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AFRIKANERS AND THE BOUNDARIES OF FAITH IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Annika Björnsdotter Teppo



Afrikaners and the Boundaries of Faith in Post-Apartheid South Africa

This book examines the shifting moral and spiritual lives of white Afrikaners in South Africa after apartheid.

The end of South Africa's apartheid system of racial and spatial segregation sparked wide-reaching social change as social, cultural, spatial and racial boundaries were transgressed and transformed. This book investigates how Afrikaners have mediated the country's shifting boundaries within the realm of religion. For instance, one in every three Afrikaners used these new freedoms to leave the traditional Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), often for an entirely new religious affiliation within the Pentecostal or Charismatic churches, or New Religious Movements such as Wiccan neopaganism. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the Western Cape area, the book investigates what spiritual life after racial totalitarianism means for the members of the ethnic group that constructed and maintained that very totalitarianism. Ultimately, the book asks how these new Afrikaner religious practices contribute to social solidarity and integration in a persistently segregated society, and what they can tell us about racial relations in the country today.

This book will be of interest to scholars of religious studies, social and cultural anthropology and African studies.

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Dedication

To three great women who left us during the writing of this book and who have greatly influenced my thinking: Professor Elaine Rosa Salo, Dr Mikki van Zyl, and Professor Anne Haila. They were all brilliant minds whom I had the privilege of knowing and learning from. You all departed too early, but will not be forgotten.



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Preface and acknowledgements

I am a private person – yet, this book is an anthropological research monograph, which not only presents long-term ethnography and suggests some theoretical innovations, but also includes some very personal experiences. I found it important to publish these stories as I was the tool of my own research work, and they shed light on the issues of Afrikaner religious change that I analyse here. Putting these field experiences on the paper made this book difficult to write, and I rewrote it over and over again. I ran out of courage a number of times. My friends and colleagues ran out of patience. Some began to believe there was never a book forthcoming, while I myself was terrified of misrepresenting my field. I feared that the tone would be wrong, that I would sugarcoat the people I studied. I feared that I would be judgmental and unfair towards them. I feared that I would insult those South Africans I loved, or those who had suffered so immensely. With all this apprehension, getting personal and putting myself on the line was the only solution I saw to these moral and ethical dilemmas, which are experienced by every field-working anthropologist worth their salt.

Today, a proud grandmother to young Elmo, and a firmly tenured and established academic, I have finally plucked up the courage to put onto paper my ethnographic analysis of what has happened in the religious scene of Stellenbosch and Cape Town from the late 1990s onwards. They were life-altering times, and I – in line with a true anthropological cliché – emerged an altered person from those experiences. The events in this book have been filtered through my unique way of understanding them, but I still believe that the text has captured something essential of what has been transpiring.

Yet, it seems that a village – or rather, a small town – is needed to write a book. There are so many people to thank, and should I have forgotten some of you, I apologize profusely. While the debts I have accumulated are many, I am only able to include some of them here.

I thank the Academy of Finland and Riksbankens Jubileumsfond in Sweden for the economic support, which has made it possible for me to work on different phases of this manuscript. I am also grateful for the fantastic care and support I have received from my text editors – the amazing

Mary Chambers, Ilse Evertse, and Amelia Burger. I thank Sarah Meder and SZ Minnaar for research assistance; I also thank the two excellent reviewers that read and provided such astute and extremely helpful comments on the almost-finished manuscript.

During the writing of this manuscript, I have been based at two academic departments in two different countries, and one research institute. I thank my former colleagues Ullamaija Seppälä and J.P. Roos at what was the Department of Social Policy at the University of Helsinki, Finland, for understanding and encouraging me. I thank Anders Sjögren and Terje Østigård for their collegiality at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. I found new inspiration for this work from the Satterthwaite Colloquium on Religion and Ritual in Africa in the UK, in which I had a privilege to participate in 2013 – my gratitude goes to all the people in our group, and to Richard and Pnina Werbner for re-enlivening my agenda and refreshing my thoughts on the subject.

From 2018, I have been the editor of the *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, which is why I want to thank the NJAS crowd, especially Jonna Katto and Thera Crane, for being so helpful in the first months of 2021, and on their part enabling me to finish this book. I thank all my wonderful present colleagues at the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology at Uppsala University, but especially Mats Utas, Sverker Finnström, Charlotta Widmark, and Mats Hyvönen for their academic and philosophical support. I thank the Engaging Vulnerability research programme at Uppsala University for a five-month Visiting Researcher Fellowship, and particularly the programme's director, Don Kulick, for his invaluable feedback on two earlier versions of this manuscript.

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Introduction

Mixed blessings

Introduction

After the end of the apartheid¹ era, the South African state no longer sanctioned social, racial, and spatial segregation. A new constitution was established in 1996, granting full religious freedom to citizens. The parts in the new constitution referring to religion are worth quoting in their entirety (Section 15, [Chapter 2](#)).

15. Freedom of religion, belief and opinion

- 1 Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.
- 2 Religious observances may be conducted at state or state-aided institutions, provided that
 - a those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities;
 - b they are conducted on an equitable basis; and
 - c attendance at them is free and voluntary.
- 3
 - a This section does not prevent legislation recognising
 - i marriages concluded under any tradition, or a system of religious, personal or family law; or
 - ii systems of personal and family law under any tradition, or adhered to by persons professing a particular religion.
 - b Recognition in terms of paragraph (a) must be consistent with this section and the other provisions of the Constitution.

It followed that, legally, basically anyone could establish a religion, as long as it was in line with the citizens' constitutional rights. Most important, however, at this key moment, was that all new faiths and practices were on an equal footing, and religions considered marginal elsewhere, or hardly regarded as religions at all – such as contemporary pagan religions – could now claim a “serious” status in the country.

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Compared with the previous legislation, this was a true revolution, and the amount of openness to religious pluralism was unusual in a postcolonial context. The progressiveness of this legislation was reflected in the fact that while several other African countries struggled with interfaith relations, South Africa began to manage religious pluralism, integrating it into the goals of the democratic state (Hackett 2011: 857). This process has not been easy, as it has been challenged frequently, at many societal levels and in many institutions: in families, congregations, and the courts of law.

The Afrikaners or *Boere*, the white Afrikaans-speaking minority² who had ruled the country since 1948, related to this change with mixed reactions. The most visible one was the racist one.

Charmaine's error

In June 2001, seven years into the new democratic South Africa, Charmaine Manuel from Goodwood, Cape Town made a big mistake. She stepped into the nearby Afrikaans Protestant Church (APK) with her mother Rachel Beukes and her son Nigel. They were soon told that they were not welcome. Charmaine's mother will remember the parting words forever: "You must get out! You don't belong here. Do you hear me? You must get out!"³ Charmaine was "coloured,"⁴ not "white" – a significant legal category in South Africa during the apartheid era. Her mistake was to presume that the apartheid-era racial categories – such as "coloured" – and spatial boundaries had gone, seven years after the end of formal apartheid. But they were still there, 11 years into the democracy, and they remain even today, 23 years later. They continue to be significant ontological categories of thinking that still affect people's lives. The racial boundaries have changed their manifestations and have been replaced, for example, by "cultural" boundaries.

"We are not racist. One of the elements of our church is that we are white and we hold church within our own culture," the chairman of the church council maintained in the newspapers, when the incident caused a public outcry.⁵ This statement, which thoroughly confounded religion, "race", and culture, reflected apartheid thinking, according to which a statement such as this would have been possible and even logical. The notoriously racist and conservative APK was still stuck in the past, along with other small churches which had also closed – or, rather, had never opened – their doors to "outsiders".

Neither did the APK, along with some other smaller Afrikaans churches, participate in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which were supposed to bring harmony and unify the nation. Thus, some minor Afrikaans churches never really made a break with apartheid, although the most important one, the NGK, participated in the proceedings.⁶ Or, as Afrikaans theologian Cornelius Els stated in his 2008 doctoral thesis: "...a God-given opportunity was, again, at hand for the Afrikaans Churches to break with their Apartheid past, but some of them decided not to participate

and turned their backs on the extended hand of the rest of the South African people – an action that, even today, makes it difficult to talk about peace and reconciliation. Not even to mention forgiveness” (Els 2008: 160).

The end of formal apartheid racial categories and spatial boundaries also meant the loss of white political power and privilege; the external boundaries of racial categorization could no longer be officially maintained. Instead, the *bittereinders*⁷ drew new boundaries or merely reintroduced old racial boundaries in new guises. Charmaine’s case was just one of those in which the former racial boundaries made themselves known. In the everyday life of South Africans, these boundaries are often conflated with or expressed as moral boundaries.

From the perspective of the Afrikaans Protestant Church, Charmaine simply did not respect the racial boundaries – a moral failure. The moral failure was in the act of spatial transgression itself: she should have known or understood that this was a “white” religious space, and she should have kept within the boundaries seen as “proper” to “her kind.” They had corrected that. Conversely, from the perspective of those sectors of the society striving to rid themselves of their inherent racism, Charmaine had transgressed old apartheid boundaries – possibly knowing full well what she was doing and looking to expose the church in order to make an urgent political point, in which she succeeded. Moral and racial boundaries were challenged from both perspectives.

Charmaine Manuel expressed her aversion to the behaviour of the Goodwood church that ejected her. “We just took our Bibles and left, feeling very disappointed and disgusted. To think that you get put out of a church when you just want to listen to the word of God. You have to ask, just what are they preaching in this church?”⁸ She had not been the one behaving without *ordentlikheid*⁹ – in fact, she had successfully questioned the respectability of the whole church and the moral integrity of its leaders.

There were many who did not wish to hold on to the old boundaries, and were seeking to create new practices and traditions better suited to their new ways of thinking. The public outcry caused by Charmaine’s case – which was also heard from liberal Afrikaans circles and from Afrikaans theologians – showed that what had happened to her was no longer acceptable. New ideas and practices had been established in the country, and large parts of *Afrikanerdom* had moved in new and diverse directions.

After the end of apartheid, inherited spatial boundaries defined social, racial, and moral borders. As the urban areas, schools, and social circles were largely segregated, the best places for crossing the boundaries were places of work and places of worship. The moral boundaries were often particularly clearly expressed in writings, practices, and rituals in the field of religion. Moral boundaries were also potentially subject to change, as the public reaction to Charmaine’s case showed. Thus, religion was central to the mediation of these changes, taking on different forms and manifestations, which were now occurring everywhere.

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There were new churches and congregations – also attended by Afrikaners – where Charmaine would have been treated differently. A number of churches had chosen to be multiracial as their point of departure, and they had become increasingly popular among the Afrikaners in the years following the apartheid era. Charmaine found a new spiritual home in the Maranatha Church, also in Goodwood – one of many new congregations that welcome people from all racial groups. She must have been spoilt for choice when choosing a new congregation: Cape Town was teeming with churches and new faith groups in all sizes, colours, and varieties.

After apartheid, people were inquisitive and keen to take on new things, exploring and experimenting with their religions. This has led to many social and spatial boundaries opening up, to more freedom in people's personal lives, and to more room for different ideas and lifestyles. Over the decades of my research on the lives of South African white people – especially those identifying as Afrikaners – there have been remarkable changes in their religious lives. Each organized faith, belief system, and religion has had to relate to the social transformation taking place in South Africa, and has commented on it in its practices – either by creating its own processes of racial and social *mediation* or, as in the case of Charmaine Manuel and her family, closing the doors to it entirely.

Among the Afrikaners, there have been tremendous religious changes. The same religious order that had kept the people of colour outside certain church doors during apartheid had kept the whites on the inside of their traditional DRC (Dutch Reformed Church), thereafter the NGK (*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*),¹⁰ whether or not they cared for it. What followed was much less publicized, yet a quiet revolution.

Some spiritual seekers

The new freedom was thus also extended to Afrikaners, who could now choose their church. A decade after Charmaine went looking for a new congregation, Marianne¹¹ was in her early 20s. She was born in the Afrikaans-speaking town of Stellenbosch to a proper, *verligte*¹² *Boere* family, and was looking for her spiritual path in the world. Having moved to Cape Town after getting her degree in architecture from Stellenbosch University, where her whole family had studied for generations, she wanted to live the life of an independent woman in vibrant, tolerant, and sometimes dangerous Cape Town.

In many ways, Marianne represented a newly liberated young Afrikaner woman. She was born during the apartheid era but hardly remembered it, and what she remembered, she didn't like. Smart and open-minded, she loathed any prejudices based on skin colour. At the time, she stated that she felt ready to move in with her boyfriend – a gesture that would have been a scandalous moral failure only a few years ago but was now a real option – and was looking to establish herself as a professional in the city.

She lived in a long, narrow old house in the suburb of Woodstock, which had been one of the “grey” or racially mixed¹³ areas during apartheid. In 2010, this area, tucked within a comfortable distance from the university and central town, was entirely mixed and gentrifying fast. There were charming cafes and quirky shops. It was still cheap enough for a young white person, but already it was getting too expensive for young black and coloured persons who had less means at their disposal.

Marianne’s house, which she shared with two other young women, was a cute, vibey, only slightly dilapidated three-bedroom flat with wooden floors and a fireplace which they never dared to use. They had adorned it with bright colours, some traditional dark wooden *Boere* furniture – great treasures which they had borrowed from their parents, and which they had combined with African shweshwe-patterned fabrics and quirky knick-knacks they had found in the many shops and flea markets of the town. The flat was a model example of the unique Cape Town aesthetics at play.

Having received, like most young Afrikaners, a Christian home upbringing, Marianne wanted to find the spiritual values that suited her newly claimed identity and lifestyle, creating her own way of being a person of a new era. She experienced a period of religious searching, during which she had visited several churches – different orientations of Christianity, including some charismatic and Pentecostal ones – but had not found the right one. She shared her experiences with me, speaking in a serious, contemplative tone.

I went to this [charismatic church] service, and this woman next to me started to twitch, and she was waving her hand in this strange way. I stayed to the end of the service, but then I did not go back...this is not my style.

(Marianne)

Her flatmates, who had graduated around the same time from Stellenbosch University, had also thrown themselves into religious experimentation. Her childhood friend Johanina had joined the popular charismatic Shofar church. Marianne joined her at their service a couple of times, and while she enjoyed the music and the racially inclusive ethos, she did not feel a need to return. It seemed that the energetic, charismatic services had little appeal for her calm and analytical personality. Another friend, Liesl, had found her way to the neopagan circles, and practised Wicca with her coven for a while. After the coven dispersed, she became a solitary practitioner and frequented the plentiful alternative New Age religious events, workshops, and private gatherings in Cape Town.

Ten years later, in 2020, all these women – *ordentlike*¹⁴ Afrikaner *noo-ientjies*¹⁵ at heart – have married. Marianne and Liesl’s marriages were both performed by a reverend from their or their husbands’ childhood NGK churches, where their future children will in all likelihood be baptized. Johanina got married in a Shofar church and participates regularly in their

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services, while Liesl still has a discreet home altar for the Goddess in her house, as a way of keeping a tiny sacred space. Marianne has left South Africa to work overseas and keeps her religious affiliation to herself, but it is clear that faith does not play a defining role in her present life.

While seeking their own spiritual truth, these three roommates participated in the vast and historical processes of religious mediation, which were built on racial, cultural, and religious crossovers. Their experiences in Cape Town transformed them and presented them with new spiritual ideas and practices which distanced them from the Afrikaners' traditional religious affiliations.

Mediations

Depending on its application, mediation is an extensive term that takes on a number of different or overlapping meanings in academic discussions and everyday parole. For example, as a legal term it refers to arbitration between disputing parties. In this book, mediation in its simplest form refers to a process that takes place between (two) social entities. In this process, new thoughts, practices, and ideas transfer from one domain to another, with both or all domains eventually changing. Mazzarella states that “the question of mediation is a general one, one that touches the fundamentals of social process,” because it is “a dynamic principle at the root of all social life” (Mazzarella 2004: 360). A mediation process requires a medium, and almost any object or phenomenon could function as such (Eisenlohr 2011) – in many studies on mediation it is understood as verbal communication occurring through mass media (Silverstone 2005: 188–191), although this book aims to develop the concept further.

Anthropologist Birgit Meyer pointed out that religion is also a mass media, that it comprises mediation practices, and that it is important to study religions when they assume a material, *sensational* form. According to this view, “Buildings, images, objects, food, and texts, for instance, may all feature within sensational forms, and yet entail different material affordances and different corporeal effects and possibilities for signification for their users and beholders.” She calls for studies of these religious, material mediations, as they provide “productive conceptual and methodological entry point into the modalities of religious co-existence in various majority-minority configurations in past and present societies” (Meyer 2020). My previous work on ritual spaces as mediatory spaces, heterotopic spaces of social mediation established during rituals in the townships of South Africa, supports this view (Teppo 2011).

This book examines the mediation of religious transformation and moral boundaries among the Afrikaners, who traditionally belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*, *NG Kerk*, or *NGK*). After the end of apartheid, many left the NGK for new religious affiliations. They joined the new Pentecostal or Charismatic congregations, while some

even joined traditional African religions or the New Religious Movements – such as the global modern pagan faiths – Wicca or Asatru.

Importantly, the history of *Afrikanerdom*,¹⁶ with its underplayed cultural crossovers and ethnic, class, and racial struggles, influenced all these new faiths and practices. Decades after apartheid, the belief in racial differences remains an ontological, naturalized principle in the South African mindset. The inherited cultural categories and boundaries have therefore influenced, for example, ideas on how to be a “proper” moral white person or a good Afrikaner, or how to practise faith in an acceptable way, and the kind of behaviour and habitus that should be involved. In addition, these moral ideas were for a long time materialized in the racially defined spatial boundaries, which remained salient even after the end of the apartheid era. Spatial boundaries have thus also been conceived as religious, social, and moral boundaries that no good South African would want to overstep.

However, when the new faiths and religions arrived, and the established ones had to find ways of adapting to the post-apartheid era, the boundaries within the field of religion also had to be renegotiated. No religion, faith, or congregation could ignore such dramatic societal changes – they were often even an integral part of them. Consequently, many spatial, racial, and moral ideas – both new and inherited ones – were mediated within the field of religion. These acts of religious mediation could take on different material forms and manifestations. At the end of this book, I argue that bodily movement is *the* medium and that concrete movements on and over sociospatial boundaries have been a central means of mediation for Afrikaners; these movements speak volumes about their social changes over the last decades. Based on ethnographic case studies, I will suggest a theoretical framework for understanding and studying movement as part of social mediation.

For this book, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork in urban areas over three decades – mostly in the town of Stellenbosch, but also in the Greater Cape Town area. The nuances, contradictions, and negotiations of urban Afrikaners’ moral and religious lives in the post-apartheid decades have been the focus of my attention: what has changed and how? What constituted spiritual life after racial totalitarianism for the members of the ethnic group responsible for its instigation? What did these religious changes reveal about the changes in this ethnic group, and in the country itself? It made sense to start to seek answers to these questions through the prism of the Afrikaners’ changing moral and religious ideas and practices, which produced spatially conveyed mediations in the post-apartheid era.

Fieldwork

In the mid-1990s, Stellenbosch was, externally, much like the early 1980s small-town community that Crapanzano (1985) called Wyndal,¹⁷ closed and wary of *inkruiipers*.¹⁸ Nevertheless, social change had already started there, and my arrival in 1997 coincided with the beginning of a new era.

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Initially, I was disappointed to find myself so far into Afrikaner territory, which I saw as conservative, socially stale, closed, and way too many miles from the beauty, vibrancy, and interesting social life of Cape Town. My initial intention had been to study at the University of Cape Town. However, Professor John Sharp, who had shown the most interest in my work, transferred to Stellenbosch – a sign of the times in itself as he was English-speaking and known for his sharp analyses of the apartheid racial order – and I followed him. At his suggestion, I soon began my doctoral fieldwork in the “poor white” suburb of Ruyterwacht (previously known as Epping Garden Village) in Goodwood, Cape Town, while residing with middle-class Afrikaners in Stellenbosch.

These were two separate worlds. In the post-apartheid era, lower-class whites, a small minority once amply supported by the apartheid government, were now living a different life from the middle-class. Stellenbosch Afrikaners, with their secure jobs and inherited money, could afford to shop, travel abroad, organize lavish parties, and get a good education. In Ruyterwacht, days were often spent struggling around the issues that managing with meagre resources caused. Their homes were generally not as safe from rampant crime, and they could not afford their own cars or dress in the latest fashion. Socially, the people living in the “poor white” area were often very aware of their neighbours’ whereabouts; this was a safety factor but it also meant the loss of any privacy. This lack of privacy also prevailed in their houses, which were often crowded, as there could be several generations living under the same roof. They had a reputation as racist, and while I met many people who dissociated themselves from racism, some did openly express racist opinions, and some even supported AWB¹⁹ and other Afrikaner extreme movements, while Stellenbosch Afrikaners were known as *verligte*.

Afrikaners from the upper social classes frequently looked down on the Afrikaners living in Ruyterwacht, regarding them all as racist leftovers from apartheid era, or even stigmatizing them as “poor whites,” and would distance themselves from them. Even though, in Ruyterwacht, people were increasingly living in daily contact with people of colour who had moved into the area, and going to the same churches as them, their experience was not the one that counted in the eyes of the Afrikaans establishment. Wealthy and intellectual Stellenbosch was the centre where the religious racial and spatial boundaries were most likely to be mediated and transformed for the whole of *Afrikanerdom*.

Stellenbosch turned out to be an intriguing place, and the town’s inhabitants were similarly intrigued by their first contact with someone from a country so far north and unknown as Finland, and who was a PhD student with a young child in tow. Although I was a very small part of a wave of newcomers, people were experimental and curious about European intellectuals, and I was a new breed of visitor, one of those who would never have set foot in the country during apartheid. I was soon invited to many social events: parties, *braais* (barbeques), and church bazaars.

I learned to appreciate many positive things about the Afrikaners – their warmth, their loyalty, their directness, their quirky sense of humour – which outsiders barely knew about, and none of which I had been expecting. In Stellenbosch, having a young child gave me the best access to the local social life. She was invited to places where I would never have been invited. Sometimes I wasn't even asked to accompany her, as everyone considered my daughter, who very quickly became trilingual in Finnish, Afrikaans, and English, such a treat. It felt as if my social awkwardness and culturally inappropriate remarks were suffered for her sake. Through the years of living with them, listening to their accounts, and having numerous discussions, I formed an idea of the lived world of white middle-class Afrikaner society in this town.

After four intensive years, I returned to Finland in 2001, but I had become rooted in South Africa and began to consider it my second home. I returned to the field as soon as I had the funding, and undertook shorter periods of fieldwork. By October 2019, I had completed 18 periods of participant observation, each lasting between three and six weeks. I gradually widened my field to consider the whole of the Greater Cape Town area, which includes the Cape Peninsula, extending from Melkbosstrand in the north to Gordon's Bay in the east. Although my interest has become increasingly focussed on Stellenbosch, which has attained a status arguably more like that of a Cape Town suburb in recent years, I have never fully moved away from the Greater Cape Town area.

In 2017, the Greater Cape Town area had 4 to 5 million inhabitants who spoke numerous languages, held multiple political affiliations, and were of a large number of ethnicities.²⁰ My grasp of this vast urban field unfolded slowly over the 20 years during which I studied South African white people from different angles, discovering ever new approaches and levels of looking at their position. While it is true that even short and sporadic fieldwork may prove fruitful in ethnographic enquiries, I found that my long experience contributed to a deeper and richer understanding of South African society. This has led me to believe that those sought-after, deep, and meaningful insights into any society are best achieved over many years of concentrated reflection and participant observation.

The data for this book were accumulated over a long time and from several sources. First, I re-examined the data I had collected during my ethnographic doctoral research in Cape Town from 1997 to 2001, and which I had not yet analysed. Next, I drew upon my other ethnographic research, carried out for my postdoctoral research on religious change among white South Africans in 2005–2019. This data included participant observation, photographs, video recordings, field diary entries, and memos. It also included approximately 110 hours of recorded interviews and events on tapes, discs and sound files, 34 interview transcripts where (mostly white) people discussed their religious practices with me, and notes on informal discussions with dozens of people. Finally, I used archival records, relevant literature, newspaper articles, and other textual material.

The majority of my research interlocutors defined themselves as “white”. They considered themselves to be middle class,²¹ and spoke Afrikaans as their first language, identifying either as “Afrikaners”, or as Afrikaans-speaking people. There were also several interlocutors from the very diverse group referred to as English-speaking South Africans when, in some cases, it was important to gain perspective on the Afrikaners. Furthermore, I also used material from my study of working-class white people, both English- and Afrikaans-speaking. The vast majority of people whom I studied for this book were therefore “white” and enjoyed the trappings of whiteness, but there were also significant differences between them. What united them was that they all belonged to one moral community or another, whether a church, a spiritual group, or a coven. They faced the same changes and challenges in the new social situation produced by this democratic and self-defined multicultural society.

Post-apartheid study of (urban) Afrikaners

During apartheid, personal freedom had been in short supply for Afrikaners, who were privileged in every possible way, but simultaneously at the receiving end of a harsh normative regulation of their behaviour. The NGK was central to this moral regime, and closely connected with the apartheid state. The violence to which white people were subjected was often less harsh, less obvious, which made it less visible – they were even treated better in prisons if they ended up being political opponents. The apartheid racial project was based on various forms of violence, and the making of racial categories was always a violent project, even for white people, as I will describe later in this book (Teppo 2004, 2015). Now this racial project, which had made white people an ethnic ruling elite, was over. The ruling elite had become a minority – albeit an important and wealthy one. The end of the racial project had brought a wave of emancipation. With more freedom and fresh ideas, new racial politics, the swiftly transforming boundaries of whiteness, and their increased connections abroad, the Afrikaners seemed to be ready to adopt new cultural identities and ideals.

Some of these post-apartheid era new ideals and activities have been noted in research, and academic interest in Afrikaners has increased.²² However, important areas of this research field remain less represented. Scholars in the post-apartheid era have studied Afrikaners as a separate ethnic group with clearly defined boundaries (see e.g. Verwey and Quayle 2012), although they have never lived in a culturally isolated territory, untouched by any outside influence – understandably, for despite the end of formal apartheid, South African cities are still characterized by segregation (Terreblanche 2002; Seekings and Nattrass 2008). In the post-apartheid era, internal and external boundaries have endured in the realms of moral values and racial ideas, but they have often been drawn in new places and in new ways, and thus also need to be studied in new ways. The academic literature on contemporary

South African cities has frequently documented the existence and reestablishment of social boundaries, spatial segregation, and ethnic enclaves (see e.g. Jürgens, Gnad and Bähr 2003; Tomlinson et al. 2014; Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell 2014; Landau 2014).

Despite the dismantling of apartheid legislation, official statistics and institutions, as well as popular thinking, still employ its racial categories: black, white, coloured, Asian. Interracial relations are being studied, although there are still academic writers who follow the traditional tendency to emphasize Afrikaners' ethnic enclavism (see e.g. Schuermans 2016). This mode of understanding the racial relations and boundaries of Afrikaners does not, however, paint a full picture of the changes occurring. While these accounts are valid and important, they offer only partial representations of racial relations – especially with regard to Afrikaners – in the post-apartheid era. The problems of stereotypes, oversimplification, and the lack of nuanced analysis also initially marred my fieldwork and distorted my research perspective (Teppo 2018).

Apartheid was a politics of space, especially urban spaces, and the changes in racial boundaries after apartheid could be traced best in the cities. This approach has led to my call to find a complementing and balanced perspective from which to carry out research on post-apartheid urban life. People and places need to be seen as being in continual interaction and as being formed by constant encounters between urban dwellers.

Nevertheless, this interjection is not meant to diminish the value of studying urban inequality issues, such as segregation, race and class, exclusion, and gentrification, in postcolonial cities; such studies have been central in providing vital social criticisms of, for example, the global increase in gated communities (Low 2001, 2011; Lemanski 2006, 2011). Historically, cities in Southern Africa are also particularly interesting in this regard, as many of the early urban anthropological pioneers, such as those from the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, worked in the area from the 1930s onward (see Hellmann 1948; Hunter Wilson and Mafeje 1963; see also Werthmann 2014). They witnessed the increasing segregation of the cities and their academic work documented the devastating consequences of racist spatial politics. There are many prominent reports of the spatial, political, and economic injustices that people of colour suffered (see e.g. Western 1981; Ramphela 1993; Mamdani 1996). A number of South African anthropologists have pointed out that black and white people had been intermingled before apartheid, and that groups should not be studied separately but should be regarded as a whole – exactly what I suggest should also be done regarding the study of life from an urbanist perspective (Gluckman 1940; Gordon 1990; Kuper 2003; Seldon 2015).

Important testimonies of the endless injustices of the apartheid system, the suffering of the black populations, and the many privileges white people enjoyed made it easy for academics to bypass white people as a serious object of study.²³ Seldon remarks that when they are included, “the study

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of white South Africans seems to easily slip into moral judgement” (Seldon 2015: 18). I interpret this not as meaning that their deeds were morally defensible but that academic attention would rather focus on their undeniable guilt over the apartheid horrors they imposed on other population groups, than on other aspects of their existence, which were of less interest. In addition, there were more burning social issues at hand – such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and crime – on which contemporary academics could focus.

Since the end of apartheid, white, urban, especially middle-class Afrikaners have been the object of some academic interest (see Nyamnjoh 2012 and the ensuing discussions in *Africa Spektrum*), but their connections with other racial groups have barely been examined. The emphasis has been on studying other important phenomena, such as their changing identity, their politics, their gender roles, their continued isolation from “others”, their determination to stay unified, and their salient segregation (see e.g. Peens 2012; Sharp and Van Wyk 2015; Schuermans 2016; van der Westhuizen 2017; Inkeri 2019). These studies seldom include an examination of the changes in social boundaries around Afrikaner whiteness, which means there is a gap and scope for research.

After the end of apartheid, the ideas and practices of social change in Afrikaners have been very visible in the realms of religion and spirituality, where a number of cultural and moral boundaries are redrawn and mediated. My research interlocutors often reflected on their pasts and futures, and the role they wanted to assume in the new social situation. For them, their new religious practices present an opportunity to redefine themselves with regard to ideologies of race and gender, and often also to discover ways of overcoming the patriarchal and racist inheritance of the past. For some though, it has, conversely, meant finding a way of rediscovering the apartheid racial ideas of segregation, if they had ever abandoned them. The new developments affecting religious and social boundaries are the reason why, in this book, I have chosen to examine the crossings of these boundaries from an Afrikaner perspective.

What I learned about studying “race” during my fieldwork

Issues of racialized economic inequality and injustice were constantly present during my fieldwork. I witnessed how hard it was to promote a religion of human equality and spiritual unity and to come across as a moral winner when the social problems caused by tenacious economic inequalities were never far from one’s door. All the new religions I studied faced the huge challenges posed by the country’s economic inequalities.

The invisibility of white privilege to its bearers was sometimes blatant. I once listened to the silver-tongued musings of a New Age motivational speaker about the laws of karma, and how we choose our fate before our birth, which is why we should accept it. These ideas were attempts to make

economic inequality seem a law of nature, which definitely helped others turn a blind eye to the surrounding realities.

Not all white people I met were oblivious to their fortunate position. Many of those who put up boundaries in some places did in fact try to mediate economic justice on other occasions. As pointed out in whiteness studies, there are many shades of being white, including in this respect, as even a short study of literature on whites of sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates (see e.g. Rutherford 2004; Uusihakala 2008; Pilosof 2009; Hughes 2010; McIntosh 2016). Being a white post-Christian in South Africa is a complicated position and a complicated issue to study.

Although Cape Town was an ideal place for a researcher interested in racial and ethnic diversity to carry out fieldwork, ideas of race overpowered any attempts to examine urban spaces. These ideas had been around for so long that they had become akin to ontological categories, part of human life – the “naturalness” of racial categories was seldom questioned. However, the interpretation of what these categories meant began to change rapidly and to diversify after the end of legislated apartheid. They found new expressions in ideas of culture, religion, ethnicity, and class, to mention but a few areas.

Eventually, these new interpretations also found their way into new spatial practices. For example, a beach in Cape Town looked very different in 2017 than in 1997. Although the Group Areas Act had been lifted and the urban spaces nominally belonged to everyone, back in 1997 the beaches were still mainly filled with white people. When a coloured female friend and I went to a Strand beach, a young coloured man looked at us and commented, half-jokingly and half-disparagingly, “a whitey and a bruinie [brown girl], look at that!” In the December 2017 holidays, the same beach was completely mixed and crowded with people of colour. White people were now a minority there, but as before, the more affluent preferred their beach houses or private pools.

Despite these new practices, the residential areas have largely remained white, and race is still a person’s most important attribute in daily exchanges. The apartheid categories still apply in many official contexts. Most wealth has also remained in the hand of the whites. This has preserved race as a continuously relevant notion in society, where it is still often discussed, although now only euphemistically (Whitehead 2011). Even without these euphemisms, “race” is a complicated concept. In South Africa, there was never a one-drop rule, as in the United States;²⁴ even during apartheid, a person’s race was often decided situationally (Posel 2001). A white person had to look white enough – too frizzy hair or too dark skin would disqualify one from whiteness.

Racial hierarchies also caused a number of difficulties for the apartheid government, and the process of establishing a racial classification for an individual could be complicated. Much has been written about the various humiliating tests to which racially doubtful people were subjected in the

course of racial testing. Deborah Posel has written about the obsession with and importance of hair: one test consisted of putting a pen in the hair; if the pen did not fall out, the person was coloured (Posel 2001: 105).

The complexity of daily life defied these artificial categories. Sometimes people of a rather dark complexion were still considered “white”, while very light people were seen as “coloured”. Racial classification also depended on social background, personal properties, and behaviour – and how everyone else regarded their habitus (Teppo 2004). Being “white” therefore meant more than having a certain skin colour or hair, and was not just limited to the (in itself extremely problematic) biological definition of race. Even the official categories were shaky, and people were at times reclassified into another racial category.

The consequences of this reclassification varied according to the situation. People would sometimes be classified as members of other racial groups than the one they identified with,²⁵ which could have serious consequences. A dark-skinned child born to white parents would be called a “throwback”, and sometimes isolated from their community and eventually re-classified as “coloured”. The life story of Sandra Laing is an infamous example of this. Laing was born in 1955 to parents who had been considered white for three generations. She was re-classified as “coloured” due to her dark skin and frizzy hair, and at the age of ten she was expelled from her boarding school due to complaints from other children’s parents. From then on, her life and her relationship with her family were extremely difficult (Ferris 2015).

Being reclassified from “white” to “coloured” was rare and unwanted, while people of colour tried actively to pass from one racial category to another, usually aiming for an “upgrade” in the racial hierarchies. Light-skinned people classified as “coloured” could achieve this by, for example, moving to another town, finding a “white” job, and eventually applying for an ID on which they were classified as “white”. The price of this would have been to never see one’s own family again. A friend of mine who identified as a “coloured” person described a family scandal in which their senior female relative had returned from another town to her “coloured” family after having lived for 40 years as a white person. This constant racial ambivalence was particularly visible in Cape Town, where half of the population was classified as “coloured”, and where, even during apartheid, there were areas such as Woodstock and Observatory that were “grey” areas, and therefore ambiguous.

Race was thus always a *relational principle* (Poirier 2013: 53–54), and became even more so after the end of formal apartheid. It remained an important everyday way of socially categorizing people, even for those who did not believe in separate human “races”. People classified one another all the time, and even from a long distance. However, telling a coloured person from an Afrikaner or a black person from a coloured one totally accurately was often difficult. Even South Africans, who were adept at placing

each other in racial categories, made mistakes – potentially insulting ones (Teppo 2018).

And then she asked if I was a so-called “Cape Coloured.” I was shocked!
(Janine, 35, a white middle-class woman)

Interestingly, even Afrikaans identity is relational in this way: on my very first days in a Cape Town bed and breakfast, a fellow resident, a kind English-speaking girl on a business trip from Gauteng, took me for a round trip in her car. When we arrived at Sea Point Boulevard – still almost empty during the daytime in 1997 – she pointed out to me a couple of women I had not thought peculiar, whispering “Now those are Afrikaner women. Look how they stand and walk, and check out their hairdo, and their long, dark, old-fashioned skirts...yes, definitely Afrikaners!” I simply did not see what was obvious to everyone else.

Making a mistake with this classification was always mortifying for the erring person, and during my early years of fieldwork I was constantly anxious not to say something wrong, yet I often did. I also made other cultural mistakes that no *ware* (“true”) *Afrikaner* would ever make with regard to sensitive matters of “race” and “whiteness”. I would ask about a white or coloured person’s African roots in a social situation, or, when looking at somebody’s family photo, innocently mention that one family member really looked quite dark, only to become aware that this comment had led to an awkward silence.

Having made a fair number of these embarrassing mistakes, I eventually learned what could constitute a suitable topic for a public discussion, and what was a faux pas. I fear that I embarrassed, and perhaps even insulted, quite a few of my research interlocutors before I learned not to ask or comment too publicly on this or that darkish great-uncle or grandmother in family photos. Race was a perilous and volatile idea, surrounded by taboos and mitigating euphemisms. “Was he a child of the night?” a coloured colleague at Stellenbosch University asked, after I had received a work call from someone. It took me a while to gather that I had been asked if the caller was black.

As my cultural competence grew over the years, I made fewer mistakes in matters of “race” and “whiteness” – mostly I learned to shut up when I was not certain of what was going on, and checked with my friends afterwards. I began to experience instances of trust and disclosure. They always occurred suddenly, hesitantly, and were expressed through euphemisms: “My father was very dark” or “We have something else in the family line as well.” These brief disclosures had the air of confessions and were followed by a silence.

I also learned that everyone belonged to this hierarchical matrix of race, whether they wanted to or not. I was seen as a white, middle-class woman, someone with education, funds, and access to certain privileges, with everything those aspects entailed. Despite this extremely advantageous position, I was shaken by being racialized everywhere. I also encountered

occasional xenophobia during my doctoral studies, even in small instances, such as a woman who drove by, brushing me with her car, and who, after hearing my unfamiliar accent, told me to go back where I came from. Others – always white South Africans – constantly repeated to me how privileged I was as a European. I agreed, but it was as if those telling me were not seeing their own privilege at all. On the rare occasions when I did some consultation work, my very wealthy white colleague told me that I could never ask the same rate as the local academics, as I was already so over-privileged. I was yet to find out how terrifying life in the country could be for a foreigner without my privileges as a white, middle-class academic.

In middle-class white Afrikaans areas, as I was promptly racialized as a fellow white person, typical white, middle-class behaviours were expected of me (Teppo 2004, 2015). Occasionally, my research benefitted because I was not South African, but my Finnish ethnicity also made me an alien to the people I studied. In “poor white” areas, I was mainly seen as an educated, middle-class white person from the prestigious university town of Stellenbosch, and my foreignness was never an issue.

After 2004, during my postdoctoral phase, I started new lines of work. Some of them took me to African townships such as Gugulethu and Khayelitsha. At first, I could never be sure how I would be received. A lot of time went into making sure that the community knew who I was, and that I had the right people to introduce me and back me up. Mistakes in these matters could have been costly. Being of a different “race” than the community I studied immediately placed me in a niche that was hard to get out of. I had to be polite, as careless words and body language could be, and sometimes were, misinterpreted (see Teppo 2018).

I could never let my guard down, since I already knew from experience how horribly wrongly I could present myself – or how horribly wrongly my innocent actions could be interpreted. My French “white” colleague carrying out fieldwork in a *shebeen* (a bar) in an African township received a death threat from a woman whose boyfriend ran the place, and was forced to change her field site. A woman nearly attacked me on a research trip to another township *shebeen* for talking with a man (presumably her boyfriend) for ten minutes. In both cases, it was assumed that a white woman could easily lure any African man away, and that she was only there for this purpose. These ideas had their origins in the historical background of racial hierarchies and classifications, and they showed how thoroughly racialized the society was in the ways it had taught its members to operate.

To add to the complications of fieldwork in Cape Town, the post-apartheid infrastructure was inadequate, public transport was non-existent, and traffic jams were already bad in the late 1990s, after which they only got worse. One interview in a township could take an entire day. There were also safety issues to be considered. There was no going to certain areas after dark, and some areas one would avoid even during the day. Consequently, people often avoided going out at night, while those who could afford it

installed satellite dishes and security services, making their homes tiny for-
tresses with full entertainment.

Over the years, a slow change occurred in racial relations. At the begin-
ning of my fieldwork in 1997, things still appeared to be similar to the
apartheid situation. Eventually, however, social changes became more
noticeable, while at the same time my sensitivity to South African society
also developed through my many mistakes, the practice of critical reflexiv-
ity, and the many encounters and conversations I had (De Neve 2016: 74).
My commitment to the field had grown into a lifelong mission, and the
good working relations that I had established developed into deep, lasting
friendships. There was no turning back now – even if I sometimes wanted to
– and the advantages of studying situations over the decades began to bear
fruit. I began to perceive the local society from a long-term perspective.

At first, the prevalence of racial categorization, the difficulties of moving
between field sites, and the problems associated with gaining access had me
believe that the urban areas allocated to different race groups during apart-
heid were disconnected, as the people were. However, historically there had
been countless connections between people from different racial categories,
some of them very intimate. There were family relationships and friend-
ships, as well as sexual relationships, but during the years of apartheid this
was considered subversive behaviour that could cause trouble for all those
involved. Even during apartheid, numerous white children were brought up
by black nannies, or were used to the presence of black domestic workers
with whom they had strong emotional connections. Yet these interactions
were overlooked, well-hidden, or silenced throughout, especially by people
who identified as white. Apartheid had been a straitjacket for them as well.

In Stellenbosch, white middle-class Afrikaners maintained the silence
and taboos surrounding crossovers and the mixing of white with other
racial categories (Teppo 2004). Racial categories, especially those of white
people, were fragile. Afrikaners had lived in the country since the 17th cen-
tury, and it has been verified that today, approximately 5% of their genetic
makeup is not of European descent – although there are great variations
between individuals.²⁶ Some people would eventually talk to me about
this, but it took a long time to gain their trust in these matters. Over the
years, some became more relaxed about these connections, but for many
these were still private family matters, and definitely not suitable for public
discussion.

With regard to the matter of mixed-race roots, the coloured people I
spoke with turned out to be the opposite of white people. In general, they
were willing to discuss their white ancestors, since being regarded as whiter
would add to their social worth. The marriage of whiteness and *ordentlik-
heid* in the racial hierarchies was also present within families: at times, I came
across coloured families whose children had different shades of skin colour,
with the whiter ones being treated better by their parents and by other fam-
ily members. These people were not always willing to define themselves as

African or discuss their black roots, although there were also those coloured people, especially among the educated middle-class, who were willing to make blackness or Khoisanness a part of their identity for political or ideological reasons (Nilsson 2016). Whiteness was, in general, still the ideal, and even a person regarded as “white” could never be too white.

It needs to be emphasized here that expressions of crude biological racism were rare. Instead, I found attitudes similar to those of white South Africans who had immigrated to Australia, or, as McKenzie and Gressier describe:

Our informants do not hate Africans, and nor do they see them as inevitably lesser. Instead, mechanisms of racial categories operate around a powerfully imagined system of hierarchically ordered cultural spaces that collectively constitute the nation and its imagined community. More specifically, our informants understand themselves as occupying a privileged role in the nation, whereby expressions of racism can be understood as reactions to perceived threats to this imagined spatial power.

(McKenzie and Gressier 2017: 6)

There was thus a hierarchy of privilege, and it was clear that “poor whites” were lower in it, and frequently lower than more middle-class people of colour. I learned about many mediations and coping mechanisms between racial categories when the concepts of “whiteness” and “race” turned out to be much more intersubjective and flexible *emic* categories than they had seemed at first.

After the end of formal apartheid, these categories also transformed. So far, my observations have confirmed that there were two major changes in the racial boundary drawing that took place daily over the last two decades.

Firstly, whether due to friendships, relationships, or marriages, the connections across racial boundaries have increased and deepened.

Secondly, it has been elaborated in many academic writings how segregation is slowly becoming more class-based in the economically most disadvantaged parts of society (Lombard and Crankshaw 2017). This means that while black people still suffer most from economic inequality, since the end of apartheid it has become normal for impoverished white people also to live in townships, caravan parks, or bleak temporary residence areas (TRAs) (Teppo and Millstein 2015), side by side with black and coloured people. The hierarchy of privileges has become more dependent on economic and symbolic capital such as cultural knowledge and networks, although the white South Africans still top it.

Concluding remarks

I had decided early on not to write directly about the Stellenbosch Afrikaners. Their perspectives were important for my doctoral thesis (2004), as their view of the “poor whites” was paramount in my seeking reasons for the

stigmatization of this group. However, for a long time I only wrote my observations of our daily lives in my field diaries. I avoided publishing an academic work about these people, as I felt I would be violating anthropologists' professional code that an informant must never suffer from our research. These fears evaporated when I realized that I could show my work to my main informants and discuss it, allowing them to decide for themselves whether it was harmful to them.

I also realized that my ethnographic writing about the Stellenbosch Afrikaners would have to contain an autobiographical element, as our lives were so interwoven. Ergo, I concluded that I could only write about Afrikaners if I could write about myself with similar honesty and integrity. At the end of a long process of reflection, I resolved that I owned my experiences and had a right to analyse them and the ethnographic insights I had gained. I was free to write as long as I did my best to keep my informants out of harm's way by hiding their identities and writing about them with their constant and informed consent. I often feared that I had overstepped some boundaries, but nevertheless strove to remain authentic, reflexive, and honest; for me, this is a non-negotiable part of my profession. I began writing about them and they read my work, but they kept talking to me. I took this as a vote of confidence.

In sum, while I had learned the importance of examining multiple perspectives and realities of racial boundaries and spatial categories in the post-apartheid era, I had also learned how easily the racially charged circumstances surrounding post-apartheid lives could divert one's focus from its complicated and less obvious realities. It was easy to overlook the development of solidarity and friendship across racial lines. There were cross-overs and religious mediations across racial boundaries that told a story of a social change that would otherwise have been hard to detect.

I wanted to examine these new movements and counter-movements across these boundaries, while avoiding drawing overtly optimistic conclusions about their meaning. Practices of religious mediation, and the ensuing movements (or the lack of them) across spatial/racial/social boundaries, were of paramount importance for this examination. Changes in these boundaries could be microscopic, and understanding their dynamics a time-consuming exercise: it took me years of fieldwork and observation to begin to see the recurring patterns of change in the religious life of Afrikaners. The processes that mediate these boundaries are, however, of great importance when attempting to understand the religious transformations of the post-apartheid era.

Notes

- 1 Apartheid, the South African state policy of racial segregation, which was accompanied by extensive practices of social engineering and spatial segregation, literally means "separateness". The formal apartheid era lasted from 1948 to 1994.

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- 2 In 2020, the population of South Africa was estimated at 60 million. Around 3 million of these are white Afrikaners. Mid-year population estimates can be found at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022020.pdf> (accessed 15 February 2021). See also http://www.statssa.gov.za/census/census_2011/census_products/Census_2011_Census_in_brief.pdf (accessed 15 February 2021).
- 3 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/church-kicks-family-out-for-not-being-white-69170> (accessed 20 March 2019). The APK which she attended was a *very* small church, and even in the 1980s was considered racist. The *Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk* (Afrikaans Protestant Church) (APK) broke away from the NGK under Andries Treurnicht precisely when the NGK became “too liberal”, and was a church for white Afrikaners only. In the end, the APK took around 30,000 members from the NGK and other Afrikaner churches, as well as about 100 ministers who resigned from the NGK to join them (NGK 1997: 44–45; Els 2008: 91).
- 4 In this book, I will use the terms “black people”, “white people”, and “coloured people” to refer to these population groups, as they still define and identify themselves using these terms. I use the term “race” to refer to a social construction lacking scientific validity to explain human cultural difference, but which is nevertheless a powerful category in the South African mindset (and, indeed, not limited to South Africa).
- 5 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/love-thy-neighbours-only-if-theyre-white-69555> (accessed 13 December 2017).
- 6 Among these churches were the AKP, the RCSA, and the NHK (Els 2008: 162).
- 7 A military term originating from the South African War 1899–1902: in its contemporary usage, the term can be used to point to any group that wants to keep on fighting until the end, regardless of the bitter consequences this choice might bring about.
- 8 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/church-kicks-family-out-for-not-being-white-69170> (accessed 13 December 2017).
- 9 The term *ordentlikheid* refers to the respectability or decency of a moral person who knows his or her place in society.
- 10 Dutch Reformed Church (DRC, *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*, *NG Kerk*, or *NGK*), the traditional church of mainstream Afrikaners.
- 11 Not her real name or profession. I have changed all the names of my research interlocutors, and adapted some details.
- 12 Literally enlightened, progressive, or liberal, as opposed to conservative or *verkrampste*.
- 13 Never fully segregated but populated by white and coloured people living together, racially and ethnically mixed, even during apartheid. See Hart (1989).
- 14 Proper, decent, respectable.
- 15 Girls.
- 16 *Afrikanerdom* refers to an ethnic unity project that merged political, religious, and economic forces. This unity was promoted by Afrikaner political and cultural organizations, the press, and the NGK.
- 17 In fact, in the Western Cape, “everyone” knew that this community was Franschhoek, a famous wine cultivating village some 30 kilometres from Stellenbosch.
- 18 Treacherous interlopers (see Teppo 2004; Crapanzano 1985).
- 19 The AWB or *Afrikaanse Weerstandsbeweging* is a white supremacist or neo-Nazi movement of around 5000 supporters. <https://awb.co.za> (accessed 12 February 2021).
- 20 According to the Western Cape Governments Socio-Economic Profile, the population numbered 4.2 million in Cape Town itself. This figure leaves out the surrounding areas, which are connected with Cape Town in multiple ways.

https://www.westerncape.gov.za/assets/departments/treasury/Documents/Socio-economic-profiles/2017/city_of_cape_town_2017_socio-economic_profile_sep-lg_-_26_january_2018.pdf (accessed 6 May 2020).

- 21 Middle-class membership is a complicated matter in South Africa: by only looking at the income levels, 15% made the cut (Burger et al. 2015a), while at the same time 28.8% of the whole population self-identified as middle class (Burger et al. 2015b).
- 22 See e.g. the ground-breaking work of Melissa Steyn (2004), or recent historical work by van Zyl-Hermann (2018).
- 23 Crapanzano wrote a few rare accounts of white South Africans during apartheid, but, after the publication of his book (Crapanzano 1985), was criticized in the journal *Social Dynamics* for taking the moral high ground – see Hugo (1985) and Boonzaier et al. (1985); also noted by Seldon (2015).
- 24 The one-drop rule in the States means that if one has any black ancestors, “one drop of black blood”, then one is black.
- 25 This did not only apply to those classified as white; coloured people were also confused with black people.
- 26 “Although Afrikaners have the majority of their ancestry from northwestern Europe, non-European admixture signals are ubiquitous in the Afrikaner population” (Hollfelder et al. 2020: 9).

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1 The Afrikaners and their church

Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by presenting some historical developments through which the group of diverse people who named themselves “Afrikaners” gained (and also demanded) the privileges of whiteness. Presenting a single history of the Afrikaner is by definition an impossible task; a large number of historians have shown that the construction of the Afrikaner as a single group was a concerted effort by the National Party and other political actors and nationalist organizations in the first half of the 20th century (too numerous to list here – see e.g. Moodie 1975; du Toit 1992; Hyslop 1995).

I examine these developments against the background of my countless discussions of Afrikaner history with my research interlocutors over the years. Almost every time I made a new acquaintance, when we came to know each other better there would be a conversation about history. It was a certainty, and the only remaining question was when it would happen – perhaps over a cup of coffee, or at the dinner table over a lovely *Boere* meal, or in a *braai* (barbeque) situation after a few glasses of wine.

Over the first two years, I wrote these discussions down faithfully in my field diary, but when I noticed that I had had the same discussion for the third time, I stopped taking notes, unless something new was said. It might seem strange that things that had happened even a hundred years ago were so frequently taken up, so significant. It could perhaps be that I was the outsider, a newcomer, an academic with a voice in communities beyond South Africa, and people wanted to teach me the correct view – their view – about Afrikaner history, but these discussions nevertheless had a deep cultural dimension.

As certain significant topics were brought up, their importance to *Afrikanerdom*, and to each person’s identity as an Afrikaner, was reiterated. I learned the code that was implicit in them. There was a variety of narratives, depending on who was talking, and by citing one of them, people also directly or indirectly expressed to me how they saw their own position as Afrikaners in present-day South Africa. The narratives compiled a picture, which centred around certain themes and topics regarding

Afrikanerdom. These could be described as strands in the history of constructing the Afrikaner nation and identity as a relentless and detailed production of domination. Nevertheless, this domination was met with dissent, and it was often compromised by the establishment. This process – which was reflected in apartheid classifications – produced paradoxes and absurdities in the construction of racial differences (Posel 2001), as well as in the field of moral, religious, and spiritual matters.

A very brief and incomplete history of *Afrikanerdom*

The South African racial segregation and apartheid policies had their origins in the year 1652 when the Dutch East India Company established a provisioning station at the Cape of Good Hope. The small colony cultivated food for passing ships, at times also trading with the local indigenous people, who later became collectively known as the Khoisan.¹ There was tension between the indigenous people and the settlers from the start. Conflicts erupted when the settlers settled on the grazing routes of the local cattle-herding Khoikhoi people. As early as 1660, the colonial administrator of the Company, Jan van Riebeeck, had erected a wooden fence and a bitter almond hedge to keep the indigenous people outside (Pooley 2009: 15).

For some years, Cape Town remained just a brief stopover for ships on their way to the East, but after 1657, the free *Burghers*² – those of Dutch origins who had been released from their contracts with the Company (Elphick and Malherbe 1989: 11) – started to farm independently. Since there were too few local indigenous people to satisfy the need for labour, the Company imported slaves from Indonesia and East Africa, while expanding the area of the colony. New immigrants from Europe also arrived; by the early 18th century, the population of whites was around 2000 and Cape Town harboured a mixed slave society with a sociospatial divide and hierarchy between the white people and the people of colour. White people were always politically, economically, and ideologically dominant, and the treatment of people of colour was still individual, class-related, and contingent. The systematic ideas of human “races” were yet to become popular in European countries, but the early attempts to develop racial taxonomies began emerging in the 18th century in the writings of enlightenment scientists such as Linnaeus.

The relationships between Southern African settlers, imported slaves, and the area’s indigenous inhabitants thus varied between the colonizing countries, depending on their historical, economic, and ideological circumstances. In the countries ruled by the Portuguese from the 16th century onward, these relationships could even be quite relaxed, and intermarriages were not frowned upon.

In Indonesia, the Dutch East India Company had initially supported unions between its workers and local women, which would ensure its success in the colonies. There, the Company’s men were encouraged to

take local wives, who would feed the men, knew how to treat local medical issues, and would keep their men contented in their domestic lives.³ Their half-blood children would be loyal, locally rooted workers for the Company. It was a win-win as far as the Company was concerned.⁴

In South Africa, which was ruled by the Dutch during the early days of the colony, this resulted in offspring of female slaves (and former slaves) and European men, who were then the ancestors of both Afrikaners and of the coloured population of Western Cape. According to both genealogical records and genetic research, European men seemed to show a preference for the women of Asian descent, but genetic research reveals that some also had intimate connections with the indigenous Khoisan people of the area. While the Khoisan genes represent only 1.3% of the Afrikaner genes, they were the most ubiquitous and were found in almost all (71 of 77) Afrikaners investigated (Hollfelder et al. 2020).

During my fieldwork I came to know an Afrikaner woman, Liesl, who told me of her ancestress, Maria van de Kaap (from the Cape). The toponym “van de Kaap” was used by many women who married in the early years of the Colony. It could mean that Maria was manumitted, or was a locally born slave (Hollfelder et al. 2020). Over the decades, I heard several of these stories of origin from my Afrikaner friends and research collaborators. The knowledge of these (female) ancestors was transmitted orally, and often kept in the family – all the women in Liesl’s family were aware of Maria but considered this a private matter.

Fascinatingly, most Afrikaners I spoke with were able to produce their genealogy from the first settlers who had arrived in the country. Whether they had come with the Huguenots, or in Jan van Riebeeck’s legendary ships in 1652, everyone had a story that showed their belonging in relation to their European ancestors.

Whatever encouragement for or tolerance of mixed marriages there might have been in the early days of Cape Colony, it was certainly gone by the time they were forbidden in 1685. Interestingly, this rule did not apply to the already existing half-European children, who went on marrying European men (Hollfelder et al. 2020). It also meant that many men, whose offspring would later regard themselves as Afrikaners, took wives of mixed origins, or married or impregnated imported slave women. The Cape Town population thus had very mixed beginnings, and the relationships between those seen as Europeans and the people of colour varied greatly over the years.

The Dutch East India Company lost the Cape Colony in 1795 when British troops invaded it in the aftermath of French Revolution. At the time, the Cape Colony comprised approximately 25,000 slaves, 20,000 white colonists, 15,000 Khoisan, and 350 “free blacks” (freed slaves) (Elphick and Shell 2014: 208–220).

The growing British influence and the steady flow of British immigrants meant that the British soon dominated politics, trade, finance, mining,

and manufacturing. The term “Afrikaner” was used for the first time in the 18th century, as the Afrikaans-speaking people slowly began forming an ethnic identity in contrast to the British, which was not to find its full expression until the early 20th century. The Dutch or Afrikaans-speaking farmers remained in the countryside, considering Stellenbosch, a town about 45 kilometres from Cape Town, their capital. The European settlers were therefore split into two competing groups with different languages and cultures (De Klerk 1975: 22–32).

Between 1779 and 1879, there was a series of border wars against local ethnic groups such as the Xhosa and Sotho-Tswana,⁵ instigated, usually as reprisals, either independently or in unison between the Cape Colony government, the British Settlers, and the *burghers* now known as *trekboere* (lit. travelling farmers). In the 1830s, a small number of *trekboere* began to leave the Cape area – a development which escalated in the mid-1830s. The reasons for the *voortrekkers*⁶ departure were manifold, including their resistance to the English colonial government replacing Dutch with English as the official language, and their unhappiness with the English influence (De Klerk 1975: 32–49) and the 1834 Slavery Abolition Act, while the *burghers* regarded slave ownership as a necessity for their continued activities. They left the vicinity of Cape Town and began to travel toward the north and the east. This departure from the Cape Colony, which later became known as the Great Trek (*die Groot Trek*), reached its most active phase between 1835 and 1846. It comprised several independent families travelling in parties to the interior of Africa, to the Free State, the Transvaal, and Natal, as these areas were later known. The expansion of the Cape Colony led to the settlers’ relationships with its indigenous inhabitants becoming tenser.

The Great Trek thus increased the hostilities between settlers, indigenous inhabitants, and the British, and led to the establishment of two Boer Republics – the Transvaal in 1852 and the Orange Free State in 1854. The British eventually decided to annex these republics for their considerable natural resources when diamonds and gold were discovered in the interior. The colonial race for ownership of Africa – “the scramble for Africa” – which was reaching its pinnacle towards the end of the 19th century, also motivated such decisions. The annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 caused an Afrikaner uprising, and the First Anglo-Boer War broke out in 1881,⁷ in which the British were defeated. However, the British won the South African War (previously called the Second Anglo-Boer War) and annexed the Orange Free State to the British dominions in 1902.

The South African War and its aftermath

The South African War (1899–1902) was a turning point for the country’s white people – although its immediate consequences were mostly felt in the two Boer Republics.⁸ During the initial phases of the war, the British Army defeated the Boer Army, who were far fewer in number, but turned out to

be hard to beat. While the British ruled in the urban areas, the countryside belonged to Afrikaners who, knowing the environment and supported by their families on their farms, could engage in guerrilla warfare. The British eventually resorted to a scorched earth policy, destroying farms, slaughtering cattle, and taking women and children to concentration camps in terrible conditions.⁹ Over 25,000 Afrikaners, mostly children, died in the 45 camps established for white people.¹⁰ This decimated the Afrikaner population, which numbered around 300,000 at the time (De Klerk 1975: 82–89). The Boer Republics surrendered in 1902, their Afrikaner citizens having lost a great deal in human and material terms. Impoverished, traumatized, and embittered, they faced a life of poverty in a country ruled by the enemy. Their African countrymen had suffered and died in the 64 camps established for black people in almost equal numbers, but only much later did historians acknowledge this.¹¹

In 1910 the separate territories of the Cape Colony, the Natal Colony, the Transvaal, and the Orange River Colony were unified to form the Union of South Africa, which became a self-governing dominion of the British Empire. The official era of segregation also began in 1910 (only to end with the beginning of the apartheid era in 1948). After the war, the British rulers realized that there was little hope of ruling the country if the Afrikaners weren't given a special position. If, as fellow whites, they were given preferential treatment, this would help unify them with the British segment of the population, and would also unify them all against *die rooi gevaar*, the fear of communism and the organized labour movement.

During the period starting in 1910, also known as the “era of segregation,” white dominance was established by means of legislation, giving those defined as “white” a huge advantage over the other population groups. The whites were, for example, given a privileged position in the labour market by means of numerous aid policies, such as the Civilized Labour Policy of 1924, which applied to the civil service. This legislation reserved skilled employment and better salaries for white workers, leaving semi-skilled and unskilled tasks to people of colour. Despite these measures to unite white people, British imperialism remained the enemy for the Afrikaners. British dominance stimulated the development of the Afrikaner post-war nation-building project, which emphasized their cultural and societal development and unification (Dubow 1992: 210).

Language and identity

When the Afrikaner nation emerged, it built itself with a myth of origin, a belief that the Afrikaners were God's chosen people, crowned by their suffering.¹² The nation-building project, supported by the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK), aimed to unite them as one group, built on racial, moral, and cultural purity, and drawing strength from its painful history (Witz 2003). The South African War is conceived as the true moment of

birth of the Afrikaner nation (Giliomee 2003: 22). The nation started organizing itself soon after the war, initially around the Afrikaans language.¹³ The country-wide Second Afrikaans Language Movement elevated the language to a central position as a marker of a common identity. The language, previously known as a *kombuistaal*, a kitchen language, was a bastardized variation of Dutch,¹⁴ which had emerged at first as a pidgin language and was reputedly only spoken by slaves and uneducated people. The multiethnic origins of the Afrikaans language become apparent in that it was one of the very few Germanic languages written in Arabic. Paradoxically, in a discursive manoeuvre, this creolized language was elevated to signify the unity of a pure *volk* and was given great symbolic significance as a boundary marker of the Afrikaner nation. Despite the common language, people of “mixed” origins and coloured people were not included in the nation.

A number of traditions were invented during the nation-building process (Ranger 1983; Hofmeyr 1984). The language movements had purified and re-invented Afrikaans as “Die Taal,” the primordial mother tongue of Afrikaners (Davids 1990; McClintock 1995: 368–369). As a consequence of the efforts of the second language movement, the South African Parliament gave Afrikaans equal status with Dutch and English as an official language in 1925.

Sacred Afrikanerdom

During my fieldwork, the British war crimes were still subject to discussion. Elderly people told testimonies of family members who had perished in concentration camps a hundred years ago and showed me family trees and chronicles, old letters, and photographs. Young men, holding back tears, told me how the British had put broken glass into Afrikaner women and children’s food, or allowed them to die of hunger, disease, and neglect. Even though it was no longer within living memory, the knowledge of suffering and trauma was retold, relived, and presented almost as if it had happened yesterday. The trauma is repeated and relived even in today’s pop culture, as exemplified by the popularity of a 2006 song asking Boer general De La Rey to come and save his people.¹⁵ Their past suffering had become a sacred event, a shrine in the Afrikaners’ minds. How did this shrine emerge, and how was it kept in such luminous power?

There had been hardships, and what had admittedly been a terrible war. These horrors were mythologized and became violent founding moments, which formed the basis of Afrikaner nation-building in the early 20th century. The trauma of these events had become part of their collective memories (Murray 2013) and an important point of reference for the nationalistically minded.

The bitter end of the South African War, an era of bloodshed and mayhem, came to be interpreted by the civil theologians as “the sacred period” in the history of Afrikaners. By causing them to suffer, “God revealed His

magnitude and glory to His Afrikaner people,” showing them how they had been chosen for a special destiny (Moodie 1975: 12). Those trying years, along with the suffering of the nation, became sublimated into holiness.

The new nation was constructed on the ideas of the Afrikaners’ “own” social order as sacred, and anything external to it as potentially evil. Their civil religion hated imperialism, capitalism, and egalitarian liberalism, which they saw as threatening the Afrikaner people. The new Afrikaner identity was built and celebrated with elaborate civil rituals, such as the famous *Tweede Trek* (Second Trek) in 1938 – a centennial commemoration of the Great Trek called *Die Simboliese Ossewa-trek*.¹⁶ Sacred days, such as the Day of the Covenant (*Geloftedag*) on December 16, were devoutly observed.¹⁷ Monuments were erected to commemorate the nation-building, such as the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, where people (still) gather on the Day of the Covenant, now known as the Day of Reconciliation.

A narrative of suffering was ever present and symbolically central (Van Heyningen 2008). This symbolism was presented, for example, in the giant bas-reliefs and statues of starving and dying Afrikaners decorating the Voortrekker Monument, which was inaugurated in 1949. The 20th-century Afrikaner canon of the *voortrekkers* told of their numerous battles with the warlike tribes, but affirmed that they, God’s chosen people in their ox-wagons, were victorious in these battles. A life-sized statue of a *voortrekker* woman, Susanna Smit, known as the *Kaalvoet Vrou* (“bare-foot woman”) was even erected in 1977 on Drakensberg, at the top of the Oliviershoek Pass near Bergville, Harrismith. She had allegedly famously said in 1837 that she would rather walk barefoot over the mountains than live under British rule. She stands there still, a model of a fiercely patriotic, all-enduring Afrikaner woman.

Even when these invented traditions were pregnant with local meanings and references to Afrikaner history, they could be culturally appropriated from other ethnic groups or nations. Examples of this were the dances known as *volkspele*, which were similar to European folk dances. Popular stories supported the image of Afrikaner bravery and self-sacrifice. One such story was the legend of Racheltjie de Beer – first told to me by a Stellenbosch teenager – who saved her little brother by covering him while she froze to death; in fact, this tale was based on a true US event.¹⁸

When these traditions came up in discussions, my Afrikaner research interlocutors could not only present a scathing irony towards the nation-building project and the consequences of apartheid, but also respect for the past generations. The past provided an endless source of mirth: an Afrikaner friend called the Voortrekker Monument a “white elephant”, and another suggested to me that it should be turned into nice family apartments. Sometimes admiringly but also, at times, ironically, Afrikaner women reminisced about how they had sometimes been told to endure troubles and difficulties as “they should think about those *Boere* women who had walked barefoot over the Drakensberg Mountains.”

My research interlocutors also told me that Afrikaner unity had always been ephemeral and that, despite the common language and history of suffering, Afrikaners had always been divided into factions. They had never agreed on anything, even among themselves, and were not that easy to define. Even the *voortrekkers* were featured in these discussions. There were those who called the *voortrekkers* “those fanatics” – as well as those who mocked the ones who remained in the Cape as *hênsoppers* (lit. hands-uppers, traitors). But also, in the very telling of the *Groot Trek*, the story is of how different *trekleiers* (trek leaders) fell out with one another and then took off in different directions.

There was a discursive separation, where nation-building was seen as different from the tenacity and bravery of the *voortrekkers*. I was reminded that the families who went on the Great Trek were not members of a unified movement, but individual families looking for their fortunes. The nationalist propaganda promoted belief in a separate Afrikaner consciousness, in their uniqueness, which was related to their language, faith, and customs. Simultaneously, they also posed the biggest problem to this imagined unity themselves:

Despite *Afrikanerdom's* belief that it is a monolithic unity, it has, throughout its history, had those departing and its homebodies; its pioneers and followers; its adventurers and constant ones; its rebels and its conformists; its defeatists and its diehards; its cowards and its heroes; its enlightened and conservative people; its conservative churchgoers and its philistines; its Afrikaners with English hearts and its English people with Afrikaner hearts (and a few with Dutch and German and French hearts.¹⁹

One of the fascinating paradoxes of Afrikaners was that, while claiming unity as an ethnic group, they remained divided, perceiving themselves as a group of individuals. However, several issues united them: whiteness with its ensuing performances, claims to a common ethnicity, centred on the Afrikaans language, and religion, expressed through membership of one of the Calvinist churches.²⁰

The church and nation-building

The Afrikaner civil religion, nation-building, and the language movement were directly linked to the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*, *NG Kerk*, or *NGK*). During the 20th century, the NGK was the cornerstone of Afrikaner ethnic identity; a considerable literature examines the links between these two (see e.g. Dubow 1992; Kuperus 1996, 1999). These relationships, however, were complicated from the beginning.

The early 20th-century NGK was not unanimously behind racial segregation or nationalistic policies. Yet, for a long time in the church, there was no clear position on racial matters; instead there were competing

conservative and progressive tendencies (Dubow 1992: 212). The matter was settled in the 1920s and 1930s when the NGK developed its policies, which slowly began to reflect hardening racial attitudes, and brought the Christian-nationalist ideology to being the central organizing doctrine (Dubow 1992: 215). The NGK began preaching for God-ordained diversity and stressing the distinctiveness of different cultures and the interrelations between culture, race, and language (Dubow 1992: 220). Yet, the message that was being conveyed never fully leaned on the ideas of biological racism, nor solely on the cultural or language differences – there were constant debates, which would continue even into the apartheid era reconsiderations on the refining of the apartheid theology (Dubow 1992: 222). Saul Dubow points out that the NGK's ideologies were a collection of contradictory ideas which nevertheless simultaneously managed to seem consistent and made it possible to accommodate a variety of competing thoughts under the umbrella of the Church. This consistent structure of ideas lent some apparent moral integrity to apartheid. The Christian-nationalist dogma of the NGK played a central role in the formulation of apartheid theories by providing them with a unique rationale (Dubow 1992: 209).

As proof of Afrikaner individualism, it was pointed out to me that even the Afrikaner church was divided into three *susterkerke* (sister churches). The *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK, Dutch Reformed Church) was the oldest of these and was originally the church of the Dutch East India Company employees. In 1859, after theological differences and organizational difficulties, some of the members of the NGK splintered off to form the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (GKSA or RCSA, Reformed Church), which in turn splintered to form the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk* (NHK, Dutch Reformed Church).

There was thus no lack of contradictions or internal rifts and conflicts among the Afrikaners, and this was also reflected in the discussions I had with them. A controversial name that was frequently mentioned was that of Jan Smuts, a famous Afrikaans general, who fought in the South African War, and later, in 1919, became prime minister until 1924, an office that he held again in 1939–1948 before the onset of apartheid. He drove the cosmopolitan politics of internationalization in endeavours such as establishing the Commonwealth.²¹ As a political character, it was hard to place him in any particular category: his attempts to patch the chasm between the English and the Afrikaners caused many of his own to conceive of him as traitor, and while considered “liberal” he was a firm supporter of racial segregation, seeing whites as more civilized – this, as Van den Berghe wrote in 1967, “applies to practically all White missionaries, humanitarians, reformers and ‘Cape liberals’” (Van den Berghe 1967: 113–115).

Nevertheless, those outside *Afrikanerdom* believed the convincing picture that the Afrikaners had begun painting of themselves after the South African War: a nation first united by their language, and thereafter fully unified behind the apartheid ideology.

Alongside this seeming unity, there was also an awareness of the artificiality of their invented traditions, from voices ranging from academic writings and literature to the fieldwork accounts I gathered over the decades of my work. The renowned author Andre Brink criticized the myth of Afrikaner unity:

It took four great events during the next three and a half centuries to forge the national consciousness which today determines the concept of *Afrikanerdom*: and it should be added that only on these four occasions was a brief and glorious experience of national unity achieved. In between everything remained very much in a state of flux, characterized by division, hostility, infighting and suspicion.

(Brink 1983: 14)

While the Afrikaners themselves did not believe that they agreed on everything, the NGK and apartheid politicians rejected *gelykstelling* (racial levelling or equality).²² They kept referring to *Afrikanerdom* as a unity, and to the cultural boundaries between Afrikaners and other citizens. Being an Afrikaner was a seemingly straightforward business: if you were classified white and spoke Afrikaans as your mother tongue, you were an Afrikaner (Cloete 1992).

The process of nation-building prompted the previously more scattered Afrikaners, often based on separate family clans identifying with different (European) ethnic origins (Dutch, German, and French Huguenot), to start regarding themselves as a nation. They still did not agree on how this nation should be managed, and what its racial relations should be. Yet, deciding on the racial relations seemed to be less important in the first decades of the 20th century, when there were other massive challenges to tackle, such as Afrikaner economic development, which was an effective way to mobilize the nation.

After the War, the majority of Afrikaners remained mainly rural and very poor (De Klerk 1975: 92–97) – a state of affairs conceived in the 1930s as the “poor white problem” by the nation’s political, academic, and spiritual leaders (Teppo 2004). Afrikaner organizations, especially cultural organizations represented by the FAK (*Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings*) as the umbrella organization, focused on solving this problem. The FAK was also a front for the *Afrikaner Broederbond* (lit. “the alliance of brothers”),²³ a hugely influential secret organization. The Bond (as it was popularly known) wanted to find new expressions for the Afrikaner identity, to organize Afrikaner workers in ethnic trade unions, and to promote Afrikaner business interests (O’Meara 1983: 66).

The poor whites and white fears

The “poor white problem” started after the South African War. Burdened by poverty and diseases, Afrikaners who had lost their farms and livelihoods moved to cities where they couldn’t find jobs, as most were illiterate

and didn't speak English. The problem was aggravated and extended by the fall in the prices of commodities and produce during the Great Depression. The Depression affected Afrikaans labourers and farmers who were already sliding into deep poverty. In 1929–1930, an estimated third of all Afrikaners lived below the subsistence level and were classified as “poor,” and 17.5% of whites were found to be “very poor” (Malherbe 1932: 228–229). The underlying assumptions for the process of uplifting of the “poor whites” were thoroughly racist, as their existence was regarded as posing a grave threat to white people's whiteness. Without the trappings of whiteness, that many issues conceived as “cultural” or “racial” differences would have been revealed as being, in fact, caused by material poverty. The foremost threats caused by the “poor white problem” were the fear of black people and miscegenation, known as *die swart gevaar*, and the fear of communism, known as *die rooi gevaar* (O'Meara 1983: 86–87; Teppo 2004).²⁴

The ideas of morality and *ordentlikheid* were part of the fear of racial mixing or *swart gevaar*, which assumed a eugenic dimension in the 20th century.²⁵ From the 19th century onward, the fear was that the superior “white race” would vanish into the “dark continent.” The impoverished whites shared quarters with people of colour, and no racial boundaries could be upheld. White people would stop being white and turn into a *mengelmoes* (mishmash) – the infamous professor Geoffrey Cronjé's favourite term for a terrifying mixed population that would follow if Afrikaners succumbed to racial integration (Coetzee 1991). While this way of thinking was an extreme example of the racialized fear of miscegenation, many everyday practices were regulated. In the country's daily thinking, ways of speaking and behaving, a certain habitus and certain ways of movement came to represent a “non-white” way of being.

Dancing was presented as a particularly dangerous activity. It is hardly a coincidence that once a moral panic about racial mixing began to rise in the 1930s, newly urbanized working-class women were the target. In an attack on the Garment Workers Union (GWU), which had mainly female members, “P. J. Kock, leader of the pro-GNP (*Gesuiwerde National Party*) rail union, *Spoorbond*, talked of how the GWU's activities led to a situation where ‘daughters of the Free State went to Johannesburg to dance with kaffirs’” (Hyslop 1995: 67). Dancing would obviously lead to intimate relations. Some alarmed politicians tried to use the perceived threat of these potential sexual relations or mixed marriages, even running electoral campaigns based on these gendered fears (Hyslop 1995).

Another fear was *die rooi gevaar*, the fear that the white workers would find socialism, which did indeed happen during the Rand Revolt in 1922 – although this was a very racist kind of socialism, and was directed against their black countrymen, united under a memorable slogan “Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa” (Breckenridge 2007: 238).

These horrors could be evaded through the economic advancement of the “poor whites.” Academics, intellectuals, and overseas foundations joined forces to produce the seminal Carnegie Commission’s investigation, which was a massive developmental research project on the South African poor whites. The project, which represented the leading social research of its time, was funded by the US Carnegie Corporation. It resulted in five volumes reporting on the *Armblanke-vraagstuk* (poor white question).²⁶ The reports, which were strongly influenced by eugenics, contained studies of the rural poor, education, living conditions, and mothers and daughters of “poor white” families. The reports laid the foundations of the social sciences in the country (Bickford-Smith, van Heyningen and Worden 1999: 103), and were vital when the solutions to the “poor white problem” were conceived.

Subsequently, social welfare programmes and special suburbs were established for “poor whites,” with the aim of rehabilitating them by turning them into “good whites” (see Teppo 2004) whose habitus would fit in every way with the proper middle-class ideals of dominant whiteness. The strategy was to build an Afrikaner bourgeoisie and avoid a class organization that would threaten the sought-after unity.

By the 1940s, the Afrikaners’ economic position had already improved: in 1936, an average of 27.5% of them were in white-collar jobs, but this had risen to 29% by 1946 (Bickford-Smith et al. 1999: 122).²⁷ From the late 1930s and early 1940s, the economic mobilization of Afrikaners gained momentum. The expanding war economy simultaneously improved the Afrikaners’ standard of living and reduced the “poor white problem” (Giliomee 1979: 159).

These developments coincided with the rise of racial science and eugenics in Europe and the USA. However, despite the end of the Second World War having revealed the horrors of racist regimes to the world, South African whites chose to aim for complete racial segregation. Racial science and eugenics ideas were already present in the country, but the beginning of apartheid in 1948 was soon followed by a hardening of the existing racist legislation. Preceding and then supporting that legislation were the racialized ideas of *ordentlikheid*. The “poor whites” could not always live up to the white ideals. They were gradually becoming an embarrassment and were seen as “*mors van ‘n wit vel*” (waste of a white skin).

Talking with the Afrikaners

In my discussions on pre-apartheid history with the Afrikaners, there were two things that surprised me: how wide the range of opinions was, and how tenaciously they stuck to certain topics which seemed to have an enormous symbolic importance for them. For the elderly, the past events were still recent history, something that had happened to their parents. While I never met anyone who could tell of the horrors of the British concentration

camps first-hand, I got a lot of secondhand accounts. A woman born in the 1920s had heard a lot about concentration camps in her youth – but even those born in the 1990s still referred to them. These stories of Afrikaner suffering could be seen as very direct explanations, defences of, or apologies for their present position, which showed them as the perpetrators of apartheid. They certainly helped me to understand how they saw themselves – as the suffering victims of colonial history – which they certainly had been. But they had also been slaveowners, racial segregationists, and members of a minority that had ruled the country with an iron hand, and among them were still many who did not accept or understand the ideas of human equality.

Apartheid was a sensitive topic: when the discussion turned to it, it was as if an invisible verbal tap had been turned off. When people did speak, the perspectives of their stories varied greatly from longing for the racial order of that era to an absolute and disgusted condemnation of its “madness”. It was not unusual for my discussion partners to point out to me that I would probably fail to comprehend anyway; they also clarified that “no outsider can really understand what it was like here under apartheid.” I could not grasp the logic of these statements. As a European who had grown up in the shadow of the Soviet Union – even living in the country itself towards the end of the Soviet regime in 1989 – I had some idea of what life under a totalitarian, mind-controlling dictatorship could be, and what it could do to its subjects. The apartheid-era propaganda had truly managed to convince Afrikaners of their exceptionality. Although I should state this with caution to avoid overgeneralising, there were many who couldn’t grasp that someone like me would not find understanding their uniqueness all that difficult.

Apartheid policies

Apartheid was largely a politics of space, comprising the systematic exclusions of people and communities. These segregationist politics pervaded all relationships at all levels of society, even the most personal and intimate relationships (Christopher 1994). The ensuing legislation ensured that these violent exclusions applied everywhere and defined people’s daily lives in detail.

The apartheid era (1948–1994) began after the Afrikaner National Party (NP) won the national election, which was limited to white voters.²⁸ The NP was known for its draconian social engineering, which was often prone to extremes and absurdities, and aimed to completely segregate all citizens into racial categories. The most important divide was between “whites” and “non-whites,” the latter being further divided into blacks or Africans, Coloureds, and Asians or Indians. These four main categories contained 23 subcategories, including Cape Coloureds, Cape Malays, and Chinese South Africans.

Urban spaces were specifically divided according to racial categorizations. Segregation was carried out according to various principles or guidelines, which were later divided into grand and petty apartheid (Christopher 1994). Petty apartheid consisted of the daily segregation of “whites” and “non-whites,” which extended from the smallest spaces, such as toilets in private homes, to parks, post offices, public toilets, and beaches. Personal relationships were also regulated: marriages and sexual relationships across racial categories had been frowned upon for a long time, but were forbidden by the 1949 Marriage Act and the 1951 Indecency Act.

Spatial differences

Grand apartheid referred to large-scale, systematic legislation that set limitations in relation to people of colour. According to the 1950 Population Registration Act, everyone had to belong to a designated racial group, which was written in the *dompas*, a document that all “non-whites” had to carry at all times. The already existing spatial segregation was cemented by the Group Areas Act of 1950, which required that each “racial group” had to live in its designated areas, while all urban land was divided into residential areas specific to each racial group.²⁹

In practice, black people or Africans (who were pejoratively called *natives* or *bantus*) were already excluded from inner city areas by the early 20th century. They were not regarded as belonging in cities at all. After generations of city living, many were forcibly removed to live in distant homelands (*bantustans*). They were only allowed to leave these to work in the cities as a source of inexpensive labour: men would usually work in mines or factories, and women would be domestic workers. Labour legislation also favoured white people, allowing them the best positions and highest salaries, while people of colour had to make do with much less.³⁰

Unemployment largely ended for white people during the 1960s. This was particularly visible in the annual expenditure on the public sector, which increased from 36.5% of government spending in 1946 to 53% in 1976. Government policies specifically supported Afrikaners; the apartheid state project to empower and enrich the Afrikaners came to be known as *volkskapitalisme* (O’Meara 1997: 10). In the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of Afrikaners joined the urban middle class (Welsh 1969: 270; Giliomee 1994: 530).

The regime ensured that it was mainly Afrikaners who were employed in the civil service. In 1976, Afrikaners comprised 60% of the white labour force in the public and semi-public sectors. In the meantime, the English-speaking people left the public sector, because the civil service expected them to know Afrikaans. In addition, the private sector was offering far more profitable employment (Giliomee 1979: 165). In 1977, 65.2% of Afrikaners worked in white-collar occupations. With Afrikaner

businessmen and companies making headway, the economic gap between the Afrikaners and the English-speaking people narrowed remarkably between 1946 and 1976 (although it never fully closed) (Giliomee 1979: 169–174).

The apartheid era reached its heyday in the 1960s, but by the end of the 1980s it had become clear that its racist policies were not sustainable. This era had generated enormous wealth for white people at the expense of the majority of the population. English-speaking people had accumulated vast properties, and the Afrikaners had been lifted out of their poverty – some had even become very wealthy – but decades of oppression had stimulated the “non-white” population’s wide-spread resistance to the government. Black people were the driving force of this resistance, but people from all other population groups were also involved.

The apartheid church

The NGK had played an important political role as a tool of Afrikaner nation-building, and this role was also crucial for the development of Afrikaner power. The NGK had largely solved its internal differences when, in 1957, it was able to agree as a whole on apartheid interpretations of the Bible (Dubow 1992: 22). It supported apartheid, believing that it was the will of God and that “races” should be segregated (Kuperus 1996). The church and state officials had the same goals and held the same beliefs in Afrikaner supremacy (Kuperus 1999). Now religion and politics were very closely connected, and the NGK was nicknamed “the National Party in prayer” (Anderson 2005; Teppo 2015).

Ideologically driven Calvinism was one of the pillars of the apartheid ideology of Christian-nationalism. It had grown into a religiously and mystically inclined framework that employed suitable parts of scientific theories to justify itself by offering holistic biological, theological, and cultural accounts of human differences (Dubow 1989). This ideology was created by prominent Afrikaner intellectuals: theologians, social scientists, politicians, and economists, who were also central figures in key institutions and organizations.

Apartheid segregation was part of the realm of religion, which meant that everyone knew in which church they had to worship, following from their racial, ethnic, and class categorization. Those regarded as “not belonging” were simply rejected, sometimes violently. The daring investigative journalist Can Themba of Drum magazine visited several white churches with his colleagues to see what would happen when persons classified as black tried to attend NGK services. He describes these encounters in his 1972 collection *The Will to Die*.

At the Kensington DRC (Dutch Reformed Church), an aged church official was just about to close the doors when he saw me. He bellowed

in Afrikaans: ‘Wat soek jy?’ (What do you want?). ‘I’ve come to church’, I said. He shoved me violently, shouting for me to get away. I walked off dejected.

A few doors away was the Baptist Church, and as I walked towards it I began to think that people didn’t want me to share their church. As I walked through the Baptist door I was tense, waiting for that tap on the shoulder ... but instead I was given a hymn book and welcomed into the church. I sat through the service ... This up and down treatment wasn’t doing my nerves much good.

(Themba 1972)

The NGK exerted significant influence on multiple areas of life and modes of thinking, especially during the formal apartheid era. It is fair to say that during apartheid, cultural, ethnic, and spatial boundaries were united in the realm of religion. By knowing people’s religious affiliation, it was possible to approximate a great deal of information about their ethnic background, social class, values, and even where they lived (Teppo 2015). The NGK’s formidable influence extended from ideas pertaining to religion and spiritual life, to the realm of art, as well as to domains of public and domestic life which, to some degree, continued in the post-apartheid era.

The powerful NGK dominated the Afrikaners and their daily lives, but never entirely unchallenged by their own. As the Afrikaners always had a number of dissidents amongst them, in the decades after 1948 there were many generations of *moral radicals*. Being one often meant defying church rules (Teppo 2015) and the apartheid racial order, and suffering the consequences of insubordination.

The moral radicals

The people I have chosen to call “moral radicals” were not moved by the amazing benefits, the high standard of living, or the self-esteem of a racially superior *volk* that the apartheid state and ideology offered all Afrikaners. For them, apartheid was an ethical flaw that needed to be corrected (Teppo 2018). The moral radicals strove to do the truly moral thing in a social order that they found immoral. Simultaneously, they abandoned the rules of *ordentlikheid* to look for their own answers – although this was not the path that all of them chose. Apart from their rejection of racial segregation, the moral radicals – characteristically for Afrikaners – were far from unified on many other issues.

The voices of these writers, intellectuals³¹, artists, and spiritual leaders of their generation were widely heard. Some of them had experienced a public conversion – such as *dominee* Beyers Naudé,³² who resisted the Afrikaner theology that the separation of “races” was God’s will, and that Afrikaners were a chosen people (Nichols and McCarty 2011).

Interestingly for this book, the issue of ecumenism – which is, fundamentally, an issue of mediation – had been a bone of contention for the NGK for

decades. After 1948, the NGK withdrew from all ecumenical institutions and prohibited ecumenical work, as it could promote racial integration (Duncan and Egan 2015: 272).

The Sharpeville massacre in 1960,³³ a defining moment, led to many people being excommunicated or resigning from the NGK. Naudé was one of the few Afrikaner clerics who went beyond their denominational affiliations in the struggle against apartheid. This struggle occurred ecumenically with “black” and “white” colleagues, such as emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Duncan and Egan 2015). Ecumenism took on the meaning of resisting apartheid and mediating across its cultural and religious boundaries (which were largely identical).³⁴

The central idea of this resistance was that since the state oppressed people against God’s will, civil disobedience was obedience to God.³⁵ Obeying God would mean disobeying apartheid legislation. For a proper Christian, this would not be a difficult choice, as they knew not to follow the law of humans, because God’s law reigned supreme.

The church yields

Religion was essential in the establishment and support of apartheid, but also in the anti-apartheid struggle, which was partly carried out in the realm of faith. Churches in African townships were places of resistance, and some clergymen – including well-known people such as the above-mentioned Beyers Naudé of the NGK and the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu – became known for their struggle against apartheid. Even some churches and church buildings, such as the Regina Mundi Catholic Church in Soweto, became symbols of resistance (Oliver and Oliver 2016). By the 1980s, the black and coloured townships had become ungovernable, demonstrations were daily events, racial relations were tenser than ever, and the economy had stalled due to the apartheid government’s weak economic policies (Jones and Inggs 1994).

In 1982, the general counsel of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches declared apartheid a heresy. It expelled two South African apartheid churches: the NGK and the NHK. The same year, the famous Belhar Confession, a statement of belief which emphasized the unity of all humankind – and thus resisted racial segregation – was released by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church.³⁶ The struggle was within the NGK now and, faced with external and internal resistance, the NGK was forced to re-evaluate its racial policies. Simultaneously, the white minority government began to relinquish power. Clergymen were very visible in the following era of negotiations and the dismantling of racial, spatial, and legislative barriers.

The NGK eventually changed its racial policies, primarily due to both domestic and international pressures.³⁷ Boycotts, border wars in the north, increasing violence, the stagnation of the economy, and – according to my informants – the growing emotional fatigue of the country’s white citizens

forced the NGK to reflect on apartheid's ideologies, which, it was increasingly clear, had failed. However, the NGK never followed the 1982 declaration of the World Alliance of Churches to proclaim apartheid a heresy. Stellenbosch churchman Japie was close to those who made decisions:

We declared apartheid a sin, because we were sorry for the way we participated in that. I think why they did not want to call it a heresy was that you cannot deny the diversity and unity that are inherent to any society.

(Japie, 66, December 2017)

In other words, the idea of cultural separateness has never left the NGK, which first declared apartheid an error, and then in 1990 stated that the church had committed a sin in using the Bible to justify apartheid policies (Kritzinger 2013). This change upset many conservative congregants, who felt that their church had turned against them. A key figure in this transformation had been Professor Johan Heyns, the influential moderator of the NGK from 1986, and an outspoken opponent of apartheid. In 1994, he was murdered in his living room in Pretoria, while playing cards with his wife and grandchildren.³⁸ It is still assumed by the press today, as well as by my Afrikaner informants, that the assassination was carried out by white extremists – another demonstration of how thoroughly *Afrikanerdom* had been divided.

The ANC (African National Congress) and other important organizations that represented the black majority of the population were banned until 1990. Both local and international pressures on the apartheid government led to negotiations in 1990, when President F.W. de Klerk announced the legalization of the banned organizations and the release of Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned ANC leader.

In November 1990, all South African churches congregated at the Rustenburg Conference,³⁹ indicating that the NGK no longer prohibited ecumenism. The NGK remained powerful after the end of legislated apartheid, although its vast influence on Afrikaner lives shrank with its dwindling membership. It faced challenges from two sides: first from the arrival of new, competing congregations and faiths, and then from the growing – and socially increasingly acceptable – popularity of alternative faiths, practices, and congregations.

In a referendum held in 1992, the majority of whites no longer supported apartheid, with 1.9 million white voters voting to start negotiations to end apartheid, and 900,000 voting against it. The negotiations on abandoning apartheid and transforming the society took place between the white minority government, the ANC, and a few other organizations. These ended in 1993 and led to the first truly democratic election in 1994. This series of events, also called a “negotiated revolution” (Adam and Moodley 1993, in Lawson 2003: 11), meant that the white minority lost its political power. Towards the end of formal apartheid, racial and spatial legislative

barriers were dismantled, even before the new progressive constitution granted a full freedom of religion to all in 1996.

Era of democracy

The ANC won the election by a huge majority, which rapidly changed the political power balance, although the white minority still held the economic power. During the negotiations, the white minority had taken great care to maintain its assets and emerged a winner with its vast private properties intact, while most of the national property was privatized and sold to multinational corporations (Terreblanche 2002; Teppo and Houssay-Holzschuch 2013). Subsequent governments have been compelled to focus on undoing the reprehensible legacy of apartheid, but the task has been challenging. They have been involved in numerous scandals, corruption, and even been accused of allowing the private entrepreneurs to carry out “state capture” according to their own business interests. In 2020, South Africa is still a country with a large, poor, black majority and a relatively well-off white minority.⁴⁰ Economic inequality has remained, although a few changes have occurred, such as the appearance of a black middle class where there was none before.⁴¹

Not only did apartheid policies cause the majority of the population immeasurable economic misery, but apartheid also formed the mindset of several generations. This allowed racial inequality to be perceived as a natural state and those disempowered as inferior and naturally belonging in crowded and underserviced townships. Apartheid’s spatial policies led to the boundaries of space and race overlapping. In addition, racial boundaries became social boundaries, which were tenaciously and intimately connected with moral and religious ideas.

Religious transformation in the post-apartheid era

In South Africa’s 2019 population estimations, whites comprised 4.6 million people or 7.9% of a population of almost 59 million,⁴² an estimated 2.7 million of whom were Afrikaners.⁴³ Studies that have looked at the religious lives of white Afrikaners have mostly concentrated on their Calvinist Christianity, since they had, from the beginning of the settlement, been members of the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK, Dutch Reformed Church), and its sister churches, the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (GK, Reformed Church) and the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk* (NHK, Dutch Reformed Church). Of these three *susterkerke* (“sister churches”), the NGK is still the largest and most influential. At the end of apartheid, most Afrikaners were still members of these churches. English-speaking white people were Jewish, Anglican, Catholic, or members of the Baptist or Methodist churches. Those who did not fit into these categories would attend smaller Christian churches, such as the Lutheran church. Members of Pentecostal and charismatic churches were usually lower middle class or

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even so-called “poor whites,” who were already stigmatized and not considered a part of “proper” white society (Teppo 2004).

Between 1985 and 2018, the NGK has seen its membership dwindle from 1.5 million to just over a million. Dr. Jean Oosthuizen from the NGK pointed out how dangerous it is for the church to have lost its members’ interest for “if the church continues to lose 25,000 members and more annually, of the current nearly one million members, after 25 years only 375,000 will be left” ⁴⁴ (Oosthuizen 2018: 210). He also wrote:

The lost members haven’t all died or left the country. Some have probably found their way to charismatic churches, but most of them can be found on Sundays in malls, or spending time with their family and friends.

(Oosthuizen 2018: 212)⁴⁵

For Oosthuizen, the most important reason for this dwindling interest is not that Afrikaners have lost their faith, but the lack of relevance of biblical scriptures in the present-day secular and postmodern society.

The NGK church is still divided, which is visible in matters of ecumenism, and in relation to sexual minorities. Previously conservative, in 2015 the Church synod made many of its most *verkrampste* members unhappy by accepting homosexuality (van Wyk 2017; Gaum 2017). Soon after that, it made its *verligte* members unhappy by reversing this decision (Teppo 2018). But sexual orientation is still only one of the things that have divided the NGK over recent years. The NGK members and dominees I have spoken with have all had a different story to tell and a different viewpoint on matters concerning their church. Afrikaner individualism continues to exist, and the NGK faithfully reflects it.

It was not only Afrikaners who withdrew from their traditional churches: the overall influence of religion in the country, at least as traditionally understood, seems to be fading. According to a 2012 international survey, the percentage of those who called themselves religious dropped from 83% in the previous survey in 2005, to 64% (Win-Gallup International 2012).⁴⁶ These figures should be interpreted in the light of “religion” being a weighty word in South African everyday conversations, and one that usually refers to one of the prominent world religions. In the survey, the term “religious” meant someone who quite strictly observed the rules or regulations of an established religious system – and this was also what the question led the respondents to think. Had the question been whether a person was “spiritual,” the responses would probably have looked very different, because, according to the same study, a mere 4% defined themselves as atheists. The remaining 96% therefore held some kind of religious belief, while the number of strictly observant people had declined.

In sum, after decades of dominant and, for Afrikaners, compulsory Christianity, religion had become an individual choice, supposedly free of racial discrimination. This change has been slow, and at times contested. Religious freedom has thus been the first big change in the post-apartheid religious scene.

The second big change is reflected in the above-mentioned figures, showing the declining attendance in the main churches. Although levels of spirituality remain high, this decline reflects the ongoing transformation in the field of religion, with people turning away from traditional forms of spirituality and looking for alternatives. The simultaneous arrival and accessibility of the Internet in the mid-1990s ensured that all the information was available for seekers and believers. The white people not only became aware of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches, but also of other non-Christian faiths and beliefs, and even of traditional African religions (e.g. Van Binsbergen 1991, 2005; Wreford 2005; Teppo 2011; Heer 2015).

The social anthropologist Joel Robbins has pointed out that these kinds of radical discontinuities or *ruptures* are typical of Christianity (Robbins 2007).⁴⁷ Robbins focuses on the concept of rupture as representing a complete break with the past, which is often seen in conversions inherent to the practices of Pentecostal Christianity. The concept of rupture also explains many of the drastic recent changes in the worldview and practices of NGK congregants, which became far more accommodating toward new religious ideas and practices in the post-apartheid era. The absence of restrictive apartheid policies and practices encouraged South Africans to test the boundaries, to look for new spiritual paths, and to consider new religious choices. After 1994, alternative religious practices spread and gained popularity.

While the domain of religion has become freer, and religion has possibly become a more private matter, inherited sociocultural conventions and ideas still guide people's choices. In particular, ideas on morality have remained important in local discourses regulating ideas pertaining to religion. Despite the rupture, there are still *white* ways of being a moral practitioner of religion – and the conservative version of these ways has hindered people from sharing their faith practices and moral communities with people from other population groups. These ideas were also tied to Afrikaner ethnicity and ideals of moral personhood in particular ways. In their religious context, they help to explain the background to my argument, focusing on the ideas of *ordentlikheid* (decency, properness) and on the change and mediation of moral boundaries.

Notes

- 1 Khoisan is a collective term for the “first people,” who, according to apartheid fabrications, either assimilated with local coloured people or lost their lives to violence and disease as a result of colonization. However, the “Khoisan” concept is a relatively recent one. There was no neatly defined population called that, but a vast diversity of small populations of herders/hunters and hunter-gatherers speaking a number of distinct languages. These populations, using sophisticated subsistence strategies, travelled around for food and water for their stock (e.g. as the Khoikhoi herders and the !Kung San hunter-gatherers did).
- 2 *Burgher* – Old Dutch for “citizen.”

- 3 This policy was in place for purely practical reasons – the VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) was a merciless ruler and was known to revert to mass murder, for example, when their pursuit of spices left a bloody trail in the Banda Islands in 1621 (Lape 2000).
- 4 Intimate and “mixed” relationships in colonial countries have been discussed by Young (2005) and McClintock (1995).
- 5 The groups were, along with the Zulu, pastoralists who spoke Bantu languages. The Xhosa and Zulu people were counted as Nguni people, while the Sotho-Tswana people were a distinct language group. Either way, these were related ethnic groupings. The Bantu speakers were considered different people from the Khoisan groups; however, the boundaries of these ethnicities were fluctuating and overlapping (Ross 1980).
- 6 *Voortrekker* – lit. “the one who travels ahead.”
- 7 Also known as the First Boer War, the First Transvaal War of Independence, or the Transvaal Rebellion or the First South African War
- 8 Black people were very much part of this war that has been called “a white man’s war.” An estimated 100,000 black people were directly involved in the struggle in a wide range of occupations, including as combatants (Warwick 1983: 4–5).
- 9 A lot has been written about the British concentration camps, as they were among the first of their kind (Stone 2017). Their existence was firmly anchored in colonial history, and the term has been used to “describe widely differing phenomena in different contexts and eras” (Smith and Stucki 2011: 418).
- 10 Altogether, around 300,000 people were placed in these camps (Van Heyningen 2008: 496).
- 11 “The official figure is 27,927 deaths and later estimates, such as those of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, put the count at over 30,000. Our calculations, from a database drawing on camp registers as well as the data from the RS series in the South African National Archives in Pretoria, and the colonial Government Gazettes, suggest that the figure is slightly lower. These figures do not include black mortality, which must have been as high, although recorded deaths total only about 14,000” (Van Heyningen 2008: 496, fn. 5).
- 12 On the “paradigm of suffering” among the Afrikaners, see Van Heyningen (2008).
- 13 According to Van den Berghe (1967: 284), the second *Afrikaanse Taal* movement (*Tweede Beweging* or *Tweede Afrikaanse Taalbeweging*) began around 1905.
- 14 Afrikaans was initially a mixture of High Dutch, local dialects, and some Indonesian and African languages – a language “intelligible to both master and servant”, which was used to communicate across the colour lines (Davids 1990: 36–37).
- 15 <https://youtu.be/nlHqKJyo3GQ> (accessed 10 March 2021). For a discussion, see Chapter 6 of this book.
- 16 *Die Simboliese Ossewa-trek* – lit. “the symbolic oxwagon-trek.”
- 17 For a full explanation, see under “Healing Cape Town one step at a time” in Chapter 6.
- 18 The true story was uncovered by two Afrikaner journalists in 2012: “Rachel-tjie is bloot ’n afspieëling van Hazel Miner.” https://web.archive.org/web/20160304003241/http://mysite.mweb.co.za/residents/dugeot/rachel_hazel.html (accessed 8 May 2020).
- 19 “Die Afrikaner het ondanks die geloof dat dit ’n monolitiese eenheid is, deur die loop van sy geskiedenis sy trekkers en sy tuisblyers gehad; sy voorlopers en sy agternakommers; sy avonturiers en bestendiges; sy jukskeibekers en sy kontormiste; sy hensoppers en sy bittereinders; sy lafaards en sy helde; sy

- verligtes en verkrampstes; sy Doppers en Filistyne; Afrikaners met Engelse harte en Afrikanerharte (selfs enkeles met Hollandse en Duitse en Franse harte)” (Coetzee 1977: 154).
- 20 Coetzee (1977: 156) interprets this as a consequence of pressure from the outside: exposure to constant and intense interethnic pressure left deep marks on the Afrikaner’s behaviour. Three aspects of his life were specifically affected: physical survival and guaranteed sustenance; language as a specific cultural component and expression of national identity; and, in a more indirect way, also the religious and moral foundations of his cultural pattern (translation by Jan Evertse). “Die blootstelling aan voortdurende en intense interetniese druk het diep merke op die Afrikaner se volksgedrag nagelaat. Veral drie aspekte van sy lewe is daardeur geraak: liggaamlike voortbestaan en behoud van lewensmiddele; taal as besondere kulturele komponent en uitdrukking van die volksidentiteit en in meer onregstreekse vorm ook die godsdienstige en sedelike grondslae van sy kultuurpatroon” (Coetzee 1977: 156).
 - 21 South Africa left the Commonwealth in 1961. On relationships between the Commonwealth and South Africa, see Dubow (2017).
 - 22 *Gelykstelling* – lit. “social/racial leveling, equalization” (Giliomee 2003: 88).
 - 23 For more on the *Afrikaner Broederbond*, see Wilkens and Strydom (2012) on super-Afrikaners.
 - 24 There was also *die Roomse gevaar* (fear of the Catholic Church), but this was not particularly connected with the “poor whites.”
 - 25 While never fully subscribing to eugenics; see Dubow (1989).
 - 26 For more on the role of the US stakeholders, see Willoughby-Herard 2015.
 - 27 For post-World War II developments in South African white professions, see Bickford-Smith et al. 1999: 121–122; Giliomee 1979: 160–161.
 - 28 For more on the 1948 election, see Roberts (2001).
 - 29 The Group Areas Act of 1950 was the most well-known (and infamous) of these laws, while the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 legalized the racial segregation of public premises, vehicles, and services.
 - 30 Paying the different races different salaries had been common practice in Cape Town for a long time. At the end of the 18th century, whites were already allocated more funds than blacks, whether by the church diaconate or by employers (Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith 1998: 67–69).
 - 31 Represented by the *Dertigers*, who were poets in the 1930s, *Sestigters*, writers, and artists in the 1960s, and *Voëlvreiers*, anti-apartheid rock musicians in the 1980s and 1990s.
 - 32 There are, of course, many people in South Africa who are not Afrikaners and who have done the same work and had the same aims as the moral radicals: people working toward apartheid resistance – everyday heroes, artists, and academics. However, I focus on the Afrikaner part of the story.
 - 33 On 21 March 1960, 69 unarmed people, many of them women and children, were shot in a demonstration by police.
 - 34 Important texts for this movement included the Christian Institute of South Africa’s document “Divine or civil disobedience” that Naudé and four other CI leaders handed over on 24 September 1973 to a Commission of Inquiry of Certain Organisations – an action that led to a three-year long trial, and had the CI declared as political organization, and thus a threat to apartheid state (Naudé 1973, 1995: 103; Van der Riet 2013: 59); another was the Kairos theologians’ seminal Kairos document in 1985, which was presented at a press conference at the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva. (Van der Riet 2013: 63, fn; Leonard 1985).
 - 35 This variety of theology has also been compared with the liberation theology of other countries grappling with colonial or postcolonial violence. It directly

48 *The Afrikaners and their church*

- influenced both black liberation theology in the USA and liberation theology in South America (see e.g. Walshe 1987, 1995; Nichols and McCarty 2011).
- 36 The DRMC was a church established for the coloured people. The Belhar Confession can be found at <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/contemporary-testimony/confession-belhar> (accessed 17 February 2021).
- 37 The NGK was expelled from the World Council of Churches in 1985.
- 38 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/preachers-murder-remains-a-mystery-423057> (accessed 10 March 2021).
- 39 SACC member churches, Catholics, AICs, the NGK, and conservative evangelicals.
- 40 Present-day South Africa's GINI coefficient, which measures inequality, is persistently one of the highest in the world, above 0.6, while unemployment is in 29% (IMF Staff Report 2020). <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/01/29/na012820six-charts-on-south-africas-persistent-and-multi-faceted-inequality> (accessed 4 May 2020.)
- 41 In South Africa, the definition of middle class has often included a lower but no upper cut-off income bracket, so it tends to include elites as well. There is also a division into an emerging (black and coloured) and an established (white and coloured) middle class; see Burger et al. (2015a, 2015b). For more work and thorough discussions on the new South African middle classes, see also James 2017.
- 42 Mid-year population estimates 2019. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022019.pdf> (accessed 5 May 2020).
- 43 The number of Afrikaners is from the 2011 census, where the number of those who defined themselves as “white” and their first language as Afrikaans was around 2.7 million. As the number of white people has only increased slightly in the newest estimates, these numbers are still applicable. http://www.statssa.gov.za/census/census_2011/census_products/Census_2011_Census_in_brief.pdf (accessed 5 May 2020).
- 44 “Indien die kerk voortgaan om jaarliks 25 000 lidmate en meer te verloor, sal daar van die huidige bykans miljoen lidmate ná 25 jaar net 375 000 oor wees” (translation mine). On their website, the NGK gave as their number of members 1,074,765, <http://ngkerk.net/english/> accessed 160621.
- 45 “Al die verlore lidmate is beslis nie dood en ook nie landuit nie. Sommige het waarskynlik hul heencome by charismatiese kerke gevind, maar die meeste van hulle kry mens Sondae in winkelsentrums of besig om saam met hul familie en vriende te kuier” (translation mine).
- 46 Globally, 50,000 people were asked the same question: “Irrespective of whether you attend a place of worship or not, would you say you are a religious person, not a religious person or a convinced atheist?”
- 47 The anthropology of Christianity has not only brought new perspectives on religious ruptures but also problems related to discussing them. I have tried to avoid some of the reductionist pitfalls of this approach, which John Comaroff describes acerbically yet eloquently (2010: 529).

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2 Performing whiteness

Introduction

There were things about people's daily lives in the former "poor white" area of Ruyterwacht that puzzled me. I did not understand, for example, why the sweet senior ladies always made a point of telling me that they liked to stay at home, that they didn't go out much, and that they only minded their own business.

For the first years of my fieldwork, my relationships with them were tainted by the fact that I lived in Stellenbosch, and by the aura of professionalism they saw around me, which they connected with social workers and nurses – the only female professionals they were familiar with. They told me how clean they were, how their bodies were clean, how their clothes were clean, and how they broke their backs cleaning their houses. Sometimes they opened their cupboards to show me how orderly they were. I had never seen cleaner houses. The social workers had been keeping a close watch on them for a long time. Huge amounts of energy had been poured into getting a whole suburb full of women to scrape and clean and organize their homes so that they could be seen to fulfil the demands of whiteness.

Afrikaners and whiteness

Afrikaners had learned to see themselves as "whites" and "Europeans", and, over the decades of apartheid, they emphasized different aspects of their identity as whites. Being "white" meant membership of a global social category loosely based on the biological ideas of race, culture, and historical convention. Membership of this category was vastly beneficial for those deemed "white" (see Frankenburg 1993; Delgado and Stefancic 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2012), while at the same time they were under constant pressure to highlight and perform their whiteness.

Since the 1990s, whiteness studies have critically examined the phenomenon of whiteness from the perspective of invisible privilege and racial normativity. Whiteness has been seen as a strategy to claim global hegemony and has also been held as an invisible measure of humans' worth (Hughey

2010). These insights are particularly applicable in South Africa, where racial normativity was the state policy during apartheid.

Whiteness studies have also pointed out that whiteness, while mostly hegemonic, comes in many shades and hues. Being regarded as a white person has meant different things in South Africa, Japan, and Finland. Discussions of the intersectionality of “race” have identified multiple other factors, such as social class, that influence interpretations of what whiteness is or what it should mean (Dyer 1997). It is therefore of great importance that the privileges and formations of whiteness are studied at different times and in different places. This will result in different whitenesses being made observable, which will make possible the deconstruction of their invisible and taken-for-granted value.

The number of researchers studying Afrikaner whiteness has increased over the past two decades, and from these studies it has become obvious that white Afrikaners have taken various paths towards establishing their ideas of whiteness, which, in the postcolonial, post-apartheid context have a particular direction (Steyn and Foster 2008). An interest in Afrikaners has focussed on the sense of crisis of the middle class, caused by their lost identity and the loss of political power (see e.g. Visser 2004; van den Berg 2011). In the new era, Afrikaner ideas of whiteness have found their expressions in many areas of life, such as consumerism, pop culture (Sonnekus 2017), minority politics (van Zyl-Hermann 2018), and in their religious lives (Teppo 2015).

The association between whiteness and proper, decent, and moral behaviour has also been noted (Teppo 2004, 2015). By the end of apartheid, the demands for white *ordentlikheid* penetrated all of the white echelons of society – demands that remained in the post-apartheid era. The seismic social change increased the class differences within the white populace, which meant that towards the end of apartheid there was only a small minority of Afrikaners among the “poor whites”, as the rest of them had ascended to the ranks of the middle class. Now the “poor whites” were outside “white” networks, and beyond the benefits of being “white,” while equally scorned by people of colour. After the end of the apartheid order and the era of *volkskapitalisme*, the government no longer supported the poorest Afrikaners economically, as it had once done. Importantly, the class differences assigned people to different and more nuanced social classes than previously, bringing on new anxieties (see e.g. Peens 2012). The well-to-do middle class lived in their own areas, and the “poor whites”, whom nobody knew (or admitted knowing), were only present in anecdotes and isolated in their own areas.

The material dimensions of Afrikaner middle-class culture are characterized by the “fear of falling”, a “terror of downward mobility” (Ortner 1991; Ong 1999: 176; Uimonen 2003: 303) that scholars have identified in middle-class cultures globally. Likewise in South Africa, among middle-class white people, this terror is palpable. It motivates Afrikaners to emphasize and perform their properness, or *ordentlikheid*, which seems to be a shield

against losing their designation as “white.” Throughout my fieldwork, I witnessed middle-class urban Afrikaners’ concerns about their economic and class position. I arrived during a phase in which, following a draconian dictatorship, their lives were adapting to a changing social and moral order, which was, in daily matters, a continuation of the previous order. This order maintained the external boundaries around their social, cultural, and religious lives. Although they might have lost their political privilege, they still had their economic, cultural, and social privilege to defend. For this, the ideas of *ordentlikheid* turned out to be useful in the post-apartheid era as well.

Ordentlikheid, or the art of being proper

Ideas about respectability have continuity in the area of the former Cape Colony, where they have been important cultural notions from the beginning. *Ordentlikheid* should be understood as an umbrella for many ideas about and behaviours related to what is socially acceptable, moral, and proper. Originally, the ideas formed a specific, dominant class ideology, which, over time, was regarded as the natural order of things. Ideas about respectability took on different manifestations over time. However, they often supported the hegemonies of dominance and power, as illustrated by descriptions of urbanized black people being made to conform to European clothing styles in the name of decency during the Victorian era (Schapera 1947; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 249–251). Robert Ross pointed out how the ideas of respectability were already helping to quell racial tensions in the Cape Colony in the 19th century (Ross 1999: 173). These ideas also constituted daily terms of social ordering in families, communities, and workplaces. Spatial manifestations were central to this ordering. A famous example of this is the so-called sanitation syndrome, a fear of bubonic plague in Cape Town, which between 1900 and 1904 led to black people being expelled from the city centre (Swanson 1977).

Being considered an *ordentlike* person is an important value among the Afrikaners, with rules about how to perform the cultural, social, and economic capital of gendered and racialized ideas of respectability. Morality, attention to social and spatial boundaries, and belonging are at the core of many of the ethnographic writings examining *ordentlikheid* in the Cape Town area. The boundaries of space and belonging were drawn in a very similar manner in different moral communities, although *ordentlikheid* was presented and performed slightly differently in the white middle-class Stellenbosch homes than in those of the Cape Flats townships (Salo 2003; Ross 2005; Jensen 2008). However, these communities have rarely been compared, and moreover, ethnographic studies have focussed mainly on the Cape Flats among poorer Capetonians (Salo 2003, 2009; Teppo 2004; Ross 2005; Jensen 2008; Versfeld 2012), with “poor whites” being the only white people involved (see e.g. Teppo 2004, 2009, 2013; Peens 2011; Kruger 2016; Lange 2018). They have been linked less

to middle-class people, whether white, black, or coloured, who also subscribed to these ideas – although there are some *ordentlikheid* studies on white middle-class discourses of gender and race in the post-apartheid era (Teppo 2015).¹ These analyses, although valuable steps ahead, tend to concentrate on narratives, leaving most everyday practices opaque.

Yet each ethnic group and moral community has nourished its own ideals and norms regarding what is proper (*lyne van ordentlikheid*), and while the concept of *ordentlikheid* has assumed different manifestations, it is familiar everywhere – even in the everyday lives of the white middle class. While the ideals regarding decency fluctuated according to individuals' class position and ethnic background, there were common denominators in their history and practices. The comparison between the *ordentlikheid* of the “poor whites” and middle-class whites sheds some light on these.

The not-so-proper Afrikaners of Ruyterwacht

The research I carried out for my PhD thesis between 1997 and 2001 in the former “poor white” area of Ruyterwacht, close to central Cape Town, showed how ideas of *ordentlikheid* were used at all levels to regulate the habitus and movements of white people who could potentially threaten the racial hierarchies (Teppo 2004).

There were numerous ways of controlling and confining the possibly dangerous classes. From the 1930s onward, the solution to the “poor white problem” was the “uplifting” of the poorest white people to the level that their assumed racial superiority required, which would also hinder them from turning to socialist ideologies. This was realized by providing support to economically disempowered but “deserving” whites, who were provided with suitable accommodation, education, and guidance in their “poor white” areas. Social workers handpicked whites with no means, but with good potential to “better themselves”, limiting them to designated areas until they had been successfully uplifted, after which they could move on. In areas such as Epping Garden Village (later known as Ruyterwacht), “poor white” people were helped to become “good” middle-class whites.

Occasionally, very light-skinned coloured people managed to be handpicked, and consequently reclassified as white, in these areas (Watson 1970; Teppo 2004; Dentlinger 2016). Since this “passing for white” could lift a coloured person to the status of “white”, “poor white” areas gained a reputation for being racially dubious – a stigma extended to all “poor whites”. The working class, and especially the *lumpenproletariat* element or the “poor whites”, were on the lower rungs of the “white” part of the racial ladder.² Only their whiteness, although dubious, distinguished them from those classified as “coloured”. If one was poor and white, there was always the risk that one was not white enough.

The support the “poor whites” received from the state, and the professionals placed in the area to monitor their rehabilitation, could make a real

difference in the lives of these people, since they were readily rewarded for good behaviour and punished for disobedience. It was therefore in the self-interests of working-class Afrikaners to emphasize their whiteness and their racial purity, even in the face of doubts regarding their whiteness – and they soon learned to self-govern their whiteness. They had to learn how to *look* and *act* white.

The residents had hierarchies, decided in a tough competition over who possessed the most convincing qualities of whiteness (Teppo 2004). If one lacked material resources, one could always emphasize one's properness: cleanliness, personal hygiene, a neat home, and good behaviour. In white working-class communities, many of the battles involving *ordentlikheid* pertained to maintaining the ideals of whiteness (Teppo 2004; see also Peens 2011).

The success of the “poor white project” coincided with a general increase in the white standard of living. By the 1960s, most of those originally chosen to live in the “poor white” areas had moved on to their own houses in more upmarket areas, having proved themselves as “proper” whites. However, those who remained behind had multiple social problems or could not live up to the ideals of being “good whites” and were branded as incapable. After the 1960s, “poor white” areas became increasingly morally stigmatized spaces, and the residents therefore found it even more difficult to fit into the hierarchies of whiteness, which meant it was even more important for these residents to constantly present enough “white” respectability.

A previously middle-class female resident who had lived in Ruyterwacht after the breakdown of her marriage in the 1980s was disgusted by her environment.

The people here are all fat, their feet are always dirty, they always wear *plakkies* [flipflops], it's very seldom you see them in stockings, and they always have this loose tops on. And sometimes they even have got shorts on. Big bums in shorts. It's just plain horrible. Their dresses is like this (demonstrating it). I don't know, hey. They put on beach bum shorts with clean tops. Just picture it! And they are like 200 pounds in weight. You can just imagine what it looks like... and their feet are dirty. You tell me, 8:30 in the morning how your feet can get so black and dirty. You know the Lord gives us water, why can't they just wash their feet when they go to bed? How can a person go to bed without bathing? This is what I want to know.

(Tannie M.)

Don't leave home!

The battles about whiteness were *gendered*, and often fought at home: cleanliness and presentability of the house and person were very important, and it was especially important for women to keep to themselves, to stay

off the streets, go to church, and emphasize their industriousness. Roaming the streets of Ruyterwacht was stigmatizing – especially for women, as only morally loose women would do this, or those who had too much time on their idle hands. In addition, hanging around in the streets was what the people of colour did.

The limitations on the movements of “non-white” people were ingrained in apartheid legislation: their places of residence and their rights to move in the urban areas were restricted. It was therefore no wonder that moving and dancing through and in urban spaces were central activities for the liberation struggles from the 1960s to the 1990s. Black and coloured people marched and toyi-toyied³ in towns and townships to demonstrate their opposition to the draconian regime of the white minority government. For white people, this behaviour was seen as utterly unsuitable – although some whites did participate in anti-apartheid demonstrations. But Susana from Ruyterwacht would never have joined one, and she would not have had a clue how to toyi-toyi. The girls in the neighbouring coloured area of Elsie’s River, only a stone’s throw away, could have taught her – if she had been allowed to speak to them.

Susana seldom mentioned her mother, whose life as the wife of an authoritarian husband and a mother of ten children sounded very hard – she was always pregnant, always working – but she talked a lot about her father. She expressed gratitude for his tough love and unwavering *ordentlikheid*, which inspired her, although a strict curfew restricted her movements (and those of her sisters) throughout her youth, while her brothers were allowed much more freedom.

She spoke of how angry she had been about these limitations, but remained convinced that her father’s protection had ultimately been good, as she had avoided all the pitfalls of a “poor white” area for a young girl – such as an unwanted pregnancy. With her reputation and virginity intact, she could marry well in a white dress at the local *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK). She eventually escaped Ruyterwacht, built a career, and ended up in a fine house in upmarket Durbanville.⁴ Unlike most of the former residents of Ruyterwacht, she remained proud of her humble origins. In Susana’s accounts – and in those of other Ruyterwacht women – there was a clearly elaborated idea that there were certain ways of moving and certain bodily practices that did not suit a “good white girl” (Teppo 2004). Movement was a moral matter, and obviously there were morally right – *ordentlike* – and morally wrong ways of moving. These right ways had served her well – we had our discussions in her pleasant office in downtown Cape Town. She had carefully permed hair and clothes that had clearly been bought from one of Cape Town’s better shops.

The restricting of movement did not, however, apply only to the controlling of teenage girls. There were three levels of spatial limitations when following the ideals of *ordentlikheid*. At Ruyterwacht, “minding one’s

own business” – not being too interested in what the neighbours did, while striving to stay confined to one’s own household and its important matters – was an often-mentioned ideal of proper spatial behaviour. The second level of practice followed from this – a concrete, yet unspoken emphasis on restricting one’s own movement. As conveyed to me, this generally meant that a “proper” good white person would “not go around too much” in the area – it was better to stay at home rather than constantly visiting one’s neighbours. A third level followed: improper spatial practices in the public spaces, such as going to places where one should not go (neighbouring “coloured” areas, or their *shebeens* (bars)), or hanging around in the streets – all such practices were presumed to automatically lead “proper” whites to experience distaste and aversion.

These three manifested levels of social hierarchies, expressed in terms of white people keeping their movements *ordentlike*, exemplified unofficial and local spatial restraints which extended far beyond the spheres regulated by official apartheid legislation. Nor were these restrictions only directed at the lowest class of white people.

The idea of spatialized respectability crossed the boundaries of colour: in the coloured working-class community of Manenberg, women produced and reproduced the *ordentlikheid* of daily life. Elaine Salo famously described how women controlled the youth, monitored their behaviour, and even saw that they remained within the boundaries of the township (Salo 2003: 345).⁵

The existence of rules of *ordentlikheid* continued in the post-apartheid era – and so did all the ensuing spoken, unspoken, and embodied rules regulating people’s lives – but they also changed. Yet being white remained an endless performance of proper habitus. Or, as the Brazilian anthropologist and historian, Fernando Rosa Ribeiro, pointed out: “Whites in South Africa seem to me *very* white” (Rosa Ribeiro 2004: 15).

The existence of “poor whites” was well known to the middle-class white Afrikaners of Stellenbosch – it was the home of the university that produced the social workers who worked to rehabilitate them. The reactions I received from people in Stellenbosch towards my fieldwork in a “poor white” area were emotional and often defensive. It brought on kind reactions, such as “they are the salt of the Earth,” or kind but implicitly racist comments such as “I feel really sorry for the ‘poor whites’, much more sorry than for the black people.” There was general mirth at my research topic. There was a particularly nasty comment about *slegmense*, rubbish people – this from a lecturer in social work at Stellenbosch University after I had told her what I was studying. At times, there was cool indifference: “We did all we could for them, now they are on their own.”

“Poor whites” seemed to be a real source of shame, a topic to avoid, or a bad joke. People of all colours laughed in my face when I told them what I studied. “To study them – it suits you well,” I was told once. I

knew it was not a compliment. Even an association with “poor whites” was stigmatizing and a source of social pollution. For the middle-class Afrikaners, it was important to differentiate themselves from the “poor whites”, who were perceived as immoral, lazy, common, and dirty, and as a good example of white people routinely regarded as breaking the rules of white *ordentlikheid*.

One should not be like a poor white.

The proper Afrikaners of Stellenbosch

More than two decades of close ties with Stellenbosch and its people granted me many opportunities to get to know the people and to learn from them what being an Afrikaner after apartheid meant. My base in Stellenbosch was mostly with the large de Wet family, and in this and the following chapters, their busy and socially lively household formed the perfect place to carry out participant observation.⁶ The de Wet family was a happy, generous, unpretentious middle-class family which comprised the parents, five children, their pets, and their friends, as well as a huge clan of relatives who came and went. The de Wets were considered good Christians and a model family. (They would probably have been considered that almost anywhere.) The children were sporty, smart, and attractive. The parents were loving and present. My daughter and I loved them all, and they loved us back.

They lived in a mock Cape Dutch-style house in central Stellenbosch. When the de Wets married in the 1980s, their house had not been that expensive; later it became clear that they had made an excellent investment. Both de Wet parents had studied at Stellenbosch University. The university played a major role in the prominence of Stellenbosch for Afrikaners during the 19th and 20th centuries, when middle-class youths from all over the country were sent to *Matieland* (the Stellenbosch campus) to be socialized into *Afrikanerdom* – a process tempered by time and changing mores. Many farming families sent their children to the university from quiet *plattelandse dorpië* (rural villages) to learn how to be immersed in the best of *Afrikanerdom* and in the freedom and safety of Stellenbosch. Having studied – and often having found suitable partners – they returned to their farms to cultivate the land and be involved in community life, or made a successful career in business, politics, or some other important area of life.

If the image of a Stellenbosch resident was that of a good elite Afrikaner, the image of a Stellenbosch student was equally idealistic: perfect, sporty, fun-loving. Farmer André, who returned to his family’s land after gaining a BA at Stellenbosch, told me: “When I went to study at Stellenbosch, I was told that you work hard, you play hard. That was the spirit.”

The male-dominated Afrikaner society generated a gendered student life, and people often teased female Stellenbosch students about studying for a *BA Mansoek* (a Bachelor’s in Husband-Hunting). I was told that this meant that by the third year of her studies, a girl was expected to be

engaged. Having gained an academic degree, she was supposed to marry and start producing babies. Being a housewife was a life goal for many young women, who would thus never use their education professionally. For male students, the expectations were different: they were told they were the future Afrikaner leaders and mostly believed this. They were socialized and networked in the spiritual and intellectual heart of *Afrikanerdom*. They not only found lifelong friends and peers but also well-matched partners, with more connections and extended networks. The opportunities to ascend socially were limitless for a clever young man.

However, these young men had to know what they were doing. To establish the best relationships, they were supposed to find the right friends, as the future – often quite literally – depended on the networks established at the university and in its hostels (*koshuise*).⁷ Each male hostel had its own reputation and was presumed to attract different youths. One was known for its party animals, one for its intellectuals, and another for its sports stars. Even after their varsity years, some of the alumni, known as the “old boys”, visited these hostels regularly. Many of them had remarkable positions in society, and beneficial connections were made.

After the social mixing of their varsity years, Afrikaners often closed their ranks, having formed their circle of friends (*vriendekringe*). These circles were united not only by ties of friendship but also by marriages and kinships. During my years in Stellenbosch, I ran into several *vriendekringe* in which people were loyal to one another literally until death – over the years, some of the circles’ members passed on, and these were always shattering experiences. Even if they lacked ties of kinship, these circles of friends formed strong and lasting ties, very similar to those of a family. Their members shared environments and experiences, jointly forming a moral universe over decades, and had built a strong moral community with each other. This was also the case with the de Wets, whose friends were largely from their varsity years.

Afrikaner society in Stellenbosch started changing from the mid-1990s onwards. On my arrival it was still divided into several layers. Academics formed the hard core of Afrikaner society. The university was the lifeblood of the town, and those within Afrikaner society were roughly divided into town and gown, i.e. into academics and others. In 1997, the university town looked much as it had during the apartheid era. Outwardly, its student life continued, with regular timetables, terms, lectures, examinations, sports, and NGK services still characterizing the town. Inside the university buildings, it was still largely the coloured employees who served tea and sandwiches to the academics. Its various departments still had mainly male, white Afrikaner professors making all the important decisions, as had always been the case. The power structures had not yet shifted, and my occasional inability to adapt to the patriarchal, authoritarian academic hierarchies caused me problems. I was too noisy, too opinionated, too young, and too female.

Nevertheless, the academics had started carefully exploring the new liberties and opportunities that the changing situation provided. The atmosphere was hopeful, and the people I met talked about the rainbow nation without the irony that would later underlie such expressions. There was an increased interest in making contact with universities abroad, money seemed limitless, numerous exchange programmes were initiated, and senior, white, male professors from prestigious European universities were flown in to provide courses and lectures. After decades of boycotts, curious visitors wandered through the corridors of the academic departments. They were mostly welcome – the long international spurning of white South African academics was coming to an end. The Afrikaner academics also did their best to look good outwardly: although there were only a few youngish coloured or African people working in the departments, mostly doing menial tasks, they were nevertheless pushed to the fore in all the official photographs, while the senior, white, male professors stood in the background.

From the start, most of the academics I met were, despite their friendliness, extremely critical of what anyone on the “outside” might have to say about South Africa and South Africans. I often heard – from both English-speaking and Afrikaans academics – the same claim: “You overseas academics come here; you pick our brains, leave, and then publish sloppy, unfair studies abroad.” It was made clear to me that studying South Africa would take a real commitment to understanding the country and its complicated social worlds.

The students in the immediate post-apartheid era were also exploring alternative lifestyles, including alternative music and arts, and looking for religious options. Many HGBQT+ people came out of their closets, and there were events, the biggest of them being the Pride March in Cape Town, which had started intermittently in 1993. Experimentation was commonplace, if not encouraged – in 2019 the student journal *Die Matie* mentions the BUG phenomenon – Bisexual Until Graduation – as a new normal.⁸ In this playground, bars and nightclubs were there within a short distance of the residences for the party-happy, and drinking, smoking weed, and even using harder drugs was common. At first, I could not understand why the campus supermarket offered such a tremendous selection – metres and metres of shelves – of air freshener sprays.

In the 1990s, the students were mostly white Afrikaners, but there were also some who spoke English as their first language. There were also some coloured youths, whose number was on the increase. Black students were a minority and were frequently from a privileged background – such as elites from former homelands, children of the party leaders, and wealthy businessmen. At first, I was surprised that the newly empowered black elites would send their offspring to Afrikaans-speaking Stellenbosch, but I understood that this reflected the appreciation that the university enjoyed and that they considered the networks that could be gained there more valuable

than the ones their children could get anywhere else. Life for students was also more contained and safer than in the big cities such as Cape Town or Johannesburg; particularly if their child had a wild streak, Stellenbosch was the least hazardous choice.⁹

Between the town-dwellers and the academics were those with economic capital, the wealthy Afrikaner business elite, who regarded Stellenbosch as their base – these included the legendary Afrikaner businessman Anton Rupert, who had been one of the driving forces behind the rise of Afrikaner capital during the apartheid era. The importance of this layer grew over the decades of my fieldwork: as business life started blooming, the Stellenbosch housing market underwent gentrification, houses were renovated, high-class restaurants appeared, and exclusive, massive artworks were bought to adorn the streets. Afrikaners in the upper echelons of economic life were keen to be connected with the university and its various cultural and sports activities, which gave them prestige. Stellenbosch was not only the capital of rugby but also of many Afrikaner cultural activities, such as music, the arts, and literature. Many of the corporate tycoons were also alumni of the university and supported its activities economically.

The black people who lived in Kayamandi, a township on the outskirts of the town, were the outsiders. They would mainly come into the town to work as manual labourers, working at the homes or businesses of white owners, although their society too developed a growing middle class over the decades. The university hostels for the few African students were separated from the other student hostels; I met many who had been placed with the overseas exchange students.

The coloured people, who lived in areas such as Cloeteville and Ida's Valley, were outside, but already closer to Afrikaner society. Both of these areas also had their middle-class layers, although Cloeteville had a larger poor population. Many office workers and some university employees lived in Ida's Valley. Afrikaans is also the mother tongue of most coloured people, with the boldest at that time even calling themselves brown Afrikaners. For obvious historical and linguistic reasons, they had for centuries been close to the Cape Afrikaners, and far less invisible to local Afrikaner society than the black people were.

The local “poor whites”, who lived in communal flats near the “coloured” areas or in trailers in caravan parks, were not considered part of the white society, although many used their whiteness to earn a living through working-class occupations. I was told that a white employee always received better tips than a black or coloured person when serving Stellenbosch academics and the wealthy middle class and tourists in the town's many hotels and restaurants. Middle-class people seldom socialized with the working-class whites: I was often attended by them, but only met them occasionally, perhaps at student parties, to which they were sometimes invited if they were co-workers of students who worked, for example, in the cafés.

The Stellenbosch middle class lived in old houses and flats in central Stellenbosch, or in magnificent new houses on the south side of the town. The mostly Victorian houses in the town centre had solid wooden floors and spacious rooms. They often looked like traditional Cape Dutch houses, although they were not always of the same age. Some of the academics had bought their houses before the prices boomed in the early 2000 and could now either rent or sell them at a good price. Some were even running hospitality businesses from their homes, which were now converted into luxury accommodation. Tourism began to define the town, which had become increasingly popular with overseas visitors touring the beautiful Winelands of the Western Cape.

Over the years, the wealthy areas of town expanded south towards Strand (lit. “beach”, the nearest seaside town) and Somerset West, the wealthiest town in South Africa, especially known for its large German immigrant population. A number of gated communities were built in this area, on the border between the Cape Town and Stellenbosch municipalities. The Greater Cape Town area was limited in the east by the Helderberg (lit. “clear mountain”) Mountains. Between Stellenbosch and the Indian Ocean were hills with dozens of vineyards and fashionable restaurants, popular with both tourists and locals. Spending a lovely day in one of the vineyard restaurants, and perhaps visiting one of the new malls in the area, was a popular pastime for well-off Stellenbossers. Every time I visited, a new winery had become fashionable.

Today, the abundant cultural entertainment revolves around food and high culture: every year a number of food- and wine-themed festivals and events are organized, and popular street markets pop up in the festival season. Many of the wine estates surrounding Stellenbosch organize atmospheric outdoor concerts and events under the stars. There is a chamber music festival, and the famous Stellenbosch University Choir tours the world frequently and is successful in choir competitions.

If anything, Stellenbosch has only grown in fame and importance in Afrikaner cultural life: one of the more formidable events is the *Woordfees* (“word festival”). It started in 2000 as an alternative event celebrating Afrikaans literature, from the initiative of then-philosophy-doctoral student and playwright Saartjie Botha. I attended the first *Woordfees* in 2000, where Saartjie Botha’s play *Op die bloodspoer van Florence Nightingale* (“On the bloody trail of Florence Nightingale”) was performed. The plot revolved around the revelation that Florence Nightingale was indeed a vampire. The festival was very alternative and looked more like an extended one-night student party than a literary event.

Since that time, the *Woordfees* has grown exponentially and is presently known as an equally intellectual and artistic event, “Toyota SU *Woordfees*”. It seems that Stellenbosch has a gift for channelling the energy of alternative talents it deems worthy into academic celebrations which complement its own civilizing and nation-building missions. Today, Toyota SU *Woordfees*

is one of the biggest festivals in South Africa, a multilingual arts festival with over 500 performances, and Dr. Saartjie Botha is still running it, now one of the leading Afrikaans cultural figures.

Middle-class comforts

With many children to feed and educate, and the parents having health issues that hindered them from working at times, the highly educated de Wets did not consider themselves well-off, but they knew better than to complain, as they were very aware of the massive disparities of wealth around them. They owned their big house and always had transport, domestic help, food, clothes, and money for essential medical treatment. Over the years, they managed to slowly but surely pay off the housing loans, upgrade their cars, and educate all their children. They always remained fun and generous – which made them very popular – and socially very open. The door of their house was reminiscent of a revolving door at a railway station, with their friends, the friends of their children, and the friends of *their* friends constantly coming and going. In the de Wet house, every weekend was a lively social occurrence, with elaborate meals. The guests were usually great conversationalists, with interesting things to say. Being part of this productive bustle was a treat, while sleeping was optional.

A typical week at the de Wet house would reach its pinnacle on Friday night when dinner was always shared with friends and family, or whoever happened to be around. Sometimes the house was full of guests for the weekend, but during the week there would be less commotion. After dinner, everyone would help clear the table, and sit in the kitchen or living room talking and joking until we all got sleepy.

The TV was placed high on the kitchen wall and on Saturdays when there was an important rugby or cricket match, a dozen people would be packed into the small kitchen, where snacks were also within easy reach. The mother, Sebastine de Wet, and her daughters would make snacks and bring drinks for the hungry watchers, while all the others would help with the cleaning and the dishes. These were fun occasions, even for those who did not understand the complicated rules of rugby or cricket. There was no praying before consuming the snacks, but every excellent *Boerekos* (Afrikaner food) meal at the de Wet table was otherwise blessed with a prayer.

On Sunday mornings, it was time for church. Before the service, the congregants met in the churchyard; during the service, they were congratulated on their birthdays, and even received cards. The children had their own programme, after which more socializing in the churchyard followed before everyone went home. Sunday lunch always featured something special, like leg of lamb, wonderful fresh avocado salads, or oysters fresh from the ocean. Over the years, the quality of meals improved even more,

reflecting not only Sebastine's genius and sense of adventure in the kitchen, but also the slow improvement in their finances.

The de Wets and their friends were well aware that white South Africans had become wealthier after the end of apartheid, but that this wealth was not evenly distributed. Some white families in town were not doing as well and had had to sell everything, even their houses in nice middle-class areas. The possibility of sliding down the social ladder was real and dreaded.

At the beginning of the millennium, and increasingly over the next two decades, I met and heard of a number of middle-class Afrikaner families who were struggling financially to maintain their "white" standard of living. These struggles were often kept hidden from neighbours and friends for as long as possible, because it was still important to appear successful and socially acceptable. Before the situation became obvious to the entire town, the families had tried all possible means of staying solvent: their cars were downgraded, holiday homes and other assets were sold, their savings were used, and family and relatives contributed what they could. It was important to appear astute and resourceful for as long as one could. A popular saying "*'n Boer maak 'n plan*" ("an Afrikaner makes a plan") refers to the cultural ideal according to which a good Afrikaner always finds a way out of a difficult situation. But not everyone could.

The façade would eventually collapse, and the inevitable sale sign would appear in front of the house – although this was sometimes explained, for example, as "they do not need all that space now that their children have grown up." There was shame in failure, and worse, exclusion. I noticed that my research interlocutors, who would otherwise enjoy a little gossip, avoided the topic of other people's monetary misfortunes. As a truly horrifying prospect for any middle-class South African, this topic of class downgrading was surrounded by silence.

How I also failed ordentlikheid

After the initial awkwardness during my first year of fieldwork – in Finland, my secularized homeland, public prayer was rare, and the practice of religion a deeply personal activity – I started appreciating the Afrikaners' way of expressing their faith. In fact, I received a very positive picture of the NGK and Calvinism from the de Wets. However, on Sunday mornings I was sleepy and grumpy (or worse, horribly hungover), and usually in no mood for going to church. Although the de Wets soon gave up on me, they would always make a point of taking my daughter along. They had hope for her, even if I was clearly a lost case.

I was divorced, I had boyfriends, I smoked, I drank in bars, I swore. I spoke my mind when I had to, and too often when I shouldn't have – hardly *ordentlike* activities for a young woman. I constantly ran into the rules of proper behaviour, or the lines of *ordentlikheid*. The patriarchalism of Afrikaner society exasperated me, and I had a hard time establishing real

friendships, since everyone else seemed to be abiding by rules that differed wildly from mine. At times, I felt that I could never say or do anything right and was constantly reminding myself to stay on my toes to prevent another blunder. Inevitably, I failed, of course – but despite my obvious flaws, the *de Wets* were there for me. They believed me when I was assaulted by someone I had previously considered a friend, while very few others did, or cared.

One night, I had organized a surprise party for my friend. When everyone else had gone, one young man kindly stayed behind to help with dishes. But that was not his intention. He dragged me screaming to bedroom and threw me on the bed. Before he managed to proceed any further with whatever he was intending, I poked my fingers into his eyes and kicked him where it hurt. Then I locked myself in the bathroom to shake and cry. I heard him throw up and leave. After the incident, I was pretty traumatized. He came to my door the next day, trying to apologize, saying that he “might have overstepped,” but I was in a state not ready to talk to him, and when he ventured to explain himself by stating “Annika, you are a very dangerous woman,” placing the responsibility for his misdemeanour on me, instead arguing politely back, I just screamed at him. I was even more traumatized when I found out that many people whom I had also considered my friends would not believe me. He was, after all, a popular guy and well-known as a Christian. And he had a sweet Christian girlfriend, who also did not believe me. “He must have just been playing,” she said.

Be that as it may, it is also possible that he thought that because I was not a very *ordentlike* woman, I would be happy to sleep with him at the slightest hint, although my screaming “No!” should probably have alerted him. From that moment on, my social life in town was considerably diminished. Invitations to parties all but stopped, and some people stopped talking to me. I was ostracized and branded a liar. Reporting to the police was out of question – who would have believed me? And what would have ensued? A police hearing, even a trial, where my lack of *ordentlikheid* would have been re-established over and over again. But my former boyfriend and the *de Wets* believed me, and they helped to put me back together (as did the therapist whom I visited a few times). After the incident, I heard numerous similar stories from women who had been through the same, or worse, none of them ever reporting the incidents to the police. When they did tell someone, their respectability was often questioned – it was either their own fault, or they had misunderstood, or they were liars.

I was aware that making social mistakes, and the ensuing shame, even to the extent of being ostracized, were typical ethnographic experiences. Over the years, I was increasingly angered by the everyday racism and xenophobia engrained into the society, by the rife crime and paranoia, and I often feared violence when driving into townships or sitting on my front *stoep* at night, listening to the perpetual wail of house and car alarms and police cars driving by.

Yet I knew that what I was experiencing was still easy in comparison with what the majority of local people experienced every day. Not far from me in the townships, people were experiencing the same fears, but had no roof over their heads, were cold, hungry, and disempowered. There were women who were abused by people on whom they depended and could do nothing to stop it. I had a comfortable life and felt that I had no moral right whatsoever to complain – but I ended up feeling useless guilt about my frustration at not fitting into the framework of *ordentlikheid*.

Thus, the ideas of *ordentlikheid* often came across as suffocating and disciplining, and as holding up the old patriarchal racial order. Despite this, they also have a socially productive side. When these moral ideas accompany the crossing of social boundaries, they create predictability and reliability, generating appearances of certainty in a country where safety is in short supply, and existential fear is commonplace. The deceptive message attached to the ideas of *ordentlikheid* is that *if you are good, you will have nothing to fear, you will be protected*. But from the many stories of women and men who had been violated, whether they were children or adults, straight or gay, sexually adventurous or “proper”, I realised that this was not true. *Ordentlikheid* is unevenly distributed and whimsical, threatened by many dangers, and fortified with many cultural, spoken, and unspoken rules. It is a complex and fragile cultural construction, and specially adapted cultural systems are needed to mediate it.

Mediated *ordentlikheid*

When social worlds change shape, things can go wrong, and disorder and violence can ensue. All acts of religious mediation involve crossing boundaries; as such they are vulnerable and are therefore guided and protected by moral rules. These rules represent cultural order, and each culture has its own set of rules. South African cultures and ethnic groups acknowledge and follow similar moral frameworks, where *ordentlikheid* defines social order. In an era of febrile mediation, the results of mediation can be very surprising, but the cultural logic of *ordentlikheid* guards the process, helping to turn the extraordinary into the ordinary when cultural boundaries are crossed. As a moral guideline, *ordentlikheid* represents a shared cultural language which helps people to communicate with one another.

In academic discussions, mediation is a widely used and understood term that takes on a number of different or overlapping meanings, depending on its usage. It has been employed as a legal term, in media studies, and in Marxist theory formation, and to signify cultural or religious mediation. The reason for the popularity of mediation as an academic term is doubtlessly due to its adaptability. Studying mediation can help us to examine the processes of social change, and to understand mutualities between people, and the ways mediation as a process changes its participants.

As, according to Mazzarella, mediation is at the root of all social life (Mazzarella 2004: 360), it follows that it can be a very helpful term in a

cultural analysis, but can easily become too wide, too broadly applied, and can lose its analytical prowess. What is mediated, when, why, and how should therefore be carefully defined. Here, I thus use it in an anthropological context to examine sociocultural change. I carry out a critical analysis of my data on religion and on the drawing of new moral boundaries as part of the post-apartheid Afrikaner cultural transformation. My analysis pushes the concept of mediation to develop new uses and to allow it to become a more practical analytical tool.

Religion and social boundaries

The field of religion has always been an important locus for social boundaries, a perfect field for mediation in every human society (Meyer 2020). It is central to the identity formation of both groups and individuals, or, as Werbner put it: “Religious identity is, above all, a discourse of boundaries, relatedness and otherness, on the one hand, and encompassment and inclusiveness, on the other – and of the powerful forces that are perceived to challenge, contest and preserve these boundaries and unities” (Werbner 2010: 233). Due to their nature, religious affiliations are part of and have served social change processes.

In the post-apartheid era, religions have remained important, gaining multiple new layers of social and symbolic meanings and purposes. Previously, moral boundaries were often expressed and negotiated in the field of religion, but once they were no longer state-controlled, the field became fragmented. The fragmentation of religious fields points to the fragmentation of social fields and towards an era of feverish and experimental mediation. In the post-apartheid era, there is a moral logic behind every change and new phenomenon in religion.

It is even more noteworthy that Birgit Meyer argues that religion should be considered as a practice of mediation:

Positing a distance between human beings and the transcendental, religion offers practices of mediation that bridge that distance and make it possible to experience – and from a more distanced perspective one could say: produce – the transcendental. Take for example the Catholic icon: though carved from wood, painted, and set up – thus obviously ‘human made’ – to the believing beholder (and possibly its maker) it appears as an embodiment of a sacred presence that can be experienced by contemplative gaze, prayer, or a kiss.

(Meyer 2008: 210)

Like its ideas of *ordentlikheid*, the post-apartheid society is a fragmented and complicated one, one in which the religious and spiritual spheres are more splintered than ever before. These circumstances have produced a plethora of mediations that can be studied through their rituals, religious

gatherings, and as moral practices; and, as they are positioned in the material world, especially in the spatial domain.

Space has always been important for any religion, whether it is a church, a mosque, a temple, or just a ritual in an ad hoc space under the open sky. In the field of religion, rich symbolism has shown that there is more to this spatial mediation than the transfer of physical space. In the ontological separation between form and content (Mazzarella 2004: 351), a church space is not just a hall where worship takes place. It can mediate sacredness and relationships between humans and God. It can also be used to mediate racial tension and a hierarchical racial order, and, as shown in the example in the introduction when Charmaine wanted to attend a white church, it can be turned into a contested moral boundary.

The use of space is important for all mediations described in this book. Space is one of the core metaphors of the South African social condition, and is frequently used in academic texts as such (see e.g. Durrheim and Dixon 2001; Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009). Ever since early colonial times, and especially during the segregation and apartheid eras, societal ordering (in)famously occurred in the ordering of urban spaces. White overlords made the spatial rules and norms, which defined where and how worship should be carried out and provided the material framework for the racial ordering of religions. As one of the most contested areas and symbols of social life, religious spaces remain an important medium. In religious spaces, layered ideas of religion and space – ideas concerning social worlds – attain concrete forms that could be considered openings to what is occurring in those echelons of society that are hard to grasp.

Spatial boundaries are important, because when considering any given space, one implicitly also considers its limits and margins. Each space demarcated as “religious” ends somewhere and has boundaries, the crossing of which always has cultural significance. In a complex multicultural society with a lingering heritage of various forms of segregation, these boundaries can become particularly charged areas where the already abundant symbolisms and moral ideas have densified.

I wanted to examine how these bounded and limited spaces were used to mediate *ordentlikheid* and the associated racial and moral ideas in the post-apartheid society. Surely if these ideas had changed in these spaces, and in the ways their boundaries were conceived, they must also have changed in society.

In the Cape Town area, religious behaviours were changing constantly, challenging and reestablishing former spatial boundaries. For example, attending any church other than the NGK – especially one more relaxed about racial boundaries, such as a charismatic or Pentecostal church – was for a long time definitely not an *ordentlike* thing for white middle-class Afrikaners to do, as they were supposed to worship with their “own” (*eie*). While the ideals of *race* and the *superiority of whiteness* were important in defining what constituted proper behaviour, *social class* dictated many of the

ways in which this respectability was performed. Presenting the right body, behaviour, and understanding of social hierarchies and the spaces where one belonged was essential. What would life in Stellenbosch, one of the cerebral powerhouses of the Afrikaners, be like after the religious rupture? How would the middle-class and elite Afrikaners mediate religious and moral boundaries, and adapt to the new South Africa that they no longer ruled?

Notes

- 1 van der Westhuizen (2017) based her feminist analysis on the *ordentlikheid* of “post-apartheid” Afrikaner women on discourse analysis of women’s magazine, and focus group and in-depth interviews. Scholars have so far mainly carried out discourse analysis of “white talk” among middle-class, English-speaking people (Steyn and Foster 2008, Besteman 2008 – an exception to this is Steyn 2004).
- 2 Eugenics later developed into racial hygiene, which then became known as the Nazi pseudoscience of race, *Rassenhygiene*, in the 20th century. The two pseudodisciplines were remarkably similar in content and practical applications. See also Dubow (1995).
- 3 Toyi-toyi was a popular dance step or movement seen at protest marches or gatherings.
- 4 A suburb about 30 km (18 miles) north of Cape Town.
- 5 For work on the ideas of morality/immorality in the coloured communities of Cape Town, see also Jensen (2008).
- 6 All names have been changed.
- 7 Very similar to the US fraternity system.
- 8 <https://diematie.com/2019/09/stellenbosch-is-like-a-gay-disney-land/> (accessed 22 February 2021).
- 9 According to a Stellenbosch University website, “in 2018, 58.1% of enrolled students were white, 20.1% African black people, 18.1% coloured people, 3.1% Indian, and 0.2% Asian people.” http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Pages/statistical_profile.aspx (accessed 22 February 2021).

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3 Cracked *laer*

Introduction

As my fieldwork progressed, I found the popular ideas of an unmoving, inflexible, and united *Afrikanerdom* increasingly insufficient and unsatisfying. The Afrikaners were supposed to be the stalwart conservatives of Africa – an idea repeated frequently in academic and journalistic accounts (De Klerk 1975; Norman 2016) – and I certainly did find conservatism, racism, and stifling ethnic boundaries. But I often also found the sociocultural boundaries far from where I had expected them to be. I encountered fascinating new cultural and religious constellations, and all manner of countercurrents, counterpublics, and compromises in daily life, which were far less well known, let alone written about. It took me a good while to understand that this flexibility had been going on in Afrikaners' daily lives for a long time, perhaps as long as they had been in southern Africa, as proven by the many millions of coloured people who consider themselves of “racially mixed” origins.¹

In this chapter, I examine the mediation of *Afrikanerdom's* external boundaries, how they were historically, socially, and politically constructed, but constantly compromised in everyday practices, and how the religious and cultural crossovers were an inseparable part of the social fabric. I focus especially on the idea of the *laer* as a symbol that has multiple cultural connotations and that organizes and represents many cultural concepts and ideas – *laer* being the external boundary that guarded the Afrikaner ideas of race, ethnicity, and belonging. I describe how the boundaries of *ordentlike Afrikanerdom* were formed and preserved as part of their nation-building and how religion was instrumental in this process. Thereafter, I present my experiences when encountering these boundaries, which I generally found to be more fluid and inconsistent than had been let on.

The canonical approach – which has undoubtedly produced many ground-breaking analyses – has emphasized the impenetrability and tenacity of the apartheid racial boundaries and the Afrikaners' unity. There have been very few analyses from a perspective more interested in Afrikaners' boundary work or their crossing of these boundaries. While some local

historians have discussed the more flexible system of racial hierarchies preceding apartheid, and how this benefitted the white Afrikaners for centuries, discussions of the apartheid era still dominate studies of Afrikaners (Ross 1999).² Owing to its huge influence on and significance for racial relations and social development, apartheid era still overshadows the majority of studies of South African society and culture, especially as the damage done during that era has been so hard to repair.

Nevertheless, apartheid ideology was essentially an expression of modernity, an ideological culmination of racial thinking created by the European intellectual tradition, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests in his classic account *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Bauman 1989). While the Third Reich was hardly representative of all Germans or all of Germany, the apartheid era, an ethically untenable, horrendously cruel social engineering experiment, while a culmination of popular racist thinking, and ruthlessly exploitative of its colonial subjects, never fully represented the opinions of all Afrikaners. The Afrikaner attempts to discuss their collective guilt about apartheid have been neither thorough nor successful, and it remains an underlying issue (Waetjen 2005).

Apartheid ideas permeated every corner of the Afrikaner consciousness; even those who resisted apartheid had to take a stance on its hard social and cultural boundaries, on its ideals of *ordentlikheid*, religious hegemony, and on the establishment of racial hierarchies. Since the apartheid policies empowered Afrikaners financially, they also made people dependent on their success, which made transgressing the social and cultural boundaries even harder. Transgressions of these boundaries were guarded with silences, which were part of a cultural code. In order to study this code, I have developed the concept of *loud silences*, which describes the ways in which many issues whose existence was denied were conveyed by those in the know. After the end of apartheid, these silences were broken on many fronts, making the fragility of *Afrikanerdom's* racial and cultural – including religious – boundaries evident. Before these equivocal external boundaries can be studied, it is vital to examine the “Afrikaner” construct.

Who gets to be an Afrikaner?

After the end of apartheid, identification with the Afrikaner nation-building project was no longer self-evident for the younger generations – although many identifying themselves as Afrikaners still harboured the previous ideas of superiority and separateness, alongside other ideas that were only thinly veiled racism, if they bothered to veil them at all. Yet, a new breed of people was emerging before my eyes in Stellenbosch: while of Afrikaans origin, they hesitated to define themselves primarily as Afrikaners. They had been brought up with the ideas of racialized and ethnicized propaganda and realized that these were not only unethical, but that they had

kept white people themselves captive, imprisoned in their villainous roles as racist relics and monsters.

The de Wet family was as Afrikaans and as *verligte* as they come; they were considered an exemplary family, with people mentioning that they were “such good Christians” – a sign of excellent social standing in Stellenbosch. The question about self-identification seldom produced any uncomplicated replies. Some of the de Wet family members and friends would reply to a question on self-identification with: “I am South African first, then an Afrikaner,” while others replied: “I would not want to call myself that at all. I would rather say I am an Afrikaans-speaking South African.” By calling themselves “Afrikaans”, they referred to their mother tongue, which they share with most coloured people, rather than using the famous ethnic term Afrikaner, which refers exclusively to white, Afrikaans-speaking *Boere* – a term linked to apartheid, religious conservatism, and racist ideologies. They therefore extended the boundaries of their identity, highlighting the difference between themselves and the Afrikaners of the past, whom they regarded as oppressors.³ They rejected the guilt and martyrdom of the Afrikaner past and its tradition of *baasskap*.⁴ Suffering was no longer seen as only characterizing Afrikaners.

Besides those hesitant to call themselves Afrikaners, there were also those who pointed out that they were Afrikaners, but that it was important to reclaim the identity, redefine its contents, and establish a new *Afrikanerdom* that would reevaluate its past and distance itself from it. Being an Afrikaner had increasingly become a choice, with many other options available to those who would previously have been instantly classified as Afrikaners or would have classified themselves as such. These options were related to another identity choice, namely the degree to which one wanted to commit to being “white”.

Whiteness in question

Being “white” means membership of a global social category loosely based on biological ideas of race, culture, and historical convention. Membership in this category is often vastly beneficial for those deemed “white” and largely invisible to those reaping its fruits. As the branch of postcolonial racial studies called whiteness studies has pointed out, whiteness is also regarded as a strategy for claiming global hegemony (Willoughby-Herard 2015), and as an invisible measure of humans’ worth.⁵ These developments have led to what Melissa Steyn calls the “master narrative of whiteness” (Steyn 2001: 3).

There are also multiple whitenesses in South Africa. To examine them further, it is important to take white peoples’ cultural characteristics and their different histories as ethnic groups into account. Instead of writing that all white South Africans belong to the same “white” group, the very real tensions and the ethnic and class differences between them, as well as within them, should be considered.⁶

Two different overlords influenced the history of whiteness in the country significantly: the Dutch and the British. Whites had been living and mixing with the locals since the arrival of the Dutch East India Company's ships on the shores of Table Bay. The 19th century was not only the golden era of British colonial expansion, but also an era during which eugenic ideas regarding the different hereditary qualities of different populations spread through the Western world. According to these ideas, interbreeding with people from other "races" degraded the quality of the "racially superior" European population. These developments not only affected the British authorities' relationship with the indigenous ethnic groups in South Africa, but also with the Afrikaners, who were regarded as racially dubious due to their history of racial intermingling (Dubow 1995).

The Afrikaners' and English-speaking South Africans' claims to whiteness and its privileges defined them from the beginning of the 20th century. Even if these claims were regarded as slightly suspect at times – especially those of the Afrikaners – they were nevertheless used for political purposes and to buttress everyday racial boundaries. Consequently, expressions of whiteness differed between English speakers and Afrikaners. Their situation was comparable to that of the Irish, who had to emphasize their whiteness to escape the lowly position they had been assigned in the social hierarchies in the 19th-century USA (Ignatiev 1995), which partly explains the embodied conservative whiteism that Afrikaners performed during apartheid. In the end, only whiteness that was successfully demonstrated mattered.

Afrikaner ethnicity and the ideas of whiteness were interwoven in a supported and guarded construction, with the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK) being the main performer of this role with regard to religious ideas and institutions. It kept the moral communities in small towns such as Stellenbosch glued together. Many other Afrikaner society institutions also supported this construction, as *Afrikanerdom* was known for its prolific Christian-nationalist organizations, such as the previously discussed *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge* (FAK) and *Broederbond*, the *Reddingsdaadbond*,⁷ the *Ossewa Brandwag*,⁸ and the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV).⁹ This system not only united the white residents internally, but also kept the external boundaries of Afrikaner society in place.

The apartheid dispensation did its best to enforce "racial" differences and to contribute to them. In their daily life, ideas of *baasskap* (bosshood) and a sense of superiority were instilled in whites, even as children. A woman who grew up in the countryside during apartheid remembered:

On the farm, we were always playing with the coloured children. We would get to know each other very well. But in the games we (white children) were always leading the way and telling the coloured children what to do. We decided for them.

Being “white” was complicated for Afrikaners, since most of the eminent old *Boere* families had some ancestors of colour. I was often told during my fieldwork that throughout the 20th century, entire family clans had been split into “white” and “coloured” parts that had no contact. In the Cape Town area, most of the old – both “white” and “coloured” – families had European, African, or Asian origins, or a combination of all three. Surnames were one proof of this; there was a limited number of Afrikaner surnames, and old family names were carried over precisely to the next generation, or just slightly modified. For example, the coloured side of the Saayman family began using the spelling Saaiman. The coloured part of the Jacobs family gave their surname a specific Cape-English pronunciation (jaykobs), while the Afrikaner part maintained the written Dutch form of Jacobs and pronounced it as such (yahkobs).

This forcible splitting of families often had tragic consequences, as the constructed “racial groups” or “race relations” meant that families were torn apart. The trauma of this separation lingered on during my fieldwork, intermittently popping up in the family histories, but surrounded by silences. Afrikaners’ genetic and cultural connections with Europeanness, regarded as the source of *true* whiteness, were often only partial. As Afrikaner whiteness was very dependent on the performance of *ordentlike* whiteness, acting as “white” as possible was a solid tactic for social success.

Another example of silences was the existence of those “passing for white”, well known to all, but met with silence by the Afrikaners. I became aware of the taboos and silences surrounding racial mixing and the shakiness of racial categories during my first visit to young Louise’s home in March 1998. Only then did I truly begin to understand (white) peoples’ lingering obsession with racial categories and the stigma attached to crossing them. Louise was my daughter’s school friend, and they often played together at the afterschool care. One day, Louise’s mother Nerine suggested that the two girls should continue playing that evening and that I should come along as well. I drove my small, pathetically coughing, rusty Suzuki jeep to the better part of Stellenbosch where their handsome, two-storey new house stood, complete with pool. Nerine, as graceful as ever, offered me tea and cakes. After tea, we started looking through their family album. I saw a very dark man in a photo of a family party and asked Nerine who he was. Nerine smilingly told me he was her brother-in-law. Then I realized that her husband was rather dark too. I asked rather innocently if they had Southern European ancestry.¹⁰ “Nee, man,” she half whispered with a conspiratorial smile, “*I think it is ‘n bietjie (a little) kaartjie.*” I wrinkled my brow, as I did not understand the term. I asked, “What do you mean with “*kaartjie*?” She just smiled and told me to forget it, which I could not do – her silence had intrigued me. In fact, adrenaline rushed through my veins, my senses suddenly felt curiously sharper, and all the colours were stronger.

At that moment in that beautiful living room, with a cup of tea warming my hand, the late autumn afternoon light filtering through the curtains

onto the stylish tiled floor, and the sounds of our children's delight in our ears, I knew I had been let into something much bigger, something normally kept from outsiders. The silence was too loud, too significant to ignore.

This moment also meant a change in my position as a fieldworker: I was clearly no longer an outsider but was becoming an insider-outsider – a precarious and volatile position. I was aware I knew something, but I did not know exactly what it was, and I had to start making sense of it. At that point, I was still unable to fully comprehend the keys that had just been placed in my hand, but I knew I could start looking for the locks into which they would fit.

Much later, and after much more ethnographic field work, I realized that “*kaartjie*” was Nerine's very own euphemistic shortening of the much longer and politically very incorrect term, *kaffertjie*, which is a pejorative word for a black person. She had told me that her husband's family had ancestors of colour, and I had missed it. The use of hard-to-decipher euphemisms was due to the forbidden nature of the subject.

Intimate relationships across racial boundaries had been there even during apartheid but had mainly been kept secret, as they were both illegal and morally intolerable. After 1990, when the legal and practical fences keeping people apart had disappeared, the inevitable began to happen: people started finding one another again across the former racial lines. There were romances and marriages across racial lines, and the “born free” generation was no longer as docile as the previous generation, whose marriage options were more limited. Families did not always rejoice over these unions, though.

One night in an upmarket Stellenbosch restaurant, I had an opportunity to observe a young biracial couple who were clearly so immersed in each other that they did not notice or care for the husband's mother's freezing demeanour. This was not what she had wished for her son, but there was little she could do, unless she wanted to alienate him for good; she just kept lifting pieces of lobster in her mouth and sipped her wine, which seemed to have a bitter aftertaste.

That this was happening was inevitable, as young people studied side by side at schools and universities, and ended up working together as well. There were differences in their values and lifestyles, but they were similarly educated: according to the Stellenbosch University website in 2018, 40% of students did not identify as white.¹¹ Having gained a good education, many people of colour – slowly but surely – have also started to gain wealth. This situation establishes fertile ground for close relationships.

Outsider-insider

The de Wets would feed any number of people in their house every week, and nobody left the house without the mother offering them at least a glass of water. While Afrikaners considered *gasvryheid* (hospitality) one of their great virtues, they were generally known to be closed to outsiders (Coetzee 1977). This mentality was spurred by some Afrikaners' fears of *inkomers* or *inkruipers* – interlopers penetrating their defences. Father de Wet

would always joke that I was a “spy”, warning everyone to watch their words when I was around; he enjoyed repeating this loudly, and often in public. Not that he had to. Afrikaners always knew when someone living among them, even speaking their language perfectly, was not of *suiwer* (pure) Afrikaner origins.

Every now and then, they did take in people who were sufficiently similar to themselves (see van der Waal 2015), but even then, they often gave them nicknames that referred to their place of origin. H. F. Verwoerd, the prime minister and state president from 1958–1966, was one of the main architects of apartheid, but was born in the Netherlands and was nicknamed *die Hollander*. The de Wets’ nickname for me was *die Fin* (“the Finn”; there were no others around at the time), while my daughter was *baba Fin* (“baby Finn”), to everyone’s delight. These terms of separation and endearment, which were a result of a complex negotiation between a strongly inwardly focussed culture and exclusionary practices, offered a limited inclusion while drawing a boundary between “us” and “them”, reflecting Afrikaners’ ethnocentric thinking.

I experienced the separation of outsiders from *ons* (“us”) in a more forbidding way when I was told that there were matters I could not possibly understand, and that I should therefore not even try to talk about them. Examples of such matters were the experience of apartheid and what it was like to live with it. People presumed that I would never really be able to grasp it from an Afrikaner perspective. In the middle of a lovely meal, the food would suddenly become sawdust in my mouth when I was told that there was no point in even trying, and isn’t this lamb just beautifully cooked? This maintaining of a boundary, which I encountered several times over the years, was popularly known as the “*laer* mentality”.

Breached laer

The term *lager* or *laer* mentality (*laermentaliteit*) originates from the Great Trek to the north and east during the 1830s. A *laer* was a protective circle of ox wagons forming a defensive perimeter against attackers. The *laer* metaphor lived on in everyday use, becoming a popular expression and a key symbol of the cultural boundary drawn between Afrikaners and other ethnic groups, which has spawned numerous academic discussions and inspired many writers.¹²

The Afrikaners’ ideology, which separated *volksvreemd*¹³ (“that considered alien to Afrikaners”) from *ons eie* (lit. “our own”), did not allow outsiders in. While, as noted, there were doubters, many Afrikaners sincerely believed in the master narrative of whiteness, the myths of nation-building, the Christian-nationalist propaganda, and in maintaining the *laer*. During apartheid, the boundaries of the *laer* were part of a complicated, compelling, and seemingly complete project of categorization. The ideas of whiteness and ethnicity, of racial and cultural purity, justified the all-embracing

spatial and social segregation. Legislation protected the boundaries of *Afrikanerdom* on several levels, but so did the daily practices of the *laer*.

The grip of this ideology of whiteness did not evaporate after 1994. Olivia Sibanda was not the only one who believed that “Apartheid institutions continue to be silently supported by unmarked pillars and institutions” (Sibanda 2014: 15). In a number of (rural) communities, the idea of the *laer* continued to hold the social structure together, and it reappeared in smaller and bigger acts of racial discrimination against people of colour. In fact, the idea of the *laer* mentality seemed to remain a specific canonical truth about Afrikaners, with some¹⁴ writers reproducing this idea as a single truth about them (see Norman 2016, e.g.). These writers have looked for *laer* examples in places such as the town of Orania in the Northern Cape Province. Orania is an experimental community, a tiny *volkstaat* of around 1000 people on privately owned land, established by Afrikaners who wanted to continue living under conditions of racial segregation after apartheid (Seldon 2015: 92).¹⁵ Most Afrikaners I met in Stellenbosch found it a relic and considered it unrealistic, either frowning upon it or laughing at it. Nevertheless, Orania has received tremendous academic and media attention. This research focus on Afrikaner extremism and the horrors of apartheid, while absolutely important, has left less space for other ideas of what Afrikaners can represent in the post-apartheid era, and for the forms their life and cultural ideas have taken.

Living in the midst of what could have been regarded as a *laer* with the de Wet family meant learning how one lived in an upstanding Afrikaner family: activities at the NGK and the Sunday school, and prayers before meals; their children sporty, well-behaved, and members of the *Voortrekkers*¹⁶; their great affection for their large and extended family; and weekend *braais*.¹⁷ Over time, the de Wets increasingly considered me as a close family friend, almost a member. They did not bother to maintain the *laer*, welcoming other guests from many walks of life and foreign countries, but were still considered a model Afrikaner family. Sebastine would help her coloured friend by looking after her children, and at times there were also people of colour at her table – this was not a frequent event, but it happened. From this perspective, it seemed to me that, in practice, the *laer* was far more complicated than its ideology – and far more porous.

While the idea of the *laer* was regarded as an important symbol of Afrikaners’ ethnic boundaries, long-term ethnographic fieldwork showed me that even when it represented the ideals of purity and exclusion, everything was much less tidy in daily life, and far more complicated. This is why the *laer* should rather be seen as a stereotype, which is hardly an objective description of a culture, or as a “partial symbol,” an idea, which is often used to fully describe the Afrikaners’ relationship with outsiders but which in practice is only one of many aspects.

What other aspects define these relationships? First, Afrikaners have always lived alongside and, at times, in symbiosis with other ethnic and

racial groups, who influenced them (Gluckman 1940; Gordon 1990; Kuper 2003; Seldon 2015). Even during apartheid, the lived experiences of race, culture, and faith did not succumb neatly to strict categories – understandably, since racial and cultural mixing had occurred on every level of the society since the early days of the colony.

Second, while the social engineering of apartheid was effective in driving a wedge between South Africa’s different “races”, as mentioned earlier, it failed in numerous ways to achieve its aim of full segregation, for example, in some inner-city areas of Cape Town.

Third, there was always another tune to be heard beyond the hegemonic rumble within the Afrikaner nation, a tune that could be better heard in the relative silence that the implosion of apartheid had created. There had always been dissidents and those who had quietly abhorred the apartheid social order; those who were too afraid to speak up in public during apartheid, or even after it, but who dared to communicate their resentment in informal fieldwork situations, fully aware that their words would be recorded and used.

My Afrikaner research collaborators knew about the violence and oppression that apartheid had entailed, and the exclusion and brutality that the people of colour had been subjected to. Yet the horrible deeds of the South African army of police and their collaborators during apartheid were almost never mentioned. I arrived in 1997, at the time of the Truth Commission’s hearings but had to get most of my information from TV and newspapers. It was not a polite topic for discussion around the coffee tables of Stellenbosch, although among some academics, especially during late night discussions, the topic did pop up.

Some Afrikaners I met had been made to suffer by their own, and they told me their own stories. The information came in tiny, horrifying droplets when this silence was broken to reveal the trauma underneath. A Stellenbosch woman told me, “You knew that things were going on here... you heard the shots at night from Kayamandi [black township of Stellenbosch], and you heard the helicopters but there was never anything in the papers, and I always had the most horrible nightmares.” There was a young man from Stellenbosch who told me about his childhood memories at the time of the South African Border War from 1966 to 1990, and how “there was a bush war in the north... and there was a funeral every Sunday. Lots of *boytjies* [‘young men, lads’] died.” There was the story of the Afrikaner woman who had been demonstrating against the government and had been raped by the guards in jail. But the unimaginable horrors that the apartheid government inflicted on others were generally not mentioned. Sometimes it was clear that guilt made it impossible for them to talk about this shameful topic; sometimes they were defensive or just did not care to dwell on it. Occasionally, they just assumed that I would hear it from the victims of apartheid regime, and they were correct.

I did meet a lot of people of colour who feared and hated Afrikaners, and who only relaxed (if they ever did) when they realized that I was not South African. The stories they told about their treatment during apartheid, the traumas people had, were heart-wrenching and inhumane: stories of

rape, lost homes and forced removals, broken families, people being worked to death in the mines, people being beaten up, detained and killed by the police. While moving around South Africa, I witnessed continued racist and degrading treatment of people of colour by white people and heard white people blaming them for every problem there was between heaven and earth. From that perspective, the new dispensation's attempts to forgive and deal with the past were truly, as it was known, a "South African miracle".

In sum, Afrikaners' relationships with outsiders were, in addition to the violently exclusive dimension of *laer* ideas, also defined by the above aspects: the history of crossing boundaries of colour, the apartheid regime's failure to establish full segregation, and the number of disillusioned Afrikaners. These factors caused the frail and complicated boundaries surrounding *Afrikanerdom* to become increasingly illogical towards the end of apartheid. The inconsistencies were mainly met with silence, because they referred to social and historical facts that could not be obliterated, but could be hushed, diminished, and rejected.

Things we did not talk about, and the loud silences

Making friends with new people was one of the perks of my research, but these relationships were complicated. Even while my participation in the Stellenbosch Afrikaners' social world helped me to see this world through their eyes (Estroff 1985), it also brought a degree of emotional involvement. My vision would become partial due to my love for them, but there would always be some epistemological productivity in this partiality (Kulick 2003: 20). In Marcus Clifford's famous words, "ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial – committed and incomplete" (Clifford 1986: 7). My affection fuelled my desire to understand them as deeply as I could, and to avoid shallow writing, which would only evoke the all-too-familiar racist stereotype of Afrikaners. Listening to and reading about the life of Afrikaners led to the emergence of a large number of resentful or sad accounts. They had not only suffered for what they were subjected to, and made everyone else suffer in turn, but they had also caused themselves to suffer. This suffering was silenced and hidden: the *ordentlike* face that the Afrikaners preferred to present to the outside world was strong and *plesierig* ("happy and jovial"). The existence of tragedies could, perhaps, be glimpsed through the instances of *galge-humor* ("gallows humour"), or in the deep fascination with tragedy that often marks Afrikaans interactions and cultural productions.

As my fieldwork progressed, my list of topics that the Afrikaners avoided discussing – especially with outsiders – also grew longer. Their silences extended from public issues pertaining to religion, violence, and politics to more private areas of life, such as family, gender relations, and economic issues. Multiple silences surrounded taboo social issues of which everyone was aware, but found too difficult, impolite, or stigmatizing to discuss. These forbidden subjects nevertheless continued to pop up – intermittently, accidentally, and surrounded by silences.¹⁸

In the early days of my fieldwork, I did not have sufficient cultural competence to understand how remarkable these silences were. Without a thorough knowledge of the context and of the life-world of those speaking up, the researcher is bound to miss out. A quintessential, classic experience of a field-working anthropologist is the encountering of issues that no one ever volunteers to explain, but that everyone knows exist.

After a number of years, people started providing an increasing number of accounts. Once I had a whiff of where to look, people started opening up. Treading carefully was vital – too much enthusiasm or asking too directly would dry the well of information up fast. These accounts often took place in the form of *skinder* (“gossip”), an important everyday way of exchanging information. *Skinder* is, according to an Afrikaans linguist’s definition, “one of the most common interactive forms of discourse in informal conversation, because it has its origin in the general inclination of man to show an intense interest in other people’s activities” (van der Merwe 2005). The words were underlined with nonverbal clues, omissions, sudden changes of topic, and, occasionally, silences.

Gradually, these silences and the changing of topic began to have meaning. Silences became heuristic and informative moments, as well as guidelines in my attempts to overcome my ignorance of the critical issues of Afrikaner society. It was important not only to listen to what was being said, but to become absorbed by what was omitted (Forsey 2010), as well as by *how* it was not being said. There could be a tone of voice, an exchange of long looks, which confirmed a mutual understanding between the participants in the discussion, and a brief or long silence. “*Jy weet...*” (“you know”) were often the last words marking a silence that was more intense than words.

I began using the term *loud silence* to describe the particular ethnographic moments when these silences began to convey multiple cultural meanings instead of just being epistemological cul-de-sacs. Looking for these instances while involved in engaged listening became part of my methodological doctrine. Elsa grew up in a family that struggled to keep the façade shiny. This is how she explained the Afrikaner culture of silence in relation to English-speaking South Africans:

However, this could, of course, ALSO be related to “*ordentlike mense*” keeping their problems to themselves. My mum was always in a panic that we would let others know how bad our financial situation was because my dad did not provide for us. But this could be a residue of the Victorian culture of “shame” and since they were stiff-upper lip English people, our upper lip had to be even stiffer!

(Elsa, Stellenbosch)

Loud silences regularly surfaced around certain morally sensitive topics: Afrikaner’s “non-white” roots, “poor whites”, apartheid violence, and Afrikaners’ cultural boundaries – especially regarding their involvement

in traditional African practices. In fact, Afrikaners were more absorbed in what were generally considered African traditions and beliefs than they liked to let on. They were also often aware of their genetic connections with the Africans. After centuries on the African continent, Afrikaners had become a mixed population with not only genetic but numerous cultural influences from the country's original population. The lonely *trekboer*, a mythological Afrikaner settler, who, according to legend, relied only on his Bible and his shotgun, had obviously never been very lonely at all. The land was inhabited and the settlers' constant interactions with Africans led to intermarriages, as well as to a mixture of cultural and spiritual traits which were generally surrounded by loud silences.

***Volkskultuur* and the spiritual crossovers**

In addition to studying the phenomena related to witchcraft beliefs, the Africanist anthropology of religion and spirituality has focussed largely on the African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs) (Meyer 2004). The religious crossovers and overlaps between traditional beliefs and practices and Christianity in these studies have mainly been examined among people identifying as black, while giving far less attention to white people.

These crossovers were also invisible to the NGK, which rejected such ideas in relation to white Afrikaners, emphasizing the purity of their faith as part of the Afrikaner nation-building project. This rejection presented the bare bones of a power that sought to constantly redefine and purify itself. Charles Stewart has examined this approach, applying the term "anti-syncretism",¹⁹ which he has defined as "the antagonism to religious synthesis shown by agents concerned with the deference of religious boundaries" (Shaw and Stewart 1994: 7). While resisting crossovers, by the same token the NGK could shut out any change that would lead to cultural integration. This boundary-driven approach became the official truth of Afrikaner spirituality, creating numerous taboos and loud silences about any non-Christian religious ideas. Simultaneously, and quite startlingly, some of these ideas were openly articulated.

The sieners ...

Famous examples of spiritual beliefs in the early 20th century were the stories about Afrikaner traditional healers, prophets, and clairvoyants or *sieners*, who were also devout believers. Characters such as *Siener* (Clairvoyant) van Rensburg and Johanna Brandt were Afrikaner heroes and prophets believed to have *magte* ("psychic powers"),²⁰ who delivered their divinations to famous Afrikaner generals during the South African War. At the same time, while externally operating much in the same way as *sangomas* (the traditional African healers and diviners), both Brandt and

van Rensburg were seen as being messengers from the Christian God, as van Rensburg was literally called the “*Boodskapper van God*.”

These *multiple religious belongings* also appear in Afrikaner folk beliefs, with their rich cosmology, filled with spirits and supernatural phenomena. The latter were again very similar to the indigenous and ancient beliefs of African traditional religion. Afrikaner *volkekundige* (ethnologist)²¹ wrote:

The old people were aware of the existence of certain black arts such as sorcery. One whole branch of our family, all God-fearing people, believed in this sorcery. People could be bewitched, and so could animals and objects, yes, even entire farms.

(Grobbelaar 1977: 58, my translation)

... and the things that go bump in the night

In her 2011 article focusing on Afrikaners, Stellenbosch professor Matilda Burden describes “an amazing phenomenon, namely that folk beliefs are alive and vibrant amongst South Africans” (Burden 2011: 102). Southern Africa is known for its rich array of urban legends and folktales, and the Afrikaners also have their own popular tradition of storytelling. It has remained a vastly popular form of art and entertainment into the present day, and *Afrikanerdom* hails its best storytellers as cultural heroes. These stories, which are perfectly acceptable entertainment even for the good Christian Afrikaners, include ghost stories, or *spookstories*. These stories are told publicly on radio programmes, as well as at cultural festivals and privately around fires during school camps, at family gatherings, and at *braais*.

Afrikaners are avid readers and book clubs are a popular pastime in Stellenbosch. Supernatural stories are popular central motifs in Afrikaans literature, theatre, media, and television. They are found in famous books, beginning with the Afrikaans national writer CJ Langenhoven’s ghost stories, and continuing all the way to more contemporary stories such as PG du Plessis’s *Sieners in the Suburbs*. After television was allowed in 1974, these stories also found their way there.

The very popular show *Koöperasiestories*, which aired on national television during the late 1980s and 1990s, achieving a cult status – and which has seen a revival in popularity post-apartheid – often mentioned folk beliefs and had a famous episode called “Soontjie”, which was precisely about the power of this belief to galvanize both public opinion and action.²² It is also an excellent illustration of the Afrikaner fascination with supernatural phenomenon and tragedy, bringing these two beguiling issues together, which explains the popularity of this particular episode. In the episode, a young boy, “*gebore met die helm*” (“born with a caul”), living in a small *plattelandse dorpie* (“country village”), becomes the subject of suspicions of practising “*wiggelary en towerkuns*” (“witchcraft and spells”), and of being allied with forces of darkness, or even of being an angel of death, as

some people die after they have met him. At the end of the story, the boy bids farewell to all in the village, and the next day is found drowned in the water container – he could foresee his own death as well. The villagers’ reactions leave an open end to the story, and it is for the viewer to decide if the boy committed suicide, if someone in the village, dreading his powers of clairvoyance, drowned him, or if indeed there were dark forces at play. Interestingly, the boy died in water in the middle of a dry desert area – references to water echo the numerous African traditions, where the *sangomas* have a very special relationship with water in many phases of their calling, training, and practice. In their beliefs, water can be healing, and an essential part of *sangoma* training, but also lethally dangerous due to the existence of complicated and unpredictable water spirits and divinities (Bernard 2010). The tradition of Afrikaans horror storytelling is also found in the 2019 series, *Die Spreeus*, which follows two detectives solving supernatural cases. There is no lack of examples of this tradition on the TV and in literature.

Boererate

Another example of folk traditions was the time-old *boererate*, or folk home remedies and tips. A vast majority of these contain nothing particularly spiritual as they deal with household hacks for cooking, health tips, and cleaning, and are merely concerned with the running of day-to-day life. These can generally be found in Afrikaans women’s magazines such as *Die Huisgenoot*, *Sarie*, *Rooi Rose*, and *Vroukeur*. Their popularity is reflected in the great number of books and reports that have been published on them, as well as in several radio programmes, such as *Kruie krei koning* (“Herbs are the Kings”). Their most important quality is the supposed efficacy of the ingredients.

This stands in contrast to the traditional African remedies, *muthi*, which are more often spiritually informed, and are received from the ancestors in dreams and trance states (Swart 2004; Meincke 2016). The mediators of these remedies are usually *sangomas*, who, as well as being healers, are also highly respected diviners, parapsychologists, teachers, storytellers, and priests in their communities. All *sangomas* claim to draw their powers from the ancestors, which they channel in a state of trance. However, in parallel with the Afrikaner practices, there are also those who identify purely as herbalists, *inyangas*, who do not emphasize their connection to the ancestral world, and for whom the efficacy of the *muthi* is the most important consideration.

According to previous literature, it has been established that *boererate* implied “the use of medicinal substances across social, ethnic and racial boundaries” and had “been a standard practice for a long time” (Dauskardt 1990; Cocks and Dold 2000; Luedke and West 2006: 17). Given the spiritually founded nature of traditional African medicine and healing, it is no wonder that among the Afrikaners too, while most are very practical and non-spiritual in nature, there are also a number of spiritually informed

boererate. There, the remedial properties are based more “on folk belief rather than the medicinal value of ingredients,” as Burden (2011: 108) points out. Sometimes the instructions accompanying the recipes are intricate to the point that some *boererate* are essentially just rituals, and do not require any ingredients. The cross-cultural influences on Afrikaner folk practices and beliefs are obvious (Burden 2011: 108).

In their nation-building project in the 1930s, the urban, modern architects of apartheid emphasized pride in the traditional Afrikaner culture, which was strongly linked to the countryside but was also a hotbed of non-Christian beliefs. After all, *Boer* means farmer, and farming and the countryside held a very special place in their ethos. Some of the rural spaces, such as the Karoo, are still considered practically sacred. The simultaneous existence and blending of the traditional with the modern, urban with rural, and traditional African with Christian beliefs was a difficult equation for the Afrikaner nation-builders, who emphasized their Christian-nationalist policies, whiteness, and adherence to European traditions, or those they considered as such.

The presumed solution for this dilemma of blurred cultural boundaries was to establish cultural differences by conceptually separating these – in reality very similar – beliefs from African beliefs and by regarding them as purely Afrikaner folk beliefs, just as the different South African cultures were conceptualized as separate entities. This discursive separation between the Afrikaner religion, spiritual belief system and practices, and traditional African beliefs and practices was made in several ways.

First, these beliefs were made part of the Afrikaner nation-building project and presented as their “inherent” knowledge – an interpretation that allowed them to remain part of the heritage of *Afrikanerdom*. Afrikaans *volkskultuur* (folk culture) or *volkekunde* (ethnology) became academic subjects taught at universities as part of the apartheid project.²³

Second, Christianity was an important tool in this separation. For example, emphasizing the passionate Christianity of Johanna Brandt and Siener van Rensburg,²⁴ well-known practitioners of these beliefs, was one way of doing this. There were also many minor local healers and *sieners*, and other people who possessed traditional herbal knowledge (Swart 2004). I also met a faith healer who prayed for her patients and put her hands on them, practices that had obviously been in existence for a long time (van Schalkwyk 2006).

A third way to create a discursive separation between Afrikaners and the local populations was to conceptualize the Afrikaner’s spiritual beliefs as imported goods from Europe. In a popular Afrikaans *volkekunde* book from 1977, the existence of these beliefs is acknowledged but described as *volk* habits imported from Europe. For example, the belief in river spirits, which is prominent in Southern (and sub-Saharan) African traditional beliefs, was mentioned as being imported from Europe, and explained as a cultural or a *volk* belief, not as a cultural loan from indigenous cosmologies or an amalgamation of belief systems (Grobelaar 1977).

This approach worked, and the crossovers went largely undiscussed in scholarly accounts. During apartheid, the country was relatively closed (or a no-go zone) to outside academics, and the local English-speaking academics were mostly too busy with arguments related to the political economy to ponder the symbolic and cultural dimensions of *Afrikanerdom*. Afrikaners, and the apartheid regime they represented, were opponents to be fought, not studied. In the meantime, Afrikaner *volkekundige* academics operated from the premise of the ethnos theory, which, as the eminent professor of social anthropology, John Sharp, formulated, “starts with the proposition that mankind is divided into *volke* (nations, peoples) and that each *volk* has its own particular culture, which may change but always remains authentic to that group in question” (Sharp 1981: 19). They were keen to claim inherent knowledge or to make a connection with European belief systems instead of referring to the local belief systems. Only after the end of apartheid did any serious examination begin into white people as participants in the anthropological discourse on traditional African healing, magic, and witchcraft (see van Binsbergen 1991; Niehaus 2001; Wreford 2005).²⁵

This discursive separation also allowed Afrikaners to – at least unofficially – continue to seek medical help from directions that might otherwise have been forbidden. Sandra Swart suggests that it is highly likely that everyday Afrikaner spirituality and traditional African religion were very intertwined in the past (Swart 2004). In the small societies out in the *veld*, drawing the lines between faiths, languages, and cultures – equal or not – had been difficult, if not impossible.

The extent of the Afrikaner cultural crossovers, and the many beliefs they held, unraveled gradually. It started during the second year of my fieldwork in 1998 with Oom (“uncle”) Koos,²⁶ who lived in Ruyterwacht, the former “poor white” housing estate, but in a shack in a coloured family’s backyard. After meeting Oom Koos, it gradually dawned on me that white Afrikaners still held beliefs that the apartheid government would have classified as “non-white”, “African”, “heathen”, or at the very least “*volksvreemde*” traditions.

Oom Koos was in poor health, frail-looking, and extremely thin. Nevertheless, he had the time and energy to look after his puppy, as well as his partner, who was an alcoholic with HIV/AIDS. As a homosexual and a “poor white”, Oom Koos had lived under this double stigmatization all his life. He had once had a proper house in Ruyterwacht, but due to his drinking problem, he had lost it. Years of alcohol abuse had taken their toll on his appearance, to the extent that he looked 20 years older than his actual age. He was destitute, sickly, and had no money to visit a doctor or buy medicine.

Instead, he told me he often turned to *sangomas* or “Malay doctors” (traditional healers working in the Cape Muslim communities), who gave their customers healing and protective *muthi*.²⁷ He vividly described the medicines he received, as well as the hallucinations he experienced. He lauded one medicine for his family and stomach problems as particularly

efficient, because it had made him “throw up two white chickens and five snakes.” Malay doctors also helped protect him from the evil intentions of others, for which he was given magical protection to place around his shack, which was really more like a big tent. Anyone could break in by merely cutting the plastic with a knife, but Oom Koos said he felt quite safe. Other Ruyterwacht residents also told me that these medicines were used to protect them from evil, while powders were sprinkled on the edges of a property and on the doorstep, to manage social relations with difficult neighbours, for example.

Nevertheless, the topic was hard to broach in Ruyterwacht. People would frequently state – with a frown – that they did not know anything about any magical practices or witchcraft, that they had never seen or heard anything, and that they definitely did not know anyone who had ever done anything like that. Even when people did speak, they were not likely to dwell on the topic. There were also stories of beliefs in restless spirits that settled in a home, making it a haunted house. The social workers in the area actively tried to discourage rumours of haunted houses, because if this label stuck, they could no longer be rented out.

Historical sources going back to the establishment of Ruyterwacht as a “poor white” housing estate in 1938 confirmed that there had been allegations of haunted houses and accusations of witchcraft throughout its existence.

Witchcraft and Neighbour Trouble: The Chief Welfare Officer reported that both tenants were of a very low mentality, were the cause of much neighbour trouble and had on occasions called in witchdoctors at considerable expense, to exorcise evil spirits.

(Citizens’ Housing League Social Workers’ Reports,
Ruyterwacht 1965)

These stories and experiences all pointed in the same direction: hidden beliefs in the supernatural and in magical practices were present from the beginning. While hidden and forbidden, they were familiar to many white people, who used them to access and manipulate the invisible world. In Ruyterwacht, these practices were a way of controlling restless spirits and tense social relations, natural phenomena, and ailing mortal bodies – everything over which the church had little influence. Such practices were not only against Christian teachings, but were also concrete examples of the religious or cultural mixing of “poor whites”, coloured people, and Africans, thus transgressing the rules of “proper white” conduct.²⁸

Middle-class white people found it normal, even understandable, that “poor whites”, stigmatized and regarded as being unable to live according to the rules of white *ordentlikheid*, were involved in some unacceptable practices. However, the white middle class also had popular beliefs in spiritual ways of influencing causal relations. A middle-class Afrikaner

friend later clarified that all Afrikaners knew the difference between witchcraft and magic, and that it was not unusual for Afrikaners to turn to traditional healers. Folk medicines, the *boererate*, have remained popular – there is even a Facebook group providing Afrikaners with guidance on the use of *boererate*, including on the rituals that would improve the effectiveness of these medicines. However, had these practices been called magic or witchcraft, their users would have been very upset, as they were also good Christians. *Muthi* potions were therefore only called “medicine” and those who provided them had God-gifted “powers” (*magte*) – a term that also referred to Christian prophets. Some middle-class friends told me proudly that they had been born with a caul (“*met die helm gebore*”), which gave them *magte*, such as an ability to see into the future.

My parents never wanted to reveal to me that I was ‘*met die helm gebore*’ ... because I was already odd enough to begin with and didn’t need to know this. Later I found out from my mum that both me and my sister were born with a caul, and both of us have had odd experiences from time to time.

(Correspondence, Anele)

Various beliefs regarding the supernatural significance of being born with the caul have occurred in many cultures (Forbes 1953). Among the Afrikaners they became a significant part of their belief system, which was, in turn, influenced by other local belief systems.

African traditional healers or *sangomas* were part of this cosmology. There were mutual beliefs in supernatural beings, such as the notion that a person whose eyebrows grew together could see a *tokoloshe*.²⁹ There were stories, sometimes served as spookstories, about the powers of *sangomas* and their ability to predict things, like deaths and accidents, and to cure diseases. Regardless of whether my informants were students, solemn church elders, or other pillars of the community, these discussions were serious, deeply personal, and confidential, breaking the silences around these issues. However, there was no point in trying to ask about these beliefs directly, or in the presence of others, as that could lead them to deny all knowledge. It seemed that it was quite usual for middle-class Afrikaners to believe in the supernatural, unknown, and unexplained forces within their environment – beliefs which many of the previous generations had shared and passed down – but that it was a bit improper to mention them publicly. I befriended a farming family, whose mother and eldest son, desperate due to the drought, carried out some rituals to make rain (exactly how was never disclosed to me) and told me – confidentially – how a subsequent cloudburst surprised them: “We made the ritual too strong.”

Given apartheid’s goal of building boundaries, it seems that nowhere were the cultural boundaries as important – and difficult – to draw as in the field of beliefs and spiritual ideas. Afrikaner folk beliefs were held alongside Christian ideas and practices. Consequently, it would also be

appropriate to use the term *multiple religious belongings* when referring to those Afrikaners who subscribed to a number of *volksgelowe* (folk beliefs), comprising a coherent spiritual order and an independent belief system.

Strange things abounded, but they were often interpreted as satanic or devilish from the Christian viewpoint:

My oupa S., a GREAT churchman, told horrifying stories of ‘goël’, a word that apparently comes from Malay and refers to ‘Malay magic’ or sorcery.... I vaguely remember him telling us that he and others had found a large black dog with ‘flaming eyes’ and it turned out that someone had used it for bad magic and had replaced the dog’s eyes with fiery coals. I still remember that he told us that this event was a confrontation with the devil himself!

(Communication with Marie, Stellenbosch)

Francis Nyamnjoh has pointed out how the “popular epistemological order” in most of Africa allows and, indeed, compels people to simultaneously live in an invisible and a visible world (Nyamnjoh 2001: 29). Other scholars have also pointed out how well these simultaneous worlds fit in with African modernity and urban life (Geschiere 1997; Ashforth 2005). Based on the field material and historical references presented above, I therefore argue that this epistemological order, with its multiple religious beliefs and need for mediation, has been present – to differing degrees – in the lives of white South Africans from their arrival on the continent onward. While the NGK did not admit any spiritual crossovers, the mediation and treading of the boundary between two worlds was familiar to Afrikaners.

Conclusion: the change

In this chapter, I have pointed out that Afrikaners were not only a “racially” mixed people from the beginning of the colonial era, but also well-versed in the local traditions, which they actively reformulated and mediated. This degree of accommodation turned against them when their cultural connections to Europe – indeed their entire claim to whiteness – were questioned. The social engineering of apartheid was meant to whitewash them, but the deep similarities between the original populations remained at several socio-cultural levels, and especially in religion and spirituality.

Since these deeply rooted ideas could not be removed, they were simply made invisible with silences, and glossed over with discursive separations between what was “theirs” and what was “ours”. The idea of *laer* represented and symbolized a social engineering project that kept the external boundaries intact. The governments of the segregation era and apartheid tried to overcome Afrikaner poverty and political disempowerment, as well as the perceived weakness of the whiteness of “poor whites”, by designating people to specific racial categories and making them stay there. During the

apartheid era, the boundaries of these racial categories hardened for everyone, including white people. For white Afrikaners this meant being held within the *laer's* tight cultural boundaries. The end of apartheid provided many laymen and academics with an opportunity to re-think these ideas.³⁰ In this regard, I have three points to make concerning Afrikaner cultural boundaries and the ways we can discuss their mediation and transformation. These points can be extended to discussions of any ethnic groups who have created tight external boundaries over a long period and have subsequently had an opportunity to stop doing so.

First, the discussions of the relationships between Afrikaners and other ethnic and “racial” groups have diminished the fact that the relationships between the white people were also deeply racialized, with Afrikaners themselves also being racialized. Writing credibly and holistically about South African white people and Afrikaners requires a fair amount of reflection on these complicated relationships, including from an intersectional perspective that takes social class into account. In the case of Afrikaners, the less economic and cultural capital one had, the less “white” one was (Teppo 2018).³¹

Second, the flexibility of cultural boundaries is often overlooked, including in discussions of Afrikaners. Culturally, Afrikaners – like any other ethnic group – have never existed in a void but have shared a spiritual universe and employed cultural concepts and ideas similar to those of other local groups. During my ethnographic fieldwork, I found the interplay of closing and opening boundaries deeply embedded in Afrikaners’ daily life. This constant and complex boundary work was expressed in numerous cultural ideas, such as moral ideals, culturally important symbols, and mediation practices. It is important that these should be examined comparatively in terms of other local groups, in order to study how they were developed in interaction with other ethnic and “racial” groups, such as those classified as “coloured”.

These interactions resulted in Afrikaners having many parallel and borrowed beliefs. Although the whiteness of the Afrikaners was frail, depending a great deal on its performance, their ardent Calvinism hid their numerous traditional beliefs of non-Christian origin. Nevertheless, over the years many people made me aware of their families’ non-European ancestors, as well as of the parallels with the local belief systems, although some simply regarded the indigenous beliefs as the devil’s work. It was, nevertheless, possible for staunchly Christian people to live in a cosmos populated with supernatural creatures, powers, and events more familiar from other faith systems. Despite this conflation of cultural, racial, and religious ideas – or perhaps because of it – the spiritual countercurrents and multiple beliefs were alive and well in a closet within the guarded boundaries of the *laer*. In “poor white” areas such as Ruyterwacht, these beliefs could become a healing strategy, or a “weapon of the weak” (Scott 2008) in the hands of disempowered residents. While silenced, they became traceable when I began to examine *loud silences*, strategic omissions of words and

ideas that marked culturally sensitive issues – a term that can be applied in the study of other cultural taboos as well.

Third, as van Bragt has suggested, where there are multiple beliefs, there is a division of labour between these beliefs. He uses the example of the Japanese, who smoothly use Shintoism in their marriage rituals but hold Buddhist beliefs regarding death and the spirit world (van Bragt 2002). The visible and invisible world also served an important purpose for the Afrikaners. On the one hand, the moral ideas of *ordentlike* Christianity ordered the Afrikaners' social world and its hierarchies. On the other hand, folk beliefs in the supernatural, *volksgelewe*, were used to communicate with and influence nature and even human bodies.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the hidden and silenced force of the connections between Afrikaners and other ethnic and “racial” groups living in South Africa. These include biological family connections, the continued existence of age-old spiritual ideas beneath the Calvinist surface, and the division of labour between these belief systems. This religiously accommodating and mediating side of *Afrikanerdom*, which could be called their “little tradition”,³² was visible but silenced in their literature and daily life and less noted in their academic writings, which emphasized the Calvinistic “great tradition”. Joel Robbins has pointed out that “anthropologists rarely imagine that a religion like Christianity might provide the core that underlies a superficial or coerced play with tradition” (Robbins 2011: 414). This “little tradition” might partly explain why, after the end of apartheid, many Afrikaners moved away from their previous forms of organized religion. Nevertheless, most Afrikaners chose to remain within the framework of Christianity.

In the next chapter, I shift my gaze and expand the focus from Afrikaners' practices of guarding or mediating the external religious boundaries to their guarding and mediating of their internal boundaries, often using the ideals and practices of *ordentlikheid* as their moral scaffolding.

Notes

- 1 According to the 2019 population estimate, the “multiracial”, “coloured” population is around 5.2 million – approximately 9% of the SA population (Stats SA 2019).
- 2 For examples of journalistic, rather sensation-seeking accounts, see Norman (2016, 2017).
- 3 This terminology has also been studied by Mads Vestergaard (2000) and Roberta Leitch (2006). Leitch's (2006) Master's dissertation was on a world that no longer exists: “White Afrikaner males revise identity for a transformed world.” An interesting recent optimistic account was produced by Theunissen (2015), in which the appearance of a more permeable identity was suggested.
- 4 *Baasskap* was a concept referring to white supremacy that was used during apartheid. The word literally translates from Afrikaans to English as “boss-ship”, but a more applicable translation is “domination” or “white supremacy”.

- 5 Since the 1990s, many critical voices, including Roediger (1991), Frankenberg (1993), and many others, have contributed to whiteness studies. Movements such as Black Lives Matter refute this hegemonic assumption by reminding people of the privilege of whiteness.
- 6 See e.g. Willoughby-Herard (2015) for a new example of this very problematic approach, which sees white people as one unified group and “poor whites” as an underclass, while underplaying the ethnic projects of *Afrikanerdom*.
- 7 The RDB (Rescue Action Society) endeavoured to awake mass Afrikaner consciousness regarding economic issues, to centralize Afrikaners’ savings in Afrikaner financial institutions, and to convince the Afrikaners to support Afrikaner traders (O’Meara 1983: 137).
- 8 Lit. “ox wagon sentinel.”
- 9 *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging*, a social work organization established in Cape Town in 1904.
- 10 Pieter-Dirk Uys, a South African actor and master of comedy, has noted this in his stage jokes about the “Spanish blood” that allegedly explains many “white” South Africans’ swarthy appearance.
- 11 http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Pages/statistical_profile.aspx (accessed 22 February 2021).
- 12 “Boweal is hy herhaaldelik in sy strewe na eie nasieskap bestry. Die wortels van die geslotenheid of beweerde, laementaliteit’ van die Afrikaner moet veral in hierdie faset van sy geskiedenis gesoek word. Dit is opmerklik dat in tye van verslapping van die druk soos in die Republiek van die Oranje-Vrystaat en gedurende n korter tydperk in die ZAR se bestaan, die geslotenheid minder strak geword het.”
 “Above all he was repeatedly thwarted in his quest for nationhood. The roots of the Afrikaner’s closedness or alleged ‘lager mentality’ can be traced back to this phase in his history. It is noticeable that in times of relaxation of the pressure, as in the Republic of the Orange Free State and during a shorter period in the South African Republic’s (ZAR) existence, this closedness became less tight” (Coetzee 1977: 156; translation by Jan Evertse).
- 13 Lit. “not of the people, but alien or strange.”
- 14 This mentality has been symbolized and illustrated in Cape Town’s urban spaces by the popular image of van Riebeeck’s wild almond hedge. Van Riebeeck built this hedge around the present city bowl area to protect the settler’s crops and cattle from “thieving natives”. The remains of this impenetrable fence are still found at Kirstenbosch Garden.
- 15 The legal arrangements making Orania possible are complicated: the land is owned by private companies, and the house owners are shareholders of these. The administration is organized according to a municipal model, but Orania is really a company.
- 16 The Afrikaner equivalent of Scouts, but with an Afrikaner ideology.
- 17 *Braais*, or barbeques, are considered a quintessential part of South African social life and identity.
- 18 While silences have been discussed by many merited recent writers, I thank the late Dr. Mikki van Zyl for this insight, which took root during our discussion in 2000. Mikki shared with me how she found silences very informative when she studied Afrikaners, and, as an Afrikaner herself, she knew when there was one. I understood immediately that back then, my lack of cultural competence did not allow this kind of ethnographic mastery. However, over the years I learned, pointed in the right direction by Mikki’s sharp insight.
- 19 While “syncretism” is a potentially useful concept in the study of religion, as it describes the fusion of diverse religious beliefs and practices or, as Stewart points out, “the combination of elements from two or more different religious

- traditions within a specified frame” (Stewart 1999: 58), it is also a problematic term in scholarly discussions, as it so centrally depends on reified, unchanging cultural boundaries.
- 20 They were also popular in literature: Adriaan Snyman wrote *Boodskapper van God (Voice of the Prophet)*, which was a popular two-part account of Siener van Rensburg’s visions and prophesies; Johanna Brandt delivered her own prophesies in a book called *Die Millenium*.
 - 21 While the Afrikaner *volkekunde* saw itself as an anthropology, it was more equivalent to ethnology as it has been studied in Europe.
 - 22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUpDhmqdohk> (accessed 11 January 2021).
 - 23 Even at the English university of Wits, as Ampie Coetzee points out (Coetzee 1996)
 - 24 The popularity of Siener van Rensburg has stood the test of time – discussions of his prophesies were revived as recently as 2015 when Nelson Mandela died.
 - 25 In traditional African belief systems, witchcraft is the epitome of absolute evil, while magic is considered to exist as a more benevolent skillset. However, the boundary between these can be fuzzy.
 - 26 Not his real name: *oom* is Afrikaans for “uncle” and is used respectfully for all older men, while older women are called *tannie* or “aunty”.
 - 27 *Muthi* means traditional medicine in isiXhosa. The term can refer to many different substances with magical properties. *Dukkum* is a magic spell or potion and specifically connected to the “Malay doctors” whom Oom Koos consulted.
 - 28 My short comparative field trip to a “poor white” area, Jan Hofmeyr, in Johannesburg in 2000 showed that the local “poor white” people were also familiar with the services of *sangomas*; see Guillaume and Teppo (2002).
 - 29 A *tokoloshe* or *tikoloshe* is a vicious hairy little man-shaped witch’s familiar, who steals babies and carries away sleeping grownups, as well as seducing or raping women. This creature from African beliefs is widely feared in Southern Africa. See Niehaus (1997), Badstuebner (2003), Thornton (2009).
 - 30 Challenging the ideas of white masculinity in art and performance; see e.g. Lewis 2012.
 - 31 This also applies to gender, although this volume does not venture there. However, an interesting body of writing emerges around Afrikaner women, racialized whiteness, Afrikaner nationalism, and how these were manifested in the lives of “poor white” women. See Vincent (2000), Du Toit (2003).
 - 32 As Swart (2004: 241, following Hexham 1981 and Redfield 1962, 1989), suggested, “Little Tradition a mixture of African, Malay, Bushman and European folklore – augmented by innovations from Europe regarding the paranormal.”

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4 The changing religious scene in Stellenbosch

Introduction

For a newcomer to South Africa, Stellenbosch provides a great visual and historical experience. Established in 1679, it is the country's second oldest town, and many consider it the capital, or at least one of the most important locations of the Afrikaans language and culture. This university town lies cradled between beautiful mountains, and whichever way one goes out of it, one soon encounters picturesque farms and vineyards. It became known as the *Eikestad* ("oak town") due to the many majestic oak trees along the main roads of the town centre, which is otherwise characterized by white Cape Dutch houses, but also by new developments. Over the last few decades, gentrification has happened fast, and property development, together with housing prices, has boomed, while the central town has become internationally known for its "sense of place" as a nostalgic, authentic, and attractive centre for the surrounding wine areas.

The urban and the rural are mixed on the edges of the town, but despite its beauty, Stellenbosch remains racially segregated and very fragmented. It is roughly divided between the wealthier side to the south and the poorer side to the north. Well-off Afrikaners mainly inhabit the central areas and leafy suburbs on the eastern and southern sides of town. On the northern outskirts of Stellenbosch, the black township of Kayamandi sprawls over the hill of Papegaaiberg, while the northeastern townships of Cloeteville and Idasvallei are mainly inhabited by coloured people. The contradicting interests of the wealthy and the poor, nature conservation, the protection of the authentic urban environments and of the town's original character make for a complicated puzzle for the urban planners (Donaldson 2021: 2–9).

While Stellenbosch is only a forty-minute drive (when traffic is good) from Cape Town, the mental distance is remarkable. On first arriving, my colleagues' introduction to the town struck me immediately. "Of course, you understand, this is not Africa," local academics told me. "Not really. This is a bubble." Over the years, other, rather ironic, nicknames for the town included "Never-never land", "the ivory tower", and "Sleepy Hollow". A friend, who identified as "coloured", called it "honkey headquarters"

and “Germania”. These names give an accurate idea of Stellenbosch as an exclusive location, a place of white privilege.

Over my years of living and regularly visiting Stellenbosch, I saw it grow from 100,000 residents to 200,000. Students are the life blood of the town, and it becomes quite silent when they leave for their holidays. The local Afrikaner community, which I consider roughly divided into overlapping categories of town, gown, and elite, was somewhat closed, rather influential, and had historically been one of the groupings that had defined *Afrikanerdom*'s identity. They have traditionally been considered a distinct group, and emblematic of what it means to be an Afrikaner. They were of symbolic importance to all those identifying themselves as Afrikaners, and had a particular influence on South African history.

The birth of the Afrikaner identity was linked to Stellenbosch. The Stellenbosch historian Hermann Giliomee described this in detail in his book *The Afrikaners*, in which he mentioned that the word “Afrikaner” was first uttered in Stellenbosch (Giliomee 2003: 22). According to Giliomee, this was where “the model of a racially exclusive white *burgher* community with special political and social privileges was crystallized” (Giliomee 2003: 57). The Cape gentry, a land-owning upper class of white, and in some cases, black slave owners, developed a harsh and hierarchical moral community that governed various aspects of life in the 18th century, making a good reputation and respectability of paramount importance for a person's standing in society (Dooling 2008: 10–40, 45). The moral hegemony created in that Stellenbosch was still centred there when I arrived.

Politically, Stellenbosch eventually became the basis of the Afrikaner think tank during the nation-building process, which was largely directed from there from about 1918, when its academics established the legendary *Broederbond* secret society, which operated at the top levels of *Afrikanerdom*. This is where the apartheid dogma was formulated; the power of Afrikaner ideology was never as strong as here. The *dominees* (church ministers) embraced the union of the church and the state, with many of them being prominent in party politics (Moodie 1975: 72).

Stellenbosch was also central theologically. *Dominees* were trained at the university's *Kweekskool* or theological faculty, and the mystical Christian-nationalist doctrine of faith was established there. The Stellenbosch theologians were, however, known for their *verligte* (liberal, enlightened) thinking, while the other intellectual centres, the *Kweekskole* in Pretoria and Potchefstroom, were seen as having more *verkramppte* ideas. This was another manifestation of a split between Cape Afrikaners and Transvaal Afrikaners, who considered Stellenboschers as fatally compromised *hensoppers* (those who lifted their hands up, or surrendered to the British). This split was occasionally mentioned to me – perhaps also to underline the liberalness and exceptionality of Stellenbosch Afrikaners.

This *verligte* centre thus attracted and produced some of the most famous Afrikaner moral radicals and rebels, such as the *dominee* Beyers Naudé and

the author and poet Breyten Breytenbach. The latter is a true intellectual celebrity, the equivalent of a 1960s rock star. This famous member of the *Sestigers* (Sixties) group of authors, poets, and artists is known not only for his literary works, but also for his numerous transgressions. He opposed apartheid, married a Vietnamese woman classified as “coloured” at a time when mixed marriages were outlawed, and lived for years in Paris in exile. He was accused of anti-apartheid political activities, and imprisoned for seven years for high treason. He was also considered a hero by many *verligte* Stellenbosch Afrikaners.

The rest of the Afrikaner *volk* considered Stellenbosch *verligtes* a species of their own: highly educated, reasonably well-off, even rich, and progressive thinkers. These *verligtes* formed the highly esteemed core of the professional class and academics in Stellenbosch, who often worked with the post-apartheid governments or were otherwise visible in social discussions, and had largely adopted the newly elaborated values of a multicoloured society. They also stood out politically. Most of them had voted against apartheid and for President de Klerk’s anti-apartheid policies in the 1992 referendum, while some had even voted for the ANC in the 1994 election. Even when *verligte* Stellenboschers emphasized that they were South Africans first and thereafter Afrikaners, they would hold on to their cultural specificity, identity, and religion.

This chapter builds on and continues my previous work (Teppo 2015) on the boundaries of Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* and spirituality. I extend that work to a more nuanced and updated account, which considers the racial aspects of the religious changes, and the long-term consequences of the post-apartheid changes in the moral boundaries of Afrikaner faith communities. I examine how the internal boundaries of decency and properness, the lines of *ordentlikheid*, were first formed under the surveillance of the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK), and then how they were transformed with regard to spiritual practices and religious rupture after the end of apartheid. The religious discontinuity transformed the religious scene in Stellenbosch as the new, multicultural churches became immensely popular.¹ I study how this transformation made the racially defined boundaries of *ordentlikheid* more porous, and more open to new processes of mediation, which, in turn, made way for some of the recent developments in Afrikaner spirituality which I will examine in the following chapters.

The ideals of *ordentlikheid* show how the ideology of whiteness is translated into an embodied knowledge of what is acceptable, and into personal expressions of selfhood, such as “proper style”. At the same time as the end of apartheid was opening up many of the internal and external racial, social, and spatial boundaries for Afrikaners, the old ideas of what constituted acceptable religious behaviour remained central in the formation of new religious boundaries, which were manifested in *verligte* Afrikaners’ everyday life in a number of ways.

Religion united the *verligte* de Wets and their massive *vriendekring*. Most of them had been brought up as loyal members of the NGK. All of them were members of local congregations, and attended church services regularly. Although the de Wets conveyed a positive image of religious life in the NGK, I was to find out that, especially during apartheid, the church had been harsh and judgmental (Teppo 2015). This was, however, less visible in Stellenbosch, although the *dominees* of the “poor white” suburb of Ruyterwacht had coached their congregation, in co-operation with other professionals, with a hard hand at times (Teppo 2004).

For an outsider, the church’s central role in emphasizing and fortifying repression in middle-class Afrikaners’ everyday life was not clear at first. Afrikaners’ ways of using power within their ethnic group were often invisible or very low-key – they seldom subjected their own to overt violence, although they had delivered it generously to “races” they considered below them. This did not mean that their ways of keeping their own under control were less efficient or even less violent – the damage they did was just of a different kind. In addition to perpetuating suffering, many Afrikaners suffered extensive psychological damage during the apartheid era. The church was an important building block of Afrikaner identity, its influence was vast, and it had imposed a strict code of conduct on its members.

The NGK as a disciplinarian

The NGK is divided into ten synods and 144 presbyteries. These presbyteries are, in turn, divided into 1158 congregations. In 2021, the number of church members is announced as being a little over one million.² In the NGK and its sister churches, each congregation had a church council consisting of *dominees* (ministers), and, following the NGK’s Presbyterian polity model, of elders and deacons. The latter two groups were voluntary officials elected from the ranks of reliable parishioners showing leadership qualities. They had many duties: deacons did the more logistical jobs, such as collecting tithes and taking responsibility for pastoral care, while the elders fulfilled a leadership and supervisory role.

Together with the spatial logic of apartheid, which designated all public and private spaces according to a person’s perceived “race”, space played a large role in the NGK’s use of power over its congregants. Each congregation was attached to a designated area. In Stellenbosch, church membership was self-evident, but who belonged to which congregation was rather rigorously defined in the urban areas. Previously, these designated areas had been very strict, and even a short move a few streets away meant a change of congregation as well. This made sense in the social order of apartheid. In practice, all the congregants knew one another personally and lived under an order of spatial control, since church membership was bound to a residential area, which, in turn, was bound to race and class. This also worked as a moral guarantee: for example, a member of the Stellenbosch

Moedergemeente (the original or oldest congregation – the “mother”) was always someone who was socially acceptable.

The church council carried a lot of weight in the social life of the Afrikaner town. Through its *ouderlings* (elders who represented the lay members of the church) and deacons’ knowledge of the daily life of their fellow congregants, through rumours, as well as through individuals exposing their neighbours to *ouderlings* and *dominees*, the NGK monitored its congregants’ daily lives. The NGK system of control was a real Foucauldian panopticon, which caused its members to internalize authority.³ It saw to it that those who did not fit in could be disciplined, leading to serious sanctions such as ostracism or excommunication. Even according to the 2011 Church Order, bad conduct included “adultery, immorality, divorce, murder, perjury, theft, and heresy” (NGK 2011, Rule 16, 6, 1, fn. 42). The church statutes determined that disciplining was called for when bad behaviour was brought to the church’s attention through “an adverse rumor, or written complaint, or a report to the church council.”⁴ Although not all congregations applied this regularly, people genuinely feared having to appear before the church council and be subjected to disciplinary measures – although I discovered that different social classes were subject to different sanctions.

In the social workers’ archives in the “poor white” working-class suburb of Ruyterwacht, there were several mentions of disciplinary measures that church officials imposed on those who indulged in sexual misconduct, alcoholism, divorce, unwillingness to work (being *work shy*), substance abuse, or fighting, to mention just a few common transgressions (Teppo 2004: 136). This could lead to a reprimand (*tugtiging*; *om getugtig te word*; *onder tug plaas/geplaas*) by the local *dominee*, which meant that one had to sit in a separate pew and could not partake in communion (*nagmaal*); one could not participate in certain trust-based roles such as serving on the church council.

Transgressions could lead to even worse consequences. *Dominees*, in cooperation with other local authorities appointed to these special “poor white” suburbs to watch over the people, could decide that they should be transferred to a work colony, or that their children should be removed. Many “poor white” children were also sent to special boarding schools in the countryside, away from their parents’ influence.

Middle-class people were not spared church surveillance, although it was executed differently. As established earlier, during apartheid, the majority of Afrikaners had become middle class citizens under the ever-watchful NGK. Some regarded the church with suspicion:

You were supposed to share your problems with your ‘*ouderling*’ (elder), but they all talked and before long everybody in a town would know your business. I don’t think that anyone – unless truly extremely desperate – would ask the *ouderling* or church for help and then perhaps only for monetary help!

(Marie, Stellenbosch)

By setting a conservative, patriarchal set of norms regarding sexuality, the NGK exerted considerable power over middle-class Afrikaners' everyday lives. Anything reminiscent of free expressions of sexuality was abhorred, although sex between married couples was encouraged, as more children were needed to improve the Afrikaners' minority position. However, the church council reprimanded premarital pregnancy. Marie relates how her sister avoided this:

My sister Cecile and her husband Piet had to go and see the *dominee* to be *tugtig-ed* (reprimanded) for indulging in premarital sex – I did too, but didn't get pregnant! However, when the *dominee* in Johannesburg heard they actually lived in Stellenbosch, they were told to go and see the head of the church there. They simply didn't, although both of them DID subsequently go to church and still do (...). Unless you lived in a small *dorp*, *tugtiging* was easy to avoid.

(Email from Marie, Stellenbosch)

These practices left scope for interpretation and consideration by individual congregations. There were local differences: matters that would not cause ripples in more liberal urban congregations would be considered a truly wicked sin on the *platteland* (countryside), where the congregations tended to be more conservative.

Even elite members had to accept the church rule, as a publically voiced opinion of a “wrong” political viewpoint was enough to call for *tugtiging*, or even censorship (*sensuur, under sensuur plaas, geplaas*). Membership of a suspicious organization, such as the Freemasons, could get one censored. Censored people were basically banned, lost their church membership, and could not attend services. These punishments applied only to the individual members (*lidmate*). If a *dominee* had faltered, he had to appear before the *Ring* (“circle”, the group of neighbouring congregations), a regional church structure.

Marnie was a strong, talented, artistic woman whose husband was a public figure and a politician. They travelled the world together and had two children with interesting careers and good lives. She had, however, been cast out from her church for holding subversive political opinions. In the 1980s, her *dominee* deemed her unsuitable and she faced disciplinary measures, the so-called censorship hearing, which meant standing and being questioned before the church council. She chose to sever her ties with the church and revoke her membership before this could take place. In Marnie's case, it was someone's opinion that had led to her being summoned before the church council.

While there were many ways of overstepping the *lines of ordentlikheid*, there were also many degrees of reprimanding people. The punishment could be informal, but this did not make it less effective. A much harsher punishment was to be entirely banished from the local community's social

space or from the congregation. The degree of church involvement in punishments varied, with the community's judgement difficult to distinguish from the church's punishment.

In *verligte* Stellenbosch, I learned from my discussions with dominees and members of congregations how much things had changed for the better, and how much more emancipated the NGK and the Afrikaner society were now. However, sometimes even these longstanding and loyal congregants were not keen on the church's disciplinary influence, and its moral code irritated them.

They are just much too interested in the other people's business. It is very easy to judge someone else if you have never had difficulties in your own life.

(Nerine, Stellenbosch, 52)

The strict moral code and related double standards caused some of my informants to dislike the NGK, which they experienced as judgmental and damaging. Referring to the psychological damage that being under the church's surveillance and ordinance had caused some, they asked, "Annika, have you ever seen anyone who has really been chewed up by the NGK?"

Chewed up

Herta Swanepoel's family was ostracized in the 1970s and 1980s in the small town where they lived. The whole community belonged to the same church, and the boundaries between the Church and the community were very fuzzy. Their father, a government official, had begun to speak out against apartheid, condemning it as a sin. This had consequences for the whole family, who were rejected as *kafferboeties* – a derogatory Afrikaans word for white people considered to be too close to black people. Herta and her siblings were bullied at school, beaten up on the way home, and had no friends in their small town. The parents were aware of their suffering, but could not do much to alleviate it.

While Afrikaners normally have a vibrant social life, neighbours would not visit the Swanepoels. In church, they sat alone, and their *dominee* and the church elders did nothing to ease their lot. Nevertheless, the family kept their dignity, put on their Sunday best and regularly went to their local church, where they would always have to sit alone, although they were not expelled from the congregation.

They remained very *ordentlike*, and maintained their poise with all the external appearance of a proper Afrikaner family. Their pariah status was in no way reflected in their habitus: the children were brought up to behave politely, and their house was always spotless. Everybody dressed in a proper Afrikaner way: the mother in a long, dark coloured skirt and blouse, sensible shoes, and conservatively styled hair. When her hair began to turn

grey – which happened quite early – she did not dye it. The children wore clean shorts and t-shirts, and went barefoot in the best Afrikaner manner most of the time, except to church. The boys had short hair and the girls long – there were no strange styles in Herta's family. An outsider could not have told the difference between this family and all the other Afrikaner families in the town. Their suffering was invisible to anyone who did not know them or did not see how they always had a lot of space around them in the church.

In the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, the church ideology began to change. When the NGK proclaimed apartheid a sin, Herta's parents ascended socially to become respected members of their local church and community. The Swanepoel children were now adults, all of whom suffered a range of psychological symptoms. The older siblings had a history of eating disorders and substance abuse. Herta was diagnosed with manic depressive disorder and a social phobia.

Despite their lives taking a turn for the better, it was still obvious that, as a whole, the Swanepoel family had suffered tremendously from the systematic, psychological, and sometimes physical violence they had endured. Nevertheless, Herta refused to dwell on this, accepting her fate and belittling her suffering.

Others had it worse. We had all we ever needed to eat and wear. We had a nice home, and always a roof over our heads. Our parents loved us. We were never wanting.

With experiences such as social isolation in the congregations, or constant supervision of private lives, *tugtiging*, summonses to appear in front of the church board, and, in some cases, even ostracism, there were many middle-class people who were genuinely afraid of the church, or fed up. Many began to look for other spiritual options once these became available during the mid-1990s.

New winds

In April 2019, the *dominees* of the Dutch Reformed Church publicly admitted that they had been part of apartheid and announced their desire to rebuild South African society.

We were very much complicit [in propping up apartheid]. We provided the theological base for apartheid [...] If you can give it a religious sanction, it becomes even stronger. And that's what we did.⁵

The NGK had clearly undergone a tremendous, if gradual, transformation. At the point of this admission, it had come a long way, from being a church that defined the political climate, to being a church of a white minority.

The church had become torn between its *verligte* and *verkrampte* elements – I will discuss some of these contestations in more detail in [Chapter 6](#) – but the *verligtes* were especially strong in the Greater Cape Town area, with some congregations no longer imposing a code of conduct on their congregants.

The bond between the church and the state had changed in the 1980s. Now the church was treading a policy line between its more conservative and more progressive members; it also began to withdraw from politics, as the NGK and the state no longer had joint goals: the state was driving reforms, but the NGK still largely promoted segregation (Kuperus 1996). In 1986, the NGK finally, and despite the protests of its most conservative members, declared that justifying apartheid on the basis of the Bible was a sin.⁶ At the general synod meeting decisions in 1986 and 1990, the NGK thus began to move towards national unity.

Previously, *dominees* had been active in politics. After its loss of political power, the NGK's sermons and practices moved from emphasizing state politics to focusing on individuals; it was no longer the “National Party in prayer” (Kuperus 1999). At the same time, many of its active members experienced disillusionment. Another disheartened group within the NGK were those *verkrampte* Afrikaners who did not like the way the church had changed since the end of apartheid, taking a direction that they found too liberal. Nevertheless, in the early years after apartheid, the NGK remained the proper choice of church for middle-class Afrikaners.

At first, the old and new Pentecostal and charismatic churches were scorned. Their members tended to be of the wrong kind for the Afrikaner middle-class's liking, since these churches were popular among the stigmatized “poor whites” and their services contained wrong activities. During the services, the members spoke in tongues, sang, danced, and went into trance states, which were seen as wholly inappropriate embodied activities for *ordentlike*, dignified, white Afrikaners. Furthermore, they were known to be less than precise in their commitment to the racial boundaries during apartheid, and even less so after apartheid. The African versions of these churches were very influential; for example, the Zionist apostolic churches were immensely popular in the black townships.

At the turn of the millennium, the change in Stellenbosch's religious scene was slow enough to be almost invisible, but during the following decade this changed completely. It became more acceptable to jump congregational boundaries – even to those previously shunned charismatic and Pentecostal churches formerly regarded as only suitable for lower-class white people. A number of academics also noted the connection between institutional religion and social change in South Africa in the post-apartheid era, and specifically how important the Pentecostal churches were in this process (Czeglédy 2008; Frahm-Arp 2012).

The arrival of Pentecostal and charismatic churches was in line with global trends. At the end of the 20th century, the growth of Pentecostal

Christianity made Christianity the fastest growing religion on Earth. Pentecostal growth occurred especially in Latin America, on the eastern rim of Asia from Indonesia to Korea, and in sub-Saharan Africa, where the African Independent Churches (AICs), in particular, grew in popularity (Anderson 2013: 1–2).⁷ It was inevitable that this expansion would eventually also reach the white Afrikaners of Stellenbosch. Eventually, the local NGK began to cooperate with the already established Pentecostal Apostolic Faith Mission churches.⁸

In 2013, 23-year-old Liesl started frequenting an AGS (Apostolic Faith Mission) church, while the rest of her family continued in the NGK. Her parents, long-standing NGK members and church elders, reflected on this change, and her mother told me that her choice would previously have been unacceptable, although the church had been in Stellenbosch for decades. However, while the time-old, established Pentecostal and charismatic churches had become acceptable, the entirely new churches turned out to be somewhat harder to digest.

*Imminent Pentecostalism*⁹

Stellenbosch was fertile ground for the many students on their own for the first time and looking for new ideas. That these ideas were changing only became truly visible in the late 1990s, when numerous lampposts and billboards on the campus suddenly featured advertisements for the charismatic church known as “His People”.¹⁰

Another new charismatic church, Shofar,¹¹ started a congregation in Stellenbosch in 1992, when formal apartheid was coming to an end. Unlike the “old” Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) (*AGS, Apostoliese Geloofsending*), which were previously associated with the “poor whites,” Shofar was able to attract middle-class people – importantly, from all “racial” categories. This “multi-cultural” church was established by Fred and Lucille May, a biracial couple. This meant a visible transformation, and even the transgression of the former racial boundaries of the realm of religion.

Within a decade or so, it had taken the home of the NGK by storm, and its congregation soon numbered thousands. Similar to many new congregations, Shofar actively encouraged members of all racial groups to join. At the time of its establishment, Shofar’s multicultural approach – which can also be seen as mediation of racial relations – was new in Stellenbosch. Its webpage pointed out that the church was expanding and already comprised 50 churches in “an international, multi-generational, multi-cultural church family with congregations in South Africa, Namibia, the United Kingdom, Burundi, Malawi and the Netherlands.”¹² From humble beginnings, it had grown, I was told, to 30,000 members internationally, perhaps more. These members were at first largely students, but over the following decades the church also attracted young, middle-class families, and even elderly people

– people with means and a voice. The influence of this church also grew, reflecting the social positions of its membership.

On an ordinary September Sunday in 2019 in Stellenbosch, the Shofar Church had three services in its rented premises at the local Afrikaans high school for girls, Bloemhof: two in the morning and one in the evening. Approximately, 1000 people attended the services, but the evening service, with its approximately 700 participants, the majority of whom were students, was the most popular. In keeping with his mostly student audience, the pastor cracked jokes about the *koshuise*, the university residences. On that Sunday, two of the services were in English and one in Afrikaans, but many people prayed in Afrikaans, even though they were participating in an English service. Those participants who didn't appear to be students were mainly very middle-class, with only a very few clearly poor people attending. Black or coloured people formed between a fifth and a quarter of the participants.

Shofar's popularity has often been credited to its upbeat, informal services, differing greatly from the NGK ones, which many experienced as austere. These services were well known for their modern and appealing musical performances – the church had its own band, admired as the best and most professional of its kind.¹³ Instead of the long sermons and stifled hymns that had previously characterized Stellenbosch church attendance, Shofar organized band nights during which the church band played rock-influenced music and songs.¹⁴

The setup was strikingly informal in comparison with the NGK: members of the congregation were dressed informally and behaved in a relaxed way; some men wore shorts and flip-flops, which the NGK would never accept – its congregation members still wore their Sunday best. Shofar allowed its people to leave their seats to sing and dance in the aisles, a sign that it tolerated, even encouraged, informal behaviour. As the pastor commanded at times, and also spontaneously, the congregation members raised their hands in the air and would even lie face down on the floor, reaching out their arms in the form of a cross. They reacted to what the pastor said by repeating “Amen!” At the end of the service, some members went to the front to pray or perhaps to talk with the pastor and with each other. None of this would have been regarded as appropriate behaviour at an NGK service, where one had to sit and listen quietly. “Sho far show good” was a popular slogan in the town. The church's popularity was probably also due to its skilful media strategy of targeting the youth through social media applications.

However, the seemingly informal and relaxed Shofar church set its own boundaries, which differed from the previous ones, but were equally strict, or even stricter. The church members I met were always very dedicated and had received close guidance and life support. Their personal behaviour and morality were tightly guarded – no premarital sex was allowed, which is, however, not unusual in charismatic churches. Shofar was structurally

and effectively organized into districts, zones, and cell groups, which also functioned as Bible study circles teaching creationism and denouncing evolutionism. I found nothing in Shofar's biblical teachings that differed radically from what other charismatic and Pentecostal churches preached.

However, these teachings were presented to the congregation in an appealing way. There was a sense of purpose and the message was charged with contemporary relevance – it was not the *what*, but the *how*. This mission was even reflected in the church name, or, as the webpage described it:

Our name, 'Shofar' (pronounced 'show far'), is the Hebrew word for the ceremonial ram's horn. In Biblical times, the shofar had several uses (all of which are significant to who we are). It was used to announce the advent of times and seasons. It was a pitcher for the oil used for anointing and inducting kings and priests. It also signalled a summons to war. The shofar is a metaphor for prophetic urgency, authority and mobilisation.¹⁵

These new Pentecostal churches were soon seen as a threat to the prevailing social order. The growth of the Shofar church made it a force to be reckoned with by the middle of the first decade of the millennium. The Afrikaner intelligentsia began muttering about this, and, at first, these mutters were seldom benevolent (Teppo 2015: 325).

The *verligte* Afrikaners, who were often known to disagree on various issues, were suddenly in relative agreement regarding their aversion to Shofar. Something new and unwanted had found a home in their midst, causing a moral panic among the Stellenbosch establishment, who feared that their young people were becoming involved in something beyond their control.¹⁶ While there were several new Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Stellenbosch,¹⁷ Shofar was the most infamous, and was even labelled a "cult" that brainwashed its members and held them in an iron grip, reputedly even demanding that their congregants cut ties with people not of the same faith, and that they only date within the church.¹⁸ Regardless of these rumours, I met a number of Shofar members who had kept their ties outside the church.

Its success at promoting itself, and at using the sensorial language of visuality and music that the new generations understood and wanted to hear, led to accusations that the church was shallow, and "just wanted to entertain" its young members.

This trend towards something new and different, away from the traditional authorities, institutions, and ways of worship, seemed to indicate a breakdown and a rupture in Afrikaners' religious life. But it also showed continuity. Stellenbosch, always keen to brand itself a haven of scientific thinking in the post-apartheid era, also harboured a past during which scientific thinking had not been of foremost importance – the theory of evolution only became part of the high school curriculum after 1994.

Ironically enough, and perhaps indicative of Afrikaner history, which was never straightforward, this happened at the very time when biblical fundamentalism was increasing. Shofar's evolution deniers provided an ironic reminder of the town's history, as, throughout the apartheid era, NGK representatives had ensured that schools and university textbooks did not overtly teach evolutionism. Van den Heever (2009) argues that creationists' claims were tied to the apartheid past, which the Pentecostal churches subsequently handed to the youth in a new guise. Since this teaching matched that of many global Pentecostal churches, it became an even more important part of the church dogma.

There was another important continuity: in interviews with present and former Shofar members, it transpired that the strict moral guidance of the Shofar church hardly differed from the NGK's teachings in the past. The Stellenbosch *verligtes* made it clear to me that they had had enough of that.

The arrival of these new churches at the turn of the millennium was reflected in many ways in Stellenbosch Afrikaners' daily lives, changing the ways in which they viewed their practice of religion and its boundaries. In my discussions with Liesl and her family, it transpired that while she had been going to the AGS services unhindered – her family did not find this strange or try to prevent her in any way, they still drew a line somewhere. Liesl's younger brother, Jacobus, went to Shofar meetings a few times. This turned out to be a step too far for his parents, who very decisively forbade him to attend the church's week-long summer camp, marketed through a clever animated online video featuring jelly beans and rock music. They feared that there, the church would get too strong a hold on their son.¹⁹

The new churches: transgressors of *ordentlikheid*, or mediators of multiculturalism?

Certain NGK members and ex-members drew the *lyne van ordentlikheid* at membership of the Shofar church, which they regarded as an improper and potentially dangerous cult. According to rumour, Shofar's influence was feared at the local university, as several staff members belonged to it. "Your life can get very difficult if you cross them," said Marelize, a senior Stellenbosch University lecturer. She mentioned that student Shofar members were known to organize protests against those faculty members who supported evolution. These events became national news.

Dr Juri van den Heever, of the Department of Zoology at the university, who teaches evolution, has not won any kudos with Shofar. Church members have staged walk-outs during his lectures. "Their reactions have been entirely fundamentalist. They have misread and been misinformed about the Bible. It is not a literal handbook but a moral one," said Van den Heever. He believes parents should be concerned about the church because it was "pretty close to a cult."²⁰

Behind the moral panic there was real fear that these spiritual newcomers would take over. Over the years, I heard *verligte* Stellenbosch Afrikaners express frustration, particularly because so many young people had joined the church. Some were more sarcastic: “At least now they [referring to the church ministers and founders] are robbing the rich for a change.” This remark referred to the fact that the Pentecostal and charismatic churches had been popular in the poorer, coloured, and black communities during apartheid, and to the practice of tithing,²¹ which Shofar enforced far more rigorously than the NGK did. In Stellenbosch there was at least more money, and there were rumours that some people gave considerably more than a tithe, that many gave more than they could afford, and that the donated money had ended up with the church’s founders, who had become very well-off within a short time. The most incisive criticism came from those who emphasized Stellenbosch’s selfish, empty materialism:

All around me, from my kids in the church to the Stellenbosch street *laaities* [street boys], I saw human neglect and outright spiritual abuse. People had huge starry-eyed visions of other countries (especially some quasi-romantic idea of Israel), and ultimately themselves materially, but they didn’t give a flying about the hundreds of wretched black squatters and their children suffering without water or basic sanitation and near starving in squalor a minute down the road. It was all bless me Lord, bless me, and Lord bless those who can bless my idea of me ...

(Lovejoy 2005: 253).

Consequently, although Pentecostal and charismatic churches were the new normal in 2013, and an upstanding middle-class Afrikaner could now attend their services since the moral boundary had shifted, many of them still did not want to. Madeleine was an upper-middle-class, middle-aged woman from a nearby seaside town. She did not answer directly to my question of what she thought of Shofar, but instead gave me a snippet from her childhood:

When I was a child, my aunt used to take me to this (charismatic) church service. I remember how people started clapping their hands. I was very young, but I remember that I found it in such bad taste.

The local criticism of Shofar (and of many of the other new churches) was therefore three-fold. First, it referred to this church’s offensiveness from a humanitarian perspective, claiming that all those involved were selfishly seeking personal amusement, wealth, and fulfilment, while others suffered. Second, it referred to the church as a swindle created to enrich its founders. Third, it referred to the general tawdriness of the church’s informal practices, its music-filled services, and its congregants now lost to conventional churches. In general, however, the critics seldom questioned what I thought

were also obvious targets for disapproval: Shofar's ideas of evolutionism and its strict moral control.

However, having just entered an era of more personal freedom and less church interference in people's daily lives, most middle-aged Afrikaners I met were not keen on returning to those times. I frequently heard more *verkramppte* Afrikaners complain that everything had been better during the apartheid era, but I never once heard any of the Stellenbosch *verligtes* say this. Yet the new church attracted younger members.

Youth and the immanence of the new churches

For most Afrikaners born at the end of apartheid and in the years thereafter, their future as white Afrikaners was very different from that of the previous generations. They were no longer economically carefree in the sense that everything was laid out from birth to death. According to the local youth, the Afrikaner life cycle expectation had been to attend a good school, go to university, and then into a safe occupation, with perks such as the housing subsidy that the university and certain large companies granted their permanent staff. The dream was a house with a large garden and a pool, looked after by (black) staff. A smart or lucky white youth, even from a working-class home, could aspire to successfully ascend the class hierarchy. But the post-apartheid labour policies no longer preferred white people, and a high standard of living was no longer within relatively easy reach for all whites. A fall in class was a real possibility. In this environment, the young generation of "born-free" white Afrikaners experienced mixed feelings of freedom and insecurity, which their parents had not known. They also experimented with new religious choices, which were suddenly appearing all around them.

As a child, Paul was very representative of his age and class position, a typical good son of a respectable Stellenbosch family. His life experiences were typical of his generation. Born in the early 1980s, Paul did not have many memories of the apartheid era, but it had defined his entire life. His generation of young Afrikaners grew up in the crossfire of contradicting ideas. While his parents' generation had been thoroughly socialized in apartheid thinking, and would still echo those ideas, he and his peers had received a very different education. School curricula had changed – amid much controversy – after the 1994 election, especially in subjects like history, which no longer reflected the white perspective (Chisholm 2005). Other subjects were also affected; as mentioned previously, evolution was now taught. In the 1990s, the NGK had distanced itself from apartheid, but most Afrikaners still belonged to the church, socializing their children to a life that revolved around the practice of faith. For children such as Paul, there was confirmation after completing Sunday school.

Paul was a quintessential privileged Stellenbosch child, brought up to believe that Afrikaners were God's chosen people. Although his family was

in the middle-income bracket, his parents had been academically educated and had a large house in the popular Die Boord area. There was nothing to stop him from fulfilling expectations and aspiring to be a sports hero, artist, academic, or politician. Paul's generation formed a class of new entrepreneurs who, with their superior training and connections (and, often, family money), would find their place among the elites.

In the meantime, however, new thoughts and ideas had arrived, which Paul mostly got to know through the Internet; this had become available in the mid-1990s. At that time, South Africa was opening up, and Paul, like so many middle-class Afrikaners, was fascinated by the influences that poured in after the years of limited contact with the world beyond the country's borders, and the long decades of censorship. Over the years, many Stellenbosch Afrikaners told me how oppressive the time under the apartheid regime had felt. Although they had not faced overt violence (like Herta's family had), they had felt limited, suffocated, controlled, and had privately loathed the force-feeding of the Christian-nationalist propaganda and the lack of free speech. Paul's generation had more options.

At the end of the 1990s, Stellenbosch was teeming with drugs, which were consumed at student parties and in hostels. Almost everybody tried them and finding weed to smoke was easy. Paul started experimenting with drugs at high school, and became a *daggaroker*,²² which was common enough. This escalated when he started studying; at the same time, he gradually became alienated from his family. In 2003, Paul's concerned friends told me that he had become a drug addict. His friends could control their consumption of cannabis, LSD, ecstasy, and mushrooms, but Paul required rehabilitation. After his rehab, Paul wanted to put the pieces of his life together again and resume his studies. It was at this juncture that his friends, thrilled with the new Shofar church, asked him to join them. For Paul, with his typical conservative Christian upbringing, Shofar was at first a very interesting alternative to the NGK, which he found stuffy and old-fashioned. Soon it was an inseparable part of his life. Paul's friends told me that he had joined "a cult".

The church helped at first, he told me. It was not judgmental about his mishaps and transgressions of *ordentlikheid*. He joined the church and was born again, sweeping his former life and sins away. Shofar was open to those who had transgressed the lines of *ordentlikheid* – even if joining this church was a transgression in itself. Paul was long past caring what his friends and family members thought – he had already overstepped the lines of good white behaviour many times.

Paul became a member of a Shofar cell group whose members shared their most intimate thoughts with one another. These cell groups provided their members with a chance to advance to different levels within the church. They also provided occasional financial help: Ria, a home economics student, received no support from her struggling parents and recounted how, at the worst times, her church, through her cell leader, gave her money. This

came as no surprise, as I had heard of other Pentecostal churches practising this small-scale financial support as well.

For Paul it was less about money and more about finding a new identity and staying clear of drugs. In return, the church regulated his life to the smallest detail. He also found a girlfriend through the church, but they were not allowed to have sex, which the church forbade before marriage. The irony of leaving one controlling church environment and ending up in another did not escape Paul.

After about a year and a half, the church's ideology and teachings began to feel strange to Paul, and he started questioning them. He left the church, abandoned his studies, found a job, and started doing drugs again, but more moderately, sticking to mild ones. In hindsight, Paul was slightly bemused by his experience, which he regarded as strange rather than coercive. He bore no serious resentment against the church, nor did he claim or exhibit signs of being traumatized or brainwashed. Instead, he made fun of it, and himself, and, like so many other Stellenboschers, merely regarded the Shofar church as "lacking in style and substance".²³

In the case of Paul and his contemporaries, the moral panic was thus unnecessary, as they simply turned their backs on the church when they no longer felt comfortable there. In Paul's case, joining Shofar church had initially been a contentious choice, and his friends had been horrified. However, over the years the panic faded, the talk of a cult – which had still been prevalent in the first decade of the millennia – stopped, and people were no longer alarmed if their children joined a charismatic church. In 2014, another informant clarified in an email:

While many of the middle-aged Christians just hate the idea of their kids going to 'common' charismatic or Pentecostal churches, many of my Stellenbosch friends are just pleased that they do still go to (a) church and regard themselves as Christians.

(Email from Marie)

In 2019, my observations and discussions with the generation born in the 1980s and 1990s showed that it had already become the norm for young people to examine their spiritual options with open minds. That the church was "multicultural" was a part of the package and considered normal.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic isolated people from one another, social media became an even more important means of communication between the Shofar pastorate (consisting of Afrikaners and one "coloured" man) and the congregation members. In a number of social media and Facebook entries, the international leader of the Shofar church apostolic team, Pastor Heinrich Titus, who identifies as a person of colour, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020, has publicly shared some of his experiences as a student in Stellenbosch in the 1990s, commenting on the "walls" (of racial discrimination) that he encountered,

and “also how God used people around me to chip away those walls”. In his blog entry he continues: “The fires of repentance, forgiveness, and mutual honour have to burn brightly in the hearts of God’s people so that the walls of fear, mistrust, and prejudice can be burnt to the ground, while preserving the good.” He is setting a clear agenda in his writings: to keep his identity and heritage and history as a “coloured” person, while doing away with racial prejudice.²⁴

In sum, when I arrived in Stellenbosch right after the end of apartheid, the new Pentecostal and charismatic churches sat uneasily with Afrikaner religious practices and their ideas of *ordentlikheid*, but towards the end of the second decade of the millennium, the changed reactions to their activities showed that they had become increasingly acceptable. Although they were not regarded as the best choice for the Stellenbosch youth, they no longer raised eyebrows. Being a member of a charismatic church had become a mainstream choice, and even if some regarded it as a rather vulgar one, it was not always the worst choice. Paul admitted that his parents would ultimately probably have preferred him to attend Shofar than be involved in drugs. The above accounts thus show how the new churches, first seen as a threat, had indeed become “immanent”, and a permanent feature in the life of Stellenbosch Afrikaners, and that their agenda of transforming the racial boundaries was underway.

Conclusion: racial (dis)continuities after rupture

Apartheid racial boundaries did not just keep people of colour in their “proper” place, but also kept white people there, and especially Afrikaners. Physically, they lived in different white areas according to their class. Socially, being a proper Afrikaner meant being a member of the NGK or one of its sister churches, which further defined a person’s social circles and standing (Crapanzano 1985).²⁵ In *Afrikanerdom*, nobody could really exist outside of the mighty influence of the NGK without existing outside of white society altogether.

At the end of apartheid, the white middle-class Afrikaners in Stellenbosch experienced a remarkable sociocultural change, which was reflected in the field of religion. In this chapter, I examined how these internal moral boundaries of *ordentlikheid* were originally formed along racial lines, and how they were thereafter transformed with regard to spiritual practices, and the rupture, which led to the establishment of a more multicultural religious scene in the post-apartheid era.

A number of new issues and developments affected the realm of religion. One of these was the emancipation of white Afrikaners from the NGK’s imposed rules and regulations, which had previously limited their everyday lives. On the one hand, this weakening left more scope for manoeuvring, which, together with the arrival of new alternatives, made it more conceivable for proper, middle-class Stellenbosch Afrikaners to experiment with

their spirituality and to move freely to racially mediated territories of faith that had previously been out of bounds. On the other hand, middle-class Afrikaners were facing new, more insecure economic realities. Guarding the boundaries of *ordentlikheid* became important in another way, as a fall in class was a real possibility.

At first, these new forms of spirituality remained on the losing side of the moral boundary. Criticized for their flamboyant performativity, tastelessness, superficiality, brainwashing, and for being cults, they were regarded as either helping the wealthy to clear their consciences, or as seducing the innocent souls of the young. Attendance at these “tacky” churches endangered the continuity of the racialized, class-related performances of whiteness and *ordentlikheid* that the youth were supposed to learn. They were not upholding segregation; they encouraged white youths to do things that were so very *black*. But the popularity of these multicultural congregations was unstoppable. Consequently, it was now acceptable for white people and people of colour to attend church services together. This was a huge change for white people, who had only ever been the overlords, employers, superiors, never equals – even if life continued as usual outside of those sacred spaces and times, even if this change did not wipe away the vast inequalities, the hegemonic position of whiteness, or people’s bitterness and insecurities, even if it did not constitute a restitution.

The new congregations challenged Stellenbosch’s conventional truths, the racial boundaries, exposed the increasing rift between Afrikaners and their traditional church – already reflected in the dwindling number of NGK members and in its internal battles – and, as the new churches became increasingly acceptable, slowly turned from imminent to imminent, shifting the *lyne van ordentlikheid*. While, in 2005, people were upset and horrified when they talked of these new churches, by 2012 they had been grudgingly accepted, and by 2019 they had become a new normal.

In this chapter, the continued existence of the internal *lyne van ordentlikheid* in white Afrikaners’ realm of religion showed their flexibility and resilience. The mounting concerns and moral panics about the changes in the town’s religious field made these lines visible. They marked the internal hierarchies between Afrikaners and also defined the external racial and cultural boundaries, which had become very porous. Despite all these changes in the religious field, Afrikaners’ cultural recognition of their traditions remained, while their sense of moral continuity and social order guided them. Nevertheless, a moral shift, a loosening of both the internal and external racial boundaries, followed the religious rupture.

The gradual stretching of the boundaries of *ordentlikheid* described in this chapter paved the way for new ideas, making these boundaries more susceptible to racial crossovers and spiritual mediations – a change that is particularly interesting when we turn our gaze to the newcomers, the non-Christian religious practitioners from New Religious Movements – New Age people, Wiccans, and Asatruans.

The position of the new faiths among the Afrikaners was akin to entering a crowded room, as the then-existing (allowed) faiths had already made themselves at home on all the physical and metaphorical levels of societal space. How could these new faiths and practices come into being and find their place in this already packed room – how was this actualization to be mediated, and what processes and paradoxes would occur? Their rapid entrance into the post-apartheid society brought about several religious mediations. How did the contemporary pagan communities mediate the public sphere and public spaces? How did they demarcate their spiritual spaces relative to the latter? Were these important spaces open and public or closed and private? Who was included or excluded? How were these spaces used? What mediations of moral boundaries occurred there, and how were the racialized ideas of *ordentlikheid* reflected in these activities?

Notes

- 1 For accounts of this development elsewhere in South Africa, see Heer 2015.
- 2 <http://ngkerk.net/english/> (accessed 16 June 2021).
- 3 In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault names the institutions that have total control over their resident's social lives as "panopticons".
- 4 "[T]he sins referred to in Article 61.2 are brought to the attention of the relevant church assembly or its authorized committee in one of three ways: by an adverse rumor or a written complaint or a report to the church council emanating from official activities" (Article 63).
- 5 <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-04-18-00-ng-kerk-is-repenting-for-apartheid/> (accessed 1 May 2019).
- 6 *Kerk en samelewing*. The document was published in 1986 and also in 1990 (Kuperus 1999).
- 7 Anderson (2013: 1–2) quotes an estimate that the Pentecostal churches now comprise a quarter of the world's Christian population, with approximately 614 million adherents in 2010.
- 8 A member of Apostolic Faith Mission International, AFM is South Africa's largest Pentecostal church. It was a "white" church during apartheid, but was united with "black" Apostolic Faith Mission churches after 1994 (Horn 2006).
- 9 The idea of imminent/immanent Pentecostalism originates from Professor Simon Coleman's farewell lecture to Professor Jan-Åke Alvarsson at Uppsala University on 3 May 2017.
- 10 For more on His People, see Frahm-Arp (2010).
- 11 A shofar is the ram's horn mentioned in the Hebrew and Christian bibles.
- 12 <https://shofaronline.org/about/> (accessed 11 October 2019).
- 13 <https://www.shofarband.com> (accessed 14 May 2019).
- 14 A Shofar worship night and music can be viewed on this video: <https://youtu.be/1v2cQEA8eNM> (accessed 14 May 2019).
- 15 <https://shofaronline.org/about/> (accessed 11 October 2019).
- 16 For moral panics among white South Africans, see e.g. Falkof 2015, and Dunbar and Swart 2015.
- 17 Such as His People and Vineyard Church.
- 18 <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/religious-sect-brainwashing-maties-1.377440> (accessed 15 June 2013).
- 19 <https://youtu.be/WZ5VOGRsYZc> (accessed 15 May 2019).

- 20 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/religious-sect-brainwashing-maties-377440> (accessed 8 March 2020).
- 21 Tithing means giving a tenth of one's income to the church.
- 22 Someone who smokes copious amounts of marijuana. In comparison with many Northern European countries, South Africans are quite relaxed in this regard (and also when it comes to legislation), but daily consumption of weed is still frowned upon.
- 23 Examples of public criticism of the church are numerous online, e.g. <http://abreakfastclub.wordpress.com/2007/05/29/shofar-christian-cult/> (accessed 15 June 2013).
- 24 Facebook updates by Heinrich Matthew Titus, 3, 10 and 21 June 2020 (<https://www.facebook.com/heinrich.m.titus>). Blog: <https://shofaronline.org/on-race-and-redemption-part-1/> (accessed 13 July 2020).
- 25 Although there were other Christian churches, they were always alternative ones.

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5 Madams and masters of magic

Introduction

During my years of fieldwork, I met a number of Afrikaners who had moved away from their relatively closed circles in Stellenbosch and other small towns to join Cape Town's more inclusive and mixed crowds. Here they began to practise new religions, often together with English-speaking South Africans. In their subsequent encounters with a wide range of new and different people and ideas, all of which differed vastly from their narrow upbringings, religious mediations over moral, social, and spatial boundaries once again became of central importance.

In [Chapter 4](#) I discussed the rupture that took place after apartheid from the perspective of Afrikaners leaving – or witnessing others leaving – the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK) for new Christian faiths and practices. However, religions known as contemporary paganism, modern paganism, and neopaganism¹ were newcomers to the religious scene, as well as vastly different from any form of Christianity, which is why people looked askance at them. Nevertheless, the same issues of shifting social boundaries – religious, moral, and racial – were present in their practices. How did the neopagans then respond to the issues of changing social boundaries issues and the fear of a fall in class? What were the sociospatial, religious, and moral boundaries that they drew and re-drew, and what can their mediations across these changing boundaries tell us of the more general social changes?

In the latter half of the 20th century, Cape Town became known as a hippie and tolerant place. Even during apartheid, and against the daunting background of the minority regime's stalwart conservatism, many counterculture flowers bloomed there. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, New Age beliefs and New Religious Movements gained popularity in Cape Town, which was by then known for its lively New Age scene and for its flourishing, dynamic countercultures. *Stadtluft macht frei* ("urban air makes you free") held true in the city, where the many *verligte* Afrikaner children from behind the "*boerewors*"² curtain" – from the areas beginning in the city's Afrikaner-dominated northern suburbs, and including small towns such as Stellenbosch, as well as *plattelandse dorpies* ("rural villages")

– had moved, established new realities, and created new moral communities. Modern pagans were especially interesting as what they represented was new and had previously been downright forbidden. They had no established spaces or places of their own; they had to create them. They were not known to the public, so they had to work harder on their acceptability, and prove their commitment to being well-adapted members of society more thoroughly. Yet their practices of mediation provided an interesting angle on post-apartheid religious practices, and on the mediation processes that all religious groupings would have to perform. If I wanted to find the practitioners of these new faiths, it was clear that I would have to expand my research area to consider all of the vast Cape Town area. I kept my base in Stellenbosch, while driving around Greater Cape Town to talk to pagans.

The city was an excellent place for New Religious Movements to take root. While Christianity in its various forms was still of undeniable importance, the (previously discussed) developments of the dwindling membership of traditional churches, as well as the political changes with the subsequent new legislation, aided the opening up of religious boundaries in the 1990s. Supported by the rise of the Internet, New Religious Movements, which had already gained popularity elsewhere, entered the country, as did economic and cultural globalization. Among the new denominations were the universal Pentecostal churches and non-Christian contemporary pagan religions, such as Wicca and Asatru.³ Following the global trend, there was a rapid rise in various new faith groups in African countries, where new global religions met indigenous beliefs to form new religious expressions (Brendbekken 2002).

In a 2009 article, I examined whether the white people adhering to these new forms of religion, especially neopagans, were using the still segregated urban spaces of Cape Town in new ways. I found that in the practice of their faith they established new, private spaces protected from outsiders – such as sacred spaces for worship or magically protected homes – which were also heterotopic reversals of the surrounding urban spaces. They were often more invested in safeguarding themselves from the rampant crime and isolating themselves in their privileged spaces than in connecting with the urban spaces and realities of the city, thus continuing the apartheid segregation in their own ways. Their isolation was not only spatial: they had created online connections with international communities, which helped them to find theological building blocks for their beliefs; they were happy to appropriate these from all other global faiths and belief systems, apart from traditional sub-Saharan African beliefs.

This was where my earlier analysis ended – I explained their spiritual practices and isolation through the prism of insecurity and the anxiety they felt as whites in the new social situation. While this analysis still holds true, in hindsight I see it as partial and as not sufficiently addressing their interactions with the surrounding world or their internal ethnic divisions. Furthermore, the place of *Afrikanerdom* in all of this was not addressed.

In this chapter, by developing my past focus on the closing and safeguarding of the external boundaries of neopagan communities, I focus on the religious practices of the Afrikaner modern pagan, and how these relate to and participate in the changes in post-apartheid society. I examine them as mediating or closing social (moral, religious, and racial) boundaries in their rituals and other religious practices, such as inclusion in and exclusion from their moral/faith communities. At the end of this chapter, this account will generate an analysis of modern pagans at the crossroads of Afrikaner ethnic politics and religious mediation.

Although mainstream society mainly regarded them as subversive or counter-cultural, the practices of these neopagans were based on local assumptions of proper (*ordentlike*) behaviour, and they produced their own moral communities – utopian ideas and moral order existed together at their core. They carried out acts of social mediation, which often took spatial forms. I examine these mediations through the rituals and activities of certain prominent Afrikaner figures on the contemporary pagan (and New Age) scene. This chapter mainly draws from my postdoctoral ethnographic fieldwork, during which I followed Cape Town's New Religious Movements from 2005 onward. After 2010, when I was already working on new research topics, I had nevertheless grown interested in the lives of the people I had met as part of my research, befriended some, and returned to visit them when something new happened until September of 2019. In addition, I continued to follow the local pagans' Internet discussions and their online magazines.⁴

Background: studying contemporary pagans in Cape Town

Since modern pagan religions spread concurrently with the rise of the Internet, they also grew swiftly in Cape Town and its surroundings. The local pagans, mostly Wiccans, were networked all over the country. People belonging to the same organization could live far apart, which meant that I occasionally also met Wiccans from other areas. I heard estimations that South Africa had between 1,000 and 50,000 neopagans.⁵ The difficulties of making a reliable estimate were exacerbated by references to various solitary practitioners. Furthermore, for many of those involved, the neopagan scene might only be a transitional phase, since many whom I met later moved on to the next faith community. The majority of my informants acknowledged having belonged to several denominations. They had usually started off as Christians, thereafter moving to different modern pagan faiths, such as Asatru, druidism, Wicca, and even Kemetism, a revived pagan version of an ancient Egyptian religion. Many of the neopagan groups I encountered in 2005 had dissolved by 2019, and new groups had been formed.

The local media sometimes mentioned contemporary paganism, and some academic works mention them (Teppo 2009; Chidester 2012; Wallace 2012), but not many have tackled the issue. A few pagans have written accounts of their faith, while several organizations and groups have an

active online presence (Groen 2001; Vos 2002).⁶ The various forms of modern paganism fit the description of hyperreal religions, innovative religions, and spiritualities that mix elements of religious tradition with popular culture, while there are also subgroups of cyber-religions that recruit their members online (Dawson and Hennebry 1999; Possamai and Lee 2011).

I found my first informants with the help of my research assistant, Sarah Meder, then via the groups' networks, using a snowballing method, which produced more informants than I could have hoped for. The circles were small and not very hierarchical, and the members knew one another socially or through the Internet. The news of my arrival spread, and my informants tended to know whom I had met and what we had discussed, although I made a point of keeping them apart. I participated in several bigger and smaller rituals, and hung out and chatted with those who identified as neopagans in one way or another. I attended dinner parties and *braais*, socialized in cafes, malls, and homes, listened to music, and drank tea, coffee, and wine, and, in one memorable instance, a ritual hot chocolate.

In 2005, whether the practitioner had English or Afrikaans ethnicity seemed to be a non-issue among the neopagans, who all spoke excellent English. English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking religious practitioners' practices overlapped, but also differed in some ways. Those with an Afrikaans background or roots would at some point mention their connectedness with the land or local traditions through their family, beliefs, ideas, and hidden powers that had been in their family line for a long time – there could be a family connection to some small *plattelandse* (country-side) town where strange things had occurred. Frequently, the root of this esoteric knowledge would have been the grandmother. Some would not mention their ethnicity at all, which at first did not seem to be of great importance, as an average Cape Town pagan was an English-speaking South African, who did not think that his or her ethnic roots or mother tongue merited discussion. Rather, the branch of paganism each group or individual practitioner followed was thoroughly discussed. The ethnic differences and tensions would surface later, and will be discussed towards the end of this chapter.

The majority of my informants were Wiccans, the most popular brand of neopaganism in Cape Town. Wiccan witchcraft, which originated in the USA and the UK, was the most common form of neopaganism in South Africa, as well as globally. Having spread online, and being an accommodating and heterogeneous religion, Wicca harbours several traditions and multiple places of worship. All of these share common qualities and beliefs. Followers of Wicca are oriented towards nature, revere ancient Germanic or Celtic holidays, and believe in the law of threefold returns (the idea that anything anyone does may be returned to them threefold). Their rituals are elaborate, and everyone is free to choose a deity from the global pantheon to worship. In other words, they “appropriate spiritual traditions and practices from other traditions” (York 2001: 367). In Cape Town, I found they

were more involved in finding new deities and practices from the global pantheon – whether Celtic, Indian, or Native American – than in relating to the local culture or traditional African belief systems, which they feared and avoided (Teppo 2009).

There are several different brands of Wicca, many of which were followed in Cape Town. The branch known as the Correllian Nativist Tradition of Wicca seemed especially popular, mainly due to its online presence and easy accessibility to theological teachings – almost anybody could start a coven and begin ascending the ranks of the church by advancing through the degrees of the Correllian hierarchy.⁷ This did not, of course, mean that the Cape Town temples or covens were easily accessible. The temple called Clan of Kheper states, on its home page:

As of the year 18 Aquarius (2018), our Coven is operating as a closed court Temple. This means that while we are still open to accepting new members, we will only consider those that are serious about coven/temple membership to join our open rituals at any given time, and unless stated otherwise, our gatherings are no longer open to the public. Membership is strictly at the discretion of the Temple Council.⁸

In addition to Wiccans, I also spoke with those who subscribed to parallel contemporary pagan traditions, such as Asatru. Over the years, I spoke to members from three different Asatru groups, all varying in their ideas and practices. There were those following the path of Celtic druidism, and those who followed several traditions simultaneously, those who did not identify with any of them directly, and those who were solitary practitioners who nevertheless considered themselves neopagans. There were almost as many faiths as there were pagans.

Those who were beginning to follow these new beliefs told me how enthusiastic they were about having started something entirely new. It was commonplace for them to express their desire to build a better South African society, and to bring about a change of which they would be part; in other words, to mediate change in a more tolerant religious direction. However, they were subjected to internal and external pressures, as they had to create their moral communities and make a living in a society that, according to them, no longer provided for them just because they were “white”, but which also regarded them with mistrust and even feared them for their strange new beliefs.

In Stellenbosch, the de Wets regarded my interest in neopagans with a tolerant, yet amused interest. Sebastine asked me every now and then how my “hex project” was doing, but they never seemed to have any fear of Satanism or witchcraft, nor were they carried away with the waves of Satanist panic that swept the country. Living with their family, it seemed almost incomprehensible that for some people, the forces of darkness were very real.

Fear of Satanism and witchcraft

Many pagans mentioned the problem of the general suspicion with which they, as perceived devil-worshippers, were regarded. Nicky Falkof's (2015) account documented the racialized Satanist panic that shook the country in the 1990s (see also Dunbar and Swart 2015). Satanism was also feared in Stellenbosch. When the Japanese Pokémon figures became all the rage in the late 1990s, some parents at my daughter's school forbade their children to own the little badges and pictures of these characters. In the yard of my daughter's daycare centre, a mother was heard prompting her child: "*Gooi weg daai duiwelse dinge*" ("Throw those devilish things away"). My daughter came home asking if there was something wrong with her Pokémon cards.

During my years of fieldwork, I often came across rumours, urban legends, and conspiracy theories that more than anything else spoke volumes about the people's ontological insecurities. In a country of strong Christianity and rampant paranoia, rumours of blood sacrifices, strange forces, and evil deeds were endemic, and I encountered them frequently.

One of my informants was on the receiving end of this panic. He landed in considerable trouble during his high school years when he, "a reader of strange books and all of fifteen," was suspected of occult activities. He lived in Camps Bay, an upmarket beachfront area. "The Camps Bay Satanist" hit the headlines with the accompanying public outcry. At the police hearings that followed, the whole commotion turned out to be a practical joke played by local schoolboys.

The police hearings were not strange, because Satanism was considered a serious matter; in fact, people's fears caused the founding of a rather unique police department, the Occult-related Crime Unit (ORCU). This unit was established in 1992 to investigate Satanism and *muthi* murders (ritual killings in which human body parts are used to brew potions or medicines with supernatural qualities).

This unit was run by a born-again Christian, an Afrikaner policeman who personified two sources of fear – one stemming from Christianity and the other from traditional African beliefs – of supernatural evil forces. Dr Kobus "Donker" Jonker, aka "God's pitbull", believed in the supernatural forces of evil, and claimed to have seen a *tokoloshe*. Jonker was a high-profile official who wrote several pamphlets and gave numerous interviews to the newspapers on Satanism (Falkof 2015: 48–49). The following excerpt is from an interview with him in the online magazine *Vice* in 2010.

Q: Have you ever come into contact with someone that has been possessed?

A: Yes, many times. It's a reality. If you talk about black witchcraft as well, in the sangoma aspect you find it a lot. The way black witchcraft works seems impossible to believe, for example: I was called out by a black pastor in Kwazulu Natal and there was an eleven-year-old girl

that had been left for a few weeks in the presence of a sangoma who was supposed to bring good luck to her family. So eventually this girl became possessed and the parents said: “There is something wrong here,” so they took the child to a black pastor for help who in turn called me. I flew down, very upset about the situation. When the pastor was praying, apart from hearing many different voices coming from her throat, blood was squirting from her breasts and I thought, I don’t believe what I’m seeing now. So eventually, after he had prayed, he spoke to one of her multiple personalities and suddenly ants started running out of her breasts.

Q: Ants?

A: Yes, ants. So that suddenly stopped. The pastor had a lot of other pastors and therapists there and they were watching all these events unfold. All of a sudden a small tortoise climbed out of the girl’s navel. A small tortoise! When they saw this happening they all ran off so that there were only three of us left in the room. Everyday people never see this kind of thing. If you told me this story I would say “don’t talk nonsense to me” because my thoughts are based on reality. If you see it for yourself it’s different. It was witchcraft and it is a reality; it does exist.⁹

In 2011 there was even an Internet address where one could tip off the authorities about satanic crimes anonymously (the site was no longer functional in 2017). The multiple categories of criminal activity included “Occult-related crime” and “Satanism”.¹⁰ Here, the South African fascination with the crime that the Comaroffs so adeptly describe (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004) is seamlessly united with the fantasies of evil Satanists lurking in the dark corners of society, in the abandoned buildings of the city, even in the cabinets of those in power. In this climate of spiritual fear, the popularity of the New Age movement, and especially the appearance of Wiccans, upset people in various communities in the mid-1990s. Some of my Wiccan informants reported having been monitored by the ORCU.

These suspicions were not tempered by the Wiccans’ practices. While certain neopagans called themselves druids or shamans, Wiccans chose to call themselves witches, regardless of the local connotations of this term (Leff, Fontleve and Martin 2008). Traditionally, a witch has always been a malevolent and truly feared character in many African societies. There is no good witchcraft, and a witch has always meant an irrevocably evil, horrifying, criminal, or satanic person carrying out wicked activities by supernatural means (Ashforth 2005).

One of the big barriers between Africans and Wiccans is our terminology. In Wiccan terms witches are light-workers, terms that we are proud to use (...) However, our neighbours in this same country, the traditional African pagans, use the same terms in a very, very different,

horrible connotation. A witch is often the person that all sorts of misfortunes are ascribed to... It is most unlikely that we are going to change the black man's perception (...) it is too deeply ingrained in the language, you cannot take it back any more... The white witches of this country, who are proud of the term, are also not prepared to give up these terms.

(Female Wiccan, 37)

This self-definition has also been problematic in the USA, where neopagans have been divided over the matter (Adler 1986: 42). This was, however, a minute problem compared to the horrified reaction caused by the use of the term in South Africa. The true extent of the fear of witches dawned on me in 2001 when I was shopping in a bookstore in a Cape Town mall. There, I saw a stylish middle-aged woman sporting a big pentagram, an important neopagan symbol, around her neck. Amused by this strange combination of upper-class “kugel chic” and Wicca, I mentioned that she was a witch to the young African salesclerk to whom I was chatting. His expression turned to pure horror and I immediately explained that she was not that kind of witch, but more like a traditional healer, a *sangoma*, after which he seemed to calm down. But I could see that he was still unsettled; once the w-word was out, there was no going back. My blunder was even worse than I thought, because at the time I did not yet fathom the extent to which even *sangomas* were often suspected of also being witches. Trying to placate the man by saying that she was like one had not helped much. I left the bookstore feeling mortified, and very guilty at having inadvertently accused an innocent woman, and frightened an innocent man, although I found his reaction thought-provoking. This error, and its consequences, later triggered my plan to study local neopagans.

For white people, the well-known religious conservatism of apartheid, tending towards rightwing fundamentalism, left little room for other faiths (Chidester 1992: 216). However, as established in [Chapter 3](#), Afrikaner folk beliefs commonly included beliefs in dark, supernatural forces. During my years of fieldwork, white people have told me hair-raising stories of blood sacrifices, mysterious accidents, and beings of darkness.

In sum: many people dreaded Wiccan witches, either because they privately held traditional African beliefs regarding the nefariousness of witches, or due to their Christian conviction that they were satanic, or both. It was difficult to justify why African “black” witches were evil, but “white” or “green” witches good, and many people I spoke with were not convinced. The use of the term caused an immediate misunderstanding and apprehension in almost all those not familiar with the Wiccan faith, which included people of every class, “race”, and ethnic group.

Wiccans described themselves prevalently as being bearers of light. They appreciated their special relationship with nature and the energies of Earth;

they were interested in herbs, potions, smells, and rituals, and in their spiritual connections with their gods or goddesses. Despite these interests, which could only be seen as positive, most neopagans preferred to hide their practices from family, colleagues, and friends.

By 2010, many had become aware of the modern pagans among them. That was when I first heard an Afrikaner church elder passingly referring to a Wiccan as a “green witch” in a rather neutral manner. Calling him “green” defined him as different from traditional African witches, referred to the orientation of Wiccans towards nature, and also sounded better than calling him a “white witch” – which could sound racializing. This neologism represented a compromise, perhaps even careful acceptance, but it was hard to say whether it would become more common.

The external pressures had thus eased over the years. However, the internal pressures that neopagan communities experienced from within were often financial. Most of them were relatively privileged middle-class white people – not necessarily wealthy, but not really struggling for their daily survival either. Their situation had not changed dramatically after apartheid, although white poverty had become slightly more widespread. While, as a group, white South Africans had become wealthier after the end of apartheid, poverty was now a real and horrifying possibility for white people, who were no longer privileged by the state. For the white New Agers and neopagan communities, money and fears of a financial disaster were fundamental issues, but also divisive ones. Some of their magical practices were therefore directed towards protecting or accumulating wealth.

Sacred investments and spiritual consumerism

During my fieldwork it transpired how profoundly important private money was for the New Age scene: it simply could not exist without individuals’ investment in it. Christian churches would help their members financially, and even charismatic congregations such as Shofar were known to look after those who were in dire straits. The New Age scene in South Africa was, however, entirely dependent on those willing to organize rituals and social events in their own homes and with their own means. Consequently, these religions had to be directly involved in the consumerism and exchange relations between their members in ways Christian religions did not need to be.

According to religious studies scholar Michael York, the commodification of religion is one of the most controversial aspects of the New Age movement (the other one being its tendency to “appropriate spiritual ideas and practices from other traditions”) (York 2001: 367). Consequently, he sees the New Age movement as an image of Western liberal capitalism, narcissistic, and with a similar cultural logic. He compares the New Age

movement to a spiritual consumer supermarket. In fact, he regards it as perfectly parallel with Calvinist Christianity:

Rather than a rejection of free market principles, New Age endorses a spiritualized counterpart of capitalism – one which seeks ever extended markets, new sources of marketable goods, and expanding profits. In that the profit motive of New Age is fully financial, if not also oriented toward greater spiritual well-being, it represents a modern continuation of Calvinistic principles which exalt material success as a sign, reflection, or consequence of one's spiritual state of grace.

(York 2001: 367)

The New Age tendency to emphasize material success was also a great match with the situation in Cape Town in the early 21st century. Long-lasting Calvinist influences that established certain moral principles regarding material success were compatible with neopagan ways of thinking about money. They were therefore also a perfect match for the ideas of whiteness and *ordentlikheid*, and well suited to the new situation in which the state no longer guaranteed the economic prospects of white people.

Money divided the New Age scene between those who were wealthier and more carefree, and those who had to plan and strategize to make ends meet. There were some fears that united them, like the one already mentioned that all South Africans shared: the fear of crime. In addition, since the neopagans were mostly white and middle-class, there were the terrors of downward mobility: fears of losing their assets, their class position, and of spiralling into poverty. These class-related fears were ever-present in the interviews I conducted with the middle-class neopagans.

The deepening class divisions were a complicated issue for the practitioners of the neopagan faiths, as there was, ideally, supposed to be equality between them; money was not supposed to be of great importance, even if it was. In addition, a number of solitary practitioners complained to me that the scene was becoming commercialized to the point that they refused to have much to do with it.

There were some who tried to eke out a living from New Age products or services, and all manner of alternative and holistic therapies were popular with Cape Town's middle-class citizens. Hordes of faith healers, fortune tellers, and therapists offered and charged (sometimes royally) for their services. Those selling their services criticized what they called the "culture of poverty", by which they meant that people were not willing to pay for their help. Charging for these services came with its own set of moral problems: was it morally right to charge for spiritual help? How much should a moral person give of their resources without being taken advantage of? Their problem was to decide how much they could give of their money and time, how much they had to protect themselves, and what they could charge for.

There were also those who were just out to make money from the needy, insecure, and disillusioned. Spending money on New Age goods and services was easy: numerous magical objects and treatments were available. A trendy Holistic Lifestyle Fair was held on the first Sunday of every month in an old school building in the suburb of Observatory. Astrologers, psychics, tarot readers, palmists, and even *sangomas* (traditional African healers) filled this building. Here one could discover one's future or fortune in a multitude of ways. Cape Town's New Age scene had fraudsters and serious spiritual seekers, and often the two met.

Whatever the case, those who were wealthiest – people like Lucille, Marie, Donna, and Oliver, whom I will describe later in this chapter – were often also at the top of the spiritual hierarchies. They could afford to organize the important rituals in their homes and gardens, and entertain guests. They were automatically at the centre of attention, both spiritually and socially.

The centrality of money was also reflected in the way the idea of obtaining wealth, and the ensuing success, spiritual continuity, and economic security, was an integral part of the individual neopagan's ritual practice. In July 2005, I met Marie, a bright and impressive Afrikaans career woman in her early forties. She was an Asatruan who followed the ancient Norse gods and goddesses. She specifically identified with the path of Odin, the god of war, death, and wisdom, and Freyja, the warrior goddess of love. She was deeply involved in both her faith and her personal enrichment, firmly believed in both, and saw them as complementary growing processes.

Her house in a suburb near the Atlantic coastline was hard to locate in a dark labyrinth of new streets. Her home was cozy and pleasant, with three small rooms and a tiny, moonlit garden. Marie, like my other research interlocutors, described her home as sacred. "This is my home, but also an investment. I am positive the value of this area will go up," she explained. In the adjoining garage, there was a new, gleaming sports car, which she also described to me as a sacred, magical chariot. "This is my treat," she sighed happily. "I had to get it, even if I still have no idea whether I can afford it." In order to ensure that she could, Marie conducted rituals that would speed her towards increasing prosperity.

In fact, she was planning a large ritual to ensure this. It would be conducted at the new moon at friends' house in a seaside town some 100 kilometres distant. The ritual would be a rather basic one, and at the heart of the ritual was the planting of seeds mixed with herbs to ensure abundance. In the coming months, while watching these seeds develop into plants, the ritual's participants would also observe the growth of their earthly success.

The middle-class fears of a fall in class, and of crime, were addressed in the complex sets of meanings owners attached to their cars and homes: they were sacred investments protected by magic. These protections began at the front gate, which could be adorned with charms. Such a home often had an altar, an important focus of religious practice. Flowers, stones,

candles, or small statues and photographs were put on or near the altar, and the burning of incense was popular. Gardens could contain sacred spaces, trees, or plants that their owner regarded as sacred or even magically protective.

These sacred places were united in that they contained sacred objects that were also at the centre of ritual magic: an *atame* (a ritual dagger), a piece of material for the altar, and a book on Wicca found in the local mall or ordered online. The places of purchase and the places of sacredness, the malls and the altars, were woven into one another. The acts of shopping and consuming also became constant quests for potential sacred objects, rituals in themselves, and charged with magical powers. Spending money on magical artefacts would protect these sacred investments, and the owner's wealth. Then there were also those who wanted to make a living from their religious activities. Oliver and Donna combined their missions of religious mediation and earning money.

Oliver

My interest in white peoples' non-Christian activities had begun during my fieldwork in Ruyterwacht with Oom Koos, and was fueled by Stellenbosch Afrikaners' reactions, but it took my encounter at the bookshop, where I had unintentionally frightened a young clerk, to transform my interest into a study of pagans. In early July 2005, I started the fieldwork for my research into neopagans at a mall in a northern Afrikaans suburb of Cape Town. That was where I had agreed to meet Oliver,¹¹ a 43-year-old salesman and a practising neopagan from this upmarket suburb, whose life was a textbook example of the New Age movement's spiritual appropriation of and material connection with Calvinism. His case is one side of neopaganism in Cape Town.

Oliver's prominent tattoos and slightly tattered hoodie did not reveal his wealth, but his expensive car did. We drove the winding suburban roads to his brand new, stylishly furnished house next to a vineyard. His wife – a beautiful, quiet younger woman who tended to their baby – made us tea in their kitchen, perfect with its country style unfinished wooden table and a chrome Alessi teapot. Oliver seemed to be doing well for himself.

After tea and rusks, Oliver drove us to a grassy hill in the neighbourhood. He showed me an empty plot surrounded by barbed wire – privately owned land earmarked for development – where he often went. We wriggled through the fence and walked a few hundred metres to the top of the green hill. As soon as we were hidden from view, he put down his blanket and started a ritual. To my astonishment, he whipped out a longish pipe, the type you see in the windows of “head shops” (shops which sell paraphernalia for the use of cannabis, where he had in all likelihood bought it) and that Native American chiefs are shown holding in Western movies. It was decorated with feathers and elaborate carvings.

I was suddenly confused about the potentially threatening turn our meeting had taken – I felt a touch of paranoia and had a brief vision of being compelled to take mind-altering drugs with a stranger in a remote space where no one could hear me scream. Before the rising paranoia gripped me completely, he took out a small bag and started packing herbs – which turned out to be completely safe and legal *imphepho*¹² leaves – into his pipe, and lit it. I discovered that Oliver was following Native American deities and that what followed was an appropriated ritual of what he believed they did.

Under the azure blue African winter sky, with the smoking pipe in his hand, he started chanting the words of what he later told me was a Native American greeting and purifying ceremony. As the two of us relaxed, puffing away, he recited a story of how the first people were made during an encounter between the gods, and how they became the different peoples of the earth. The grassy green hills became the prairies, and we were the only two people left on earth – a childhood fantasy effortlessly evoked. It was surprisingly easy to forget that we were on a piece of development land in a northern suburb of Cape Town. It all felt detached from the surrounding reality of a hectic, unequal, and tense city.¹³

Oliver was not the kind of person with whom I would normally have bonded. But there, on a green hill in Durbanville that did not feel like Africa at all, I felt a sense of affinity with him, and a strong sense of belonging and homecoming. His friendly and welcoming ritual, conceived in the realm of a global religious scene with an intense nostalgia for distant people and places, moved me.

Time and again I felt this longing, the reach for the utopian and the hyperreal, the mediation between the unknown global and the familiar local, in the ritual practices of Cape Town's neopagans. These rituals were firmly anchored in the moral universe of white people, and so was Oliver. Despite his unusual beliefs and bohemian looks, he was a kind-hearted, moral pillar of his community: a family man who claimed to have solid values and had a successful business. He was, like so many other middle-class whites, looking for his place and identity in a changing social situation.¹⁴ Later on, as I followed his work, he continued to enter new areas, and to change interests: he studied Buddhism and different varieties of shamanism, among other things, setting aside the Native American elements of his practice.

The way he was building his identity was interesting in itself, because postcolonial identity politics can be seen as all-encompassing, since “difference is also vested, increasingly, in gender, sexuality, generation, race, religion, lifestyle, and social class” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003: 455). For Oliver, this identity building did not include what I was hoping to find: evidence of movements across social and racial boundaries – quite the opposite.

His life was cocooned in the luxury of his home, in the happiness of his family life, and in the fantasy, adventure, and mystery of his spiritual

practices. A fascinating world of cultural loans was at his disposal, and he wanted to reflect on them in his ritual practices and daily life. He planned, for example, to put up a teepee in his yard, where he could occasionally spend time away from family life, reading his books and meditating.

Oliver's privileged lifestyle had very few connections with the country's contemporary realities, or with those identifying themselves as other than "white". He reminded me of many people I met in the neopagan scene: from an Afrikaans background, but always speaking English, and not mentioning their ethnic origins. Oliver had said nothing about being Afrikaner, or even about being in Africa, just showed me teepees and prairies.

He also carried out rituals and gave speeches from time to time, organizing rituals for paying participants. He did not support his entire lifestyle with this income, but like many others, he tried hard. He never asked me for money, and I thanked him profusely for his generous welcome.

Donna

The Wiccan priestess Donna "Darkwolf" Vos was one of the wealthy neopagans, who had allocated her personal property and time almost boundlessly to the practice of Wicca. It was impossible to move in neopagan circles in Cape Town in 2005 without constantly encountering the name of this high priestess from the northern, Afrikaans suburbs of Durbanville. She seemed to be everywhere, knew everyone, and was known by everyone. While Wiccans claimed to be anti-hierarchical, Donna was nevertheless a leader with a special position.

Donna was an Afrikaner with no qualms about it. She was outspoken, and as direct as they come. In the *volkskapitalisme* years of apartheid, my white middle-class informants had received the best of everything, and this was also the case with Donna, who was born in 1962. These informants had never known real competition for university acceptance or jobs and had never experienced housing insecurity. Materially, they had always had what they needed, but they also knew suffering, and many of them felt imprisoned by the apartheid system. However, their suffering was cushioned by sunshine, swimming pools, barbecues, social relaxation, housing benefits, and retirement packages.

Donna came across as someone who had been brought up to be a quintessential South African *madam*, a white lady of the house, responsible for overseeing black servants. Her outlet was religion. As a young woman, she had signed up for a course at a college of religion, and later studied theology. However, her search for spiritual experiences and communion with a higher being was not satisfied within the limited Calvinist Christianity available to middle-class white Afrikaners.

She ran her own coven – a witch group or community – the Circle of the African Moon, for 15 years. She started doing this from the house she shared with her husband and, after their divorce, from her house in

Durbanville, a suburb behind the “*boerewors* curtain”. Her house was a startling place, completely devoted to her faith. I visited her home-based temple on several memorable occasions. It boasted a big pentagram on the living room floor and traces of magical practices all over the house and garden: altars, statues, other mysterious decorations, and copies of Waterhouse’s dramatic pre-Raphaelite paintings.

An energetic figure driven by an all-consuming sense of purpose, Donna was one of the central initiators of the Wiccan scene in Cape Town. During the apartheid era, neopagan faiths were hardly ever practised in the country, but in 1996, Donna was among the founders of the first neopagan association in the country, the Pagan Federation of South Africa. A striking and disputed public character, she represented South African Wiccans on many occasions. She was often interviewed and wrote a book, *Dancing under an African Moon*, on Wicca in South Africa (Vos 2002). She also played a central part in establishing the South African Pagan Rights Association (SAPRA).

Donna worked for pagan rights for almost two decades. Despite being marginalized by her beliefs, and at times feared for her personality, there was a great measure of *ordentlikheid* in her. She was a person with her own moral principles, who did not shy away from making moral statements. She was a pragmatic who was never shy of hiring a lawyer if she felt that pagan rights were threatened. She took on legal proceedings, influencing the equal marriage act, among other matters. She also sued the South African Air Force for first hiring her as a chaplain and then dismissing her when they discovered that she was Wiccan.¹⁵

Donna was not only extremely courageous in tackling challenges but had a striking personal style. Even her looks fit her occult role: a beauty with dark flowing hair, almond-shaped eyes, and impressive features. She was often seen wearing robes and dramatic jewelry that could only add to the witchlike impression. She wrote, self-ironically, “It is not enough only to be a Cher lookalike, but one needs hard work and study to be able to carry out the Wiccan rituals” (Vos 2002: 25). She was occasionally unstable, getting into trouble easily, and was known to have sometimes been involved in bar fights. She donned her pentagram openly,¹⁶ had a wicked sense of humour, and a straightforward, at times abrasive manner – traits that earned her both friends and enemies. Donna’s hardness could also be seen as a moral stance. She devoted her whole life to her religious project and expected no less from the others.

Materially, there were several changes and turns in her life. She was initially wealthy, and opened a witch school in Johannesburg in 2009 for aspiring Wiccans, investing her own funds in it. It turned out to be unviable and she returned to Cape Town. Donna never made much money with her practice; her funds, she told me, came from “having divorced successfully,” but I witnessed her struggles after the unsuccessful stint in Johannesburg. After that, little altars dedicated to money magic appeared in her house,

which she sold soon after her return. Her importance in the pagan scene deteriorated along with her wealth and health. In May 2012, Donna withdrew from her public role as the high priestess of her coven. On her retirement, and having given up her house/temple, she moved to another part of town to start over. In an open letter to the pagan community, she proclaimed:

... Darkwolf is resuming NOT retiring; reinventing – NOT retreating, other leaders have been created or found their way into leadership positions. they will dance to the tune of their own vision.¹⁷

This letter also marked the end of her career as the most remarkable Wiccan high priestess that had ever reigned in South Africa. From her friends, I heard how she had gradually and pragmatically handed away her responsibilities as a pagan leader, as well as some of her key magical objects to those she had chosen to be her followers. In July 2017, the Cape Town neopagan community was stunned to hear that Donna had died at the age of 55.¹⁸

Her path, while unique, also held many elements representative of Afrikaner neopagans' activities, hopes, and fears: like so many others, she had left the NGK behind, and done her best to teach her new faith. She had once been well-off, but in the end, as her changing housing situation showed, she had suffered a financial downfall, and was forced to move from the wealth and privilege of an upper middle-class house to a very middle-class suburban house, ultimately even downgrading that to a flat in town. She had mediated across all the boundaries she possibly could and had worked hard to make the general public aware of paganism.

Towards the end of the second decade of the 21st century, there were newcomers to the pagan field. The previously imperceptible rift in the pagan communities had become visible – these newcomers were not interested in supporting the racial politics of the democratically chosen dispensation, but instead mediated the racist ideologies of the global far right and harboured a belief in the *Boerevolk's* sacredness.

Regardless of their politics, the same questions remained to be dealt with in neopagan communities: where should the social, moral, and religious boundaries be drawn in the post-apartheid era, and how was the new South Africa to be mediated in these communities (if at all)? In the second half of this chapter, I examine these questions through acts of mediation. With a particular interest in spatial phenomena, my analysis will flesh out how the practices regarding the boundaries of these religious communities have been renegotiated and reconfigured through ritual mediations, moral values, and racial relationships.

The practice of movement was central for these rituals, which mediated – re-establishing, closing, or opening – moral boundaries and followed certain fault lines of exclusion from and inclusion in private and public spaces. Examining these spaces speaks volumes about the internal ordering of

these moral communities, their external boundaries, and the ways these were mediated. I will argue that these religious mediations indicated and reflected the processes of change in South African society's racial climate and ethnic politics on a more general level, as well as in the spread of the global far-right ideologies.

In the following pages, I thus examine practices, narratives, and movements in and around the neopagan moral communities through their activities, and especially their rituals.

How to establish a moral pagan community

Lucille's home in the suburb of Table View was new, large, and welcoming. There I met the members of Witches Unite, the Wiccan coven she led. I stepped through a hallway decorated with a charmingly lit miniature model of the castle of Avalon. Artificial fog drifted on the surface of the tiny lake surrounding the castle – produced by a hidden machine. I stopped to stare at it, before continuing to a lounge, where there was a bar featuring the ubiquitous high stools and a counter stocked with various interesting boxes and bottles. The whole bar area was cluttered with witchy paraphernalia. A pinball machine decorated a corner of this entertainment room (I soon discovered that it worked), a fire crackled in the hearth, and the doors opened to a patio with a winter-empty Jacuzzi. It was easy to understand why the coven liked to meet there. I found Lucille a skilled entertainer and a delightful person, and her house was just as charming.

The coven gathered in the bar room – a dozen people sipping drinks and having a lively conversation. They turned out to be a warm and pleasant bunch: fun, thoughtful, and likeable. Many of them had found Wicca and one another via the Internet, although the original founders of the group had met at Donna's basic course on Wicca and started their own coven, having found Donna's ways of practising magic morally dubious and harmful. "She wanted us to learn to hurt our enemies," they told me.

Lucille was the leader of the group. She had earned a number of Wiccan degrees via an online witch school, as had some of the other members. They found there everything required for a complete education as a Wiccan witch, even rituals and incantations. Once they had finalized their education, they ordered the robes and badges showing the degrees they had earned. The group was open to and included straight and gay people, black and white people, men and women, but mainly comprised white women, and the idea of emancipation through faith was a theme I often heard in their discussions. Their moral statement presented their open-mindedness, their sense of community, and their *ordentlike* personhood, which was underlined in the group's ethos. These people were out to do good things and be good people, and that was also how they saw themselves.

After chatting for a while, I was invited to join the Imbolc ritual, which celebrated the arrival of the first signs of spring and light. Imbolc is one

of eight Wiccan seasonal festivals, appropriated from the four Celtic festivals and the two solstices and equinoxes. In the southern hemisphere, early August was a perfect time for the ritual that the Wiccans in the northern hemisphere would carry out in early February.

When there were 15 people, 12 of us white women between 16 and 54, one youngish woman identifying as “coloured”, and two white middle-aged men, in the group, we moved to the back of the house for the ritual, which was led by Lucille, dressed in flowing robes. The ritual space was a garage with tools and car parts hanging on the walls. I was surprised to see how artistically this profane space had been transformed into a makeshift temple, with patterned pieces of cloth hanging from the ceiling, multiple candles, and bowls of sand, water, and flowers.

The fluorescent light was turned off, and incense drifted through the room. Everyone entering the ritual space was smudged and then anointed, and suddenly the drills and wire-cutters on the walls no longer mattered. Again, I felt the enchantment, the touch of hyperreality, a transfer to another place and time where things were simpler, easier, and more beautiful. The violent society and its traumatic past ceased to exist; we were all sisters and brothers under African skies. We were united with one another and with all that was.

Most of the people attending the ritual were in their normal clothes, with just three wearing special garb. As we sat, stood to draw the circle, called the quarters around the flower altar, spoke, invoked deities, and participated in the ritual, I felt nostalgic, almost as if I were elsewhere. The garage felt like a haven or island out of time and in another dimension. It was the Utopia again – the same Utopia that Oliver had shown me on the hills of Durbanville.

In the ritual, *Witches Unite*, as the coven was known, emphasized their sense of responsibility for looking after the younger members of the community – there were minors present, so Lucille had changed the ritual wine to hot chocolate. Her voice faltered only slightly when she asked the gods to “bless this sacred hot chocolate,” but the other participants giggled openly. Summer was coming. This was a joyous ritual, a joyous coven.

I felt a real sense of loss when the circle was closed, the ritual ended, the candles snuffed out, the flowers taken away, and the space stripped back to a garage. The Utopia was gone, and all that was left was an ordinary suburban garage where the tools hung in their places, which someone had marked with carefully drawn shapes on the walls with a black felt marker. I stared at them, suddenly feeling very devoid of substance, empty, like those outlines without tools. I wanted to go back to that friendly and magical place, instead of knowing that I would soon have to step into my car and drive off into the Cape Town night, well aware that it was hardly a wise or safe thing to do: a few evenings prior to this ritual, someone had thrown a big stone at my windshield when I had been driving to another interview, and the fright was still raw.

Afterwards, there was a riotously funny drinking and karaoke party in the bar room, which I was told lasted until 4 a.m. the next morning. On the whole, Witches Unite was a coven of pleasant, fun-loving people who emphasized their responsible stance toward their community, environment, animals, and children. The group openly represented a local white middle-class lifestyle and ideals, and acted from this vantage point, but they kept their doors open to people who did not conform to all the ideals of whiteness. They had no problems with those who were gay, single parents, or people of colour, and snap judgements about people were avoided. Inclusiveness was an ideology for them.

People have said that they have met different kinds of groups, but they have never met a group like us before, because we accepted them with open arms. We never judge their skin colour, we never judge who they are, where they are from, the way they have been judged before.

(Lucille, Witches Unite)

Despite a certain level of inclusiveness, everyone I met seemed to represent similar values, and in this sense the group represented inclusivity in a manner that Caroline Besteman described as typical of the South African middle-class – social life was formed around closed, like-minded friendship circles, whose members shared the same values (Besteman 2008).

The boundaries were drawn with regard to opinions, behaviour, and habitus; the lines were therefore not completely open, just much wider than those of the mainstream society. Differences were not frowned upon, but Lucille did not include just anyone. She told me that they were so busy and popular that they simply could not accommodate everyone who wanted to join. A moral code of proper “white” behaviour, although not clearly articulated, still existed. The space where the Witches Unite rituals were organized was private; the coven screened its members, and not only after their first contact, when those deemed unsuitable were not even invited in. The public visibility of Witches Unite drew many people who wanted to join.

We got some very funny people. There was a huge interest; we had the weirdest people coming in, so we have to monitor very carefully.

(Lucille, Witches Unite)

I came to understand that “funny” could mean serious mental or behavioural problems, behaviour that could even endanger the members, or just a general inability to adapt to the group. I noticed that people were well received and welcomed, but that some also vanished after a while. In discussions on who was suitable, the issue of English and Afrikaans ethnicity was never discussed. In fact, the overall silence about Afrikaners and *Afrikanerdom* among neopagans was deafening. I would hear people proclaiming that they were coloured or black, but not once did I hear anyone

say they were Afrikaans – except Donna, who made no secret of it. I am guessing that being openly an Afrikaner did not improve her image in the Cape Town pagan circles.

Witches Unite was thus a predominantly “white”, English-speaking coven which also accepted people of colour. It had its own ethos and kept its own moral boundaries – and watched over them. Lars Buur and Steffen Jensen, who have carried out research in Cape Town’s coloured communities, point out that this is, indeed, a sign of a moral community (Buur and Jensen 2004: 146). Simultaneously, the coven also pushed and mediated the moral boundaries of whiteness. *Afrikanerdom* was almost invisible in this context, as if it did not really fit into the picture. One member lived in an Afrikaans community, which made her watch her behaviour and what she wore, and everyone agreed that she would not have been accepted there as a Wiccan in 2005 – it was wiser to remain in the “broom closet”. The only person named and presented to me as morally suspect was the very Afrikaans and public Donna – the Witches Unite members told me that she had wanted to teach them how to use dark magic against their enemies. They clearly feared her – but then, many neopagans I met were afraid of her and her perceived occult powers. I found her sharp tongue the scariest part of her, although I was never at the receiving end of any of her famous tongue-lashings.

The coven’s public appearances, its availability to the media, as well as its moral code, established new ways of being white but not Christian, and carrying out new kinds of rituals that pushed the boundaries of the satanic for many white South Africans. Despite the suspicions of the surrounding society, the coven comprised respectable, middle-class pagans with successful professional and personal lives. Their way of living their faith was integrated into their identity as good whites, sanitized of *Afrikanerdom*’s historical weight and the racism it represented for many people. The coven’s moral stance avoided a subversive disposition that marginalized people and stigmatized them, which being too abrasive and too Afrikaans, like Donna, might have done.

This moral community, which was formed after a religious rupture, drew its fault lines and hierarchies in keeping with its members’ economic capital. It feared economic downfall, mediated new social values, obscured the boundaries between Afrikaners and English, and emphasized their whiteness rather than their Africanness.

The neopagan groups did not only mediate their middle-class respectability, or their own moral boundaries in the private spaces, but they frequently also told me about their activities, their desire to have a voice and to be part of the ongoing social change and public discussions. The Habermasian ideas of the public sphere as a public space are useful when describing their activities (Habermas 1962; see Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009). Habermas – along with a number of French sociologists¹⁹ – saw this space as a metaphorical space for public debate, which civil society

and participatory citizenship would most notably exemplify. Keen to make their mark, the neopagans wanted to make themselves known in society's public sphere for what they were, to mediate religious tolerance and their faith, and to be acceptable and known in South Africa – a religious community with a recognized place in the country.

Neopagans mediating the social public sphere

There were considerable limitations to neopagan participation in the public sphere. The neopagans were mainly middle-class white people who were used to being afraid of crime, and who exhibited what sometimes seemed like a lack of understanding of the realities facing the majority of their financially less-privileged countrymen, with some rejecting these realities, or even their existence. Simultaneously, many of the global neopagan ideals they subscribed to were utopian, egalitarian, and inclusive – quite the opposite of the segregated realities of the surrounding society. As shown, this longing for a utopia was reflected in the rituals performed by Oliver and Witches United, but the country's poverty, deprivation, and crime left scant space for inclusive utopias where people from all walks of life could come together. The surrounding social realities also defined the sphere of the sacred.

To be a part of neopagan activities, one needed certain economic and cultural capital: there were books to buy and read, badges to order from the Internet, snacks to provide, and rituals to attend. There was no public transport that the white people considered suitable for themselves – one needed a private car to be an active pagan in Cape Town. Driving around at night was also risky, which made protecting one's car with magic commonplace and understandable. Without sufficient resources, it was almost impossible to belong to the pagan scene.

Finding suitable spheres for public activity, such as public spaces for rituals, was especially problematic. The soaring crime rate meant that public spaces were not considered safe for nature-oriented religions. Lucille's ritual was in a garage for a reason. Donna mentioned rather bluntly:

Many people will tell you they love forests. Forests are dangerous. Very dangerous. Tokai Forest, as romantic as it sounds, is dangerous. The beaches are dangerous. [...] And I am very serious about this. If you are going to have public rituals... you are risking the people who trust you.

Consequently, a sense of urban crisis characterized ritual activities, compelling them to be carried out in private homes, instead of in one of the many attractive natural settings that Cape Town has in such abundance. It also meant a level of exclusiveness, and that the transformative power of the rituals could seldom be brought into the public view, although there were a number of neopagans who were happy to discuss their beliefs in the media.

Closing and opening the boundaries of social public sphere

The neopagans expressed a complex continuum of emotions and ideas about racial boundaries in their practices. Guilt, fear, and feelings of disconnectedness from the surrounding landscapes contributed a specific flavour to white neopagans' magical practices. This is how Lisa described her astral travel – a visualization during a trance experience:

I have started exploring the astral Cape Town, and I must say we European people are not very welcome here. We are not welcome here at all.

(Lisa 2005)

While white people doubted their ability to fit into traditional African faith systems, they also doubted black South Africans' suitability to be Wiccans. Some gave lengthy explanations for having no African members in their groups, or for their lack of contact with black African areas. One coven leader explained how it "seems impossible for black people to learn how to visualize." This dubious-sounding justification for not including black people was presented to me as a major challenge, for, as Tanya Luhrmann in her study of neopagan witchcraft has explained, visualization is, in addition to meditation, an essential skill, which will guide the magical practitioner towards mystical states and experiences (Luhrmann 1991: 180–187). To me, it sounded like one of those prejudiced explanations about "what black people cannot do" that I constantly heard from white South Africans.

Nevertheless, in addition to practising their craft, neopagans also expressed the need to have a legitimate social existence, and to get along with others as just another multicultural, post-apartheid religious grouping, of which Cape Town had many. Some neopagans simply said that they were in no way interested in mediating across racial boundaries.

Closing: pagans and Afrikaner ethnopolitics

Mark was adamant about maintaining apartheid's racial boundaries. Living in the southern suburbs or, as he called it, "the Deep South", he was a leading character in the small group of Asatruans in Cape Town. He followed the ancient Norse gods and goddesses, specifically identifying with the path of Odin. A teacher by profession, Mark gave an impression of being gentle and mild-mannered, but was, in fact, a martial arts expert. His living room was adorned with massive *katanas* (Japanese swords) that he valued greatly. I liked him instantly, although at times I was quite taken aback by his racist statements, which he linked to his faith. For example, he believed in everyone worshipping only their own ancestral gods – the gods of their genetic ancestors, that is. Mark could trace all his ancestors to Europe, especially to Scandinavian countries, which he used to justify

his faith in Scandinavian gods. “Blacks should only worship their own gods and ancestors,” he said. I asked him what he thought of white Afrikaners, as many of them also had African ancestry. Who could they worship? “That’s a problem,” he admitted. “They should first come to terms with it.” Mark’s thinking fitted in perfectly with the principles of racist thinking, which dictates that the biological heritage of individuals is unchangeable and defines their fate. From this racist and essentialist view, it followed that the only logical way to relate to racial and social boundaries was to close them and dismiss any mediation across them as a waste of time.²⁰

Every fortnight, Mark organized a ritual in his garden, which consisted mainly of a circle of stones with ancient Norse runes drawn on them. The circle was a sacred space and the stones bounded the rituals. Mark told me that everything of importance happened in the circle, never outside of it. What was spoken in the circle was not to leave it, and it was the space of complete truthfulness. This was where the rituals became truly powerful. The rituals carried out within the circle served many ends, of which protecting homes, people, and belongings was among the most important.

Different parts of the house, such as the front door, could also be the focus of protection rituals. For example, Marie, a member of Mark’s circle, had protected her home, her person, and her new car with rune stones and associated spells. Mark also had protection in place: instead of his house having the usual motion sensor alarm and electric fence, he had placed a hammer of Thor on his windowsill. Mark had turned his back on the rest of Cape Town and its complex and mixed social realities, and he left the country a few years later (Calico 2013). I met Mark and Marie in 2005, and could no longer reach their group after Mark left the country, but new groups popped up after them.

South African Asatruans became increasingly open about their racial agenda over the years. After I lost contact with Mark’s group, I found a new Asatruan group for my follow-up fieldwork in 2019. By then, some local Asatruans had already found their way to and were supported by an international umbrella organization, the Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA).²¹ The openly segregationist AFA had established a branch, called a *volkswachstum*, for the small group of Afrikaner neopagans. Their leader, Kobus, strongly emphasized ethnicity and they preferred to be called “*Boere*” rather than Afrikaners and “heathens” instead of pagans (Weber 2018). Their logo presents the word *kulturkampf*, a term emanating from late 19th-century Germany and referring to the battle between the German Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, also used to describe battles against the Catholic Church in general. The national socialists of the Third Reich appropriated the term to describe the Nazi war against Christian resistance (Bonney 2009).

The activities of this small new group of Asatruans reflected a renewed union between religion and the increasingly open support for racial segregation. The interest in racist, ethnopolitical neopaganism in the country

showed that racial and ethnic boundaries and racism had become an increasingly deeply divisive issue within the neopagan community. However, the Asatruans have yet to organize any public events such as the one Donna and Lucille facilitated in 2010. This major public ritual was a rare joint endeavour between neopagans and Wiccan covens, which made considerable efforts to go out and relate, belong, and mediate.

Opening: public handfasting ritual at the Beltaine Festival 2010

Lucille stood in front of me with Green Point Stadium gleaming behind her in the October sunlight. The 2010 FIFA World Cup had been over for months and the world was looking elsewhere. However, this Saturday, Cape Town's pagans were focussed on this place or, more precisely, next door on the grounds of Hamilton's Rugby Football Club, where the big public Beltaine Festival was taking place.

Lucille looked impressive in white robes and cool sunglasses, with a blue stole around her neck. The stole was decorated with colourful Correllian Wiccan sigils or symbols indicating her rank (they can be bought online once a Wiccan degree has been successfully completed). She looked rather tired behind her black shades, but greeted me and began preparing for her ceremonial role in the upcoming ritual. I sat down on the blanket on the grass with the Witches Unite members, and Donna followed the proceedings from her stall at the side of the ritual space.

I was later told that having all the clans together was important. The organizer, a pagan with no affiliation to any of the reigning clans – avoiding the easily flammable tensions between the different Wiccan groupings – had facilitated this gathering.

Cape Town's southeasterly wind was the only uninvited guest at this open event, which consisted of inspirational talks, drumming lessons for children, art, fires, music, dance, and, most importantly, the first ever mass pagan wedding (called a handfasting) in South Africa. Numerous stalls sold New Age paraphernalia, handicrafts, jewelry, knick-knacks, snacks, tattoos, and various treatments. Different Cape Town pagan groupings had stalls and there were dozens of people in flowing violet, black, and white clothes. Amid the dogs, kids, and bagpipe players, there was dancing around a maypole, a popular feature in pagan rituals, accompanied by Celtic music.

The Western Cape pagans had left their garages, home temples, and moonlit gardens to come to the heart of the city. In their robes, magical decorations, and other paraphernalia, they seemed slightly out of place on the vast space of the rugby field. What had looked enchanting during candlelit nocturnal rituals in small rooms did not quite achieve that effect here. I realized that it must have taken a great deal of determination to organize this public event in the city bowl on a small budget, not to mention the courage that the organizing of a public handfasting demanded.

Handfasting is a neopagan commitment ceremony, a wedding, or a love ceremony, depending on the participants' intentions. This one was carried out by several priests and priestesses from Cape Town covens. The ceremony began with men and women, led by musicians playing drums and pipes, approaching a circle in two separate lines; the circle was then ceremonially closed. This time, there were only heterosexual couples, although neopagans had done handfastings for same-sex couples as well.

The participants were anointed, smudged with sacred smoke, and sat down in the middle of the circle. Seven couples huddled together while the priests and priestesses continued the ceremony, which involved tying their hands with ribbons and giving them blessings and sacred wine to drink. Finally, all the participants jumped over a broom, and the circle was ceremonially opened again.

The ritual was emotional, but not half as impressive as Lucille's garage ritual or Oliver's welcoming ritual, although its openness and sincerity were moving. Anyone could attend, and there was not much left of the numinous, utopian fascination I had experienced in the more private rituals. Daylight revealed the mystical priests and priestesses as they were: offbeat, perhaps a bit bizarre in their black polyester robes. The Wiccans had come to the city's public social space to build connections between their different clans, to show themselves as they were, to assert their right to the city as a religious grouping, and to mediate their ideals of family, marriage, and religion in Cape Town's public spaces.

The position of neopagans was a precarious one, and they constantly negotiated and mediated the boundaries between socially acceptable and offensive, spiritual and demonic, dangerous and safe. There was one boundary that they would never cross, though. Early on it had become clear that they would never worship African deities. Their gods came from India, from Celtic traditions, and from Scandinavian Asatru. This was how far their mediations could reach – anywhere but sub-Saharan Africa (Egyptian gods still seemed to be safe) (Teppo 2009).

Their difficulty with relating to African traditions, and their refusal to cross that boundary, also had other manifestations. Donna and some others told me that they felt that they had been called to *thwasa*, to begin training to become *sangomas*, traditional African healers, but that they were too afraid to heed that calling. They could not and did not want to go there, they told me, time and again. African spiritual beliefs and rituals and the ensuing animal sacrifices and witchcraft beliefs horrified these Wiccans; such things were simply too far out of their comfort zone to embrace. The boundary of public space was there to secure white middle-class spaces, and crossing that boundary would have meant going to African townships, which most white people were taught to avoid. It would have meant leaving their safe middle-class life behind and getting tangibly, unavoidably, involved in the most burning social issues of the

racially divided country. This would have meant not only abandoning the beautiful utopias created in Wiccan rituals, but also being present in areas most of which were desperately poor and downright dangerous – real dystopias.

Mediating global neopaganism

I return to Witches Unite. The day after the garage ritual, we had lunch in a restaurant in Camps Bay. Lucille was drained and hung over, and admitted that running a coven tapped her energy. Nevertheless, she became excited when talking about their study groups, which received most of their material and ideas online, as did many neopagans around the globe.²² This was a supremely important space for them. It was also easy for these groups to look for identification outside the country: relatively wealthy white people spoke good English and lived on the winning side of the digital divide, which meant they had computers and access to the Internet, expensive commodities in the latter half of the 1990s.

As mentioned previously, Lucille and other Correllian priestesses ordered the flamboyant badges for their stoles on the Internet. Like many other local pagans, Lucille liked belonging to global neopagan communities, who constituted the primary source of theology for her coven. She wore the same robes and symbols, and chanted the same chants, as Correllian Wiccans all over the world. This uniform materiality mediated their faith, bound them together, and served as a point of reference.²³

Regardless of this constant access to the global faith community, and their inheritance of racial segregation, the recurring issue of Wiccans' unwillingness to follow African deities or traditions complicated matters.

Donna had travelled widely and found it difficult to fit her cultural background and her postcolonial identity as a white Afrikaner into the global Wiccan community. "It was very hard... they were very welcoming overseas, but sometimes they wanted me to tell 'African' tales and talk about 'African' magic. It was hard to relate to that. I do not think I know too much of that either." The irony was easy to appreciate.

The Asatruan heathens, who aimed to reconstruct the old Scandinavian religions as a tool for racism and nation building, also found online resources. A number of global online communities are dedicated to spreading fascist and far right wing ideas, which have spread across the northern hemisphere during the first two decades of the new millennium. According to these ideas, only "Aryans", people of Northern European and Germanic heritage, may follow Norse or Germanic gods (Weber 2018). Consequently, both those promoting multiculturalism and working against racism and racial boundaries, and those looking to establish them, have found and operationalized online resources.

The global faiths had found their glocal expressions in the connections that the neopagans mediated between themselves and the global online

communities. These expressions were strongly biased by South African histories of whiteness, “white” religious practices, and racial segregation. They were also reflected in the inclusions in and exclusions from the communities. Mediating the racist ideologies of global communities was much easier than bringing in ideas of the equality of all faiths and gods to neopagan practices. The Asatruans of the *Volkswachstum* could follow the guidelines of their racist umbrella organization with no apparent contradictions. But following African deities or relating to local traditional practices seemed hard for Wiccans, if not impossible.

A second, complementary perspective on the social public sphere is required in order to understand pagans’ public sphere activities in the juridical and political sphere, and to further examine the practices of neopagans’ mediation and their acts of inclusion and exclusion.

The pursuit of legitimacy in the juridical and political public spheres

Throughout my fieldwork, the country’s neopagan community sought legitimacy from outside their own circles or outside their neighbourhoods, from the political and juridical spheres of their local societies. This task was facilitated by the media’s fervent interest in the neopagans, and they did not shy away from it. In the public sphere, the neopagan leaders were unafraid of the (Satanic) stigma so easily attached to the country’s non-Christian religions (Falkof 2015).

Lucille had lent her face to the media a number of times – just as Donna Darkwolf had during her active years. They visited schools and fairs to talk about their faith, and were always keen to discuss it with the general public in other ways as well. Donna had written a book, *Dancing under the African Moon*, on Wicca and neopaganism in South Africa (2002), the only complete account of its kind to date. Damon Leff has been very public in his Internet writings, wanting, among other things, to legitimize the Wiccan use of the word “witch”, while strongly opposing racist forms of neopaganism in his writings.²⁴

In this pursuit of legitimacy, white Wiccans practising their magic were always acutely aware of what the “others” (black people) were doing. Wiccan magic was constantly discussed against the larger frame of reference of traditional African healing, and the associated practices and beliefs. There might have been individual contacts, but the neopagans did not, to my knowledge, carry out any joint rituals with traditional healers. Whether these practices were called magic, religion, or had healing or spiritual value, they were mostly avoided and even feared.

On closer inspection, the neopagan’s relationship with the local and traditional practices was ambivalent and complicated. While African beliefs and practices were not followed, nevertheless, having a black person – who did not need to be a spiritual expert – acknowledge one’s spiritual

competence as a *sangoma* or herbalist was considered a great honour, a guarantee of legitimacy. While there was fear and rejection of traditional African practices, neopagans also sought legitimation from them. Just like the Afrikaners I described in [Chapter 3](#) on silences about religious crossovers, who had regarded indigenous practices as the devil's work, and who called traditional African herbal *muthi* "medicines", I never encountered any doubt about Africans' spiritual legitimacy – just apprehension mingled with respect towards it.

This equivocal relationship presented itself when a Wiccan priestess told me that she made herbal pouches and remedies, and that she had given some to the black woman who cleaned her house. She was proud and happy when she told me of the woman's respectful response, which legitimized her spiritual competence. From the look of others around her, I concluded that they had heard this anecdote a few times.

She said (mimicking an astonished and respectful tone of voice and an African accent) Madam has her own, strong *muthi* [traditional healing herbs or medicines]. Madam has her own *muthi*.

Amidst these complications, the judicial system provided more clear-cut ways to legitimize new religious practices.

Juridical and political paganism

By allowing all religions and also making traditional African religions equal before the law, the new constitution created space for the legitimization of traditional African beliefs, which were disparaged during the apartheid era. This made practising traditional religion a hot political topic, and a part of identity politics. These days, praise singers and *sangomas* are found in many respected African politicians' public and private employ: they open ceremonies and also provide personal advice. Since the new legislation also made room for New Religious Movements, Wiccans were not far behind in their search for political and juridical legitimacy, establishing a number of organizations, such as the Pagan Federation of South Africa (PFSA, established 1996), the South African Pagan Rights Alliance (SAPRA, est. 2004), the Circle of the African Moon (CAM, est. 2001), and the South African Pagan Council (SAPC, est. 2006).

In 2007, a meeting of 62 pagans from different covens and organizations in Johannesburg produced a public statement, the Melville Mandate. This mandate aimed to influence outdated local legislation on witchcraft, especially the 1957 Witchcraft Suppression Act (Act 3 of 1957, amended by Act 50 of 1970). It does not define witchcraft, but determines that any person who professes to use "any supernatural power, or witchcraft, or professes knowledge of witchcraft or the use of charms, or for gain exercises any supernatural power or witchcraft shall be guilty of a criminal

offense.” In 2007, there were plans to revise it. The pagan gathering commented on it:

South African Pagans who self-define as Witches argue that Act 3 prohibits South African citizens from practicing their religion. These citizens of the Republic of South Africa have been and are being denied their constitutional rights to religious freedom, expression, equality, liberty, dignity, security and their right to choose and practice their occupation within South Africa on the basis on an existing piece of apartheid legislation that is itself unconstitutional. With this argument in mind, the representatives elected in September 2007 have secured the legal services of Lawyers for Human Rights in order to have the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1957 revoked. We are fairly confident given the protections afforded to religious minorities in our country’s constitution that we will succeed in having said act revoked in due course.

(Leff, Fontleve and Martin 2008: 5).

The other mission of the authors of the Melville Mandate was to defend the use of the word “witch” in their activities, as their understanding of what it meant differed profoundly from that of African traditional religions (Katzke, Fontleve and Leff 2013). They made this appeal despite witchcraft-related violence leading to the deaths of several victims each year in the South African countryside, where the belief in witches is still widely prevalent. As already pointed out, redefining this hopelessly tainted word would be a hard, if not impossible, task (Niehaus 1997, 2001; Osei 2003, Comaroff and Comaroff 2004; Buur and Jensen 2004; Ashforth 2005; Petrus 2011). For most people in Africa, a “good witch” is as unthinkable as, for example, a “good paedophile.” It is almost impossible to evaluate how distressing it would be for the African majority of the population if being a witch were suddenly declared an acceptable religious choice. Wiccans nevertheless insisted on a redefinition of the term (Leff, Fontleve and Martin 2008: 58–59). However, they tied the legislative change issues to their right to practise their faith, and presented the right to call themselves witches as a human rights issue – in other words, they claimed their moral right to do so.²⁵

The amount of energy that my neopagan interviewees and other Western Cape pagan trailblazers invested in this search for legitimacy was striking. Donna, for example, worked prolifically for pagan rights, and established (or participated in the establishment of) several pagan organizations. She lobbied for a change to the Marriage Act and, as mentioned, was involved in advocacy for a review of the 1957 Witchcraft Suppression Act. She was also among the first to take advantage of Section 5 of the Civil Union Act of 2006, which gave her the right to act as a marriage officer. The SAPC was the first official pagan church to be listed on the African continent in 2006.²⁶ In 2020, there were 18 registered marriage officers on their webpage.

The Wiccans' endeavour to change the public's idea of witches as moral degenerates, by reclaiming the terminology of the recently imported faith of a privileged minority, was a tall order. From the start it seemed a battle they could never win, and they have not done so to date. Their efforts aimed to set them apart as morally superior to others, while clearly distancing them from "being in Africa" or "being Africans" in yet another way. Asking for traditional practices and words to be redefined to benefit their minority was not aimed at mediating between traditional African religion and the Wiccan newcomers, but was moral and racial politics disguised as a human rights issue.

Conclusion: being African, being neopagan

When studying neopagans' use of urban space, it became clear that their ideal of social public space is a space that is public, accessible for all, and available for different uses and practices (Joseph 1984, 1998). In post-apartheid Cape Town, this was a space of performances and even rituals. The neopagans were on stage when they inhabited these spaces, and their use of them was characterized by the remnants of segregation policies, and vast differences in wealth. Occasionally, they organized rituals in public social spaces that everyone could access.

Spatial divisions became an important way for neopagans to regulate who could belong to their communities. Their rituals and temples were not public, but were often private spaces in people's homes. Their juridical battles over the definition of the term "witch" served to alienate those following the African traditional religions, without much concern for their distress. These demands were justified by using the language of human rights, and, implicitly, by the high moral standing of the neopagans.

The ideas of morality were interwoven with their mediation processes. The most important clues to understanding these mediations were spatial. What were the important spaces and how were they used? Were they open or closed? Who was included or excluded? These moral mediations occurred: a) within the pagan communities, b) in the areas where the interactions between them and the social public sphere or the surrounding society had been negotiated, and c) in the political and juridical public spheres. Their moral ideas were particularly prevalent around three important, although at times overlapping, discursive formations that arose from the analysis, namely in whiteness and racial relations, public/spatial coexistence in the urban environment, and between the global and local ideas, beliefs, and practices of neopaganism.

First, there was the mediation of whiteness and racial relations in the communities: the neopagan groupings established (utopian) moral communities while defining their racial boundaries. Being a *moral white pagan* was often important in these definitions – *ordentlikheid* was the hard currency of these processes. Some – such as Donna – were seen as suspicious, false, or dangerous, and thus needed to be excluded. Some of my informants called these tensions within the scene *bitchcraft*.

Most neopagan groupings I met did not openly proclaim racial exclusivity the way the Asatruans did.²⁷ Regardless of the degree of racial or ethnic inclusivity, the entangled processes of establishing moral communities, as well as guarding and mediating their boundaries, were central to the formation of pagan communities. They held discussions in the public space, and their ethnic or racial inclusivity was reflected in their rituals, if not always in their members, who were mainly white. This pointed to considerable difficulties in being inclusive. Even more so, a mixed message emerged from their activities: organized pagans were promoting the idea of using the word “witch” as a human rights question, never really stopping to ponder how this would affect those who believed in witches’ dark powers.

Second, there was the need to coexist with the surrounding society. While practising an unusual religion, the neopagans still had to get along with their neighbours, follow the laws, and adapt to the surrounding urban spaces. Although the groups and practices varied widely, each group had to define its relationship with its neighbourhood and the other urban spaces it used. Some chose to act as mediators: the inclusive urban Beltaine handfasting ritual and Lucille’s enchanted garage were examples of this. Some chose exclusion, as shown by Mark’s suburban sacred circle, or the new Asatruans’ openly practised ethnic/racial segregation. They would also challenge the surrounding society by using words such as “witch” or “*kulturkampf*”, loaded with connotations.

Third, all the neopagans I met mediated global ideas and practices, but many Wiccans found the ideas of equality promoted by the progressive modern global pagan organizations a difficult fit with local ideals of moral whiteness. My fieldwork showed that, despite the rhetoric of inclusivity and equality so often prevalent in the mission statements of international neopagan organizations,²⁸ the South African neopagan religions cannot be understood separately from the hegemony and trappings of whiteness. The South African contemporary pagan religions became their own version of a New Religious Movement in a racially segregated society. Wiccans spoke for racial inclusivity but mainly only mediated unity between the white people, sweeping the ethnic discord between the English and the Afrikaners under the proverbial carpet (although suspicions remained). This seemed a particular challenge for those who came from an Afrikaans background: a few – such as Donna – emphasized their identity as Afrikaners, but many preferred not to mention it.

This was not an option for Asatruans, who found a great fit with the ideas sourced from a global community with ideas of racial segregation, and even re-defined other Afrikaners as “traitors” or “not *Boere*” – a similar division to the one that had once prevailed between Transvaal and Cape Afrikaners. Ironically, the Asatruan neopagan movement seemed to receive and obey precisely the spiritual and political guidance that their far-right Northern overlords offered.

The encounters between moral mediations and discursive formations thus produced several balancing acts. While mediating new spiritual ideas

and spatial practices, neopagans had to constantly negotiate and define their faith – among themselves, in relation to other local religions, and within their global faith communities.

The neopagans' vexed relationship with the local dispensation was visible in the ways they constructed their sacred spaces. These were heterotopic reversals of urban spaces – extraordinary spaces of otherness – in Cape Town. These reversals “interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space” (De Cauter and Dehaene 2008: 4). Their altars, ritual spaces, and sacred circles were not merely tiny utopias that shut them off and protected them from post-apartheid realities, but they could also mediate the relationships of their builders with the surrounding city and society. The neopagans' private rituals of protection and wealth and their public rituals of inclusion referred to the same double mission: again, hanging onto the privileges of whiteness, while working to adapt to and mediate the coming into being of a new, democratic society.

Their acts of mediation were responses to the same post-apartheid challenges of social transformation, exclusion or inclusion, new moral boundaries, and social involvement that every white person faced in the post-apartheid era.²⁹ Or, as one high priest told me in 2019 after the new group of ethnopolitical Asatruans had made their entrance on the pagan scene: “We are now deeply divided.” The clear division of neopagan communities along racial issue lines emerged during the course of this research. While the beginnings of this division were already there in 2005, they only resulted in full-blown, organized racist utterances almost 15 years later. All of these groups were newcomers who had to create space for themselves in the field of organized religions. Their processes of coming into being by mediating these boundaries, while different in content, followed similar routes to all the groups I examined – from Wiccan neopagans to Asatruan heathens. Their practices show that while they rejected the NGK and challenged or mediated post-apartheid era social/spatial/moral boundaries, they also mediated the transfer from the social order of apartheid to a new social and moral order.

Some practitioners of the new forms of spirituality looked away from these global ideas to a more local definition or acknowledgement of their “little tradition,” their Afrikaner folk beliefs. These forms of spirituality were less organized, ad hoc, more individual, and based on the moral subjectivities of their practitioners. In the next chapter, I study the methods of these mediations, and especially the role of movement in them.

Notes

- 1 Today, some modern pagans reject the term “neopagan” and prefer “contemporary” or “modern” pagan, as they prefer to emphasize the continuities between their practices and other contemporary practices (Magliocco 2012: 151). This book uses these terms interchangeably.
- 2 *Boerewors* is a popular South African raw sausage, a staple food in *braais* or barbeques, lit. “Afrikaner sausage”.

- 3 Wicca and Asatru are New Religious Movements, spread mainly in Western countries. Their followers hold polytheistic beliefs – Wiccans are also nature worshippers, and practise what they call “witchcraft”, while Asatruans identify with a broader pagan movement of “heathenry” and follow ancient Germanic gods such as Odin, Freyja, and Thor. Both consider themselves to follow pre-Christian traditions.
- 4 <http://wildhunt.org/2015/10/a-look-at-paganism-in-south-africa.html> (accessed 18 July 2017).
- 5 The worldwide number of practitioners of modern paganism is equally difficult to determine – estimations vary between 200,000 and 10,000,000.
- 6 <https://www.paganrightsalliance.org> (accessed 8 August 2019), <http://www.sapagancouncil.org.za/pfdm.php> (accessed 19 March 2021).
- 7 <http://www.correllian.com> (accessed 8 August 2019).
- 8 <https://clanofkheper temple.co.za> (accessed 8 August 2019).
- 9 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/5gdwp3/dr-kobus-jonker-420-v17n4> (accessed 19 March 2021).
- 10 http://www.saps.gov.za/_dynamicModules/internetsite/crimestop.asp (accessed 16 August 2011, no longer functional in August 2017).
- 11 Not his real name.
- 12 *Imphepho* is a dried plant belonging to the botanical group *Helichrysum Petiolare Herba*. It is burned like incense by traditional healers. It has a calming effect and can be used for meditation.
- 13 Perhaps because of my secular upbringing, I never felt insincere or found it difficult to relate to any of the religious rituals in which I participated, unlike Katharine Wiegele, who was brought up Catholic (Wiegele 2013). To me, these rituals were impressive and enjoyable when they happened, and the feeling of unity with the other participants felt real. During the rituals, I was a believer enjoying the sacredness of the event. Outside the rituals, I gained immediate distance, and returned to being an anthropologist and an analytical thinker.
- 14 Dale Wallace discusses the development of individual neopagan identities, their construction and articulation in her 2006 PhD dissertation.
- 15 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/pagan-padre-saaf-see-eye-to-eye-428159> (accessed 16 September 2019).
- 16 As it turned out, I was not the only one witnessing the fear of Wiccans, as the pentagram Donna always wore openly raised horror in the local supermarket. See <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2011-07-24-pagan-witches-pendant-sparks-terror-at-the-till/> (accessed 1 February 2020).
- 17 Donna Darkwolf Vos, open letter to her friends, 15th May 2012.
- 18 A public figure and Afrikaans pagan, Damon Leff, who had often had words with Donna, but with whom he also shared an almost wordless understanding, posted on Facebook: “May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again, may the Goddess hold you in the palm of Her hand. What is remembered, lives.”
- 19 See, for instance, Baudrillard (1991), Collignon and Diouf (2001), and Barril et al. (2003).
- 20 <http://www.runestone.org/south-africa-fund/> (accessed 10 May 2020).
- 21 <https://www.runestone.org> (accessed 10 May 2020).
- 22 As she said: “We are all online all the time.” For more on their Internet practices, see Teppo (2009).
- 23 On materiality and mediation, see Meyer (2020).
- 24 <https://wildhunt.org/2019/06/south-african-heathens-and-declaration-127.html> (accessed 10 May 2020).

- 25 The legislative regulation of occult practices has also been carried out in other African countries – Cameroon, Malawi, and Zimbabwe have (or have had) anti-witchcraft legislation in place. The discussion regarding the necessity of such legislation is an ongoing debate (Mavhangu 2012: 16–20).
- 26 Pagan Federation of South Africa, <http://www.sapagancouncil.org.za/about.php> (accessed 14 April 2020).
- 27 They may nevertheless have promoted exclusive whiteness in the guise of a specific code of conduct and practices, such as being able to “fit into the group.”
- 28 See, e.g., <https://www.paganfed.org> (accessed 2 May 2020).
- 29 See, e.g., the challenges of transformation with regard to education in Besteman (2008) and Chisholm (2005).

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6 “We kept everything, and we changed everything”

Introduction

I have previously shown that the repercussions of religious discontinuity have been felt at all levels of the Afrikaners’ spiritual life, and that the new faiths mediate new expressions of *ordentlikheid* and moral subjectivities which would have been impossible in the previous era. The religious undertakings I have described in the previous chapters were focussed on the mediation of moral and racial boundaries and showed the profound transformations of these boundaries after the apartheid era. These practices had been applied to establish new social boundaries, new moral communities, and vastly differing moral subjectivities.

Different methods and media were used in these mediations, which were carried out ritually and by organizing spaces, or by means of dance, music, and movement. Spoken words were important, emphasized with songs and with the silences between the words, but these mediations occurred just as often beyond the sphere of the verbal.¹ The verbal descriptions of the rituals were often too vague and insufficient to obtain a full picture of how and what boundaries were crossed. Taking the spatial level of rituals into account made the picture clearer, but when I examined religious practices and events, I began to see motion as central to all mediations.

People’s bodies and their uses are the media; consequently, a sensory understanding of these is central to understanding religious mediations and the power they have. Sometimes the role that movement plays is noticeable: walking the landscape, running, dancing, or toyi-toying in public. Sometimes the movement is very subtle: people congregating at a private home, forming a small circle around someone. However, it is always significant, and the ritual participants regard it as such. Bodily movements convey their own messages and underline the verbal messages, which gain strength from this sensorial dimension.

Focusing on movement can thus be a useful theoretical and methodological point of departure in the study of social change, religious mediations, and emerging moral subjectivities. In the following case studies, I examine the role of movement in ritual mediations of Afrikaners’ social worlds, including their new constellations.

In the religious rupture of the post-apartheid era, Stellenbosch and Cape Town Afrikaners’ spirituality experienced a transformation, contributing to a rapid change in the role of the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK). I explore how the interconnections between global and local traditions have been absorbed by and filtered into Afrikaner traditions, which fused and synthesized the new mediated practices with their older practices. Movement has a role in these processes, which also produced new moral subjectivities for Afrikaners looking for alternatives. None of the people I examine here have entirely turned their backs on their NGK church; many have, in fact, become mediators in their own moral communities: between churches, congregations, *vriendekringe* (social circles), or families.

These people draw from the cultural influences that have been around for centuries, seeking to reach across racial and faith boundaries through their religious or spiritual activities. Afrikaner counterpublics, *moral radicals* (Teppo 2018), have established their own moral subjectivities. In their rituals, movement has publicly mediated new spiritual values, new internal and external social boundaries, and new ways of existing in the post-apartheid society. These new ways of existing are bound to the inherently moral issues of *ordentlikheid*, and include ethical choices. These rituals are based on the easiest and most accessible form of movement, walking – together in the city, or individually, around the contours of the landscape. The case studies also show how this movement, which I call *deep walking*, is essentially a mediation practice engrained in South African cultural schemas. Examining these ritual movements is a way of understanding post-apartheid mediation; they are a social revolution materialized in the spiritual sphere.

On the “right” and “wrong” ways of moving

Anthropological research has long pointed out that the body is the great medium in all societies, and a natural symbol (Douglas 2002). The control of white (female) bodies, specifically, has been somewhat discussed in historical and sociological studies of white Afrikaners (Vincent 2000; Du Toit 2003; Teppo 2004; Van der Westhuizen 2017), as also demonstrated by the case of Susana in [Chapter 2](#). Controlling by restricting movement was just one of the social demands made with regard to the white body; it was also actively used to produce racial awareness and mediate ethnic identifications. Both themes are clearly present in Afrikaner history. A great example of mediating nation building through movement was the way the movement of white bodies was made historically important.

The Great Trek – how movement produced Afrikaners

After the South African War, Afrikaner nation building in the early 20th century focussed mainly on Afrikaner unity. There was a demand for symbols to represent and help build the nation. One of the most powerful

of these symbols was expressed through the imagery of movement of *die Groot Trek* (“the Great Trek”), which has famously been described as one of the great invented Afrikaner myths of origin. The legends about it were important building blocks in a history that was largely a construction, since the Great Trek was actually a longish and quite random event comprising many families or clans moving together over several years, and there were also many people of colour on this journey.

The myth of the Great Trek was elevated to unforeseen importance during the nation-building era. The centennial celebration of the Great Trek was held in the late 1930s, a time when great efforts were being made to increase the political awareness of Afrikaners. The re-enactment of the Great Trek – a long band of ox wagons travelling for months on the route used by the original *Voortrekkers*, driven by people dressed in 19th-century outfits – was a central element of these celebrations and was called *die simboliese trek* (“the symbolic trek”). The route meandered through the celebrating small towns of the Western Cape, the Karoo, and the Free State towards the newly completed Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. People were exhilarated, to the point of preserving the wheel grease of the wagons in their handkerchiefs, and baptizing their female babies *Ossewania* (“Oxwaggoness”) or *Eeupeesia* (“Centenaryness”).

The movement, which brought living history to everyone to touch and feel, became, in a sensorial way, part of their identities. The zenith occurred in Pretoria, where, on 16 December 1938, on the sacred Dingaan’s Day,² the Voortrekker Monument, paid for by Afrikaners, was inaugurated to cheering crowds when the ox wagons arrived at the monument. These celebrations have been cited as one of the reasons for the Afrikaner National Party winning the elections in 1948 and starting to implement the Christian-nationalist policies of apartheid (Witz 2003).

In the apartheid era, based on segregation and the constant restriction of movement on the one hand, and on the socially subversive potential of movement on the other, movement was seen to have huge transformative power, which made it dangerous. These dangers extended from the macro level of people moving through the country to the smallest movements of the body – like the wrong ways of presenting oneself. These would counter the ideals of a proper habitus, which were always gendered and racialized.

The NGK and ordentlike ways to move

The common history of racial segregation and the NGK made movement a particularly significant focus in the 20th century, which also explains its weight in the post-apartheid era. As some of the most important minds promoting the racial segregation ideology, which, in practice, meant restricting social and spatial movement in many ways, the NGK *dominees* had an active role in Afrikaner nation building. The *dominees* were also in a key

position to ensure that the apartheid dogma condemned all matters that could diminish the church’s power in daily life.

The severity of these restrictions depended on one’s racial classification. Apartheid legislation forbade black and coloured people from moving to areas designated for another “racial” group (whites), or to the wrong side of the beaches, parks, and any public spaces that they shared at all. Breaching these rules could have serious consequences, ranging from arrest and fines to imprisonment (depending on who one was, and to which racial category one belonged), as the “wrong” movement challenged the status quo of the Christian-nationalist dogma of racial segregation. The disobedient movements carried out by those participating in the liberation struggles would become an important part of the protests against the apartheid government when, in the 1980s, the townships became ungovernable, and huge demonstrations with dancing and toyi-toying were frequently organized.

These subversive movements were usually met with violence, and Afrikaners heard cultural segregation preached from the *kansels* (“pulpits”) on Sundays. Draconian legislation regulated the interactions between the races at all times, while in whatever part of daily life that remained outside religious and legislative regulation, ideas of *ordentlikheid* frequently halted any attempt at racial mediation. These ideas of *ordentlikheid* manifested themselves – similarly to what I presented in [Chapter 2](#) when discussing spatial limitations – in three levels of regulations and rules. The “poor whites” were a case in point, showing that the ideas of *ordentlikheid* were used at all three levels to regulate the movements of white people who could potentially threaten the racial hierarchies.

There were many *spoken rules*, and it was the *dominee’s* task to ensure they were followed with the help and support of his congregation, church elders, home visits, and disciplinary measures. Following from the spoken rules, there was the level of *nonverbal regulation and silent practices*. In this second level, the ideas of *ordentlikheid* were important for the daily social order and social hierarchies. For example, as pointed out earlier, during the apartheid years, middle-class Afrikaners understood that going to any church other than the NGK or its sister churches was not a proper thing, while charismatic and Pentecostal churches were popular in “poor white” areas. Finally, on the third level, *ordentlikheid* was all about internalized, embodied *performance*, included the elusive realm of the affective, emerging in bodies from the nonverbal zone of emotions and manifesting itself in motions (Stewart 2007) – a person breaching the rules of *ordentlikheid* would just know when things were wrong and not properly done. For example, loitering in town would have been regarded as unsuitable for a white woman, but natural for a black woman.

These three layers of social ordering – spoken, practised, and affective/embodied – made the racialized social order incredibly strong in people’s minds and bodies. This social ordering originated at the deep level of embodied emotions and in the realm of the unspoken. From this

perspective, it was no wonder that during my years of fieldwork so many white people pointed out that they believed it was impossible for me, an outsider, to understand “how it was” during the apartheid era – for I hadn’t lived it in my body. This claim is easier to understand from a phenomenological perspective on humans’ experience as always being embodied or, as Tim Ingold would phrase it, I hadn’t been part of their sentient lifeworld (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Ingold 2011: 31).

While Afrikaners were the instigators of apartheid, there were always also those *moral radicals* who did not subscribe to the idea of racial segregation and found the racial hierarchies of Christian-nationalism immoral, but remained deeply Christian in their convictions (Teppo 2018). Some of these radicals were not only active in politically resisting the apartheid boundaries within the churches but also in carrying out acts of mediation in the sphere of artistic expression, both during apartheid and thereafter. These endeavours were very public and had a definite relationship with the ideas of *ordentlikheid*, whose changing status was mediated by movements in the urban spaces of the apartheid and post-apartheid eras.

Moral radicals and mediation

The 1960s was not only a time of uproar in the NGK, but cultural and artistic lives were also in turmoil. A group of Afrikaans poets and authors, known as the *Sestigers*, rebelled openly against the apartheid establishment, while never negating the Christian message. They regarded the NGK as having lost its moral compass, believing that the church and its middle-class supporters were living a lie and were only moral on the outside. They were at the heart of an Afrikaner counterpublic opposing mainstream Afrikaner culture in its own language.

The *Sestigers* proposed a moral discourse, frequently expressed in poetic language drawn from the Bible, and celebrated Christian metaphors. The poet Breyten Breytenbach, who has already been discussed in [chapter 4](#), revealed the moral failure of apartheid in poems such as “Breyten prays for himself.”³

“But keep pain from Me oh Lord
So that others may bear it ...
But not Me
Never give us Pain or complaints”⁴

Against Breytenbach’s sardonic take, Ingrid Jonker’s poetry came across differently, although her message pointed in the same direction. She called Afrikaners her “rotten nation” (De Saxe 2014: 51), yet Jonker’s poetic vision united the ideas of Christian suffering and her hopes of the Afrikaners’ eventual moral redemption through the compassion they would find. In the poem “Seen from the wound on my side,” she sees, more optimistically, a

possibility of redemption, as John places his hand “on the shoulder of the black man with the cross.”⁵

Jonker created a poignant image of a loving, caring touch that shows how the *Sestigers*’ goals paralleled those of the moral radicals within the NGK. They presented the need to shatter the false and callous system of racial categories, and to reach across racial boundaries. Their requests for mediation had become a contested political topic. The poets’ work shows that acts of subversion were not only present in the religious sphere, but also in the sphere of any self-expression – although, in the case of Afrikaners, these were normally close to one another.

Many *Sestigers* also rebelled in their personal lives. Not only did they break the apartheid law the way Breytenbach did when he married a Vietnamese woman, but they also transgressed the rules of *ordentlikheid* in their private lives, and paid the price. Jonker committed suicide in 1965, and many died in exile. Nevertheless, they had a large following and a notable influence on subsequent generations of Afrikaans artists, such as the musicians of the *Voëlvry* movement, who in the 1980s continued their anti-apartheid criticism against the hypocrisies and conservatism of the Afrikaner middle class (O’Meara 1997: 368; Klopper 2011). One of the most important pillars of the group was Ralph Rabie, who used the stage name Johannes Kerkorrel (*kerkorrel* means “church organ” in Afrikaans) in order to satirize the NGK. In the post-apartheid era, the tradition of public moral radicals continued in the spheres of artistic expression, with bands such as *Fokofpolisiekar*⁶ continuing to challenge the ideas of what Afrikaners believed was *ordentlike*.⁷

They were also reacting against the right-wing extremism among the Afrikaners, and the general nostalgia for the past. The Afrikaners’ passion for their history found another form recently in the vast popularity of a song by Bok van Blerk, asking the General of the South African War, De la Rey, to come and lead the Afrikaners – *De la Rey, De la Rey, sal jy die Boere kom lei* – from their present, difficult sociopolitical situation.⁸ Music therapist Dr Carol Lotter described what happened in 2007, in the midst of De la Rey-fever, when the song was played in a wedding:

The minute the song began playing there was a buzz in the air. The small groups merged into one large group as they approached the dance floor. The energy was electric as people began to dance, not merely to the catchy rhythm, but with conviction and passion. During the refrain they all spontaneously began to sing (perhaps shout-sing would be more accurate), stood embracing each other in a large circle, with some guests standing in the centre with their hands on their hearts or raising their arms, as if in protest or displaying some form of patriotism. The music seemed to represent something very powerful which galvanised a communal response. At the same time, though, not everyone was moved in this way. It would seem that most English speaking guests,

as well as those, whether English or Afrikaans who do not subscribe to the ideology or sentiment of the song, did not engage in the dance and fervour of the moment.

(Lotter 2007)

In her article, Dr Lotter pays attention to the music – but it is the movement she describes that I found so striking here. Clearly, both the radicals and the conservatives were bonding in their separate ways, and expressing themselves through movement. The traditions of *verligte* and *verkrampste* were re-formed and re-born in the popular culture.

Some of these new radical activities took the form of mediating movements merely because such movements were now possible: moving around in urban spaces no longer involved the danger of being arrested, teargassed or shot by the police or the army – at least for the white middle class. While there were still violent demonstrations in the post-apartheid era – every South African remembers the ugly ending of the Marikana protests⁹ – for the white middle class, the toyi-toying and marching of the previous decades had now found different foci. The time had come for performances of a different nature: they could be contemplative, community building, and healing, or they could challenge the norms and ideals of whiteness – a famous example of this being *Die Antwoord* (“The Answer”)¹⁰, a hip-hop group which represents the *zef* subculture (*zef* being a derogatory name for poor whites). In an interview the male member of the duo, Ninja, stated how “*zef* means that you literally don’t care what anyone else thinks of you, like, you represent yourself in your music, in how you dress, how you think, how you speak”¹¹ – literally throwing down another gauntlet at the feet of *ordentlikheid*.

Public rituals

For numerous Afrikaners, the end of apartheid was a welcome beginning to a new moral project that would build the society on more sustainable grounds.

The NGK has faced many internal issues. New ideas and practices have entered the church, where they have found space among older ideas and dogmas. Some of these new ideas were a better fit with *Afrikanerdom* than others. Female ministers were accepted in 1990 after a long and complicated debate (Büchner 2007; see also Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Vosloo 2013), which led to the first female *dominee* being ordained in 1995. In the meantime, the acceptance of homosexuality has remained a bone of contention.¹² The church made its standpoint on homosexuality clear in its 2007 guidelines and resolutions: “Synod decides that homosexual ministers or candidates for the ministry who practice a celibate lifestyle may be admitted to the office of minister.”¹³ This decision caused a huge uproar, and the church soon reversed its decision. Subsequently, 12 moral radical

dominees, mostly from Stellenbosch, sued the church – and won. At present, the NGK accepts homosexuality in that it acknowledges that a person can be born a homosexual, accepts committed gay relationships, and allows such gay people to have trusted lay positions in the church, such as those of an elder or a deacon. However, this might change any day – the battles surrounding this issue show that the moral lines are constantly being contested and redrawn. In comparison to their predecessors, the post-apartheid moral radicals have less to fear, now that the restrictions of apartheid have been abolished. As disillusionment with the post-apartheid era has grown, the moral radicals’ messages have intensified.

Public ritual movements could be mediations that pushed against the unspoken rules and practices of *ordentlikheid*. These ritual movements created new moral subjectivities and affects,¹⁴ embodied sentiments in which mediation towards religious inclusivity was central, and replaced the previous, apartheid-sanctioned sentiments – a process that I describe by means of two examples. The moral radicals of the NGK, looking for new ways to mediate between different religions and for ways to collapse the often overlapping social, racial, and faith boundaries, promoted the first affect. The second affect was an alternative ritual aimed at mediating new ways of existing with and relating to the environment, while promoting female empowerment. This ritual mediation had no explicit religious subtext but was clearly influenced by New Age or pagan spiritualities. Both of these rituals of mediation were centred on movement – walking – taking the form of a pilgrimage, and both had social and psychological healing at their core.

Healing Cape Town one step at the time

The annual Interfaith Walk in central Cape Town is an example of a public act of religious mediation. I participated in these walks on 16 December 2016 and 2017. The date is important, because in the post-apartheid era it is known as Reconciliation Day, formerly known as *Dingaansdag*. As mentioned earlier, this day has an important symbolic significance, which has even been called “overdetermined” (Wenzel 2016). This symbolism has its roots in the Afrikaner nation-building project. During apartheid, the resistance also used the day to organize protests and acts of noncompliance (Wenzel 2016: 816). After the end of legislated apartheid, the symbolism remained, but the name was changed to the Day of Reconciliation. A public holiday at the start of the summer holiday season, it is a perfect time to organize interfaith mediation activities. It was pointed out to me quite a few times during my fieldwork in the latter half of the 2010s that while the NGK had come to regard the ecumenical work between the Christian denominations as relatively acceptable, interfaith work was still much less palatable.¹⁵ It was therefore no wonder that, officially, the NGK played no institutional part in this activity. Nevertheless, its members

and clergy contributed to organizing the event, pushing the boundaries of their church’s unspoken rules and practices. For many proper NGK members, visiting mosques or synagogues was still not an *ordentlike* practice. Moral NGK radicals, however, regarded such visits as exactly the way to be moral, as they mediated between different racial groups and erased the tenacious racial and social boundaries.

The idea of the walks was that the participants would visit different places of worship. This highlighted Capetonians’ similarities and their common histories. The walks were also a commentary on Cape Town’s religious diversity – all the faiths belong to the city and are vital to its spirit, while the places visited were of historical and political significance.

Both times that I participated in this walk, the route circled the District Six area, but on other occasions it has gone elsewhere, for example, circling the equally central Muslim stronghold area of the Bo-Kaap, where slaves used to live during the colonial era. The walks provided Capetonians with an opportunity to tread safely in urban areas where some might normally have felt uncomfortable.

The choice of District Six was well-founded, as it is one of the most symbolically loaded areas in Cape Town. Until the mid-1970s, it was a vibrant, multicultural, multi-faith area just next to its central business district. At the end of 1970s, apartheid bulldozers razed the area to the ground, leaving only its churches and mosques still standing. The area became a wasteland in the heart of the city. While the value of the land is enormous today, it remains almost barren, and building on it is still a contested topic.

Walking through the vast emptiness of District Six reminded the participants of the colossal damage that apartheid policies had inflicted on these communities, whose coloured residents had been forcibly removed and dispersed to the bleak, sandy plains of the Cape Flats. Both times I attended, former residents of District Six were also present. Many of them had unresolved land claims in the area, since the post-apartheid restitution process was proceeding very slowly, if at all. At the gathering at the first church, where the walk started, the speakers encouraged all the participants to interact, and the former residents were happy to talk about life in the area back in the day. Sharing was an important part of the experience.

On both occasions the events started with welcome speeches in full churches: at St Mark’s Anglican Church in 2016, and at the Moravian Church in 2017. There were familiar faces in attendance: Lisa, a white Afrikaans woman from an NGK background, and Dave, born in a coloured area of Cape Town who had, with his parents and siblings, attended a fairly conservative coloured Afrikaans church before moving to the Anglican Church. The NGK *dominee* Laurie Gaum, a famous gay rights activist, was one of the organizers and a route marshal.

After a few welcoming speeches, we stepped out into the hot and windy streets of District Six. Both times we visited the Al-Azhar Mosque and ended up drinking juice and coffee and eating *koeksisters* (popular honey-dipped

pastries) in the community hall on Searle Street. At every stop, there were speeches, presentations, songs, prayers, and new things to see. In 2016, one of the speakers was Horst Kleinschmidt, an associate of the prominent moral radical Beyers Naudé.

This walk also contained a level of healing. By walking along the empty streets amidst the yellow grass of District Six, all the participants had an opportunity to connect their bodies with the land by walking on it – a practice I call *deep walking*. This was an unusual activity in a deserted, formerly poor area, especially for the amply represented white middle class. It gave everyone a chance to form an idea of how it felt to belong here and to visit other churches and mosques, which helped the participants to connect with other faiths in an embodied way. Taking off our shoes and sitting on a mosque floor gave a different perspective to being there and allowed us feel a connection with the place.

By the end of the day, all the walking, standing, sitting, and spending time with people I had never met before had begun to influence me. The transformative power of the day caused something new to emerge between me and the other participants, as well as within me. A deep sense of loss and sadness about past events in District Six, a sense of belonging with all the others on the walk, and raised hopes for a better future emerged. A new, permanent affect was remaking a part of us all, and I was reminded of this every time I drove through the area after that day. *I have prayed and sung there with the people who once lived there. I have felt something of their loss, while I will have no chance of ever fully comprehending its enormity.*

In 2017, I was no longer the only curious outsider attending this event: a US academic was present, and a documentarist was busy with his camera. The work of the moral radicals was, once again, bearing fruit and its ripples were spreading throughout the world.

The Karoo burns

The vast open semi-desert landscapes of the Karoo are traditionally close to many Afrikaners’ hearts. These landscapes and houses have been immortalized in numerous works of visual art, while its people are regarded as possessing values of symbolic importance to *Afrikanerdom*: independence, perseverance, and rootedness in the land. In local literature, the Karoo has inspired many important texts, one of which is considered a founding narrative, namely Olive Schreiner’s *The story of an African farm* (1883).

The Klein Karoo or Little Karoo is a dry but fruitful area, often conceptualized as *Afrikanerdom*’s pure and sacred space, with its own pilgrimages. Every year, thousands of Afrikaners from all walks of life travel to Oudtshoorn in the Klein Karoo to attend the KKNK (the *Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees*), an arts festival, sometimes mockingly called a *Boere* carnival. The small town of Oudtshoorn has many reminders of the settler merchants’ early wealth and success; they grew rich through ostrich

farming at the turn of the 20th century, when ostrich plumes were all the rage in Europe. The KKNK caters to both *verligte* and more *verkrampte* Afrikaners’ tastes.

There are still many *verkrampte* Afrikaners who see merit in racial segregation and believe that there was a powerful rationality behind the apartheid ideology. They believe that the end of that system meant the public bankruptcy of what they regarded as the Afrikaner nation’s moral project, and they see the sometimes avant garde performances at the KKNK as being representative of the Afrikaner nation’s decay. Performances are often disputed – and as often sold out. While it is sometimes tiredly referred to as *boerebasaar*, a commercial and nonsensical event, the KKNK is also one of the places where *Afrikanerdom* is reinventing and mediating itself in the presence of many moral radicals – a process that has at times led to fierce confrontations and debates over race, sexuality, and the limits of performative art.

The KKNK is still a mainstream event, which is presented to Afrikaners as a cultural, literary audience. *Woordfees* in Stellenbosch has found a similar audience (although some consider it a bit pretentious, as it has an emphasis on intellectualism as well as art), while the hip and radically inclined can attend the AfrikaBurn arts festival, held on a private reserve in the Tankwa Karoo National Park, an area on the border between the Northern Cape and the Western Cape. For this festival, a temporary “Tankwa Town” is erected. AfrikaBurn is best described as a South African equivalent of the famous Burning Man festival in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada in the USA. Similar to Burning Man, it is an alternative event based on basic ideas of inclusion, self-expression, self-reliance, and decommodification, to mention just a few of its principles.¹⁶ For the middle-class Stellenbosch crowds, AfrikaBurn is a bit too challenging a concept, or, as self-defined “culture vulture” Amanda, from Stellenbosch, points out:

Not my scene. Not because I’m not eco-friendly, but I don’t see the charm in having to rough it for several days and having to clean up your own poo in the middle of nowhere AfrikaBurn is seen as a thing for the more eccentric people, for lack of a better word. Adventurous and arty tree huggers and campers. And there’s nothing wrong with any of that. I also love nature and art. I just also love hot showers and toilets that can flush.

Art performances and the burning of the installations at the end of the week are important parts of the festival. Huge art works are constructed – in 2017, a massive *Yggdrasil* (sacred world tree or an *axis mundi* of the ancient Norse cosmology) was built to be admired by the 13,000 strong crowd of festival participants – only to be burned at the end of the event (Steele 2017). After the event, the whole space is cleaned so thoroughly that it looks as if nobody had ever visited there.

Many ideas behind AfrikaBurn can be interpreted as spiritually New Age, and many of its visitors are neopagan or participate in New Age practices. AfrikaBurn, created for a week as a non-consumerist event and encouraging alternative exchange practices, aims to provide a different relationship with the world (Sherry and Kozinets 2007). No money is used, with barter the only way of obtaining whatever one needs. Despite the barter, money is not unimportant. While the USA and South African organizers take a verbal stance against commodification, the tickets are relatively expensive (R1,500 in 2017), which makes it a strictly middle-class event. This has led to Burning Man type events being criticized as adult theme parks. They are, however, one of the events where Afrikaner counterpublics congregate. The festival tells of the global connectedness of the Afrikaner youth, of a desire to have a voice and to leave the past behind, but also of the raw, creative energy that is bursting everywhere, and that they also see as theirs.

Over the decades, and especially after the end of legislated apartheid, moral radicals’ voices have become stronger, and more public. They have become leaders of a rather loud counterpublic. Stellenbosch singer and artist Eugenie Grobler belongs to a new generation of *verligte* Afrikaners who continue to renew the moral radicals’ tradition.

Grobler was part of the working group that created landscape art in several locations around the country. During AfrikaBurn in 2009, Grobler and her colleagues built a giant figure of a snake woman, an Earth Siren, from Tankwa desert stones. The figure was spread over the landscape and people were supposed to walk a “thinking path” around her while being immersed in contemplation and experiencing personal healing, which, it was hoped, would turn into social healing.

Eventually it is envisaged to build a big Siren that will be visible from Google Earth – approximately 16 km of trail, somewhere in the Karoo – where people can walk the Siren in order to heal themselves, find a new perspective, or as an offering of ritual reconnection to the earth.¹⁷

The purpose of the figure was also to create a symbolic parallel between violence against women and the destruction of the fragile environment of the wilderness – both rife in present-day South Africa. In the vast Karoo, concern was specifically increasing around the issue of environmentally detrimental fracking.¹⁸ After the 2009 project, the group of artists built several “thinking paths” and created environmental art workshops, performances, and cleansing rituals.¹⁹

These embodied, sensory practices of mediation positioned the movement at the core of moral radical practices. They showed how Afrikaners were navigating their way in the new society, so very different from the one in which they had grown up, and how they were choosing to move into the future. Theirs was a new *trek* that presented what was important in their lived worlds. Their deep walking underlined the message, which gained

strength from the sensory experience of the walking, while sensory and bodily experiences supported the words. Movement charged these artists’ messages with affective power.

Conclusion: to keep it all and change it all

The new mediation practices were not limited to public rituals where Afrikaans moral radicals tested the new social boundaries and sent their message to the world. The past and the present of white Afrikaans families first met in the intimate spaces of their homes and rituals, when the need for mediation prevailed over the will to construct or enforce strict racial, religious, and ethnic boundaries. Sometimes these new practices were enjoyed by all; sometimes they were only acceptable after long and intense negotiations.

Christo, an Afrikaner patriarch, was very ill. His life had been long and interesting; he had once been a prominent figure in politics and an active pillar of society in the small coastal town where his family had lived for decades. His illness cast a long shadow on his family, with the doctor giving him only three months to live – but that had been a year ago.

Christo had allegedly always been the benevolent head of his family – a wife, a son, and a daughter – but all the family members were strong characters with their own agendas. Members of the cultural and former political elite, they were well aware of the rules of *ordentlikheid*, but habitually transgressed them, while remaining visible and accepted in society – a fine balance to keep. The privilege of being members of the political and intellectual elite had given them the economic freedom and a lot of confidence to explore their lives as freely as was possible during the apartheid era, although this was still very limited.

Christo’s wife, Bokkie, came across as a strong and talented woman, a fiercely intelligent and energetic sculptor and painter. Her children and the two grandchildren had inherited her talent. The family members were all very close.

However, the life of this privileged family had been divided and torn by societal pressure, contradictions, and generational clashes. Christo and Bokkie were born just before the beginning of apartheid, witnessing its draconian social order as they grew up. Their children, Jacoba and Koos, were born in its heyday, and grew up bombarded by propaganda and religious control, which they abhorred, searching for outlets to pursue their artistic and academic activities.

Jacoba’s children were “born free”, after the end of legislated apartheid. Their experience of life and society was very different from what Jacoba had grown up with, as freedom of thought and inquisitiveness were now acceptable and even admired.

Christo had been a devout man and a loyal member of the NGK all his life. Unlike the rest of his family, he seldom missed a Sunday church service. While his wife was far less enthusiastic, his children were downright

rebellious. Jacoba had even refused to marry in the church and, later, to have her children baptized. As a consequence, Christo (and some other family members) only attended the wedding reception and not the wedding, because it was not a religious ceremony.

Influenced by many ideas from the New Religious Movements, and being a believer in free spirituality, Jacoba was determined to raise her children without the direct influence of the NGK. The rift between the father and the daughter seemed too vast to bridge. However, her father's illness had softened Jacoba's stance. Under the influence of a number of faiths and beliefs, Jacoba designed a novel ceremony for her son's seventh birthday.

The ritual was about the child choosing a new, secret name for himself – a reference to American Indian traditions – and Jacoba's father, the grandfather, blessing the child – a Christian tradition. This ritual took place at Jacoba and her husband's Cape Dutch-style cottage. It was a tiny, private ceremony, with only family members and some of the family's closest friends being invited.

While I was not present at the ritual, I still choose to include it here. It was described to me by different people, bringing so many important aspects of mediation together, and summarizing the change taking place. Jacoba described the ceremony as beautiful, profound, and important. Some people, like Jacoba's brother Koos, who was building a successful business career abroad, came from afar to attend the ceremony. The ceremony was performed in the small but beautiful inner courtyard of their house by grandfather Christo, who acted as the minister. He read excerpts from the family Bible and poured water on the child's head from a glass bowl set on the courtyard table, giving the child his blessing, while the male members of the family and their friends gathered around to support him.

Christo had never studied theology, but this arrangement made perfect cultural sense: due to the country's vast distances between small communities, Afrikaners have for centuries known that they do not need a minister or a church to mediate between themselves and God. While an unordained man could not serve the sacraments, he could preach, and could record marriages, births, and deaths in the family Bible. I was told a number of times that in the older settler days, the distance to the local church was often too far, and that couples could not always travel all the way to get married, or that children could not always be taken to baptism. However, when the family patriarch had written the name of the new child, or a new couple, in the family Bible, that was as good as a church ritual.

There was also a culturally new part in the ceremony, which involved the child choosing a secret name – a name known only to him, symbolizing the independence of his soul. It was emphasized that everyone present was free to believe in the deity or deities of their choice.

The ritual was an inventive revival of an old tradition born out of necessity, and therefore acceptable to all those involved. In emphasizing the men's role in religious rituals, it was grounded in the Afrikaners' long roots

and settler traditions in Africa. It comprised traditions that Afrikaners hold dear: the central role of the father (and grandfather), the male line, the family Bible, the collectivity, and Christian baptism.

At the same time, it presented their new desire to reach out, to mediate things from outside of their traditional, patriarchal, Christian frame of reference. The ritual, while very *ordentlike*, also broke the boundaries of *ordentlike* tradition by inverting the previous social hierarchies and bringing in new, neopagan elements. Much of it was planned and decided by the child’s mother, Jacoba, and it reversed generational hierarchies by giving the child the freedom to choose his own name.

Jacoba made the point: “We kept everything, and we changed everything.”

The ritual mediated between the different generations of the family, who had all been born in different time periods and therefore had very different takes on life. They showed respect for each other’s experiences and demonstrated that, despite the changing times, they were ready to move on together as a family. The harmony in this loving family was restored in a way that would not have been possible 20 years ago when Jacoba got married. The family members and friends’ active and embodied participation in the ritual showed their commitment to this new way of doing things, changing the spoken rules and unspoken practices, while creating an affective state that bound the participants together. Jacoba chose to keep this naming party a very small and private affair, which was hardly exceptional.

While traditional rituals remain popular, and some will probably never change, I have heard of or attended several other rituals in Stellenbosch during which old ritual forms have been deconstructed, reinvented, and innovated. In the personal and domestic spheres of Stellenbosch Afrikaner families, movement was often small, but was always part of the rituals that these families organized. In the constrained spaces of a private yard, in family practices, and in daily lives, boundaries were opened and closed, families were united, and a child walked into his grandfather’s arms.

The emergence of these new ritual forms as small but successful acts of mediation signifies Afrikaners’ will to step outside their cultural boundaries. There was creativity in these rituals, but also a deep, moving seriousness. These rituals were not simply people randomly appropriating piquant cultural flavours from other traditions to liven up their old and stale ones, or shopping around for religions, which might be updated with more fashionable ideas next week. These people had committed their hearts, souls, and lives to new ways of being.

Notes

- 1 As others have noted too; see Meyer (2020).
- 2 *Dingaansdag* (Dingaan’s Day) was established to commemorate the Voortrekkers’ triumph over King Dingaan’s Zulu army at the Battle of Blood River near Dundee in KwaZulu-Natal in 1838. Before the battle, the Voortrekkers prayed for God’s protection. They also took an oath to honour this day and to

- dedicate it to thanking God should they win the battle. From 1938, this day was devoted to honouring this covenant with God and later became known as the Day of the Covenant.
- 3 Breyten bid vir homself, from his first 1964 collection *Die Ysterkoei moet sweet* (“The iron cow must sweat”).
 - 4 “... hou Pyn vér van My o Heer / Sodat ander dit mag dra.../ Maar nie Ek nie / Maar ons nooit Pyn gee of klae.” (Translated by Amelia Burger and Ilse Evertse.)
 - 5 From the poem “Seen from the wound in my side.” (Translated by Antjie Krog and André P. Brink.) Original Afrikaans title: “Gesien uit die wond in my sy” (*Rook en Oker*, 1963).
 - 6 “Fuck off police car” – a name that no *ordentlike* person would have uttered in 2003 at the time the band was formed.
 - 7 For a more comprehensive account of their position as morally radical Afrikaners, see Teppo (2018).
 - 8 <https://youtu.be/nlHqKJyo3GQ> (accessed 10 March 2021).
 - 9 On 12 August 2012 the police opened fire on demonstrating miners, killing 43 men, some of whom were shot in the back – a grim echo of Sharpeville, more than five decades earlier, and the first time that the post-apartheid government opened fire on its citizens.
 - 10 Examples of writings on this group, which was formed in 2008, include Scott (2012) and Krueger (2012).
 - 11 <https://youtu.be/uIrkK4NoZpg> (accessed 17 March 2021).
 - 12 This does not mean that illicit behaviour did not occur during apartheid. I heard several accounts of the many kinds of misdemeanours that occurred in the NGK’s heartlands: for example, one of my male informants told me that in his youth in the 1980s, he had had many sexual encounters with theology students – potential *dominees* – who would cruise plant nurseries, although homosexuality was, of course, strictly forbidden.
 - 13 Church order 2007.
 - 14 Pre-discursive forces that condition the body, the consciousness, and the senses. See also Skoggard and Waterston (2015).
 - 15 Ecumenical work could take place between, for instance, the NGK and Pentecostal churches. Interfaith work was, however, far more contentious, as it would mean co-operation, for example, between Muslims and Christians.
 - 16 www.afrikaburn.com/about/guiding-principles (accessed 9 February 2018).
 - 17 <http://annisyman.co.za/2010/content/artGallery/siren00.html> (accessed 3 May 2018).
 - 18 <http://sitespecific.org.za/karoo-geoglyph/> (accessed 5 February 2018).
 - 19 www.sitespecific.org.za (accessed 7 February 2018).

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Conclusion

South African miracles

Introduction

Religious mediations have shown that the social boundaries and racial relations that defined white Afrikaners have not only changed, but have also taken unexpected forms and guises over the last 20 odd years. These changes have also occurred in the heart of *Afrikanerdom*, influencing and transforming their ideas of race, morals, and religion. These subtle, yet remarkable, changes would not have been possible without a concurrent, fundamental transformation of the ways in which South Africans think about moral and racial boundaries.

From their arrival onwards, the white settlers emphasized their tenuous links with Europe and their whiteness through racial hierarchies and minute distinctions that formed the basis of the rules of *ordentlikheid* – the code of proper conduct according to which everyone knew their place. Even when cultural purity was idealized, regular interactions across racial boundaries caused many local cultural ideas and categories – such as *ordentlikheid* – to be very similar in all walks of society, regardless of the “race” or social class one identified with. Racialized ideals regarding what was decent and moral regulated interracial encounters, keeping white people at the top of the racial hierarchy.

During the 20th century, this process culminated with the apartheid era, when these hierarchies were hardened into detailed racial legislation, which the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK) supported. The Afrikaner-led apartheid regime emphasized the existence of separate human “races”. They constructed racial categories enmeshed with cultural, spatial, and religious ones and strove to minimize bonds across the racial boundaries. At the same time, these categories were fragile and artificial after centuries of interaction, in various forms, between South Africans of European descent, Africans, and those imported as slaves from other continents. While emphasizing their whiteness, Afrikaners were not only the biological offspring of these encounters, but had over time appropriated a number of elements from other cultures, including in the form of spiritual beliefs.

Despite the Afrikaners' cultural variety, and their different voices, the NGK pushed its congregants towards unity throughout the apartheid era by emphasizing the high moral "white" standards of *ordentlikheid*, which few ordinary human beings could uphold permanently. Even after the end of apartheid's near-compulsory membership of the NGK, religion remained significant for Afrikaners. Nevertheless, many of them turned their backs on the demands of the NGK, seeking other forms of spirituality. With this development, and the decline in membership, the NGK had to amend its position on several issues, including the ideas of race. The external and internal boundaries of *Afrikanerdom* therefore changed, simultaneously making it more acceptable for them to also attend other denominations' services, and to carry out more inclusive, sometimes even interfaith, practices. These developments meant a discontinuity, or a *rupture*, in Afrikaner faith practices, which also brought about a change in the ideals of *ordentlikheid* – an interesting case in point being the ongoing debate on the church's acceptance (or not) of homosexuality.

The new forms of spirituality, religion, churches, and congregations no longer demanded that their members comply blindly with the former ideals of *ordentlikheid*. Their transformed ideals not only allowed them to express their views on interracial interactions, but often placed these interactions in a central position, where different actors disapproved of or mediated them. All the religious actors were interested in drawing their own moral boundaries, some of which continued to be very strict regulators of behaviour, as the Shofar church exemplified.

Although the religious rupture created opportunities for new faith groups to grow, these were regarded with suspicion. Through the ideas of Pentecostalism, ecumenism, and the New Age, as well as through Wiccan rituals, spatial and social behaviours have emerged that would previously have been regarded as satanic or criminal, or, at the very least, inappropriate. The new faiths have crossed the previous boundaries not only through their racial mediation practices, but also theologically, by diverting from Christianity, as well as spatially, by means of rituals that mediate heterotopic reversals of urban spaces and new utopias. These mediations have to be compatible with the practical issues they face regarding funding, creating spaces for themselves, and inclusivity. I consider the resultant post-apartheid religious mediations, new moral boundaries, and moral subjectivities as key issues that reveal a set of changes in (white) peoples' relationships with one another, and with other "races". They also tell of the changes and continuities in the post-apartheid society in general.

While some of these new religious practices have demolished the previously inherited sociospatial conventions, a great deal of energy has been devoted to protecting white privilege and white people's superior position in the social hierarchies. Some glocalized forms of religion have become racially exclusive despite initially or deliberately striving for inclusivity. Wiccans maintained the lines of whiteness while successfully mediating

gender relations. For example, Wiccans had strong female leaders, and they conducted handfastings – marriage rituals – for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. Nevertheless, many of them insisted on calling their practices “witchcraft” in an avoidable language game which would always antagonize their black countrymen. Adapting the terminology to better suit the local environment, and thus making Wicca more acceptable to the local belief systems, seemed to be out of the question for many Wiccans, who otherwise supported inclusivity and racial mediation. Not all the new religious groups were even interested in racial mediation: the new Asatruan group, which had connections with the global far right, drew hard racial lines, even wanting to reorganize Afrikaner ethnic lines to exclude those who would not suit their agenda, making the hitherto invisible presence of Afrikaner ethnic politics visible in this pagan grouping.

Humans, movement, mediation

The new religious activities moved constantly: there was dance in the churches, neopagans danced around maypoles and moral radicals organized what can only be called pilgrimages to relevant urban spaces. Movement allowed the participants to these events to simultaneously mediate and differentiate between belief worlds that were far apart and hard to reconcile.

On examining these mediations between belief worlds, focusing on their ontological differences (such as the meanings given to ideas of “race”) and their multiple moral subjectivities (such as those of a Wiccan who, despite being regarded with suspicion, also wanted to be perceived as a moral citizen) turned out to be more productive than arguing about terms like “representation”, “symbolism”, and “belief”. These differences were due to the existence of and participation in alternative realities – historically constructed multiple worlds. Movement was the medium used in bringing together these worlds, and in bringing different ontologies face-to-face with one another. Both huge works of landscape art by Afrikaans artist-activists and interreligious events organized in the city served the same purpose – people participated by engaging in deep walking, in order to embody and create affects relating to that which cannot be sufficiently verbalized, namely that despite the different ontological realities that centuries of racial segregation have caused, everyone can share the sense of place and experience the same walking, moving bodies. Even family-sized micro-mediations included movement as an important element – as in the creation of a ritual that united family members again.

The importance of movement unites all the cases described in this book. The size and freedom of movement in these cases varied with the message sent, and the circumstances in which they were carried out. Movement could be limited, restricted, and prevented as rebellious, or dangerous. Movements became bigger and more noticeable as soon as the rituals of mediation became public and included more participants. As a result of

these mediations, individuals and communities were at times emancipated from the burdens of the past – but sometimes they only reproduced the apartheid boundaries.

The examples in this book also raise issues regarding mediation between racial categories and spaces. These much-needed mediations rarely occurred between participants on an equal footing, as the ideas of the utopian colonial past, the strict moral boundaries of a heterosexual patriarchy, and the hierarchies between different groups of people formed the subtext. Mediation was initiated by those who – after all was said and done – had prevailed. Did all the trouble only lead to the silencing of the subaltern, while the others claimed their voices? I hope to address these doubts at a later stage.

Observing and participating in these mediations has prompted me to suggest a new, theoretically and methodologically grounded framework for analysis. It needs to combine a sensorial understanding of movement with the study of mediations across social boundaries. This way of perceiving movement should produce useful perspectives and open new avenues of enquiry for the wider study of religious changes and social transformation, and for more general social changes.

Combined with anthropological participant observation, the mediatory aspects of human bodies' movements could be studied together with people's and groups' other verbal or nonverbal behaviours. The social significance of these movements could be examined in terms of (and even compared with) changes in the movements, and, for example, with regard to the new and unexpected ways they are carried out. These mediations not only communicate the changes that have occurred, but also illuminate the things that are on the edge of happening, but which the wider society has not yet noticed or verbalized. They help catch the weak signals of multiple phenomena, such as social and religious change, unrest, or even gentrification. When mediation occurs through movement, movement is the medium. The subtlest mediations can lead to vast changes.

I suggest that the new ideas and practices of mediation – such as those described in the previous chapters – could also be examined as being relevant for people other than just those identifying as Afrikaners or as white South Africans. Bringing new social worlds into being by means of movement is a deeply human exercise, and this framework for examining a combination of movement and mediation can also be employed to study social and religious changes in other African countries, as well as elsewhere. It could be studied even in combination with numerical methods: the quantitative changes in movements and the use of urban spaces have long been used within urban studies to chart the different events taking place in these spaces, and to understand societal trends.

In this book, I have presented one way of examining social transformation by examining mediation through moral/religious boundaries. Movement has proven to be a workable way of analysing some of the most

opaque topics. It can also be applied to larger contexts or across different sociocultural boundaries, and can be combined with other theoretical approaches (such as practice theory and affect theory) with only the writer's inventiveness setting the limits. The power of movement to influence minds and build new boundaries was important in the ethnographic cases in this book, whether a walk in the countryside or a pagan wedding in the middle of the city. Movement was there, defiant and transformative, making a statement – there was movement in religious practices whenever there was a socially important event. Such movement could occur anywhere: in a living room, around a maypole, or on a sports field. It could be rapid, slow, or almost undetectable – yet every time it occurred, it mediated something new. It could draw a new boundary or create a new social idea. It could represent a strong claim, make a calm statement, or ask a tentative question: could it be done? Can we find new ways of existing together, moving together in this divided land? Could we learn to live like that?

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