” but has also demonstrated that the variation between these whitenesses is related to their different positioning in relation to the global centres of whiteness. Unlike the whiteness of English-speaking South Africans, which is intimately linked ideologically to Anglo whiteness globally, and gains a great deal of its power through that hegemony, Afrikaner whiteness is more isolated, characterized by greater self-preoccupation, and largely shaped by the experienced need of defending its ethnic contours against the powerful—and therefore unmarked—ethnicity of the Anglo whiteness. Whereas, relatively speaking, for English-speaking South Africans who *talk white* the “problems” of the New South Africa are not seen to affect the fundamental ideology which underpins their sense of their white “self,” for Afrikaners these very ideological underpinnings are in such trouble that even their *white talk* is involved in exacting reconstructions of Afrikanerness. In some ways this may put Afrikaners at an advantage in terms of adjustment, as greater introspection and less certainty may lead to greater growth. Their resistant whiteness also inclines them to be less committed to a Eurocentric framework, so that they may find it easier to throw their weight behind such national rallying calls as the *African Renaissance*. What is also

apparent, however, is that the extent to which Afrikaners are able to take up the position in the society which they feel is rightfully theirs will depend on the honesty and earnestness with which this reconstruction is done—and this, in turn, involves finally coming to terms with the pain of their suffering at the hands of British imperialism in ways that move them beyond the complex of eternal victim/abuser. The last word goes to one of their prominent own:

Can we not work towards an outcome where the thought of a racist Afrikaner is a contradiction in terms rather than a stereotype? (Slabbert, 1999, p. 84-5)

NOTES

1. According to A. Marx (1998)

Afrikaners . . . represented the greatest threat to colonial rule. . . . [I]n South Africa the late-arriving British encountered the Dutch descendants who had taken root. The British incursion was not welcomed by the fiercely independent Afrikaners, who particularly resented policies anglicizing their education. Early British reforms in the treatment of Africans, who had by then been long subordinated under Dutch rule, further aggravated relations. . . . [The conflict between the British and the Afrikaners] was the major legacy of the colonial period in South Africa. (pp. 37, 39)

2. For an analysis of similar dynamics in the racialization of the Irish, see (Hickman & Walter, 1995), and for other partially racialized white groups in the United States, see Ignatiev (1995) Roediger, (1991, 1994).
3. This kind of “intra-white” rivalry for who “owns” real whiteness is of course not unique to the South African context. In fact, Seshadri-Crooks (2000) argues that the origin of racial practice was not in the black-white dichotomy of the colonial encounter, but in “the race to approximate and appropriate whiteness” within Europe, itself. “The dichotomy of self and other is within Whiteness in the competition over who properly possesses Whiteness, or sovereign humanness” (p. 55).
4. Annie Gagiano comments in an interview with Goodwin and Schiff that if you analyse Afrikaner identity it is “full of a great deal of hogwash. Powerful Afrikaners running the show and at the same time having this romantic notion of being the underdogs.” (Goodwin & Schiff, 1995, p. 47)
5. The term *Creole* is used inconsistently, but conventionally a definition includes some, or most, of the following features: European lineage within the context of colonial settlement, some mixed blood, the preservation of European culture, a mother tongue formed from the contact of a European language with local language(s). Erasmus (2001a) following Glissant (1997; 1998) argues for a post-colonial/post-modern non-biological understanding of Creole that emphasizes cultural creativity through “entanglements.” By her reading, *creolization* applies only to the most marginalized of groups, and therefore cannot apply to Afrikaners by virtue of their having had the privileges of whiteness. These arguments are in the same

NOTES (cont.)

domain of discourse, and closely parallel, the arguments around the status of diaspora, as discussed in Chapter Two.

6. Commenting on the conclusion of Heese (1971) that 7% of the “blood units” of the Afrikaner population has been contributed by “nonwhite” genes, Fredrickson concludes: “Whether or not the precise proportion is accurate substantial infiltration of the white population by those of non-European origin obviously occurred, contrary to the myth of Afrikaner race purity that later developed.” (p. 119)

7. Literally: that which is the “nation’s” own, which cannot be alienated.

8 As studies such as those of Essed (1991) demonstrate, the racial and ethnic are totally rolled into each other in “normal” whiteness too, but the dominance of the cultural Euro-American positionality from which it is theorized makes this fact less visible, and as the analysis in the previous chapter of the role of English and other cultural markers in the dominant white discourse in the country has shown. In the case of a subaltern whiteness the interwoven nature of racism and ethnicism is more visible to the “normal” white gaze. The salient factor is visibility/invisibility, not absence/presence.

9 Herman Giliomee (2001) argues that the platform for the nationalist government which came into power in 1948 was not as much racial apartheid as the Afrikaner nationalist movement, which advocated a republican drive to replace the symbols of British ascendancy. Apartheid was folded into this republican agenda, and was intended to ensure the survival of the Afrikaner, as well as focus on the “rehabilitation of the subordinate racial communities than was the case under the pre-1948 segregation order” (p. 2).

According to Giliomee, security, rather than race, per se, was what obsessed those who implemented the racial policy of apartheid, in the face of the declining power of white European power globally (p. 6). For this reason, it was viewed as essential not only that whites should retain supremacy, but that the *correct group* of whites should remain supreme (p. 12). Even the infamous apartheid education system, Giliomee maintains, was conceived not so much to arrest the modernization of Africans as their anglicization (p. 21). My argument, however, is that if whiteness is not as visible in this discourse, it is because it is completely and implicitly assumed to be part of the ethnicity, operating as a core notion of the preferred way of being human. It would be a mistake to think that it is not active. Also see Schönteich and Boshoff (2003).

10. For example, Norval quotes Solly Sachs, General Secretary of the Garment Workers’ Union, as saying that young, poor Afrikaner women garment workers lived in conditions “hardly equalled by the worst slums in the world,” and that these conditions existed adjacent to some of the most affluent and ostentatious suburbs in the cities. (1996, pp. 23, 313)

11. De Klerk occupied various positions in the course of his active career: editor of the *Transvaler*, of *Rapport*, an honorary professor at the Rand Afrikaans University, a member of the Broederbond, a consultant and a psychologist. (Louw, 2001)

12. Louw summarizes the life’s work of De Klerk’s generation as follows:

The motive: Resentment against English imperialism and oppression

The ideal: A state system in which the Afrikaner would finally be at rest

NOTES (cont.)

The product: A racist state in which hatred of the British in absolute terms was projected onto black people and your children. (Louw, 2001, p. 9, my translation)

13. Most notably Pieter Fourie's play, produced by Marthinus Basson for the *Aardklop* arts festival at Potchefstroom in September 2000. It was received with standing ovations at every performance (Louw, 2001, p 25).

14. http://www.news24.com/Rapport/Content_display/RapportWie_Is_Ons_Index/ accessed 01/10/02

15. <http://www.naspers.com/cgi/nph-bwccgis/RAPPORT/rapport/alg/storie/DDW?W%3DKAT>.

Downloaded on 01/10/02.

16. In a sample of urban white Afrikaners, for example, Korf and Malan found high levels of concern for the ongoing well-being of the Afrikaners as an ethnic group, a concern which correlated with perceptions that Afrikaners were negatively perceived by other groups (Korf & Malan, 2002).

17. An encampment made by a circle of ox-wagons, also used by the Afrikaners to provide protection from attacks by the indigenous people during the Great Trek. The Afrikaner volk has often been characterized as having a "laager mentality," signifying a defensive and entrenched or narrow-minded viewpoint.

18. It is necessary to remember the illegitimate premises that underpinned the old self-construction, and of the need for such a self to be deconstructed. This is the trouble with the analysis of the Boetman debate by Louw and De Lange (2001). While they rightly identify the problem as "loss of self" they fail to fully problematize the premises of special entitlement that informed the "self" in the first place.

19. A reference to a controversial proposal by the mayor of Cape Town that two of the oldest and best-known streets in Cape Town be renamed after ex-presidents Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk.

20. The strategic value of recreating the perpetrator as victim has not been lost in other perpetrator communities. Reisigl and Wodak (2001) comment on a dynamic in post-war Austria, whereby an "exculpating, self-victimizing" identity was adopted even by anti-semites to create a new community of victims, within which Jews were just victims like everybody else. This policy "trivialised, minimised or concealed" the question of reparations for four decades (p. 93).

21. In her Lacanian analysis of race, Seshadri-Crooks (2000) argues that "it is the notion of a particular language and language groups as expressive of the 'genius' of particular geographically localized peoples that is at the foundation of race thinking" and that without the linguistic basis, race could never obtain the "folk" consistency that it continues to have (p. 50).

22. Abbreviation for "Dominee," Afrikaans for Reverend.

23. Seshadri-Crooks (2000) characterizes the function of whiteness as "a signifier that not only inaugurates a system of differences, but one that attempts to signify the impossible, a core notion of humanness, or being itself . . ." (p. 54).

24. A regular political column in Rapport.

25. Van Rooyen (2000) comments that "Migrating away from political dispensations that do not appeal to them is not a new phenomenon to Afrikaners. As with their present-day descendants, the early Afrikaners

NOTES (cont.)

commenced the Great Trek of the 1830s because they resented the interference of British colonial government . . . it is not surprising that even today the concept of “trekking away” from what they perceive as threats to their nationhood forms part of the Afrikaner philosophy. . . (p. 15).

26. An Afrikaner “homeland” that is inhabited only by white Afrikaners. The expansion of this homeland is still official policy of some of the Afrikaner political parties, most notably the Freedom Front.

27. “Dingaan’s Day” (as it was originally known) celebrated the defeat of the Zulus by the Afrikaner trekkers at the “Battle of Blood River” (1936). The event was a founding narrative of Afrikaner Nationalism. The Voortrekkers made a covenant with God to hallow the day (16 December) if they won the battle. They did, and some Afrikaners still celebrate the Day of the Covenant. The public holiday has been retained, but renamed the Day of Reconciliation to capture the conflicted history, and the contested meanings it has for people in the New South Africa.

28. An Afrikaner version of the Boy Scouts movement, which was based on the mythology of the Great Trek, and was intended to instill the values of Afrikaner Nationalism in the youth.

29. Traditional Afrikaner folk dancing.

30. Van Rooyen’s (2000) book, *The New Great Trek*, would certainly qualify as what Geertz (1983) has called “an ethnography of witchcraft written by a witch.” It unself-reflexively shares the assumptions he purports to be analysing, and reproduces all the tropes of *white talk* without problematization. By way of illustration: his introduction states his intentions as follows:

Apart from the loss of skills that South Africa can ill afford, that people are leaving the country in large numbers is an indictment of the government’s inability to control the social forces that accompany the transformation process, and indeed it questions the viability of the democratic state structure. With South Africa well into the Mbeki era, it is obvious that they actually threaten the success of transformation, as the hopes and confidence of South Africans are slowly being strangled by an anarchic society with unacceptably high levels of crime and corruption, declining standards of healthcare, education and morality, growing authoritarianism and an obsession with race. (p. xiii)

31. Youth Un(Ltd).

32. A play on *okkasie* (occasion) and UK.

33. Between 65% and 75% of South African emigrants settle in the five most popular countries, namely, the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Van Rooyen, 2000, p. 50). Van Rooyen cites the journalist Charlotte Bauer as follows: “South Africans are drawn to Australia for many reasons, not least because it offers all the comforts of home—outdoor living, a suburban temperament and cold beer—*without the blacks*” (pp. 141-2).

34. The short discussion which follows does not in any way lay claim to capturing the complexities of the debates on coloured identity(ies). It merely seeks to flag a place of identification that makes the alliance discussed here possible.

NOTES (cont.)

35. Also see Soudien (2001) for an account of how Africa has been displaced within the non-racial discourse of District Six.

36. According to Brah (1996) "ethnicism defines the experience of racialized groups primarily in 'culturalist' terms: that is, it posits 'ethnic difference' as the primary modality around which social life is constituted and experienced. Cultural needs are defined largely as independent of other social experiences centred around class, gender, racism or sexuality. . . . [Ethnicist discourses] often fail to address the relationship between 'difference' and the social relations of power in which it may be inscribed." (pp. 99-100).

37. I am borrowing this term, as well as *melanize* from Wicomb (2001).

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CONCLUSION:

WHAT HAPPENS TO WHITENESS, THEN?

It changes its strategies.

If this dissertation attests to nothing else, it is the tenacity of whiteness. The privileged subject positions, the identities formed in those social locations, do not easily deconstruct themselves or allow themselves to be deconstructed. Although the *white talk* analysed in the preceding pages is only one discursive formation attempting to interpellate white subjectivities, its pervasiveness, rhetorical vigour and strategic versatility bear testimony to the unwillingness of whiteness to let go. Deep-seated convictions of entitlement for those of European descent still provide the ideological bearings and invigorating energy for the resistant white bloc in the discursive struggle that characterizes this highly political moment in the history of South Africa. Whiteness, it is clear, does not easily give up; rather, it realigns, re-organizes, reframes—reflecting, sadly, the tenacity of race as a way of organizing the social not only within this country, but also within the global project that operates across continents.

Its powerful dominance, its establishment, its prevalence, make whiteness extremely difficult to pin down; those who identify its operations are likely to be branded as oversensitive at best, but more likely as paranoid, or politically too radical to be taken seriously. The analysis in this dissertation goes some way towards showing how

much the new order in South Africa has to overcome, just how difficult it will be to establish a society that is post-colonial not only in terms of formal political structures, but in lived reality—particularly in a context where those who carry (on) the colonial unconscious are less and less willing to acknowledge that conquest and racial subordination have structured their positioning within the country for close on four centuries.¹

The past decade, though politically peaceful in the main, has nevertheless been a period of intense ideological struggle in post-apartheid South Africa. The emerging centres of power participated in the struggle against colonization and white overlordship in Africa. They therefore prioritize the interests of those who were previously the oppressed, and attempt to rearticulate the country's vision, productive capacity, and creative energy in ways that directly conflict with the perpetuation of whiteness. White South Africa, though numerically not sizeable, still continues to have a disproportionate influence, and it is therefore highly significant how they respond to the ideological choices that the New South Africa has opened up for them. The constitution of social groupings, the way they are constructed relative to each other, the overall social imaginary—these are fields that are open to rearticulation in important ways, and what form this takes depends on the subject positions which citizens adopt.

White talk has been shown to be one discourse competing within the antagonistic struggle between the different discursive formations that seek to fix subject positions for white South Africans. Because this is essentially a moment of dislocation in South African history (Norval, 1994b, 1996; Steyn, 2001b; Thornton, 1996), key signifiers, which previously were pegged down by the system (though clearly were challenged within the subaltern population) are open to different signification. *White talk* attempts to prevent the contingency of certain key signifiers from being revealed, and, optimally, to retain the signification from the past seamlessly, or, as second choice, to refix signifiers so that, in real terms, as little changes as possible. The chapters of this dissertation have teased out the way in which *white talk* attempts to secure whiteness through articulating what Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau, 1994; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) term nodal points, or floating signifiers, that are crucial to national reconstruction, signifiers such as *transition, reconciliation, the New South Africa, Africa, Afrikaner, the past, the future, democracy, rights*. These are linked in chains of meaning to other signifiers, which *white talk* similarly attempts to fix—*crime, affirmative action, Third World, profitability, civilization, standards, non-racialism, African Renaissance*. The discursive fabric thus

woven wraps up the boundaries of the white population and maintains their advantageous position, their whiteness.

In itself, illustrating yet again the tenacity of whiteness is not exactly a groundbreaking finding; indeed the attempt to expose and attenuate its durability is exactly the reason for the emergence of Whiteness Studies. The significance of how whiteness hangs in, and on, into the post-apartheid South African era lies in showing how whiteness reacts when it is in a (perceived) weak position. What emerges is that whiteness shifts from being controlling to being manipulative, and that in the South African context, this is achieved primarily through projecting a diasporic template onto its positioning. The activation of a diasporic dimension is entirely consistent with the experience of loss of power; diasporic discourses are characteristically the weapons of the (relatively) weak (Clifford, 1994, p. 307).

Since the change in political regime, whites in South Africa do indeed experience their position, as a group, to be weak in relation to the immediate centres of state power. Their (numerical) minority status in the past was more than compensated for by (a) their control of the state apparatuses, which secured their dominance in every aspect of the society, including the economy, and (b) the fact that power was in the hands of people who were, whatever their flaws, perceived to be part of the greater dominion of the West. By the “unexpected and contingent results of lived experience” (Coombes & Brah, 2000) they have suddenly found themselves converted from a settled stronghold into a diaspora. Constitutional democracy has unseated their monopoly on overt power, economic guarantees, and psychological security. Now that the nation state no longer sees itself as exceptional to, and separate from, the rest of Africa, white South Africans do not easily identify with the nation-state or its objectives. “Their” interests are no longer prioritized. It emerges from the analysis that *white-talkers* fear being drawn into a common destiny with the dominant group. They experience a strong need to maintain a separate identity; to be set apart, to be seen to have a special role and place by virtue of having origins and ties—and skills that are saleable—elsewhere. The analysis in chapter five suggests that as long as they adopt this attitude, black South Africans in turn are also inclined to construct them as an “unassimilable minority,” not “real” Africans. This visible minority status is the first step in creating a diasporic moment.

The development of a diasporic inflection in the subjectivity of white South Africa is also the moment of resistance to the ideological centres of the state. *White-talkers* wish to keep the boundaries of privilege secure, and to do that they need to

subvert the dominant flow of post-apartheid sentiment and policy. This resistant stance within the nation state is another important step in the creation of a diasporic consciousness (Tölölyan, 1991, 1996). The diasporic element, in other words, attempts to ensure that while white South Africans will not be disqualified from being national players, they can play by special rules. As Clifford (1994) reminds us, it is in the nature of diaspora to traverse and subvert the nation state; the moment of diaspora may be reconstituted at the moment a group feels the desire or need to enter into a subversive relationship with state: "The nation state cannot assimilate groups that maintain important allegiances and practical connections to a homeland or a dispersed community located elsewhere" (p. 307).

Moreover, it is apparent that as they constitute themselves as diasporic, *white-talkers* assiduously construct the "calamitous" content that often characterizes diasporic discourse. The refrains of hardship, victimization, discrimination, lack of recognition and opportunity, run through the representative texts presented here. White South Africans, despite their minority status, did not construct themselves in this manner before. The point is neatly illustrated, in other words, that the self-positioning as diasporic is always, at least in part, a political act. Safran (1991) points out that a diasporic consciousness is often created "after the fact" (p. 92). There is a need, now, to change the way white South Africa is seen: from a small group of oppressing, white supremacists, to a misunderstood, suffering, victimized, and even endangered minority group in an unsafe location. This feeling-world acts to justify an unwillingness to engage fully with the reconstruction of the society, to become a part, emotionally, of the new nation being forged in the embers of the old. It rationalizes an oppositional stance and forecloses the necessity to examine the real causes of disaffection with the new society—causes which have their psychological origins in an unexamined racist, colonial unconscious. On the contrary, subversion of the national project becomes imbued with moral righteousness. In other words, (re)framing *white-talking* subjectivity in this way accomplishes repair work; bringing out the diasporic layers to white history in Africa makes sense in the circumstances as it provides considerable leverage. The state must constantly bear in mind the sensibilities of those who hold a good measure of the means to facilitate development, but whose loyalties are not secure: if events move them too far out of their comfort zone, they can transfer allegiance totally.

Of course, *white talk* is quite correct to reframe the position of whiteness, as distinct from white people, as precarious. The policies, attitudes, assumptions and

expectations of whiteness do, in reality, represent that which the new order defines itself against. Even though it may not actually wish to recreate the apartheid system, ideologically *white talk* belongs to a world that is essentially pre-transition; it is pre-eminently a set of discursive practices that are restorative in impetus, harbouring a desire to bring back the certainties of a world that centred whiteness, in which the others *were* the “other.” Ballard (2002) has shown how white South Africans experience the racial mixing of previously whites-only suburbs as troubling because “the stranger” has come to settle in their midst. This is undoubtedly true at the level of smaller geographical locations, the immediate vicinities in which people live and work. What this dissertation has shown, however, is that in the broader politics of location, *white-talking* South Africans are positioning *themselves* as the outsiders, as dislocated souls who find themselves in a foreign land, the “strangers within the gates” (Safran, 1991, p. 92). The country has become irredeemably alien; it is no longer home.

Hankering after a home that is no longer accessible is kernel to the constellation of diasporic experience, and recognizing the vectors of the nostalgic dynamic in this case helps to distinguish the particular diasporic consciousness under examination. Primarily, this is a diaspora of the Old South Africa, a fact recognized with varying degrees of consciousness and honesty by the authors of the many excerpts presented in this dissertation. To the extent that whites continue to hold on to the worldview that informed the old privileged order, they experience themselves as the remnants of a lost country, a home from which they have been debarred. The mindset is perhaps analogous to the dethroned royalty of erstwhile kingdoms of Eastern Europe who roam the world as the dispossessed of an order that legitimately reflected their positioning, worth and entitlement, while they wait for the day when the monarchy will be reinstated. While such typical diasporic fantasies of return, of the restoration of the lost order, are present in the texts analysed here, the more frequent fantasy is that essential aspects of the old order of whiteness can still be preserved, or reconfigured in the new society so that not too much will be sacrificed.

The mode and degree of displacement, and the nature and fervour of the concomitant fantasy of restoration, are very much dependent on how individuals and groups are positioned within white South Africa. The post-structuralist insight that all social positions and identities are constructed through discourse, and indeed in contradistinction from other discursive constructions, has been central to the argument of this dissertation. The *white talk* that positions white South Africans in the way described

gains its meaning primarily in antagonistic struggle with discourses emanating from black African centres of power. But crucially, *white talk*, and the subjectivities it enables, is also constructed in relation to other discourses within the terrain of whiteness both locally, and abroad.

This work has argued that one cannot understand whiteness in South Africa unless one recognizes the role of the co-construction of two competing “brands” of whitenesses, each of which uses the other as a foil, and is shaped differently by virtue of a differing position in relation to global Anglo whiteness. As had been shown, the greater measure of creolization of Afrikaner whiteness makes the analysis in terms of a diasporic framework more complex. English-speaking South Africans, who never felt as disconnected from their European tribe, experience themselves more as “out on a limb,” removed from the mainlands of whiteness. Afrikaners, by contrast, tend to construct selves as stranded, exiled. While neither construction is exclusive of the other, but rather a matter of differing emphases, the *white talk* typical of English-speaking South Africans tends to construct subjectivities which stress the vector connecting white South Africans to current international whitenesses, whereas for Afrikaans *white-talkers* the primary sense is of being a diaspora of the lost past.

It needs to be emphasized that both dominant subjectivities shaped within *white talk* deflect attention away from themselves as beneficiaries. Each group, in its own manner, disavows its power in securing and perpetuating its privilege. Both dominant subjectivities also predispose those thus positioned to emigrate, to regroup (Van Hear, 1998) with white-dominated societies elsewhere—whether they see themselves as going back to where they will be more at home, or into permanent exile. “Reconnection” or “return” is cast as appropriate, sensible, even inevitable. Having always seen themselves as the representatives of the West, of whiteness, in Africa, they reach back to the originary centres from which their scattering first emanated and to the other places where their “kind” has settled, and look for the certainties of an order that centres those that they perceive to be “the same.” In doing so, they create a new layer of diaspora—white South Africans abroad. This movement between centres and settlements abroad, and between settlements and other settlements—the contrapuntal, and snowballing, layering of dispersed peoples is yet again typical of diasporic peoples. This trend is well documented in terms of ethnic groups more narrowly defined, however it is clear that the same dynamic operates amongst those who identify racially.

Just as *white talk* needs to be understood in relation to alternative, and competing, discourses circulating within the country, it is also in a relationship to whiteness globally. The discourses of whiteness that help to maintain the powerful, centred subject positions for whites in the countries of the North and in Australasia provide the counterbalancing power to the weakness that whites perceive in their immediate circumstances. Whites in South Africa comprehend the meaning of their whiteness in relation to, and draw on, these international discourses of whiteness.

It is because they can see themselves, and can be seen by others, as a scattering of this powerful global community—as people with “transnational forces, double allegiances, plural affiliations” (Tölölyan, 1991, p. 4) that reach into these international connections—that they can leverage their relative disempowerment in South Africa. And it is this leverage that makes them not *simply* a “stranded community” (cf. Cohen, 1997, p. 190). Psychologically, discursively, and materially, they have become more deliberate, more active in the way that they play the intersections of the local and the global lines of white advantage, a process that ironically has been facilitated by the opening of the country to the international community since the demise of apartheid. Whiteness in South Africa relies heavily on its connection to the centres of whiteness, invoking Eurocentric norms as the legitimating field that underwrites its power moves. The preceding analyses show the depth and extent of these appeals to the power of established western thinking and custom. Moreover, the credibility that comes with being perceived by this powerful section of the international community as “of the same kind” is also not lost on this diasporic community. It is used to secure the sympathies of people overseas, a kind of insurance policy. As with diasporic groups elsewhere, the (re)energized connection provides the ability to mobilize the centre(s) to act to protect scatterings, a facility which can be recognized in the appeals of Afrikaner groups analysed in chapter eight to have their plight recognized.

Through their role in the media, through their business connections, through their informal networks, white South Africans continue to position themselves as the brokers, the translators and interpreters, the gatekeepers of the West in its encounters with Africa. (A very simple example of this is that white tour guides outnumber people of colour in the tourism industry by about 6 to 1.²) *White talk*, in particular, undertakes this mediating role as the ideological representative of white-centric interests in South Africa. Here, the complicity with what Gabriel (1998) has called “globalizing whiteness” becomes most apparent. The familiar tropes—the interlinking and travelling themes of affirmative

action, the white male victim, black criminality, the need for tougher policing, the intrusive presence of others in what used to be white spaces, and such like—these travel across the oceans, building a “respectable, coherent, common-sense whiteness” (p. 188). *White talk* affirms those discourses abroad, even as it draws on them to confirm white resistance here. Indeed, whiteness in South Africa has received a great boon in the form of the conservative turn that has taken place in (especially American) western politics. The structures of feeling that link this diasporic whiteness with whiteness elsewhere makes for easy cross-dissemination of discourses that are, *mutatis mutandis*, working well to preserve privilege elsewhere. Borrowed discursive strategies abound in *white talk*: privileging the individual as the primary social unit; trashing discourses that run counter to the conservative grain as fascist “political correctness” on the part of the loony left; adopting premature and power-evasive “color blindness,” the face-saving disclaimers.

Linking in this manner with white discourses elsewhere, *white talk* joins in the project of whitewashing right wing discourse (Gabriel, 1998). As has been shown in the analysis, it puts a presentable, everyday face on what are often quite reactive sentiments. In aligning itself with these global discursive formations, *white talk* declares itself part of the post-colonial discursive struggle, on the side that attempts to preserve the ascendancy of the west in relation to the other peoples of the world. Whereas post-colonial discourses quite specifically wish to dislocate those understandings of global relations that were articulated in the era of western domination of the globe, *white talk* seeks to obfuscate the fact that these hegemonic understandings are the sedimentation of once highly contested meanings, which were, and still are, driven by the sectional interests of the “white race.” Instead, it presents them as “objective,” “common sense,” and “natural.” This discursive formation tends to be more in touch with, and sympathetic to, sentiment in the west to issues than to the responses of African people at home. Dominant western definitions of issues are preferred, even if these have imperial overtones. The discussion in the dissertation has shown how this applies in relation to most aspects of South African society, such as the arts, education, social customs, and especially, economic organization. The effect is an attempt to render alternative ways of conceptualizing how things are done, how they could be done, literally unthinkable.

Most particularly, though, *white talk* aligns with dominant (neo)colonial discourses that position Africa, its people, its past and its future, as backward and hopeless. Indeed, by far the most important trope in *white talk* is Africa: the denigration

of the African continent and its people, so central to, and well suited for, the colonial and imperial projects of the west are its stock-in-trade. The perpetuation of these constructions of Africa ensures that “the problem” continues to be located outside of whiteness, and that nobody will be suspected of racism, as *white talk* feeds into, and gains corroboration from, that strand of international sympathy that writes off the continent. In doing this, white South Africans are propelled towards the international white centre; the social distance between them and those who share this ideology of Afro-pessimism decreases. *White talk* conspires with those discourses that fix Africa in a position that gives it little or no bargaining power in international relations, and minimizes its chances of turning around the way it is positioned.

The technological advancement and institutional establishment of the global west provides valuable ideological ammunition in this struggle to maintain the power of whiteness relative to blackness in South Africa. An implication of much of the analysis is that an important way in which whiteness holds onto its still dominant economic and cultural position within the society is through mobilizing established links into the institutional life and infrastructure of the country, and their relationship, in turn, to internationalization and globalization. Good schooling, the banking system, the press, private health care are all infused with white interests, values and customs. This is presented as incidental, or co-incidental; the inherited power interests are downplayed, so that the continuance of such articulations is represented as innocent and inevitable, and in everybody’s interests. The “right” way, the tried-and-tested way, cannot but be ideologically allied to the white way, the internationally accepted way, to the gateways to opportunity, and *white talk* makes it difficult to extricate the genuinely valuable from purely sectarian interest. Notions such as progress, development, modernization, and now most particularly, globalization, still carry enormous emotional valence, and are identified with the West, which still points the way forward. The analysis of diasporic whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa, ironically, turns out to illustrate the essential intactness of global whiteness. Kendall Clark states clearly that white privilege is a global privilege, backed by a global ideology of white supremacy. It must be seen, understood, and opposed as such (p. 9). South African *white talk* has to be recognized not as deviant behaviour of exceptional white-supremacist bigots, but as part of this bigger picture; part of the processes by which “dominant versions of whiteness have been embedded in culturally disparate and discordant contexts which then resist, re-work and/or appropriate their preferred meanings (Gabriel, 1998, p. 189).

After three hundred years of living in Africa, there is no doubt that whiteness in South Africa has produced complex, hybrid identity positions. This hybridity is generally unconscious, the type of hybridity which Werbner (1997) discusses as a major impetus for cultural creativity. Whites in South Africa have lost some aspects of mainstream Euro-American whiteness. They have moved in a different direction. They have acquired other characteristics through living shoulder to shoulder with Africans. Undoubtedly, white South Africans DO live in a cultural *mestiche*. *White talk* is careful not to position white South Africa as lacking legitimacy in the context of Africa. Rather than claiming an authentic, pure identity, therefore, *white talk* adopts the strategic anti-essentialism of diaspora, a “political/cultural bifocality” (Mankekar, 1994). To utilize its hybridity maximally, South African whiteness appropriates Africanness expediently. This borrowing is careful nevertheless to leave its real power centres intact. It presents itself as open to mixing and matching cultural repertoires, and in doing so is able to exercise a measure of control over the processes of change by being just African enough to gain acceptance in the new order. This means that claims to entitlement can be preserved, and accusations of indifference can be refuted. Audaciously, it is even able to present itself as the place from which change is emanating, for the benefit of all. *White talk* has been shown to be particularly skilful at manipulating intersections of identifications, both those that extend externally beyond the country’s borders, and those that operate between local ethnic and racial groupings. It is abundantly clear from the way in which *white talk* operates these overlaps that it uses non-essentialist identifications to promote an essentially backward social agenda. While it is well-known that theorists have argued that not all essentialist arguments are necessarily retrogressive in effect (Calhoun, 1994; Fuss, 1989), it is less often noted that not all non-essentialist positions are inherently liberatory. Indeed, the deconstructive virtue of hybridity is almost the *Hail Mary* of post-colonial and postmodern theory, often “romanticizing or uncritically celebrating” “processes of displacement, hybridity and fragmentation” (Mankekar, 1994, p. 363). Yet the adeptness at using demotic discourses in ways that are expedient to promote sectional, hierarchical interests is one of the most remarkable characteristics of this discourse. As the New South Africa matures, it has become clear that there is no guarantee that a person who regards him or herself as a “white African” has genuinely developed an identification that includes “otherness.” Deconstructing “purity” in this case is as likely to be an opening gambit in establishing alliances of resistance or denial.

Closely allied to this strategic non-essentialism are built-in ambiguity, duality, and linguistic plasticity. This has been demonstrated particularly in the manner in which the languages of inclusivity and non-racialism, the cornerstones of the new democracy, are used to perpetuate inherited, exclusive racial privilege. Like all dominant discourses, *white talk* is a skilled shape-shifter. It fixes whiteness as a nodal point in post-apartheid South Africa, but this is a *flexible articulation*³—overt subject positions in one discourse may be a front for “hidden” subject positions in another, and movement between different positions—victim, authority, stranger, indigene etc.—is smooth. The discursive equipment has been shown to be versatile, complex and inventive, utilizing different repertoires for different tasks, cleverly disguising damaging motivations, shifting subject positions as the need arises. In line with the insights from Discursive Psychology, it has emerged from this study that it is important to research discourse in its situated context to recognize the manner in which discourse is used to accomplish social goals. The patently strategic nature of the discourse of resistant white South Africans emerges as one observes it perform its tasks—hiding the contingency of its signification, saving face, undermining the ideological “other,” constructing the social “other,” rallying outrage, creating victimhood, recreating memory. It is clear that while it is certainly not uniform, but highly varied, *white talk* is nevertheless entirely consistent as strategic, group-oriented behaviour.

An important route to understanding group-oriented behaviour is taking into account the cross-cutting currents of power that flow through the social location. This re-emphasizes the notion of politics of location, an exploration of who is competing against/allying with/colluding with/silencing/speaking for/co-opting whom in the social space. While not specifically focusing on class or gender, the dissertation has shown that class operates, for example, through the role of “elite discourse,” which hides its operation as it preformulates discourses of whiteness for the utilization of the broader white society, most of whom are not in the same relationship to the means of producing symbolic capital and the power which this affords. Similarly, the central role that patriarchal constructions of masculinity play in maintaining the racial hierarchy has been reflected in the analysis of the two films and also in the discussion on the crisis in Afrikaner identity. The dominant axis of power that has been the focus of attention in this dissertation, however, is the colonial-postcolonial axis, as it manifests itself in the on-going construction of a position of taken-for-granted privilege for those of European descent in relation to “others,” the social domain we call whiteness. The analysis has

indicated, once again, the importance of keeping both the local and global in focus. While Frankenberg and Mani (1993) are right in noting that the post-colonial lens is not equally apt for examining all contexts, it is certainly the dimension of the politics of location that is most central to an understanding of what is happening in post-apartheid South Africa. The legacy of the colonial encounter makes its presence felt in ongoing, everyday social activity, as López (2001) correctly contends, not only in the continued physical presence of the erstwhile colonizer and oppressor who are still partners in the country's destiny, but also in the residues of the white supremacist system that continue to contour the material, symbolic and psychological realities of both white and black South Africans (pp. 92-3).

The way in which whiteness responds to its new postcolonial realities in countries like South Africa is "crucial not only to the individual postcolonial states," López argues, "but to the future of the very concept of postcoloniality" (p. 93). White South Africans have not been jumping with alacrity to give account of where they positioned themselves politically during the era of apartheid—a standard joke in the society is that one cannot any more find anyone who supported apartheid. One wonders whether, in later times, they will be more accountable in explaining the choices they are making now in relation to the ongoing construction of white privilege, now that they are no longer under state coercion to maintain white supremacy, and every opportunity is afforded them to understand the effects of racial organizing on the society. It is certain that there has been no overwhelming, widespread Damascus experience in the white population of South Africa. It is equally certain, however, that the opportunity to grow in humanity, to establish dialogic, intersubjective relationships with "others," to break through the narrow confines of privileged assumptions that stunt insight into the social construction of the interrelated dynamics of poverty and wealth,⁴ abounds in current post-apartheid South Africa as perhaps nowhere else. And there are those who are taking this opportunity wholeheartedly, and also others who are growing osmotically, just by virtue of being in the country and being exposed to discourses that relativize their past expectations, and by participating, with greater or lesser enthusiasm, in challenges which face the young democracy.

A moment of dislocation presents people with options, more options and different options than those to which they are subject-ed in times characterized by extensive sedimentation of dominant significations. A rhetorical space has opened up for white South Africans that has as its extremes identification with Afro-pessimism at the

one end, and optimistic discourses about an African Renaissance at the other. At this stage, the identity construction of white South Africans is highly contested, and very fluid. Which narratives of whiteness gain dominance will be the function of many interlocking variables: economic, political and other. Significantly, the option NOT to be White is freely available in post-apartheid South Africa, does not carry the extreme penalties it did in the past (Ware & Back, 2002), and may offer great personal and social rewards. Those who choose to put their energies and intentionality into maintaining the Magic Circle, who choose whiteness through, for example, perpetuating resistant, local *white talk*, assimilating into Euro-America and the other white ex-colonies, or retaining a strong double-consciousness which valorizes the privileged white-centred worldview, are indeed making a moral choice (Ware, 2001). Norval's (1994b) words bear repeating:

There can be . . . no possibility of thinking a necessary or teleological link between dislocated structures and the discursive attempts to re-articulate them. . . . The articulations provided by a variety of resistance organizations cannot, therefore, be argued to be a necessary result of "objective" conditions, but are always the results of particular political logics, and reflect in that sense the logic dominant in the resistance discourses. (p. 134)

White South Africans have always contributed to global discourses on race, on the abilities of Africa and Africans, through their privileged position as those who are "on the spot" (see, for example, Dubow, 1995) and can relay information to the white mainlands on the basis of first-hand experience. This is probably no less true now than before, and, indeed, is given a further avenue as the new white South African diaspora develops powerful interpersonal networks in most of the white-centred parts of the world where they settle. The perspective of Whiteness Studies would say that they carry a special responsibility to become cognizant of how, in this context where the colonial-postcolonial axis is especially in the fire, they do, or do not, choose to contribute to struggle for a better world order. The option is presented very starkly for those who are situated on African soil and who wish to see: to contribute to discourses that keep particularly Africa, and by extension, black people, in the grip of perceptions which continue to benefit the beneficiaries of the old colonial dynamics with which whiteness still identifies, or to align with those that feel outrage against injustice and the oppression of the majority of the world's people, the darker people. As those who were structured

into privileged colonial social spaces at the time, white South Africans chose to support apartheid. As a small, but powerful scattering of whiteness on the continent most ravaged by the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism, Africa, will they choose, now, to bolster global apartheid?

The situated knowledge of white South Africans means that they are pre-eminently the ones who can attest to the talent, inventiveness, potential, human and moral integrity of their compatriots, who like all of us, are neither saints nor angels; they can provide contextualized understandings of such issues as crime, and can promote ways of thinking that can lead to more equitable ways of organizing. Far from keeping the (neo)colonial discourses about Africa circulating, they are the best positioned to challenge them. Living daily with the consequences of the past visible around them, they have the option to throw their weight in with those disadvantaged by the legacy of colonialism, or to *talk white* and side with the power of international whiteness. The analysis has shown how *white talk* assists in refusing the past, in recasting memory in the light of present sociopolitical circumstances in a manner typical of diaspora (Mankekar, 1994). It denies and rewrites all the years of the implication of whiteness in Africa: conquest, genocide, displacement, disenfranchisement, slavery, exploitation, neglect, discrimination, dehumanization. We have no reason to be surprised if most of white South Africa wants to kick its heels and be free of all accountability: it is in the nature of white privilege to evade responsibility and those living in the mainlands of whiteness do no differently in relation to their implication in colonialism (K. Clark, 2001). Yet those white South Africans who want to escape the cycles of denial and disinformation will have to undertake the difficult task of embracing, and taking responsibility for, the full story of their entanglement with Africa, and recognize its ongoing struggle to finally take its rightful place in the global community as their own issue.

A few weeks ago I watched a television programme in which a young black child was reprimanded for stealing a cellular phone. He had done this in order to assist his mother who had no money to buy food for her children that night. How is it, I wonder, that we take for granted a society in which the destitute “criminal” who steals carries all the shame and guilt for social delinquency? Surely it is not too difficult to imagine societies that would take for granted that those who have more than enough should feel

ashamed and guilty for allowing a system where some in their midst are reduced to stealing a cellular phone out of compassion for their mother's pain? The study of Whiteness tells us that we may not stop interrogating where the delinquency really lies as long as the sedimented centre takes for granted that we live in a normal world.

NOTES

1. In 1996, I found that all the white South Africans who participated in my study (Steyn, 1996, 2001b) acknowledged that they had been advantaged by the past system, whether or not they had actively sought it. Ten years after democracy this is no longer true, and denial of having benefited from apartheid is becoming prevalent.
2. Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism Statistics, reported in the Cape Times, Friday, 15 August, 2003.
3. I am adapting Ong's (1996) notion of *flexible citizenship*, which has also been taken up by Drzewiecka (2002) in her work on diaspora.
4. In terms of post-structuralist/post-marxist thinking, economics is not "hard" reality, but also, like everything else, a product of political dynamics and framed in discursive contestation. (Torfling, 1999)

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