Monstrous Transformations: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in Post-Apartheid Portrayals of Afrikaners

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Abstract

According to Ulrich Beck, the breakdown of nation-state power and the migration of people, culture and ideas through neoliberalism provides us with a unique historical moment that simultaneously holds the potential for unparalleled cosmopolitanism and rising xenophobia. This essay further explores and problematizes this distinction through an analysis of the video art and music of the rap-rave group Die Antwoord and the photographer Roger Ballen, both of which provide images of Afrikaner Identity with differing ramifications for the formation of cosmopolitan identities. In both, figures become living collages, their anatomy mixes with animals and inanimate objects, and they transform into stark colors of black and white. The cosmopolitan becomes something monstrous and frightening. If an understanding of this xenophobic seed embedded in cross cultural soil is placed in the context of the larger history of capitalist market expansion, within the cyclical movement of cosmopolitanism and nationalism in South Africa, then discourses of monstrous transformations can be seen as obfuscating cosmopolitanism and xenophobia as alternatives opposing one another – as dialectically related phenomena. Interactions between groups within capitalism might lead to innovative mixtures but only in ways that quietly reinforce differences which surface when competition over resources occurs in hierarchical social relationships. Through analyzing how identities fuse in the works of Ballen and Die Antwoord, the following article will display both the space of critique and the danger of co-option of cosmopolitan identities.

Keywords

Nationalism; Cosmopolitanism; Whiteness; Post-Apartheid; Afrikaner; Photography; Hip-Hop

Introduction: Global Risk and the Dialectic of Cosmopolitanism

> Global risks force us to confront the apparently excluded other. They tear down national barriers and mix natives with foreigners. The expelled other becomes the internal other, as a result not of migration but global risks. Everyday life is becoming cosmopolitan: human beings must lend meaning to their lives through exchanges with others and no longer in encounters with people like themselves (Beck 2007, p. 15).

The quote above from *World at Risk* aptly describes the cosmopolitan moment. As a political economic system neoliberalism has reduced the power and significance of the state and, as a result, exposed us to ever growing risks that transcend individual nation states, such as global climate change and international stratification. In *Distant Love*, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014) intimately display what 'encounters' with an 'internal other' look like. Negotiating the pressures of growing inequality, the movement of people and the technology to communicate across vast distances reformulates families from homogenous, nation-state families into what they describe as world families. Parents separated from their children to raise affluent western children, babies born in surrogacy on different continents from their biological parents, and intercultural marriages due to increased immigration all speak to the familiarity of once clearly externalized others. Even our bodies have become the internalization of otherness that sometimes literally see through the eyes of a once-thought-to-be external other. Driven by economic necessity we see an increased organ trade where 'the bodies of the rich are…transformed into patchwork creations while those of the poor are converted into one-eyed or one-kidneyed spare-part stores which come in handy for mutilations of many kinds' (p. 69).

Neoliberalism, while a sufficiently destructive force to threaten the existence of its subjects through economic disenfranchisement and environmental degradation, also undermines the separations and distinctions of national and ethic identities. Thus, it ironically creates the potential for communication and collaboration necessary for its dismantling. From immigration of people to the metropole to the sale of organs creating wealthy bodies as an assemblage of rich and poor organs, the sheer brutality of neoliberal regimes displays its capacity to destroy the externalized forms of difference upon which modernity and colonialism are based and internalizes these differences. This moment of blurring, melding, and forming assemblages between different identities constitutes the cosmopolitan moment. In the context of this essay it is also what is being portrayed as occurring in South Africa, and specifically Afrikaners, by both Ballen and Die Antwoord.

While the cosmopolitan moment inadvertently works to overcome otherness through intimacy, the cosmopolitan outlook seeks to reflexively utilize this decrease of otherness to transcend nationalism and purposefully utilized this intimacy with the other. It seeks to embrace cosmopolitanization and utilize its potential for transformation. It is the purposeful discursive action made by those who find themselves within the cosmopolitan moment. The existence of the cosmopolitan moment does not guarantee a cosmopolitan outlook. Historically, we see cosmopolitan moments produce very different effects. As Beck explains:

> The forced mixing of cultures is not anything new in world history but, on the contrary, the rule; one need only think of wars of rapine and conquest, mass migration, the slave trade and colonization, world wars, ethnic cleansing and forced repatriation and expulsion. From the very beginning, the emerging global market required the mixing of peoples and imposed it by force if necessary…

Capital tears down all national boundaries and jumbles together the 'native' with the 'foreign' (2006, p. 21).

Thus, with the economic formation of capital there has always been forced interaction between cultural others. Potentially, the nation state itself may even be a product of this interaction, but this cosmopolitan moment in the past resulted in the opposite of a cosmopolitan outlook. It is possible that current cosmopolitanism is unique, that 'what is new is not forced mixing but awareness of it, it's self-conscious political affirmation and recognition before a global public via the mass media' (p. 21). Nonetheless, this new recognition is not sufficient to produce the cosmopolitan outlook because, 'cosmopolitanization is a non-linear, dialectical process in which the universal and the particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and the local are to be perceived' (p. 73). When we take the above comments concerning the sometimes transformative, sometimes destructive, outcomes of the cosmopolitan moment, they display this moment as one that produces two very different responses trapped in contention with one another. One response, the cosmopolitan outlook, overcomes the epistemologies of the nation state where the other, nationalism, occurs when cosmopolitanization 'triggers the defensive impulses of those who think in nation state categories,' and thus 'twist cosmopolitanization in an anti-cosmopolitan direction' (p. 74).

With today's worldwide wave of authoritarianism and protectionist policies like Brexit or the U.S tariff system, we see an anti-cosmopolitan response to globalization growing out of perceived threats to national identity by perceived external others (e.g. Syrian or Guatemalan refugees). The danger inherent in such political economic responses, juxtaposed with the ever-increasing need to understand and intervene in growing global risk, points to the importance of understanding nationalistic responses to cosmopolitanization. This study seeks to explore the cultural products latently or overtly representing and reinforcing nation state categories. Such products allow for future utilization when dialectical shifts move away from the cosmopolitan outlook and towards anti-cosmopolitan nationalism.

This article closely examines two cultural examples displaying the tension between cosmopolitan and nationalistic responses to the cosmopolitan moment – the photography of Roger Ballen and the video art of Die Antwoord, both of which portray post-apartheid, white Afrikaners' increasingly mixed identity Although similar on the surface, both containing figures that transgress boundaries between race, species, and objects, upon closer examination the artists offer very different imaginings of these divides and, as a result, very different reactions to the cosmopolitan moment. A brief overview of the history of cosmopolitanization in South Africa and the varied responses to cosmopolitanization is needed to contextualize the place of Afrikaners in the history of cosmopolitanization, as well as the significance of the portrayal of Afrikaner's hybridity in the post-apartheid time.

Cosmopolitan Dialectics in South African History

Selecting South Africa as the location of this case study is not arbitrary but reflects the location's unique historical position, making it an ideal place to consider the dialectic of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. This is not, as some would assume, based on apartheid history. As the current African National Council (ANC) government confronts the historical legacy of the National Party (NP), it is arguably one of the more cosmopolitan regimes in world politics. Even though some have claimed, in light of recent xenophobic violence against immigrant populations and rising populist nationalism in recent decades, that its cosmopolitanism is waning, its official rhetoric still remains one of being among the world's foremost cosmopolitan nations, a contradiction described by Hart (2013). In this contradiction between its apparent cosmopolitan outlook and its still largely subterranean nationalism, the usefulness of uncovering signs of latent nationalism in South Africa today is particularly poignant. In other words, where North American and European nationalistic responses to the cosmopolitan moment are clearly manifest, sometimes resulting

in seizures of government, nationalistic sentiments in South Africa demonstrates how nationalism lingers latently and primes for later dialectical shifts.

Like most nation states, South Africa's history has shifted between periods of cosmopolitanization approximating the cosmopolitan outlook and periods of nationalistic responses. When global markets forced interaction in the early colonial period there was a relatively cosmopolitan response. Located part way between Europe and the Asian colonies of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), Cape Town's growing urban center became home to a variety of European nationals (Dutch, German, Scandinavian, French) and populations from other areas under VOC control (Batavia, China, Mozambique, Middle East). Though hierarchically structured between the outlining colonies' slaves and prisoners, European free burghers, and VOC elite, the boundaries between distinctions were economically and socially blurred. Marriages between disparate populations were common. There was mobility due to trade; slaves and prisoners engaged in entrepreneurial ownership. Often social institutions, such as schools and medical care, cut across hierarchies serving multiple populations (Worden 2012).

The early Cape Town colony, an image of global economic expansion, predates the rise of national identity, the combination of set geographic territory and unified ethnic identity that comes into being in European states in the 18th century. Prior to this, states developed what McNeill (1986) describes as polyethnicity. Preceding the concepts of national sovereignty and ethnic homogeneity, the imperial expansions and trade networks of premodern states resulted in constant ethnic mixing creating fluid boundaries between populations. Hierarchies were not geographically bounded and, therefore, were not based upon an internal and external divide produced by national categories. Thus, in the early years of the cape colony, even with ethnic differences far greater than those between European nations, fluid boundaries are visible between European settlers, indigenous African peoples, and exiles from the VOC's Asian colonies.

Despite this cosmopolitan response to the populations' forced mixing in the 16th and 17th centuries, forms of nationalism mark later interactions between the Cape Town community and surrounding areas. This shift began in the 18th century, as colonists increasingly expanded into the interior of southern Africa. With rainfall too low and soil too poor for European methods of farming in the Table Valley, the Cape population assimilated to Khoehoe practices of animal husbandry, which placed them in direct material conflict with the indigenous population; the Khoehoe population was summarily destroyed, enslaved, or escaped through integration into the Xhosa. As expansion continued to the northeast, especially after 1802 when Great Britain gained control of the colony through the Peace of Amiens, similar contacts with indigenous populations developed into armed conflicts and subjection (Arendt 1968; Wilson & Thompson 1971; De Kiewiet 1957).

This tripartite conflict between former Dutch colonists, newer British colonist, and indigenous populations had significance not only in developing national identity in southern Africa but also in the history of race and nationalism in colonies more broadly. As Dyer (1988) has explored in *White*, whiteness itself is often a contested category with normative sanctions placed on whites who display characteristics coded as black. The dominant white status of colonists cannot be assumed, and it appears it was often called into question, initially in their status as colonists, an occupation for marginal occidentals and later as a result of their transculturation with non-European populations of the colony. Arendt (1968) in her analysis of the birth of racial categories describes early colonists, 'the bohemians of four continents,' as follows:

> The decision to join this crowd 'of all nations and colors' was no longer up to them; that they had not stepped out of society but had been spat out by it; that they were not enterprising beyond the permitted limits of civilization but simply victims without use or function ... They were nothing of their own making, they were like symbols of what happened to them, living abstractions and witnesses to the absurdity of human institutions (p. 189).

While dominant because of their status as Europeans, colonists often represented populations whose inclusion in dominant categories were already questioned before leaving Europe. Undoubtably, the cosmopolitan moment of the early Cape Colony, in which colonists assimilated elements of non-European culture through the inclusion of non-Europeans, made their claims to full European, and later white, statuses even more suspect. Thus, the dialectic between the cosmopolitan outlook and nationalistic responses came to fruition, first in the construction of racialized categories and later in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism. Arendt's explanation of the colonial origins of the concept of race, set specifically in a South African context, explains that these early *trekboers*, those Dutch colonists who expanded out beyond the Table Valley, 'embarked upon a process which could only end with their own degeneration into a white race living beside and together with black races from whom in the end they would differ only in the color of their skin' (p. 194). Although overstated, this statement indicates the fundamental tension that led to nascent forms of modern racism present in early colonial conflicts. As nationalism became more prevalent in Europe, and, subsequently, the loss of status through transculturation became a more salient threat, colonists' whiteness became increasingly meaningful. As German colonist and *Völkisch* philosopher Carl Peters claimed, he was 'fed up with being counted among the pariahs and wanted to belong to a master race' (Arendt 1968, p. 189). Thus, the category of whiteness was born as a contested category; a category that needed to be actively defended by the marginally included who were both its creators and most active replicators.

Prior to the British invasion, the Dutch colonists' defensiveness of their whiteness remained a remote psychological tension with a population not actually present in the colony. Later, dominant English colonial populations created direct tensions that increased Afrikaner nationalism and furthered indigenous populations' subjugation. While the Transvaal and South African Wars fought between Dutch and British colonists are the most manifest examples of these tensions, what underlies them were substantial economic changes in the north eastern area of the colony where non-English whites settled after South Africa's transition into the British Empire. Particularly, changes in mining techniques made the extraction of new mineral deposits possible. This intensified Dutch colonists' contact with the Empire through British capital and Australian skilled labor and substantially altering the hierarchy in mineral rich regions of South Africa (De Kiewiet 1957; Moodie 1975; O'Meara 1983; Wilson & Thompson 1971).

This decline in hierarchical status further incentivized ideological developments that, in turn, justified further dominations. This included Afrikaner identity as a nationalized group with a specific history, language, and culture independent from European colonists and indigenous Africans. The history of colonization was reframed into the history of the creation of the Afrikaners with new focus placed on the pioneering *Voortrekker* traversing the wilderness in ox carts. Their subordination by the British and domination of indigenous Africans was transformed via Calvinism into God's immediate election paralleling Old Testament Israel. A civil religion with holidays, such as the Day of the Covenant, monuments, such as Voortrekker Monument, and an anthem, *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*, were created. Afrikaans, before thought of as an improper dialect of Dutch, was codified into an official language (Moodie 1975). This ideological apparatus provided the epistemological underpinnings for a flurry of organizations, each specifically concerned with the advancement of Afrikaners. Included in these were political movements, such the Nationalist Party (NP) and *Afrikaner Broederbond* (AB), as well as various economic organizations, such as Christian-nationalist trade unions and the *Ekonomiese Volkskongres*. Both were specifically concerned with what was then being called the problem of 'poor whiteism,' a phrase signifying Afrikaner whites' fear of declining to same level as the indigenous population, and sought, either consciously or unconsciously, to restructure political and economic institutions to favor white workers (O'Meara 1983, p. 82). In 1948 when the NP came to power it implemented policies collectively known as apartheid, that were intellectually developed by these organizations in response to economic changes that occurred through industrialization caused by mining in the late 19th and early 20th century (O'Meara 1983).

The result of the apartheid system is well documented. Forced relocations limited the movement of people within their identified geographic territories and led to destabilization and impoverishment of whole regions of South Africa. In 1973 the UN declared apartheid a crime against humanity. In the 1980s when the system became threated by growing tensions, the NP resorted to increasingly repressive actions culminating in the 'total strategy' of illegalization, incarceration, and armed engagement with oppositional political parties within and outside South Africa. A few statistics from the total strategy, published by the Truth and Reconciliation Council during the transfer of power from the NP to the African National Council (ANC), should suffice to express the level of resulting oppression. Between 1985-89 in South Africa 80,000 people (15,000 children) were detained without trial, 10,000 were tortured, and 100 were assassinated (200 attempted). Outside of South Africa, commando raids, hit squad assassinations, invasions, and economic actions designed to destabilize neighboring countries resulted in the death over 1,500,000 people (*African National Council* 1996).

The ANC government, which came into power with the election of Nelson Mandela in 1994, was constructed as an antithesis of the apartheid regime, calling South Africa a 'rainbow nation'. As such, the ANC embraced a multi-cultural and inclusive philosophy that has often led to its identification as a regime specifically supportive of cosmopolitanization (Harris 2009; Kondlo 2014; Lazea 2014; Nagy 2006). In the early years of the ANC reign, actions such as the Truth and Reconciliation Council attempted to overcome racial divides and transcend differences in national identity constructed during the apartheid era. In the same way that apartheid became a microcosm of nationalistic response, the ANC became a microcosm of cosmopolitan outlook. Yet, partially due to the opening of boundaries for trade that exposed South Africa to neo-liberal market forces and resulted in increasing inequality, subsequent ANC leaders have, without outright rejection, distanced themselves from Mandela's rainbowism. This can be seen in Mbeki's and Zuma's focus on Africanization, which proposes different racial nations as oppositional categories and reinforces the need to enhance indigenous culture as a means of overcoming increasing inequality (Horáková 2018). Paralleling the change towards racialized national categories is an increase in regionalism as well as increasing hostilities towards immigration approaching the attitudes of America and Europe (Hart 2013; Landau 2010).

Taken together, the history set out above displays that, if we interpret South African history through the lens of cosmopolitanization and the dialectical relationship between cosmopolitan and nationalistic responses to this process, we see that the history of South Africa involves a fluctuation between these two responses. While both responses are always present, there is a general pattern to the responses to cosmopolitanization. The initial settlement in Cape Town led to a relatively cosmopolitan outlook due to the waning but still present polyethnicity of early modern states. But competition with indigenous people and fear of the loss of hierarchical position, further fueled by British domination, led to the opposite response, that of nationalism and racialization, increasingly taking precedence. In more recent decades, since the rise of the ANC government, there have been great strides towards a more cosmopolitan outlook. Nonetheless, there appears to be growing fissures in pro-cosmopolitan attitudes. With an understanding of the tenuousness of the cosmopolitan outlook and with an eye towards the historic place of marginal whiteness in the history of nationalism, both in South Africa and globally, this essay seeks to examine the portrayal of marginalized South African whites, specifically Afrikaners, analyzing the way in which these portrayals are likely illicit cosmopolitan or anti-cosmopolitan responses to the current cosmopolitan moment.

Contemporary Portrayal of Afrikaners and the Counter Cosmopolitan

Generally, when cosmopolitanization is mediated through racial hierarchies it often leads to nationalistic responses originating with subordinate white populations whose privilege within the hierarchy is tenuous. Shortly after the ANC came to power, mirroring the sentiments of Europe after the holocaust, they announced that South Africa should embrace an attitude of 'Never Again' in regard to the past regimes' atrocities (*African National Council* 1996). Yet, as rising xenophobia and authoritarianism across Europe in response to the Syrian immigration crisis illustrates, latent nationalism can lie dormant for decades subtly reinforced by nationalistic cultural products. This essay will now examine latent nationalistic messages embedded in portrayals of marginal whites, specifically South African Afrikaans-speaking whites often identified as Afrikaners, to show the potential of nationalism during a regime which, despite recent shifts, is arguably, especially in light of recent political events, less nationalistic than many nations in North America and Europe[1].

Afrikaner identity has recently risen in South African media, particularly in terms of current Afrikaans language politics. During apartheid Afrikaans and English were the two nationally recognized languages. The ANC has since expanded the list of official languages to include IsiNdebele, Sepedi, SeSotho sa Borwa, SiSwati, XiTsonga, SeTswana, TshiVenda, IsiXhosa, and IsiZulu (*South Africa's People,* n.d.). As Adriaan Steyn (2016) identified, this expansion has led many Afrikaners (40-60%) to be concerned with the decline of the Afrikaans and even to feel that the ANC is purposely trying to eradicate the language. This has fueled a media that specifically produces for Afrikaners who feel, because of the ANC's lack of support for the language, the 'longevity and vitality of Afrikaans depends heavily on the language's ability to prove itself in the marketplace' (p. 485). The increasing culture industry surrounding Afrikaans largely relies not only on the remaining buying power Afrikaans-speaking whites but on fears of the extension of Afrikaans and Afrikaner cultural to open markets for news, magazines, record labels, music festivals, television stations, and films. Steyn explains this industry growth in the perceptions of Afrikaners who feel:

> They belong to a small white minority in an African country, cut loose from their European ancestry and ruled by an ANC government many perceive as hostile. In different ways, on different grounds and to different degrees, many white Afrikaans speakers are articulating narratives of victimhood under South Africa's democratic regime. Under these conditions, the Afrikaans language is perceived as a possible safe haven for its white speakers. It offers a sense of community, belonging and control in an environment that is often experienced as hostility. For Afrikaners who have lost control over the state, language has become a potential substitute for land – a-an enclave of familiarity and homeliness (p. 486).

Thus, we see many of the elements of past forms of nationalistic responses, particularly the identification of victimhood and the seeking of a unified Afrikaner identity. Similarly, Steyn (2004), identifies the form of subaltern whiteness in the post-apartheid era as being caught between British South Africans, legitimated by their ties to Europe, and black South Africans, who are finically weaker than the Afrikaners as a whole but whose status shifts due to class based inclusion in the political and economic system. The Afrikaners' middling status has developed a form of 'white talk' which polarizes and racializes political discourse within their populations. Furthermore, Afrikaners find themselves as an 'other' in their need to be rehabilitated and refashioned after the fall of apartheid.

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1   The use of the word ˈAfrikanerˈ here, and throughout this essay, refers specifically to portrayals identified as such. These portrayals are often applied to marginalized white Afrikaans speakers in South Africa and therefore shape the identity and politics of this subset of the population. The real ontological existence of Afrikaners as a national group is not the subject of this study. This would be ironic considering that identification of national groups as ontologically real, rather than simply a construction of nationalist epistemologies accompanying modernity, would contradict the theoretical frameworks used in this essay.

In this environment, the portrayal of Afrikaners takes on new significance. If Afrikaners themselves are envisioned as individuals embodying racism, as themselves being racist and their inferiority being the cause of their own racism rather than being caught up in colonial and neocolonial systemic racial politics, then the precondition for nationalistic responses based on whiteness is reinstated. Being identified as someone abject and aberrant only reinforces marginal whiteness and thus recreates the initial preconditions that motivate racism and nationalism. As the consolidation of white dominance, through the extension of neo-liberal politics, is misdirected to a subordinate white population, they become scapegoats for what is a larger, more central problem of western discourse and policy. To identify the specific rhetoric being used to construct this scapegoat, I will examine two moments when Afrikaners have been the object of a discourse widely consumed by non-South Africans. One is the photography of Roger Ballen who, in addition to having 12 published books, has had hundreds of exhibitions across Europe and America displaying his photographs of Afrikaners (*Roger Ballen Photography*, n.d.). The other is in the videography surrounding the rap-rave group Die Antwoord, which has had a number of hits and albums on the Billboard charts in the US and UK, including a number one on the US billboard dance/electronica charts for Mount Ninji and Da Nice Time Kid, (*Billboard*, n.d.). Therefore, one reason for focusing on these two artists is their immense popularity, both being major points where global populations see post-apartheid Afrikaners portrayed. They are significant moments when poor, white, Afrikaans speaking South Africans see themselves being portrayed to the world. Within the body of work produced by these artists, examples representative of their art were selected (i.e. many of Die Antwoord's videos portray similar transformations as those discussed below and many of Ballen's early work present images of impoverished Afrikaners and later work with a collage of human, animal, and non-living materials). Other similar works have been excluded for concision.

Ballen: Monstrous Whiteness in the Eye of the Traveler

Figure 1.   A Boy Named Gary, *Outland* ([2001](#))

With the release of Platteland in 1995 Roger Ballen entered the public eye as an artist. The various black and white portraits of impoverished Afrikaners in the Transvaal (Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and North West Provinces), where Ballen worked as a mine geologist, clearly try to connect the audience with Afrikaner victimhood. Considering its release date, the connection between the work's reception and the fall of the apartheid is certain. As Ballen explains in an interview with the *South Bank Show* (1995), he sees his work as a refutation to Afrikanerdom, mainly in its failure to address its essential problem, poor whiteism:

> Apartheid made everyone think that the whites are supreme, and whites were right, the whites were living the good life and the blacks were incapable of achieving any of those things. So, in many ways we unstripped some of the illusions of the apartheid system. Whites are living in poverty. Whites are living in paralysis on a large scale and these issues weren't touched by the South African press or the South African regime.

On one level, Ballen's early work, continued in *Outlander* (2001), can be read as an attempt to inject an intersectionality into an otherwise dichotomous interpretation of racial politics in South Africa, in this case by displaying poor Afrikaners as outside the cycle of privilege perpetuated in the apartheid system as well the reformations of power during the ANC. Despite this intention, in this period of Ballen's work, his depiction of Afrikaners is trapped inside a portrayal of the victim. The victims are reduced to the harm done to them and are themselves dehumanized. When we look at the poverty of the Transvaal manifested in this portrait photography, we are confronted in the foreground with misshapen and sun withered bodies covered in dirty, ill-fitting clothes and in the background with decaying structures strewn with trash and graffiti. Whatever sense of outrage or disgust we are meant to feel is distributed between the structural poverty and that poverty's embodiment, the Afrikaner, who when set before us elicits, on some level, a sense of being abject. But more significantly, the photo feels sterile in its black and white detachment, typical of a genre that Barthes (2012) described as 'shock photos.' Within this genre the 'intentional language of horror' used by the photographer causes the image to become 'overconstructed'. As a result, the audience is 'disposed' of their 'judgement' because 'someone has shuddered for us, reflected for us, judged for us' thus 'the photographer has left us nothing except a simple right of intellectual acquiescence' (p. 116). When we see the Afrikaner, we see him or her through the eyes of Ballen, which leaves us strangely removed from the figure he has mediated for us.

But the figure refracted through Ballen's eye is a more typified figure of the rural impoverished Afrikaner than its status as shock photography may imply. As he explains in the *South Bank Show* (1995) documentary:

> I think that the architype I'm dealing with is someone who has been lost in time, people who have be passed over, people who wanted the old frontier, who are still living in the bush of South Africa, who have not passed over into modern time. They feel very confused by that. They don't know if they should be going backwards or they should be going forwards. They don't know where they stand.

Ballen's Afrikaner visually, cognitively, and culturally amalgamates the past with the present. In their clothing, homes, and possessions the past and present coexist and blend together in the photos. As a people 'they yearn for the past when things were different when they could just kick the soil and find a diamond' (South Bank Show 1995). Equally uncomfortable in the present and the past, the Afrikaner becomes a timeless and spaceless figure whose merger with the past destroys any ability to belong to the South African present.

Figure 2.   Johan and Bertie, Brothers, Western Transvaal, *Platteland* (1995)

In *Shadow Chamber*, Ballen's ([2005](#)) portrayal of Afrikaners transcends boundaries other than the temporal. He moves away from portrait photography by creating abstract, sculpted photos where he manipulates objects, animals, and human forms occupying buildings in abandoned mine dumps and squatter settlements surrounding Johannesburg. More psychological in character, these images are designed to express Ballen's understanding of art as 'a river, a chasm, an abyss that you cross. You get across, somehow or another you are swept across, someplace you've never been before' (*[George Eastman House](#) [2010](#)*). In Roger Ballen's *Asylum of the Birds* (2014), a documentary exploring his most recent iteration of the project, he describes how when he 'pass[es] through the door,' he enters 'another universe, a world haunting and complex, bordering on dreams and reality. A place in which birds and other animals mingle with its human inhabitants'.

Figure 3.   Prowling, *Shadow Chamber* ([2005](#))

This place, hidden deep within Ballen's world of Jungian architypes and confrontation with a psychoanalytic concept of a shadow self, is still grounded in his experiences in the Transvaal (*George Eastman House* 2010). As he explains, 'the objects, the things I began to photograph on the walls, the sense of place all came from this beginning in these small towns. The wires, the walls, the masks, the types of images that would come out later were found here in these small villages and towns in South Africa' (*George Eastman House* 2010). The dystopian landscape and the poverty of the Afrikaner in his earlier work still occupies his dreams. His subjects, still predominately Afrikaners, now removed from the political landscape of apartheid, are depicted in an even more transformative fashion. They instead occupy an 'untamable place' that 'has its own rules and functions according to its own laws' where they meld and merge not only with the past but with material objects and animals. As one moves through his images, the distinction is often difficult to read. Initially one mistakes a mask for a face, a real arm for the arm of a mannequin, a human subject for a piece of textured wall.

Figure 4.   Take Off, *Asylum of Birds* (2012)

In both his early and later work, Ballen presents himself as a traveler, first to the little know rural regions of the apartheid Transvaal and later in his explorations to surrealistic dreamscapes constructed from places of urban poverty in Johannesburg. The historian François Hartog ([1988](#)) in *The Mirror of Herodotus* describes how the traveler, always caught in the act of translation, utilizes rhetorics of otherness to transform the foreign into the familiar to render his experiences legible to the occident. One such rhetoric is the construction of the monstrous. Everyday objects and experiences of remote places when described by the traveler become an unnatural assemblage of otherwise familiar elements. Such descriptions are seen in premodern and early modern travellers whose description of animals, such as a hippopotamus, have rendered them into a monster. That:

> A hippopotamus has features of an ox, a horse, or even a boar, yet it is neither an ox, horse nor boar. The monster is always a combination of elements which are familiar, and it is even desirable that every single element should be familiar so that the combination of them will be monstrous… the eye of the traveler is, moreover, in the position of a link connecting the heterogeneous element that compose the various animals of there; it is he who sets up this combination and guarantees its veracity and so it is who produces all these monstrosities through his way of selecting and assembling what is visible (pp. 249-250).

Ballen, in translating his experiences, describes his experiences through a sort of unnatural hybridity. Like travellers of the past, he translates his experiences into something monstrous, which in turn transforms his subjects into monsters. In this case, monsters produced by their poor whiteism and the fall of the apartheid. They are neither white nor black, present nor past, human or animal, animate or inanimate but merging both as familiar visual stimuli to create the unfamiliar. They become a transgression, a dark doppelganger of a postmodern cyborg assemblage, who, rather than transforming the world, are instead tied to a past trauma of being both caught between the colonized and the colonizer. They are presented as monstrous because they are caught between white acceptability and black marginality.
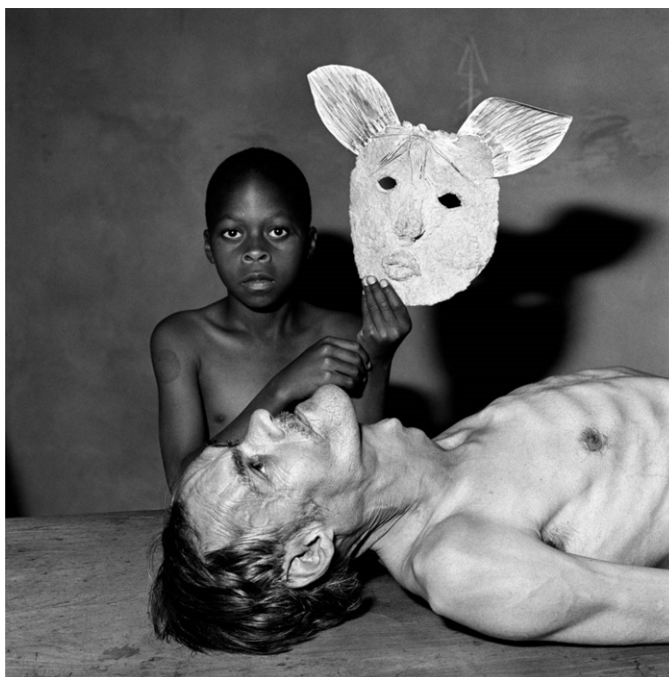
Figure 5.   Tommy, Samson, and a Mask, *Outland* ([2001](#))

In the wider context of South African history, and particularly the relationship between various national identities, this production of the monster reflects and reinforces nationalistic responses to cosmopolitanization by presenting the crossing of boundaries as something to elicit fear. The various familiar elements of the monster – a hand, a dead bird, a live bird, a mask, a child's drawing – are combined in the image to create something disturbing. This gives the audience the impression that each element of the monster – the human, the animal, the animate, the inanimate-all have a proper location, that they belong separate from and bounded from one another. That when mixed, when combined in the same figure, a natural order is disturbed. It is this disturbance which interpolates the audience into the photograph. It possesses a freak-show-like quality where the uncomfortableness of the image draws the audience into a visceral response to what they have seen. If we consider the choice of Afrikaners as subjects, the nationalistic response to presenting the breakdown of boundaries between categories has further significance. The Afrikaner, in his simultaneous association with both Europe and Africa, transcends our epistemological categories for understanding place and people. The transformative effect of Africanized poverty upon white European bodies indicates a transgression, a blurring of the assumed boundaries between black and white. Occasionally, even in his earlier body of work, Ballen contrasts black and white bodies, sometimes even contrasting them with inanimate objects or animals. Such images racialize monstrous assemblages linking the Afrikaner to his transgression against the category of whiteness by his association with the 'dark continent' and the black bodies which inhabit it.

Die Antwoord: Zef Interrogation of White Fear

Figure 6.   *I Fink U Freeky* (2012)

A similar aesthetic can be found in the work of Die Antwoord (The Answer), who collaborated with Ballen for their 2012 video *I Fink U Freeky*. Borrowing largely from the culture of Cape Flat, a suburb of Cape Town, Die Antwoord constructs a heightened parody of poor white Afrikanerism known as *zef*. Growing from a slur about impoverished whites (taken from the stereotype of driving the inexpensive, late model Ford Zephyr), *zef* style appropriates the images of white poverty as a mock display of apartheid attitudes and politics ([Chruszczewska 2015](#); [Haupt 2012](#); [Du Preez 2011](#)). This choice of portrayal latently indicates not only marginal whiteness but their transculturation resulting from cohabitation with other marginalized population.

Thus, Die Antwoord fashions *zef* as a sort of jetsam of western, local, and indigenous culture. Watkin Tudor Jones' character of Ninja, often shirtless, clad only in a pair of 'Pink Floyd' boxers, and sporting a rat-tailed mullet, is an embodiment of Die Antwoord's *zef*. Ninja, discussing their utilization of different cultural elements in the videos and songs during a Mother Jones interview, stated that, despite 'PC-version people try[ing] to promote an image of South Afrika as a rainbow nation' it is 'actually like a *fokked*-up, kind of broken fruit salad. Cause all those things don't mix' ([Mechanic 2010](#)). This image of the cosmopolitan as *zef* in Die Antwoord's work, described as a 'kind of like apocalyptic debris we've stuck together', dances behind the group's imagery. In the video for *I Fink U Freeky* (2012) a variety of monstrously portrayed figures transcend the divides between black and white, human and animal, and stare at the viewer with a fixed menacing gaze or dance with wild abandon across a gratified dystopian backdrop.

Imagery of transformation, particularly transforming into something unreal and frightening, is common in Die Antwoord videos, many of which are directed by Jones. Such transformations often involve crossing racial boundaries either through color or other signifiers of blackness (indigenous dress, physical characteristics, etc...). In the video *Banana Brain* (2012) band member Yolandi Vi$$er is portrayed as a young, innocent, religious Afrikaner girl, a symbol of nationalistic purity. When attending a racially mixed party in a heavily graffitied house, she inadvertently drops acid and Ninja, her date, transforms into a menacing black figure with exaggerated genitalia. After fleeing from the figure, she locks herself in a restroom and begins cutting off chunks of her own hair, which transforms into Vi$$er's characteristic

zef mullet. In other videos, such as *Cookie Thumper* (2017), Vi$$er's 'innocent' symbol or racial purity is juxtaposed with the threat of black sexuality through literal intercourse with black people, but in *Banana Brain* Ninja transforms into this racial other in heightened and exaggerated form.

'It's the sum of our philosophy: become the enemy'. As Ninja describes it, 'Now if someone breaks into the house, you don't want to be the *fokken* victim, you want to be the master. Die Antwoord is like the Ninja. If you break into the house that I live in, you're pretty much *fokked*. Because, like, you're not the enemy. I'm the enemy' ([Mechanic 2010](#)). This subtle statement provides us with a key for understanding the rhetoric practiced in Die Antwoord's videos. The transformations are not transformations into genuine blackness or indigenous people but something very different, a heightened form of blackness. Ninja's transformation into a figure of black sexuality is a transformation into an exaggerated, more menacing form of blackness, the form of inversion of racial hierarchy with blackness dominating over whiteness. Likewise, the threat of sexual intercourse with the black figure propels further transformation of Vi$$er into a symbol of *zef*, of marginal whiteness in response to the image of black as master.

Past analysis of Die Antwoord mainly center around whether these transformations constitute a form of blackface of either marginal whites or black South Africans ([Schmidt 2014](#); [Haupt 2012](#); [Scott 2012](#)) or, often borrowing on the language of postmodernism, if they represent some sort of post-racial, cyborg assemblage capable of destroying binary categories of black and white or a display of the racial liminality of Afrikaner identity ([Bekker & Levon 2020](#); [Obbard & Cork 2016](#); [Chruszczewska 2015](#); [Parry 2015](#); [Smit 2015](#); [Du Preez 2011](#); [Marx & Milton 2011](#)). What is often missing from these debates is the sheer horrific absurdity of the portrayal, which elicits a *jouissance* combining repulsion and fear for the racialized other with humorous irony and the ridiculousness of that reaction. If the example above from Banana Brain (2012) was meant as a genuine portrayal of transculturation, with their transformations through a monstrous, heightened, deformed black figure, their transformation would be blackface not only of an exaggerated black body but a heightened distillation of the simultaneous repulsion and desire towards black sexuality which accompanied colonialism[2]. But, when both the element of fear and feeling of absurdity present in Die Antwoord's transformations are identified, neither a celebration of post racial transculturation nor a blackface portray of marginal populations is presented. Rather, there is a parodic inversion of the fear of not only black people but the transformation of white people through hybridity which leads to the marginality of poor white populations.

Equally illustrative in this regard, is the image of Die Antwoord member DJ Hi-Tek, who supposedly mixes the highly aggressive and menacing beats that compose their sound[3]. When he is portrayed in videos, Hi-Tek is from the onset an ironically menacing figure. For instance, throughout the video for *Fatty Boom Boom* (2012), Hi-Tek dons a white executioner's robe inscribed with various inclusive words (respect, peace, love, kindness, joy, hope, care) and the image of a rainbow, while he stares forward at the viewer beating slowly on makeshift drums. Mostly, High-Tek is displayed wearing a mask with exaggerated black features. This is the mask he wears when, in the song *Fok Julle Naaiers* (2017), Hi-Tek, who the group claims is an openly gay black man, threatens the audience, a 'punk ass white boy', with rape by saying in a low distorted voice that he will 'fuck you in da ass' and 'fuck you till you love me'. But, in other videos, such as *Wat Pomp* (2010), the mask is worn by the other members. Thus, rather than a genuine display of blackness, Hi-Tek's persona is a physicalization of otherizing fear that, when set before us, becomes something ridiculous. The act of white members wearing the exaggerated Hi-Tek mask, likewise, displays our fear of marginal

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2   Examples of the expansive literature on sexuality and colonialism see the works of Collins ([2000](#)), Young ([1995](#)), Hyman ([1990](#)), and Gilman ([1985](#)).

3   The real existence of DJ High-Tek is disputed and it is possible that he is a composite of multiple figures or that he is a single anonymous performer ([Obbard & Cork 2016](#); [Churszczewska 2015](#); [Parry 2015](#)).

whiteness, our fear of the racial pollution of blackness embedded in marginal whiteness, as something that is also laughable and ridiculous.

Die Antwoord satirical xenophobic messages alerts us to the fact that cosmopolitanization can result in truly monstrous transformations, meaning dangerous or fearful conglomerations, but not in the transformations we normally code as being monstrous. That the rhetoric of otherness apparent in the monster is not what is truly to be feared. The cultural invader is not the enemy, but when we transform ourselves into a perceived other, we cloak ourselves in the brutality assumed in the other. This is Ninja's claim 'you're not the enemy. I'm the enemy' ([Mechanic 2010](#)). To become the enemy, he transforms into the character's fears, not into a form of genuine blackness. In the defense of homogeneous culture, we become the brutality that before our transformation was merely a fiction. The brutality feared by anti-cosmopolitan responses to the cosmopolitan moment ironically becomes brutal just as in the past the colonists' fear of 'savages' transformed them into something savage.

Subaltern Whiteness and Nationalism in Ballen and Die Antwoord

When we compare the monstrous assemblages in the works of Ballen and Die Antwoord clear differences in racial and political meanings present themselves. For Ballen, the discourse constructs for us a monster, piecemealed by the camera lens, that fuses together elements of contemporary South Africa as genuine *fokked* up fruit salad. Die Antwoord, on the other hand, shifts this narrative by replacing genuine otherness with a heightened fictious other. The figure merges not with other cultures, but with the nationalizing categories themselves transforming their characters into something simultaneously frighteningly violent and ridiculously ironic. When Jones speaks in the voice of Ninja via lyrics, videos, and interviews, he transfigures this monstrous assemblage to dismiss it, not by portraying a static, subaltern, semi-white, Afrikaner other, but by showing us the formation of subaltern whiteness in the moment of its creation.

In the two examples of the portrayal of Afrikaners the transposition of the dialectical tension of cosmopolitanism and nationalism can be seen. In the work of Ballen, the analysis found portrayals which, while acting to defend poor Afrikaners, create a narrative which reinforces their subaltern white status. Through disturbing portrayals of the transcendence of epistemological and cultural boundaries (white/black, human/animal, living/dead) the Afrikaner is transformed into an abject lesson of transculturation that reinforces the naturalness of national boundaries. On the other hand, Die Antwoord, through a crude and forceful performance of the national identity, displays not only whiteness, as Scott ([2012](#)) identified, but the desire to understand self and otherness through hierarchical nationalistic categories as absurd. Both at the level of cultural reinforcement and in the larger geo-political environment, the outcome of such tensions is not predetermined, and how different imagining of subaltern whites in South Africa will affect recent trends towards renationalization is unknown. But, the place of marginal white populations, whose political actions have long been tied to racialized violence and nationalism, may be potentially impacted by their portrayal. The degree to which such depictions reinforce notions of abjection at the middling position of marginal whites being coded between the 'whiteness' and 'blackness' may have differing effects on the need and desire to reinforce racial distinctions. As our examples have shown, the fear of the transculturation of marginal whites as well as the negation of fear are both present in their portrayals.

Conclusion

This study has taken South Africa, focusing on the depiction of Afrikaners, as a case study for understanding the dialectical tensions between the cosmopolitan outlook and nationalistic response to globalization and how it can be identified and understood at an ideological level. While more work is needed for definitive claims concerning this tension's place in South African art more generally, let alone identifying and understanding these tensions globally, some insights into the ideological apparatus surrounding nationalism

have been made. Most significantly, the results point to the limits of cosmopolitanization when it occurs in existing hierarchies. When different cultures and peoples are unequally ranked, transculturation becomes suspect and can easily be transformed into a mark of impurity, as something monstrous, for marginal groups within dominant statuses. As was shown historically, in the creation of racialized categories and Afrikaner national identity, cosmopolitanization created contested categories of whiteness which precipitated the forms of ardent nationalism manifest in apartheid. This occurred in the Dutch settler colonists, whose interaction with indigenous Africans in combination with their often already marginalized position in Europe, placed them in a precarious position between indigenous peoples and other Europeans. Thus, the modern idea of race, in its very origins, was mobilized to defend marginal white status. Later, the apartheid system was at least partially the result of similar attempts to preserve white identity among marginal whites who felt their status within racial hierarchy was in question. As we have seen, such portrayals of Afrikaners caught between racial hierarchies of black and white persist in the post-apartheid era. The photography of Ballen, even in *Platteland's* defense of the Afrikaner population, treats Afrikaner poverty and their transculturation – seen in their assemblages with black bodies, animals, and inanimate objects – as something to elicit fear, pity, and disgust – in short as something abject.

Portraying a population as an enemy of racial progress, rather than embedding racial inequality in larger geopolitical flows of privilege and disenfranchisement, can lead to the reconstitution of nationalism based on the threat of inclusion or exclusion in a politics of national identity. Such findings have ramifications reaching beyond the South African context of this study. Currently, in the United States, xenophobia has become a political engine often driven by the populous responses of subaltern whites. In political discourse, racism is seen as the result of the 'backwardness' of 'dumb rednecks'. One does not have to look far to find images connecting racism with marginal whiteness in the mass media. Racial inequality, removed from the effect of market expansion via neoliberalism and increasing global stratification, is scapegoated on populations with contested whiteness whose racial and nationalistic responses to globalization occur through their middle status, between wealthy white acceptability and the marginal status of minorities, in racial social hierarchy. Their inclusion in nationalistic categories built upon the wealth meritocracy of the American dream is incomplete and thus competition with an externalized other of race and citizenship are given weight and purpose. Likewise, as globalization stretches throughout the world, there is likely similar images of middling statuses, populations caught between intersections of privilege and domination. These images interpolate these populations into nationalistic responses, reinforcing the hierarchical exclusion of the nation state and forestalling cosmopolitan outlooks.

Thus, the portrayal of subaltern white populations is significant within patterns of nationalism. But this essay's findings also point to a potential counter rhetoric at work in South African media exemplified in the work of Die Antwoord. Far from scapegoating Afrikaners or questioning their white status, they instead render the fictitious racialized other and the fear of the transformation of these marginalized whites legible. We see the characters of Ninja and Vi$$er transform, putting on nightmarish masks perpetuated and created by racialized hierarchies. We see them become the image of the enemy. Their monstrous transformations are not the result of their status as Afrikaners but something that occurs though the application of nationalized hierarchies and their tenuous position within them. Monsters are not born, they do not preexist in cognizable groups, they are made through the application of difference, a subtlety that neither negates the harm done by subaltern whites nor identifies them as the creators of their unique position in the history and continuation of nationalism.

Acknowledgements

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