

Ons sal antwoord op jou roepstem: Steve Hofmeyr and Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid Afrikaans cinema¹

ABSTRACT

This article argues that Steve Hofmeyr's Afrikaner identity, an identity he performs across various media platforms, including a selection of feature length Afrikaans films, is a paradoxical hybrid of Afrikaner exceptionalism and claims to victimhood. The exceptionalism and self-imposed victimhood are engaged in an across-media dialogue, as Steve Hofmeyr's social media and political activist persona speak to his participation in three Afrikaans language films: *Pretville* (Korsten, 2012), *Platteland* (Else, 2011) and *Treurgrond* (Roodt, 2015). Hofmeyr's presence foregrounds and exacerbates an already problematic ideological context in which attempts at multiculturalism are rendered moot by the conservatism in these films, especially where land – the farm – is concerned. While *Pretville* invents a 1950s South African town that fails to correspond to any inhabited reality of that time, *Platteland* offers an Afrikaans musical-western wherein Hofmeyr dominates as patriarch. Finally, the attempts of *Treurgrond* at raising farm murder awareness are nullified through casting Hofmeyr as a farmer facing a land claim, given Hofmeyr's active campaigning against an alleged Boer genocide.²

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¹ The phrase *ons sal antwoord op u roepstem* ("we will heed your calling") is taken from the apartheid-era South African national anthem, "Die Stem", and reflects both Afrikanerdom's Christian foundationalism as well as a response to the land, the South African soil, calling out to Afrikaners.

² This article, specifically section two on Afrikaner identity, draws on the author's doctoral research on the political impotence of contemporary Afrikaans language cinema in a study titled, *Absences, exclusivities, utopias: Afrikaans films as a cinema of political impotence, 1994–2014* (2015).

INTRODUCTION

This article argues that the Afrikaner identity that Steve Hofmeyr promotes in his films is strongly aligned with a specific form of Afrikaner identity constructed through his social media persona and his political activism. As such, this article foregrounds and interrogates a specific constellation of Afrikaner identity that occupies a prominent space in the Afrikaner socio-cultural sphere. Whereas this construction of a specific Afrikaner identity as performed by Steve Hofmeyr is not necessarily culturally hegemonic, it remains a prominent, visible, and culturally pervasive performance of identity. Popular culture tends to focus on constructions of the 'alpha male' and such performances of identity take precedence over other, subordinate identity discourses (Jackson & Balaji, 2013:19). This article takes the established position that identity is performed. While a rehearsal of Judith Butler's arguments about performativity and gender identity in this regard falls beyond the scope of the article, it is worth underlining Butler's rejection of an inherent essence to identity (Brickell, 2005:24), and her position that identity, like gender, is shaped through discourse (2005:26). It is through the performance of an identity that "gendered subjectivity is brought into being, or made to 'matter'" (Tyler & Cohen, 2010:178). This performativity aims to construct a coherent identity, often at the cost of its own complexity (2010:179).

While the films *Pretville*, *Platteland* and *Treurgrond* suggest a deeply problematic notion of Afrikaner identity, history and nation, the presence of Hofmeyr in these films further legitimates and reinscribes this particular politically conservative identity of Afrikaner exceptionalism.³

The article develops its argument in three consecutive parts – on Hofmeyr, on Afrikaner identity and on the three films respectively – before offering a conclusion that speaks to Afrikaner identity's regular claims to, and of, victimhood.

1. STEVE HOFMEYR'S SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Steve Hofmeyr is a contentious Afrikaans-speaking South African political and entertainment figure, especially in the post-apartheid Afrikaans context. He is a figure devoid of mystery, a non-enigma, a political saviour and albatross, a figure who offers the public many intersecting micro-narratives to be altogether consumed as the macro-narrative, "Steve Hofmeyr". This article explores the persona of Steve Hofmeyr the film actor (and former talk show host) by bringing his film roles in *Pretville* (Korsten, 2012), *Platteland* (Else, 2011) and *Treurgrond* (Roodt, 2015) into alignment with his social media and political activist roles to interrogate the Afrikaner identity that Hofmeyr promotes across different media. Identity, as Van der Westhuizen (2008:46) explains, is a pliable and fluid concept that corresponds to changing circumstances and interactions.

³ *Pretville* best translates as "Funville", while *Platteland* could translate as "Country" (indicative of the countryside in rural areas). *Treurgrond* can be translated as "Soil of Sorrows". I will use the original Afrikaans titles throughout the article.

In this light, it is even more compelling to observe how Hofmeyr's performance of Afrikaner identity remains consistent and unbending.⁴

While at times Hofmeyr seems to subscribe to a contemporary double-truth approach to social issues [see Terry Eagleton's *Culture and the Death of God* (2014)] – avoiding actual discussions of religion and politics so as to not upset his fans, while personally subscribing to a charitably agnostic religious position, for instance – his views on and performance of Afrikaner identity may be somewhat clearer to identify and articulate. In response to Hofmeyr's statement that he views himself as having betrayed the Afrikaner in the preamble to the 1994 democratic elections, Max du Preez (2014:21)⁵ reflects that being branded by one's community as a traitor or hensopper⁶ can result in one being ostracised from that community. Hofmeyr has experienced ostracism and marginalisation first hand, as I will discuss below. As an active, visible social media presence, Hofmeyr responds to challenges by those whose political views differ from his and finds ample support from those who share his positions on the Afrikaner, the Afrikaans language and alleged black-on-white violence. As Lewis (2013:64) explains, different media forms are united by the purpose "to deliver audiences to advertisers", and not simply to entertain and inform. Similarly, different media find points of convergence in how they might market a specific ideological construct, such as Hofmeyr's particular performance of Afrikaner identity.

Even a cursory view of a single afternoon and evening's Twitter activity reveals Hofmeyr's construction of a particular Afrikaner identity. On Sunday, 27 September 2015, Hofmeyr first tweeted about the Springboks' win over West Samoa at the Rugby World Cup, then reminded his followers about the birth of general Louis Botha, and finally tweeted 1 Corinthians 6:20.⁷ In three tweets, Hofmeyr offers a snapshot of his Afrikaner identity through his commemoration of Afrikaner history, how he confirms his interest in sport and his loyalty to the South African national

⁴ It may very well be that the relative consistency of Hofmeyr's performance of a particular Afrikaner identity is because Hofmeyr does not wish to alienate the loyal audience he has cultivated over the past thirty years. This audience has buying power, and alienating them would directly affect the income generated by his record sales and public appearances.

⁵ Du Preez is the author of *Pale Native* (2011), an autobiographical reflection on being a white Afrikaans speaking male in post-apartheid South Africa, and a reflection on life as a political activist against government oppression during the 1980s. He was one of the founding members of the politically progressive weekly *Vrye Weekblad* in 1988, which offered a regular critique of the PW Botha-led government.

⁶ The word *hensopper* originated in the South African War (previously known as the Anglo-Boer War) as a derogatory term for those Afrikaner men who opted to surrender to the British forces during the (1899-1902) conflict. The word indicates the cowardice of individuals who choose to put their hands in the air in the face of a superior force, with the literal gesture of putting one's "hands up" transforming into *hensop* in colloquial Afrikaans.

⁷ "[Y]ou were bought at a price. Therefore honor God [with your bodies]" (translation taken from the New International Version of the Bible).

rugby team, and by tweeting an extract from the Bible.⁸ Somewhat cynically, but accurately, Hofmeyr has been aptly described as a “shameless self-promoter” (Baines, 2009:5) given the vastness of his online visibility and activity.

Hofmeyr, who started his career in the entertainment industry in the 1980s as an actor, would in the 1990s and beyond become an Afrikaans singer-songwriter and poet, as well as (in the view of some Afrikaans-speaking South Africans), a political activist.⁹ Hofmeyr’s primary cultural position is within the event industry of live music performances (Manners, Saayman & Kruger, 2014:1). Much like Afrikaans cinema, Afrikaans pop music specifically became known after 1994 for its depoliticised content that failed to speak to either apartheid or democracy (Van der Waal & Robins, 2011:764), as evidenced by a number of Hofmeyr’s songs including *Pampoen* (“Pumpkin”), a wildly popular hybrid of nostalgia and crashing ocean waves performed as a duet with former Afrikaans teen singing sensation Nádine Hoffeldt. Indeed, Van der Waal and Robins (2011:774–775) identify a nostalgic turn among white Afrikaners, a turn reflected in Afrikaans songs such as *De la Rey*.¹⁰ As Nel (2010:129–130) demonstrates, Afrikaans music addresses issues such as Afrikaner Calvinism critically as in the music of Fokopolisiekar. While Marx and Milton (2011:726) rightly claim that some contemporary white musicians do attempt to interrogate their own identities and the ambivalences of their own cultural contexts, Hofmeyr approaches his own position without irony and conceptual nuance, instead constantly reaffirming and solidifying his identity as a hegemonic Afrikaner male.

Hofmeyr gained a measure of notoriety in 2013 when he and Sunnette Bridges, the daughter of late Afrikaans singer Bles Bridges, hosted the Red October march which, according to numerous social critics, was a misguided attempt at bringing black-on-white violence to the foreground. Willemien Calitz (2014:35) describes Hofmeyr’s involvement in the Red October campaign as playing on associations of victimhood, and as conveying a message of white victimhood to an audience composed primarily of working class white Afrikaners. This social group is mostly affected by equity employment policies, but Hofmeyr generates an income from this mostly white fan base; as a performer, he himself is “unaffected by the competition of the integrated job sphere” (2014:36). The following year, at the 2014 Innibos Festival held in Nelspruit, South Africa, Hofmeyr led an audience of approximately 40,000 festival attendees in singing the former South African national anthem, “Die Stem”, resulting in a considerable media controversy and renewed debate

⁸ Hofmeyr is an avid Blue Bull rugby team supporter, and his song *Die Bloubul* (“The Blue Bull”) is considered the national song of the rugby team (Villet, n.d.:72), although Hofmeyr’s rendition of Ge Korsten’s *Liefeling* remains a favourite.

⁹ It has become standard practice in Afrikaans cinema to cast Afrikaans musicians, especially singers, in feature length films. Examples include Kurt Darren in the Dutch-Afrikaans coproduction *Ek Lief Jou* (De Jong, 2012) and Theuns Jordaan in *Jakhalsdans* (Roodt, 2012). Bok van Blerk has headlined many Afrikaans films in addition to *Platteland*, such as *As Jy Sing* (Odendaal, 2013) and *Leading Lady* (Pretorius, 2014).

¹⁰ Van der Waal and Robins (2011:765) frame the song *De La Rey*, performed by Bok van Blerk, as “[embodying] a post-modern identity politics” that in a highly selective manner “re-appropriated Afrikaner symbols and perceptions in the name of cultural revitalisation” with a decidedly nostalgic slant.

on whether to include the Afrikaans portions of the national anthem which are derived from “Die Stem”. The incident was one of a series of key events that would lead to Hofmeyr’s removal from various arts festival line-ups, and to sponsorship withdrawals (Magcaba, 2015).¹¹

In one bruising social media *faux pas*, Hofmeyr suggested on Twitter that black South Africans should “take ownership of ‘their part’ in apartheid” (Williams, 2014, par. 2), using the hashtag #RealArchitectsofApartheid. Rafieka Williams suggests that the tweet is ideologically aligned with Hofmeyr’s spearheading of the Red October campaign as “a form of latent apartheid denialism that often finds expression in right wing political discourse” (2014, par. 4); the perceived failures of the ANC-led government are seen to justify the apartheid regime. In Williams’s (2014) view, Hofmeyr perpetuates the notion that white superiority is a natural condition, one that other races simply need to wake up to and accept. De Vos (2015, par. 3) suggests that Hofmeyr gives voice to the prejudices and fears that many of his fans are too scared or hypocritical to themselves articulate, even as these views are held in the face of constant media criticism. According to a post on the conservative Afrikaans website PRAAG (<http://praag.org/?p=17063>), Hofmeyr is positioned as a target of the local media monopoly held by Media24, with Hofmeyr as a scapegoat to save Media24’s “Atlanticist neo-colonial project”.¹² As described above, Hofmeyr performs an online and offline Afrikaner identity that promotes complementary narratives of white victimhood and white superiority.

How does Hofmeyr see himself? In an interview with Annemarie van Niekerk (2010), Hofmeyr locates himself between two perceived polarities: whites who consider him a *kafferboetie* (a white ‘brother’ to black people) and blacks who see him as racist.¹³ Reflecting on his role as artist, Hofmeyr says: “like Nietzsche, I embrace art for the ease of it; I find the wideness of the spectrum too beautiful to specialise in just one art”. As a self-described “typical existentialist”, Hofmeyr says he suffers from “self-imposed loadshedding”, during which time he busies himself with creatively moot projects for months.

Existential Nietzschean or not, Hofmeyr’s view of history is rather simplistic. In response to the Paul Kruger statue being vandalised in Pretoria, he positions himself as a cultural crusader and

¹¹ Hofmeyr has long had an uneasy presence on the mainstream arts festival circuit, having infamously assaulted journalist and newspaper editor Jan-Jan Joubert at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK) in 2002 (Wasserman, 2004:141). In Hofmeyr’s view, Joubert should have prevented the publication of a negative review of Hofmeyr’s show since the journalist who wrote the review made derogatory comments about Hofmeyr’s fans and family, instead of focusing on the content of the show itself (2004:141). The majority of newspaper correspondence reflected massive public support for Hofmeyr (ibid.).

¹² For Dan Roodt (2015), Media24 employees such as Pierre de Vos place political correctness above truth, and Roodt accuses the journalist of trying Hofmeyr in a kangaroo court. See Smith, Fourie and Froneman (2012) for a broad overview of Afrikaans-language tabloid reporting in particular.

¹³ The word *kafferboetie*, as Simoes da Silva (2007:13) explains, literally translates as ‘brother to blacks’; “in the racist language of old South Africa, the phrase had a derogative meaning, applied to a White person perceived to have got so close to Black people as to risk semiotic, if not genetic defilement”.

conservator: “I am defending a Western tradition of how civilisations go about history where they have known for a long time that there is no monument in the world that doesn’t offend somebody”. Hofmeyr continues: “We are the sum total of all our history, not just the fun parts for you. Whereas history serves most civilisations, South Africa prefers to be enslaved by its history” (as quoted in De Villiers, 2015, par. 5 & 6). Clearly, Hofmeyr sees history as something inherently offensive, and that one cannot edit out those parts of history that someone deems offensive without altering the ‘truth’ of history. In addition, Hofmeyr sees South African history as a preferred condition of stasis where there is a hegemonic ‘true’ history that should be honoured. Hofmeyr’s use of the phrase “enslaved by history” is significant, as it speaks to tensions around forgetting the past that are explored in the next section.

2. AFRIKANER IDENTITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The idea of Afrikaner identity is a much-interrogated notion in post-apartheid South African scholarship on identity and social change. It often focuses on how white Afrikaners have responded (or not) to the dynamics of socio-political change that continues to mark the South African cultural landscape.¹⁴ There are numerous approaches to and constructions of Afrikaner identity, and I provide a brief overview of a selection of these constructions below.

Recently, white Afrikaans-speaking documentary filmmaker Annalet Steenkamp, director of *Ek, Afrikaner* (2014), described herself as a “white African” whose films interrogate a variety of cultural myths ingrained in Afrikanerdom, such as the religious conviction that God had promised the white Afrikaners African soil (Van Zyl, 2014). Steenkamp distances herself from the label ‘Afrikaner’ by opting instead for the more inclusive label, ‘African’.

Van Staden and Sevenhuysen (2009:170) explain that the Afrikaner, as a social group, possesses a clearly articulated shared value system. Annette Combrink (in Viljoen, Lewis & Van Der Merwe, 2004:4) lists the following items as characteristics or “markers” of Afrikaner identity: the presence of the Afrikaans language in itself; the desire and love for land (as epitomised in the farm); a pervasive sense (and accompanying narrative) of survival; a strong sense of family; a sense of political conservatism; and a dominant religious position occupied by Christianity, especially in its Calvinist form. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its narratives of police brutality, politically-motivated murder and relentless racial oppression during apartheid discredited the idealism of Afrikaner identity (Viljoen et al., 2004:4).

Antonique van Staden and Karina Sevenhuysen (2009:157) investigate the social consciousness of the Afrikaner as portrayed in three early Afrikaans films, including *Die Bou van ‘n Nasie* (Albrecht, 1938). Van Staden and Sevenhuysen (2009:157) describe the social consciousness of the Afrikaner as reflective of the Afrikaner’s adherence to Christianity, its political conservatism,

¹⁴ See Sonnekus (2009; 2013) for interrogations of post-apartheid white Afrikaner masculinity as read through a queer lens. Especially in his discussion of the film *Skoonheid* (Hermanus, 2011); Sonnekus (2013) reveals the failure of some Afrikaner males to productively respond to political change.

and its privileging of the farm and rural spaces. In his discussion of Afrikaner identity, Lewis (2001) even uses the totalising term ‘the Afrikaner mind’, but is cognisant of the criticism of such an approach and pre-empts such critique: “[i]n defence of that totalising term *the Afrikaner mind*, I would draw attention again to the construction of a peculiar monolithic social identity over the last 120 years or so” in part constituted “in reaction to external forces – not least to the racial and ethnic categorization of the English” (Lewis, 2001:439).

Afrikaner identity is in itself the result of historical political and ethnic demarcation and marginalisation and has a firm religious foundation in validating its dominant myth of white superiority. Krog (2013:77) argues that Afrikaners developed their own exclusionary mythology, especially where suffering was concerned. As Ernst Renan recognised in the late nineteenth century already, “‘having suffered together’ can be more powerful than memories of joy and triumph” in unifying social groups (Marschall, 2010:364). As Steyn (2004:148) explains, the position of victim has been prominent in discussions of Afrikaner whiteness; as Brayton (2007:58) suggests, the white male both disavows and embraces victimhood. This sense of victimhood is verbally articulated by the protagonists in the selected films and reflects pervasive anxieties about racial and cultural identity (Steyn, 2004:153), of being “[a]liens in a now foreign and disintegrating land” (2004:156).

Nyamnjoh (2011:19) warns that “[a]ttending to the interests of particular cultural groups as strategically essential entities risks contradicting the principles of liberal democracy and its emphasis on civic citizenship and the autonomous individual”. Specifically, Afrikaans language cinema should be careful to not, as Nyamnjoh (2011:22) phrases it, “slip into meta-narratives that celebrate victimhood”. In his analysis of the predominantly Afrikaans trade union Solidarity (or, *Solidariteit*), Boersema (2012:420) confirms that in the aftermath of political transformation – experienced as the collapse of Afrikaner nationalism – Afrikaners often perform the role of victim in response to change.

For some conservative Afrikaans cultural figures, the most productive response to political change is one of forgetting. Dan Roodt (2000:3) states that an ideology of guilt took hold of Afrikaners and white individuals.¹⁵ Such was the strength of this ideology of guilt, says Roodt (2000:3), that it impeded rational thinking. For Roodt (2000:5), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was little more than a process of rewriting history through propaganda; the TRC literally rewrote South African history. Roodt (2000:120) recommends that Afrikaans-speaking people surrender themselves to a radical forgetfulness incapable of recollecting the TRC or any part of its contents. It is then, says Roodt, that ‘we’ (*Afrikaanssprekendes*, or Afrikaans speaking people) “will be capable of rewriting history using a completely different vocabulary. By forgetting the TRC, Afrikaans speaking people will be ridding themselves of a series of apartheid related clichés”

¹⁵ Buys (2013:13) criticises Dan Roodt’s strategy of promoting issues close to the Afrikaner by attempting to “prove” how unintelligent black people are. Such a destructive approach to promoting Afrikaner issues simply creates more opposition to any causes the Afrikaner associates with and leads some Afrikaners to reject the label ‘Afrikaner’ completely (ibid.).

(2000:125). Finally, forgetting the TRC, says Roodt (2000:126) would make it possible to remember the past. Problematically, Roodt sees the TRC, a memory and recollection-based project, as an obstacle to 'true' remembering, to an 'accurate' version of the past. In Roodt's project, the black voices that emerged during the TRC, as well as the white voices that articulated their accountability in crimes and misconduct, should be silenced by forgetting the entire TRC event.

Mangu (2008:103) cites Njabulo Ndebele as describing a "culture of callousness" evidenced by "white silence about the desecration of black bodies in present-day South Africa". This white silence is a form of conservative nationalism, a response of white perceptions to "black attacks on white entitlements". Forgetting can only inflate a sense of silence and associated privilege. Forgetting and silencing, of course, are measures of exclusion. The idea of exclusion signifies that inclusion of a select group of individuals within the parameters of a cultural narrative and within a certain community. "Culture," explain Zegeye and Liebenberg (2001:316), "was not simply an instrument for constructing communities or allocating material resources, but was marshalled as an ideological weapon for both apartheid beneficiaries and the dispossessed". White Afrikaans culture instilled a sense of fear not only of the other, but also "manifestations of the culture of 'others'" (Zegeye & Liebenberg, 2001:316). Masilela (2001:225) recounts how *De Voortrekkers* was shown annually on 16 December "as a means of recharging nationalist passions by means of the invocation of historical myths", and adds: "[t]his could not but have the effect of narrowing the possibilities and options of our cinematic national imagination". Any narrowing of a collective imagination was in line with eventual apartheid practice. *De Voortrekkers* (Shaw, 1916) did not celebrate one race's conquering of the land, but a specific *culture's* dominance over the land and all of its inhabitants (a key scene in the film shows a Zulu man's religious conversion to Christianity). A uniform white Afrikaans culture was hegemonic for the duration of the 20th century in South Africa, and its sense of dominant cultural primacy has not receded given the numerous financial successes of the Afrikaans music and film industries.

As Coombes (2003:8) puts it, "research on the witnessing and testimony collected in the aftermath of genocide, war, or systematic political repression (*such as in the case of South Africa*) has pointed to the impact of trauma on memory and the distinction between narrative and traumatic memory" (emphasis added). Post-conflict societies, such as South Africa, should be aware of the possibilities of exacerbating past transgressions, and be cognisant of how many new democracies present socio-economic hardship (Volltmer, 2013:109). It is not sufficient for the media – and social media – to not perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices (2013:195). Rather, media should create opportunities of dialogue between citizens (*ibid.*). To be sure, minorities often rewrite their past in an assertive, legitimising narrative instead of seeking out such constructive interaction; for Žižek (2005:126), this "retroactive rewriting" omits "the Real of a traumatic encounter", even when these rewritten narratives have the appearance of being inclusive. Žižek argues that

the relationship between traditional imperialist colonialism and global capitalist self-colonization is exactly the same as the relationship between Western cultural imperialism and multiculturalism ... [which] involves patronizing Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without root in one's own particular culture. (Žižek, 1997:44).

As such, multiculturalism is “a racism which empties its own position of all positive content ... but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures” (emphasis in original) (Žižek, 2007:171). Effectively, respecting the specificity of the Other is the actual manifestation of one’s own superiority.

Appiah (2006:118) uses cultural patrimony to refer to “products of a culture: the group from whose conventions the object derives its significance. Here the objects are understood to belong to a particular group, heirs to a trans-historical identity, whose patrimony they are”. In this sense, films and figures such as Hofmeyr that emerge from a specific cultural context need to be read and interpreted against that background and as part of that context, oscillating between sustaining that culture and subverting it. In the instance of contemporary Afrikaans cinema and the films featuring Hofmeyr as a primary cast member, little cultural subversion occurs. *Pretville*, *Platteland* and to a lesser extent *Treurgroend* offer a South African multicultural veneer instead of a sense of socio-political plurality.

The word “plural”, as political philosopher J.J. Degenaar (1980:110) uses it, indicates a group’s autonomy in the sense that the rules and regulations that guide behaviour for group members are prescribed by the group itself. Political maturation and plurality are the antithesis of Afrikaner *laager* culture, referring “to the Afrikaner’s feeling of being threatened, and his fear of domination results in the continual withdrawal into a laager to protect his identity”; this self-imposed isolation results in a ‘frontier mentality’ and ‘frontier fear’ based on and feeding a fear of other (racial) groups (Degenaar, 1983:51).¹⁶ The Afrikaner aimed to sustain a separate identity and remained suspicious of anyone perceived as a threat to their identity (ibid.), and it is this sense of isolation as exceptionalism that *Pretville* and *Platteland* convey. In instances of siege culture, the Afrikaner opts purely for survival and not a more productive ‘creative survival’ that is guided by a process of self-analysis (1983:35).¹⁷

Mangcu (2008:103) argues “the politics of solidarity are just as strong in the white community as they are in the black community. The political vehicle or manifestation of the indifference is what the renowned African American political scientist Ron Walters describes as a conservative nationalism”. This white conservative nationalism, as embodied and performed by Hofmeyr, is “a form of reaction against what is perceived as a black attack on white entitlements” (Mangcu, 2008:107). As an extremism, Afrikaner exceptionalism knows only allies or enemies, and while exceptionalism may not always create these categories in explicit terms, its presence is often

¹⁶ *Laager* refers to the way in which Voortrekkers arranged their wagons in periods of rest while moving north during the Great Trek (1835-1846). The *laager* was a protective stationary structure that allowed the Voortrekkers to more easily defend themselves if they were attacked. The idea of a *laager* mentality would come to indicate a sense of political retreat and ethnic insularity (Blaser, 2004:192) and would often be used in a derogatory manner to describe Afrikaner parochialism (Brits, 2008:55, 61).

¹⁷ As Ndeble (cited in Dlamini & Jones, 2013:9) explains, “each of us, to various degrees, wants to hold onto some notion of purity that has not been tainted by the other. But, in fact, it’s impossible to find such purity”.

perceptible in the indifference to race and class that often occurs under the thin veneer of multiculturalism.

3. STEVE HOFMEYR'S CINEMATIC AFRIKANER IDENTITY

This section offers a selection of three Afrikaans language films that, given Hofmeyr's participation and presence, promote a specific form of Afrikaner identity. These films are popular mainstream movies mostly modelled on clear genre types, such as the musical, the western and the thriller. Hofmeyr's presence in these films complements a rather narrow and set idea of Afrikaner identity, one that is far removed from the more nuanced definitions and constructions of Afrikaner identity that filmmakers such as Jans Rautenbach created in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁸

Hofmeyr rose to fame as an actor in playing the villain Bruce Beyers in the Afrikaans language drama series *Agter Elke Man* (1985-1988).¹⁹ As Beyers, Hofmeyr became so popular that he was first billed in the series-inspired feature film *Agter Elke Man* (Marx, 1990), and two years later he landed the lead in the romantic musical comedy *No Hero* (Spring, 1992). Senekal's (2015) multi-level network analysis of actors and other role players in the South African film industry demonstrates that Hofmeyr has a rather low presence in Afrikaans cinema overall, starring in only a few films. His visibility in these films is raised by his social media and social activist visibility. In the teen comedy *Bakgat! 2* (Pretorius, 2010), he cameoed as mad psychiatrist running a bizarre mental health treatment facility. His presence in the film amounts to little more than a curiosity. Seen in alignment with his public personas, *Pretville* (Korsten, 2012) is a more provocative film. That film's marketing campaign interpellated Afrikaans speaking individuals the world over to identify themselves with signs reading, "Pretville is here, Pretville is everywhere". Canada, Australia, England: all those Afrikaans speaking expatriate homelands became *Pretville* by virtue of the individuals inhabiting those spaces, their claim to what those spaces are or can be, and their implicit association and alignment with Hofmeyr. In *Pretville*, Hofmeyr stars as Eddie Electric, an Elvis-like local music legend who returns to his 1950s hometown to rekindle a romantic relationship with a former flame.

Casting Hofmeyr as the singer emphasises the kitschy conservatism of the film, a musical that offers a 1950s era that fails to correlate with any of the political upheaval and social policies of the time. This is a 1950s of diners, milkshakes and hot dogs that more closely resembles the American musical *Grease* (Kleiser, 1978) than it does the South African historical context of separate development. At the centre is Hofmeyr's character, informing the viewer (whether they are in Pretoria, Toronto or Melbourne), that he always returns home, but also, that home is wherever you make it to be. Afrikaans culture and its shaping of belonging can be transplanted to anywhere in the world as long as participants claim that process as one of ideological geographic

¹⁸ Rautenbach, specifically, was a *Sestiger*. The word *Sestiger* describes an individual such as Rautenbach "whose work was exploratory, innovative and provocative at this key moment of redefinition of what can loosely be called 'Afrikaner identity'" (Hees, 2007:377).

¹⁹ *Agter Elke Man* translates as "Behind every man".

demarcation. *Pretville* delivers the laager that evades the life-world a specific type of Afrikaner. Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski reflected on the Iranian revolution, remarking that “a whole nation cannot emigrate, so it undertakes a migration in time rather than space ... it goes back to a past that seems a lost paradise” (Wheen, 2004:10). *Pretville* offers a distinctive Afrikaner homeland led by Steve Hofmeyr, a harmonious society as a kind of fantasy that obscures social antagonism (Žižek, 2005:108).

Platteland, produced by Philo Pieterse and directed by Sean Else, is a series of farm-based soft-focus music videos masquerading as a Boersploitatio-cum-western epic. The film offers a narrative thematically centred on the significance of land and land ownership. Hofmeyr’s character, the villainous Mike Ferreira, is introduced seven minutes into the film and from these early scenes the character is framed (with firearms) as overtly masculine. Early in the film, another character raises accusations of a white strategy behind “so-called farm attacks” in the area. This controversial remark takes a back seat to Ferreira’s first solo singing number, called “Baas van die Plaas” (“Boss of the farm”), 14 minutes into the film. The film’s protagonist, Dirk Pretorius (played by Afrikaans singer Bok van Blerk), is only introduced after 26 minutes, by which time Hofmeyr is clearly dominating the narrative. Indeed, at 01:55:50, Ferreira tells Pretorius: “But this isn’t your movie. It’s mine”. *Platteland* is Hofmeyr’s film not only in terms of his character’s narrative dominance, but also in his character’s outlaw persona. In an interview with the Afrikaans women’s magazine *Sarie* (2008), Hofmeyr states that Afrikaners are cowboys who are naturally more drawn to rural settings than cities, where four-wheel drive vehicles have replaced horses. Hofmeyr’s positioning of the Afrikaner as cowboy conveys a certain masculine identity about protecting one’s homestead or farm against the outlaws that threaten its existence or stability. The farm, as Tomaselli (2006:145) explains, represents a timeless existence as well as a “cultural memory [that] represented the ‘traditions’ on which the Afrikaner ‘nation’ tried to maintain group cohesion” (2006:145), as “a guarantor for cultural integrity” (2006:149).

In Darrell James Roodt’s *Treurgrond*, the Hofmeyr patriarch persona returns as the religiously devout Lukas van Staden, a farmer facing a land claim against the backdrop of brutal farm murders in South Africa. At the film’s premiere, producer Samuel Frauenstein stated, “we will not stop fighting until South Africa is again the wonderful land it once was” (Swanepoel, 2015:12). Free tissues were handed out the premiere in cynical anticipation of viewers’ emotional response to the film – the commodification of tears as part of a larger marketing strategy.

Before the screening, Steve Hofmeyr denied criticism that the film is propaganda for civil rights organisation AfriForum, saying that such criticism would only be valid if the statistics about the prevalence and brutality of farm murders were wrong. Weys (2016) argues that viewers of *Treurgrond* will in all likelihood be unable to separate their own opinions about Hofmeyr (and, I want to add, his particular Afrikaner identity) from the fictional character, Lukas van Staden. Casting Hofmeyr as the farmer in a film about farmers reinforces the perception that farm attacks occur exclusively along racial lines, with white farmers under attack from black criminals (Weys, 2016, par. 30).

While screenwriter Tarryn-Tanille Prinsloo describes *Treurgrond* in the mould of multi-character narratives such as Inarritu's *21 Grams* and *Babel* (Nel 2015:12), the film is mainly centred on Lukas, an honest man trying to make an honest living and looking after his immediate, multiracial community. Hofmeyr occupies a very public role in the narration of the Boer genocide. He sees himself as representative of a dwindling minority, a social and ethnic group he refers to as "my community" (Pretorius, 2014:23). Pretorius (2014:30) frames the prevalence of the Boer genocide narrative as a phobic response that extends a continuing Afrikaner struggle to assimilate into the post-apartheid landscape. "The farm (or land) is a particular post-colonial space, almost mythical in its representation of political struggle for freedom in South African security imaginaries" (Pretorius, 2014:28).

In an interview with Danie Marais, Darrell James Roodt denies that Hofmeyr's involvement in *Treurgrond* threatened the integrity of the project due to the performer's considerable political and personal baggage. "If anything," says Roodt, "the extremists ... would probably brand Steve as a traitor for his (deeply) sympathetic portrayal of a farmer caught up in strange times!" Roodt concedes that casting Hofmeyr as a farmer facing a land claim might create the "(false) impression that it is right-wing propaganda", which the film, he maintains, is not. Hofmeyr, says Roodt, is simply the face of the cause.²⁰ At the end of the film, Lukas, his wife and a grandchild are murdered in a farm attack. The last shot is a close-up of Hofmeyr's face as he holds up a hand against blinding torchlight, his eyes a brilliant blue, as he begs for the life of his family. Not that this is not the last time we see Hofmeyr; at the end of the film, we enter another character's flashback in which Hofmeyr is celebrating Christmas with his family. Looking straight into the camera, at "us", Hofmeyr rises from the table to embrace us, and welcome us to the festivities.

Platteland and *Treurgrond* offer an interesting polarity as far as Hofmeyr's politics are concerned: in the former film, he is an imperialist crime lord intent on taking others' farmland, while in the latter, he is the boer fighting to retain his land. *Platteland* is a western musical fantasy; *Treurgrond* is a thriller. Hofmeyr's persona as entertainer-activist anchors both films as a central point of reference and in each, he embodies an Afrikaner male who will fight for what he believes is his, even at great personal cost.

In the context of New German Cinema, Santner (1992:144) uses the notion of narrative fetishism to refer to "the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called the narrative into being in the first place". Narrative fetishism actually undoes the need for collective mourning "by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere" (Santner, 1992:144). For Cunningham (2013:544), "[t]he instability of cultural maintenance and negotiation can lead, at one extreme, to being locked into a time warp with the fetishized homeland – as it once might have

²⁰ What Roodt does not explicitly point out is that Hofmeyr's involvement in a film helps to secure financing: a major film needs to "be 'made' before it is actually made, either through the promise of a particular star or group of stars, rumours of spectacular new technologies, or astonishing production costs" (Corrigan, 1991:12).

been but no longer is or can be; and, at the other, to assimilation of the dominant host culture and a loss of place in one's originary culture". On stage and on screen, it is this homeland that Hofmeyr fights for, not as part of a mourning work, but as part of a social imaginary that closely ties into his entertainer-activist persona.

Mainly, though, Hofmeyr emerges as nostalgic figure *par excellence* across all three films in a manner reminiscent of the postheroic narratives emerging from Europe the past decade. Due to various social realities and pressures such as increasing wealth inequalities, "Europe no longer has a *heroic narrative* of self-identity" (emphasis in original) (Elsaesser, 2012:707). The heroic narrative, such as it was, was founded on "imperialism, slavery, and colonialism, on exploitation and exclusion" (2012:708). Instead of exploring the possibilities in the post-heroic narrative now on offer, Europe has turned instead "towards the past, towards commemoration and collective nostalgia" (ibid.). A post-heroic narrative foregrounds the presence of antagonism and conflict and the oppositional values and interests that characterise a society; nonetheless, there are other factors that still bind individuals into a community (2012:709). In the work of filmmakers such as Aki Kaurismaki, Michael Haneke, Lars von Trier and the Dardennes Brothers, the post-heroic narrative provides an account of the 'other' within the self, with the 'not-I' as part of the white middle-class protagonist (2012:723).

4. CONCLUSION

It is within a similar context that Steve Hofmeyr occupies a visible position in this post-heroic metanarrative that much of Afrikaans cinema seems to offer, where Afrikaner identity is performed as central monocultural construct. As JJ Degenaar (2008:296) describes it, monoculturalism sustains the supremacy of Western patriarchy; it is a type of conservative multiculturalism, since monoculturalism nonetheless acknowledges a variety of existing cultures, albeit in an often-patronising manner. Hofmeyr's performance of Afrikaner identity within and outside of the selected films, suggests an almost insular monocultural primacy of this particular form of Afrikaner identity.

Hofmeyr's propagation of a singular Afrikaner identity and history as an act of forgetting (as Roodt defines it), serves to silence oppositional views. In the films, Hofmeyr's presence exacerbates perceptions of Afrikaner identity as equivocal to Afrikaner exceptionalism, where the open South African society has offered Afrikaner identity constructions and the myth of the conquering hero clashes and conflates with the persistent claims to victimhood. The veneer of multiculturalism, as opposed to political plurality, creates an ideological space that facilitates and allows for such problematic constructions of Afrikaner identity. Within this context, Steve Hofmeyr continues to embody a past-centric, singular Afrikaner identity that refuses to correspond to socio-political South African realities in ways that encourage dialogue and debate in a constructive manner.

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