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A new laager for a new South Africa : Afrikaans film and the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom

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A new laager for a new South Africa

Afrikaans film and the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom

Adriaan Steyn



African Studies Centre
Leiden



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Afrikaans film and the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom

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1 Introduction

This study deals with the recent revival and expansion of the Afrikaans film industry. While this industry flourished under the apartheid state's extensive subsidy scheme – with sometimes more than ten films released within a single year – South Africa's democratic transition and the subsequent rescinding of the subsidy scheme seemed to announce the Afrikaans film's death. Only three Afrikaans-language feature films¹ were produced between 1994 and 1998, appearing to signal the end of Afrikaans filmmaking. Not a single Afrikaans film was released on the mainstream circuit for the following nine years. And then the Afrikaans film made its unexpected return to the silver screen in 2007. Managing to find – or to produce – an audience for its films, this industry began to burgeon, attracting a substantial number of directors, producers, funders and other stakeholders. Between 2007 and 2015, a total of 61 Afrikaans feature films were released on the mainstream circuit at a rate akin to the heyday of apartheid.

The vast majority of these films have been tailored to the imagined needs and expectations of, marketed to, and consumed by white Afrikaans-speakers – Afrikaners² (as I show in Chapter 3). This, despite the fact that Afrikaners

1 I classify Afrikaans-language films as all films of which the vast majority of dialogue is in Afrikaans. Although I refer to some bilingual films in this text, I do not regard them as Afrikaans-language films per se. In addition, for the purpose of this study, I use the term "Afrikaans films" to include all Afrikaans feature-length films that have been released on the mainstream commercial circuit, excluding documentaries and films dubbed into Afrikaans.

2 For the purpose of this study, I use the term "Afrikaners" to denote white people who speak Afrikaans as a first language. I am well-aware that such a categorization is and has always been slippery. What, for example, should the test be to determine whiteness? In addition, some "Afrikaners" choose to distance themselves from any identification with "other" Afrikaners or with some form of "Afrikaner identity", while other "Afrikaners", in their everyday lives, speak little or no Afrikaans. This does not, however, take anything away from the fact that many – and possibly even the majority of – Afrikaners today consider themselves members of an Afrikaner community with its own cultural identity and heritage. For the purpose of this study, thus, I admit to the fact that Afrikaners are a diverse group of people with no unique essence and when I make claims about Afrikaners, in the present or in the past, I do not wish to generalize these claims to all Afrikaners. I am also cognisant of the fact that such claims can apply in different ways and to different degrees to different Afrikaners. By reserving the term "Afrikaners" for whites, I am also opposing a popular movement to use the term to signify all Afrikaans-

only make up about 40%³ of all Afrikaans-speakers. In addition, the Afrikaans film industry is only one element within a much larger – and equally thriving – Afrikaans culture industry, also mostly patronized by Afrikaners. Here, I use the term “culture industry”, coined by Adorno and Horkheimer (1972 [1944]), to include all commercial media and cultural forms, and all the commercial products of art and entertainment. To some extent, the revival and expansion of the Afrikaans film industry can be regarded as only one manifestation of a much larger process that is taking place across the entire Afrikaans culture industry – a process that, at first glance, appears highly paradoxical. While there has been an ongoing discourse, intermittently subsiding and flaring up since the advent of democracy, about the future of the Afrikaans language and its “endangered” status, Afrikaans has in recent years prospered in a plethora of market-driven domains.

In this study, I am concerned with two central questions. How can this apparent paradox be accounted for? And what are the possible consequences of a vibrant Afrikaans culture industry, and Afrikaners’ collective consumption of Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities, on postapartheid Afrikaner subjectivity and community formation? I attempt to answer these questions through an exploration of the Afrikaans film industry, situating its recent revival and expansion within the context of a broader Afrikaans culture industry and also within the context of postapartheid South Africa, where Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) have argued that African ethnicities have increasingly become branded and consumed. I consider the different historical, social, cultural and economic factors that have coalesced to enable its revival. Yet, as much as this is a study about Afrikaans film, it is also a study about Afrikaners and I would suggest that the Afrikaans film’s revival has opened up a privileged site, and a unique vantage point, from which to explore Afrikaner subjectivities. Thus, I also pay close attention to the position that the Afrikaans film occupies in the lives and imaginations of its

speakers (i.e. Van Blerk 2015). Already in the 1960s, members of a group of Afrikaans writers, the so-called *Sestigers* [Sixtiers], demanded that the term be cleansed of its racial connotations and used to refer to all Afrikaans-speakers (Giliomee 1975, 30). In my experience, those who want to pin the label of Afrikaner onto all Afrikaans-speakers are almost always white. When referring to all first-language Afrikaans-speakers, I simply use the term “Afrikaans-speakers”. I am opposed to using the term “Afrikaanses”, as some Afrikaans newspapers do (Wasserman 2009, 74), to signify this group, since it suggests a sense of solidarity or community amongst all Afrikaans-speakers, which hardly exists in reality (as I show in Chapter 2). When referring to non-Afrikaner Afrikaans-speakers, I use the term “black Afrikaans-speakers” to include African, coloured and Indian Afrikaans-speakers.

3 Percentage based on census data from 2011 (SSA 2012, 26).

consumers and its part “in the reproduction of social experience” (Mazzarella 2004, 347).

Approaching film

Hitherto, few scholarly attempts have been made to account for the recent proliferation in the production of Afrikaans films, to trace its trajectory, to consider its significance or to contemplate its possible consequences.⁴ I can only assume that the poor aesthetic quality and escapist nature of the bulk of these films have inspired some academic aversion. Yet, Kracauer (1963) makes a strong case for the importance of paying close attention to these kinds of, what he calls, “inconspicuous surface-level expressions”, when attempting to understand specific historical moments. Such expressions, he argues, can grant us with unique insights and “by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things” (Kracauer 1963, 75).

However, film and media in general do not only reflect society but can also animate social life. Not only do particular media forms bear the imprint of the historical moment and the social context in which they were produced, but, through their circulation, also become intimately woven into the ways in which people see and interpret themselves and their life-worlds, which ultimately shapes their participation in society. Appadurai (1996) claims that in recent times, together with expanding “global cultural flows” of electronic and print media forms, different mediascapes have had a growing presence in people’s perceptions of reality. Indeed, mediascapes have become one of the fundamental building blocks of people’s “imagined worlds”, providing them with “proto-narratives of possible lives” (Appadurai 1996, 36).

Because media forms like film have become ubiquitous – even in some of the remotest locations in the world – anthropologists are increasingly recognizing the necessity of studying its significance (Ginsburg 2002, 160). Most of these anthropologists have resisted the “fantasy” (Ortner 1998, 414-415) that one can understand the workings of media by merely interpreting

⁴ A few scholars have taken recent Afrikaans films as the object of their analysis: some have analysed the content of individual films (Browne 2013; Marx 2014; Sonnekus 2013); Adendorff and Van Dyk (2014) discuss the novel Roepman’s adaptation to film (Eilers 2011); Broodryk (2013) discusses some themes in the work of director Willie Esterhuizen. Jordaan, Botha and Viviers (2015) conducted a quantitative study to determine Afrikaans film audiences’ ticket-buying behaviour.

its representations. Although textual analyses can be useful because mass media are sites of collective mediation and representation, the picture it creates is never complete. Anthropologists studying media have, for the most part, turned their attention to the social and cultural contexts in which media texts are produced and consumed, analysing processes of media production, the social histories and political economy of media institutions, the distribution and circulation of media, and the ways in which media is consumed (Spitulnik 1993, 295). For the purpose of this study, I am not so much interested in Afrikaans films as autonomous texts, but rather in the way that these “discrete cultural texts... are produced, circulated and consumed” (Abu-Lughod 1997, 114). And like Ginsburg (1991), I am “less concerned with the usual focus on the formal qualities of film as text and more with the cultural mediations that occur through film” (Ginsburg 1991, 94).

The imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom

To introduce some of the questions I will be engaging with in this study, I present here a trajectory of the Afrikaners as an imagined community, from past to present. According to Anderson (2006 [1983]), an “imagined community” consists of a group of people, where any one person will never meet most of the other members of the group, “yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006 [1983], 6). Rejecting the widely-held notion that nations have some primordial origin, Anderson suggests that communities or nations are imagined into existence through a process mainly fomented by the circulation and collective consumption of media forms, like the novel and the newspaper. Yet, social entities like nations, cultures and communities, Mazzarella (2004, 357) argues, are not only fundamentally constituted, but also continuously reconstituted, through the consumption of mass media and related processes of mediation.

In this section, I present an account of the Afrikaners as a collective formation by delineating three historical moments, which shows how this collectivity has been composed and imagined in different ways over the last one hundred and twenty years. Firstly, I outline the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and attempts during the first half of the 20th century to demarcate the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom – a process that developed into mass political mobilization and reached its zenith with the 1948 general elections when the Afrikaner-led National Party managed to capture state power. Secondly, I trace the gradual fragmentation of Afrikaner nationalism that began in the 1970s and ultimately culminated with the country’s democratic transition.

Thirdly, I consider the status of Afrikaner nationalism in the present moment, identifying some traces of recent attempts to once again reaffirm the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom, to resist assimilation into a rainbow nation, to re-emphasize Afrikaners' distinctiveness and to rebirth a form of Afrikaner nationalism. Lastly, I argue that the Afrikaans culture industry provides a unique point of access from which to explore these new ways in which some Afrikaners are – through processes enabled by new technologies and under new social conditions – imagining or re-imagining themselves as a community.

“A people”

It is generally agreed that Afrikaner nationalism only became a substantial, full-fledged movement after 1910, once the union of the four British provinces could “[provide] a structural basis for the unification of all Afrikaners” (Stokes 1973, 563). During the next four decades, the movement gradually gained shape and strength. At the beginning of the 20th century, after their defeat in the Anglo-Boer War, many of the Boers – or Afrikaners, as they would increasingly become known – were devastated. Fresh in their minds were the memories of their collective suffering under the British, of women and children's misery in concentration camps, and of Boer-owned farms being burned to the ground. This trauma was further compounded by the mass urbanization of Afrikaners⁵ and their increased poverty. Many Afrikaners, unaccustomed to a life in the city, formed part of the impoverished urban proletariat, with living standards significantly lower than the English (Welsh 1969, 266; Vestergaard 2001, 21), but still superior to blacks. At the time, Afrikaner leaders had growing concerns about these poor Afrikaners' moral degeneration, about racial boundaries in urban settings becoming increasingly porous and about growing incidences of miscegenation (Posel 2001, 52; Swart, 2006, 99).⁶ In addition to the “threat” posed by black people, many Afrikaners were also anxious about the threat posed by English-speakers, who they perceived as treating “their language, culture, history and religion... with contempt” (Giliomee 1975, 19). These very conditions laid the foundation for the development of an Afrikaner national consciousness: a mass ethnic nationalist movement mobilized to challenge

5 In 1904, 6% of Afrikaners lived in towns. By 1936, the figure had risen to 44% (Welsh 1969, 265).

6 In their report about poor whites, the Carnegie Commission (1932, xix), for example, addressed the “deleterious effects” of white families living in close proximity to black families and the associated “danger” of whites “going kaff*r”.

British imperialism and Anglicization, and to reaffirm racial boundaries, stressing the rights of individuals to speak their own language and to cherish and preserve their own cultural traditions and way of life (Dubow 1992, 201; Moodie 1975, 48; Webb and Kriel 2000, 37).

Moodie (1975) argues that the Afrikaner nationalist movement rose in conjunction with the formulation, elaboration, diffusion and later the general acceptance of the “Afrikaner civil religion”. In his “ideal-typical” outline of this civil religion, Moodie describes it as a mythologized 20th century religious reading of Afrikaner history. According to this mythology, the Afrikaners are descendent from Western European ancestry and established themselves during the 17th century as a nation in the Cape. The British occupation of the Cape in 1806 instigated a “period of revelation”, during which God began to reveal his divine will to the Afrikaner people by allowing them to succumb to two cycles of hardship and suffering (Moodie 1975, 2). First, the Afrikaners had to escape the “oppression” they endured at the hands of the British. Like the Israelites fled from Egypt, so the Afrikaners fled during the Great Trek, seeking the freedom to live their lives undisturbed. Despite facing several adversaries and severe obstacles, they remained faithful to the will of God and he rewarded them with freedom, and the Republic of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal Republic – “the promised land” (Moodie 1975, 5). A major milestone in this mythology was the Battle of Blood River on 16 December 1838, when God granted them victory over thousands of Zulus, which acted as proof of the Afrikaners’ status as an elect people. The second cycle was the woes they had to endure during the Anglo-Boer War and the marginalization, victimization and prejudice they experienced in its aftermath. Their “suffering” after the Anglo-Boer War was, therefore, incorporated into the civil religion’s mythological framework, acting as “a reminder of the coming glory” (Moodie 1975, 14). If they waited patiently, and remained faithful, God would reward them with a republic of their own. Maintaining their distinctiveness and preserving their language and cultural heritage became seen as a sacred duty to God, and anything threatening their distinctiveness was seen as evil (Moodie 1975, 14-15).

In the years directly following the union of South Africa, the major tenets of the Afrikaner civil religion were only accepted by some members of the Afrikaner elite and intelligentsia, but hardly affected the majority of Afrikaners’ subjectivities or conceptions of self. Gradually, however, its content became diffused and Afrikaners increasingly viewed themselves as members of an Afrikaner collectivity – or an imagined community of Afrikaners – with a distinct, yet shared, destiny. A wide range of Afrikaner

elite-headed organisations that mushroomed in the three decades after the union of the four British provinces were instrumental in propagating the content of the Afrikaners' civil religion,⁷ creating a self-referential world in which the civil religion's themes, symbols and rituals became so ubiquitous that its truth seemed incontrovertible.

None were more pivotal to this process than the secret society, the Afrikaner Broederbond (Brotherhood), which took on the role as "vanguard" of Afrikaner nationalism (O'Meara 1977, 164) and embarked on a full-scale "civil-religion crusade for their people" (Moodie 1975, 199). Founded in 1918 and going underground in 1922, the Broederbond dominated the ideological terrain of Afrikaner nationalism and had far-reaching influences on the inner workings of, amongst others, cultural organizations, Afrikaans churches, the National Party itself and later also on a number of Afrikaner-owned businesses (O'Meara 1977, 167). Many of their goals were achieved through the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings [Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organizations] (FAK), an umbrella organization founded by them in 1929, aimed at coordinating and unifying all Afrikaner cultural activities within a single body; by the 1930s, hundreds of different Afrikaner organizations were part of the FAK, from youth clubs and student associations to labour unions and church organizations (Giliomee 2012, 401; O'Meara 1977, 169). It was mainly through the FAK and its members' activities within the cultural sphere that a "consistent ideology firmly based on the civil faith began to be institutionalized" (Moodie 1975, x). This process was further fomented by the growth of an Afrikaans literary culture, which began to take off in the 1910s, especially after the establishment of *Nasionale Pers* [National Press] in 1915. Not only did a plethora of Afrikaans novels, newspapers and magazines create a communicative space shared by a large number of Afrikaners, it was also through these media forms that the first images of Afrikanerness – of Afrikaners as a distinct people – were projected. Hofmeyr, for example, writes about Afrikaans magazines that "carried articles, advertisements, pictures and stories which took every imaginable phenomena (sic) of people's worlds and then repackaged these as 'Afrikaans'" (Hofmeyr 1987, 111). The Afrikaans media also became over-run with romanticized treatments of Afrikaner history and especially the events of the Anglo-Boer War and the Great Trek were mythologized (Hofmeyr 1987, 109-110).

7 See O'Meara (1977; 1983) for more detailed discussions of the interests that various groups had in the proliferation of an Afrikaner national consciousness. He argues that Afrikaner nationalism was used in the period between 1934 and 1948 to forge a class alliance between the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and Afrikaner workers, which ultimately prepared the ground for Afrikaners to capture their "legitimate" share of the economy (O'Meara 1983, 16).

The diffusion of the content of the Afrikaner civil religion was further fuelled by civil rituals, such as the singing of *Die Stem*, which was accepted as national anthem in 1938 and sung together with *God save the king* (Giliomee 2012, 402), and the celebration of certain days of historical significance, like Van Riebeeck Day, Kruger Day and Dingaans Day. Yet, no ritual was as important for the kindling of an Afrikaner national consciousness as the 1938 “cultural orgy of the celebration of Voortrekker Centenary” (O’Meara 1977, 179). To commemorate the Great Trek, nine oxwagons made their way from Cape Town to Pretoria, stopping in numerous towns and villages along the way, where they were welcomed by large crowds of Afrikaners dressed in Voortrekker attire (Giliomee 2012, 432). Around campfires, they sang folksongs and did re-enactments of the Great Trek. Afrikaner leaders delivered speeches pervaded with the theme of *volkseenheid* [national unity] and “republicanism became more and more the expressed goal” (Moodie 1975, 182). The result was “civil-religion enthusiasm [seizing] Afrikanerdom” (Moodie 1975, 180). The Voortrekker Centenary celebrations managed to bridge the divisions that existed within Afrikanerdom at the time, showing Afrikaners how much they had in common with one another, affirming Afrikanerdom’s imagined boundaries, convincing Afrikaners that they shared a collective destiny and creating “a massive demand for *volkseenheid*” (O’Meara 1977, 179).

Afrikaner nationalism was further strengthened by the establishment of a spate of financial institutions catering specifically for the needs of Afrikaners, like insurance giants SANLAM and SANTAM, the bank Volkskas, Federale Volksbeleggings [Federal Investments of a People] and the Reddingsdaadbond [Rescue Act Bond]. In addition to the vast network of financial and cultural Afrikaner organizations through which the Afrikaners could be mobilized, Afrikaner unity was further consolidated in 1948 when the National Party won the general elections. With Afrikaner nationalism as their “explicit ideology” (O’Meara 1983, 1), the National Party propagated the idea that “the party was the nation and the nation the party” (Giliomee 1975, 35). At the time, with the National Party in control of state power, Afrikaner nationalism seemed impenetrable.

Fragmentation

However, by the 1970s, the slow implosion of Afrikaner nationalism was under way. Gradually, Afrikaners’ solidarity and association with an Afrikaner identity began to loosen. By then, the anxieties that had once made the content – or the mythology – of the Afrikaner civil religion so

attractive had, for the most part, withered away. The second cycle of hardship and suffering that they had to endure following the Anglo-Boer War had become a distant memory. The Afrikaner National Party had firm control of the state, South Africa had become a republic, Afrikaans's place as official public language was secured, and schools and universities with Afrikaans as language of instruction had been erected to fit the needs of the Afrikaner community (Giliomee 2012, 637). In addition, through apartheid policies, the National Party ensured "a vigorous and thoroughgoing reassertion of racial difference" (Posel 2001, 52). Most Afrikaners also managed to shake off the sense of inferiority that had pervaded Afrikanerdom in the first half of the 20th century, allowing them to become less anxious and more complacent with their position in South African society (Giliomee 1975, 29).

Afrikaners, to different degrees, also benefitted from the National Party's partisan support for Afrikaner-owned business and Afrikaner economic development, and from South Africa's rapid economic growth during the 1960s (Stokes 1974, 566; O'Meara 1979). According to Hyslop (2000), the period between the 1970s and 1990s was marked by a transformation in the subjectivities of white South Africans. As whites, and especially Afrikaners, accumulated greater wealth, they also abandoned their strong identification with the Afrikaner nationalist project and, instead, favoured more individual and consumption-oriented identities. This process was further compounded by, amongst others, the introduction of television in South Africa and Afrikaners being increasingly "exposed to globalizing influences" (Hyslop 2000, 38). In addition, the National Party began relying more heavily on the votes of English-speakers. As the party slowly abandoned the notion of Afrikaner dominance, its identity started changing, weakening the solidarity that had previously existed in its Afrikaner support-base (Hyslop 2000, 39).

The fragmentation of Afrikaner identities continued and even intensified after the country's democratic transition as "[t]he mythology that narrativized Afrikaner ideology imploded" (Steyn 2004, 150). After the 1994 general elections, Giliomee (2012, 692) argues, "it became increasingly difficult to talk about a coherent Afrikaner community with a sense of common destiny". Vestergaard (2001, 22) argues that "the old Afrikaner identity" had become so contaminated by its common association with apartheid that Afrikaners neither could nor wanted to express their identities along racial lines; some white Afrikaans-speakers refused to identify with either an Afrikaner identity or with their "fellow" Afrikaners (Giliomee 2012, 692) and some Afrikaners Anglicized completely, opting to raise their children in English.

A threat

The Afrikaners did not, however, simply dissolve into postapartheid South Africa. Despite how fragmented their identities might have become, today many Afrikaners still perceive their Afrikaner identities as an integral part of their selfhood. Moreover, as the realities of the new South Africa have set in, it has become increasingly popular for Afrikaners to construct Afrikanerdom as under some kind of threat and their Afrikaner identities as a source of collective “victimhood”. Consider, for example, this extract from a recent article by Afrikaner activist, *taalstryder* [language activist] and leader of the Pro-Afrikaans Aksiegroep [Pro Afrikaans Action Group] (PRAAG), Dan Roodt,

It can no longer be denied that a war is being waged against Afrikaans. And it does not only come from the ANC state, but also from big businesses and even from Afrikaans journalists... Today the slogan is: “Extinguish Afrikaans. Make everything English.” But Afrikaans is, just like apartheid, only a metonym for the people who speak it and especially those who want to attend school and study in it. It is not only our language that they want to extinguish; also the people that speak it, should be massacred... According to international definitions, genocide materializes in many forms. Assimilation is one such form. Another is what is known as “cultural genocide” ...Our land is being taken away from us and there is a hateful, violent campaign to destroy our “integrity as a separate people” and to either kill or assimilate our children. We are currently fighting for survival. That it has to be better organized and done with even greater resoluteness, speak for itself. (Roodt 2015)⁸

According to Roodt, South Africa has yet again turned into a hostile environment for its Afrikaner citizens. Not only has their language and their lives come under threat, but also their status as a “distinct people”. One could, of course, argue that Roodt is part of the Afrikaner right-wing fringe and that the sentiments he expresses here are not necessarily representative of the sentiments held by the majority of Afrikaners. I would, however, contend that Roodt’s views are not uncommon and that many Afrikaners would agree with the basic tenets of his tirade, although possibly choosing to articulate it in different ways.

⁸ This translation and all other translations from Afrikaans to English that appear in this text are my own.

This extract from Roodt's article can, for example, be compared to the last three chapters of renowned Afrikaner scholar Hermann Giliomee's extensive book, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, where he chronicles the Afrikaners' descent into a situation of ever deepening desperation following the country's democratic transition. Although he writes in a very different register, the picture that emerges from his writing is remarkably similar to the one sketched by Roodt. Giliomee describes the Afrikaners' systematic loss of power, which ultimately culminated in the disbandment of the National Party. He mentions their growing frustration and disillusionment with the realities of postapartheid South Africa, like, amongst others, high crime rates, the proliferation of farm attacks and farm murders, affirmative action policies, Afrikaner civil servants being retrenched, poor service-delivery and the presence of quota systems in traditionally white- or Afrikaner-dominated sports. He writes about Afrikaners increasingly feeling themselves alienated from the state and about Afrikaners fleeing the country and settling abroad. Yet, Giliomee's greatest concern seems to be with the way in which the Afrikaans language is ostensibly being squeezed out of schools and out of universities, how Afrikaans is disappearing from the public domain and how English is increasingly becoming South Africa's *de facto* lingua franca. Elsewhere, Giliomee (2014) writes about how the disappearance of the Afrikaans language will ultimately lead to the disappearance of the Afrikaners as a discernible ethnic community.

Unlike Roodt, however, Giliomee is ultimately optimistic and he argues that the Afrikaners have showcased a "mysterious vitality" (2012, 715) in the past, which is something they will need to draw on to overcome the challenges they are facing in the present. Giliomee ends his book with the following paragraph,

The Afrikaners were [after apartheid] without national leaders or strong organizations, but with apartheid receding into the past, the hope was that many would rediscover and re-invent that part of their identity forged by the Afrikaners' complex and turbulent history, by the Afrikaans language itself and by the harsh but beautiful land in which they lived. Their challenge was to come to terms with this history, to nourish and replenish this love for their language and take up their responsibility to hand over their cultural heritage to the next generation in a sound state. If they were to accept this challenge, they would become part of a new, democratic South Africa in their own special way. (Giliomee 2012, 715)

Both authors cast Afrikaners as the victims of the new South Africa, who are being treated like second class citizens. Moreover, they seem to suggest that South Africa's democratization has released a force that is threatening to destroy the Afrikaans language and the very essence of Afrikanerdom. Afrikaners, they argue, have a responsibility to rebel against and reverse this process. For Roodt, this means taking up arms, encouraging greater Afrikaner solidarity and organized mass mobilization. This will, at least, allow them to survive in South Africa as a distinct group of people. For Giliomee, this rebellion means that Afrikaners should re-invent themselves by returning to their roots and recovering the essence of their transhistorical Afrikaner identities, and accepting their "duty" to pass their cultural heritage on to future generations. By becoming true Afrikaners again, they will also – almost magically – become true members of the new South Africa.

A movement

On 5 May 2015, the Solidarity Movement held a "crisis deliberation" at the Voortrekker Monument to reflect on the Afrikaner minority's plight and future in postapartheid South Africa. This movement was brought to life with the ambition "to create a future for the Afrikaner cultural community and Afrikaans language community where they can be free, safe and prosperous" (Krisisberaad 2015). Originally born out of the Solidarity labour union, the Solidarity Movement also includes organizations like the civil rights group, AfriForum, the Afrikaans publishing house, Kraal-Uitgewers, and the online news platform, Maroela Media. It has a "rapidly growing" membership-base of 340 000 people (Jansen 2015) – the vast majority of which are Afrikaners. By adding the families of these members to its membership figures, the movement claims to "represent nearly a million people" (Rademeyer 2015). During their crisis deliberation, a motion was accepted to investigate the possibilities of Afrikaner self-determination in South Africa. The following day, the largest Afrikaans digital news platform, *Netwerk24* (2015), launched a poll with the question, "Do you think self-determination for Afrikaners is a good idea?" More than 94% of participants voted yes.

Hitherto, the only form of Afrikaner self-determination that has emerged in postapartheid South Africa, is the small town of Orania, located in the Northern Cape. Orania is a self-proclaimed, although not officially recognized, *volkstaat* [Afrikaner nation-state], celebrating the apartheid ideal of separate development and operating as an inversion of the former homeland system. In Orania, attempts have been made to cultivate an "Afrikaner way of life"

that is mostly undisturbed by black-majority rule and the politics of the new South Africa. Orania, however, remains a small initiative with just over a thousand residents (Orania Sensus 2014, 9). General Secretary of the Solidarity Movement, Flip Buys (2015), considers the establishment of an Afrikaner *volkstaat* much larger than Orania as the ideal, although he admits that it is impractical at the moment, mainly because Afrikaners do not occupy a single territory, but are dispersed across the country. Instead of establishing a *volkstaat*, the Solidarity Movement is interested in creating Afrikaner-majority spaces across South Africa, because, Buys (2015) argues, “[m]inorities need spaces where they can be the majority”.

Following their crisis deliberation, the Solidarity Movement held a “future deliberation” on 10 October 2015, during which they announced their R3.5 billion “Plan B” for South Africa (Carstens and Eybers 2015). The plan was conceived as a blueprint for setting up a “parallel government” that would provide a range of services to an Afrikaner minority that is, so they claim, being “neglected” by the ANC. The government, they say, is mainly concerned with black people. For this reason, the plan makes provision for setting up a host of alternative formations – over and above the state – that will, for example, provide Afrikaans-speakers with an Afrikaans education, secure Afrikaners’ safety and security, deliver municipal services, fund arts and cultural activities, preserve the Afrikaners’ cultural heritage and document their history. This plan largely pivots on Afrikaners becoming actively involved in governing themselves, as Buys (in Carstens and Eybers 2015) explained, “We cannot trust the state to create a future for us. We have to take responsibility ourselves.”

Van Rooyen (2000), in his book, *The New Great Trek*, about the whites that have left South Africa since the country’s democratic transition, identifies an alternative to emigration, which he refers to as “pseudo migration”. He describes it as a “self-induced emotional detachment from the realities of South Africa” (Van Rooyen 2000, 17). What the Solidarity Movement has envisioned through its Plan B is, although different from Van Rooyen’s description, also a form of pseudo migration. Where Van Rooyen refers to individuals withdrawing from the South African reality, what the Solidarity Movement is proposing is Afrikaners’ systematic and continued collective withdrawal from the South African state and the “rainbow nation”. That the movement has such a strong support-base is already indicative of a strong presence of separatist and sub-nationalist sentiments amongst certain Afrikaners today. And, apart from threatening to obliterate the social bonds that exist between Afrikaners and their fellow South Africans, the Solidarity

Movement's Plan B also promises to strengthen the social bonds amongst Afrikaners as a collectivity.

Although bearing similarities to earlier manifestations of Afrikaner nationalism, this movement is explicitly postnationalist. It has no ambition to capture or even to secede from the South African state. Instead, its aim is to ensure cultural security, and to create physical and psychological spaces where Afrikaners can be a majority, where they can rule themselves, where they can live their "particular way of life" free from interference or, as Brink (2006, 79) described this "ideal" a decade ago, "a *volkstaat* of the mind".

I would argue that if the last quarter of the 20th century marked the loosening of Afrikaners' attachment to an Afrikaner identity, the last decade has been characterized by many Afrikaners' return to and embrace of their Afrikaner identities. A new solidarity is being forged between some Afrikaners through, amongst others, their collective experiences of "victimhood" and a shared sense of duty to preserve their language and culture. Admittedly, the social bonds being forged might be weak and many Afrikaners might feel little solidarity with their fellow Afrikaners, yet, both the size and ambition of the Solidarity Movement shows that these new laager-drawing tendencies amongst Afrikaners cannot be ignored or reduced to a status of insignificance.

The De la Rey phenomenon

In 2006, the then relatively unknown pop singer, Bok van Blerk, released an album featuring a song about the Anglo-Boer War called *De la Rey*. The song's lyrics include first person descriptions of the Boers, with their backs against the wall, fighting the mighty British Empire, pleading to Afrikaner war hero, General Koos de la Rey (also known as the Lion of the West Transvaal), to lead them through these dark times. Consider the chorus and one of the song's verses,

De la Rey, De la Rey, will you come to lead the Boers?
De la Rey, De la Rey
General, general, like one man we'll fall around you
General De la Rey
...

And the Khakis [British] that laugh
A handful of us against their great might
And the cliffs against our back, they think it's over
But the heart of a Boer lies deeper and wider, they will soon discover
On a horse he approaches, the Lion of the West Transvaal

The song quickly went viral. More than 200 000 copies of the album that bore the song's title were sold within less than a year (Grundlingh 2011, 154), which is a remarkable feat considering Van Blerk's relatively small target audience of Afrikaans-speaking consumers. Across the country, the song was performed in pubs, at concerts and at festivals in front of large Afrikaner-majority audiences – in most cases these audiences consisted of predominantly young Afrikaners. Some scholars (Grundlingh 2011; Van der Waal and Robins 2011, 768) have noted the almost ritualistic form that many of these performances took on: audiences on their feet, their eyes closed, their hands to their hearts, as though van Blerk was performing the national anthem. In 2008, following the success of *De la Rey, Ons vir you* [literally: We for you], a musical featuring Koos de la Rey as the protagonist, was produced and became the “most successful Afrikaans musical in history” (Collective Dream Films 2016).

More than anything, however, the song spawned controversy and a fierce public and scholarly debate; in fact, even *New York Times* published a feature about the song and its controversy (Wines 2007). Indeed, why would a song about a long-dead Afrikaner hero resonate so strongly with the Afrikaners of the 21st century? Was it proof of the resurgence of a form of Afrikaner ethno-nationalism? Many argued that the song resonated so well with Afrikaner audiences because they transposed its content to their own life-worlds and contexts and drew a comparison between the hardships the Boers had to endure and the “hardships” they faced in postapartheid South Africa. It struck a nerve with Afrikaner audiences, because, in some way, it allowed them to “[articulate] a range of emotions from anger, anxiety, confusion and fear, on the one hand, to pride, purposefulness and defiance, on the other” (Baines 2013, 255). To some extent, the song became a symbol – a touchstone – of some Afrikaners' experience of alienation from the South African state and the “rainbow nation”. The figure of De la Rey was invoked as some kind of *volksleier* [leader of a people], who would symbolically lead his “suffering” people “to a safe place where they would be able to regroup and thrive” (Van der Waal and Robins 2011, 778). What many would come to refer to as “the

De la Rey phenomenon”, bore traces of the content of the Afrikaner civil religion as characterized by Moodie (1975).

Apart from merely reflecting certain anxieties and aspirations of a loosely related group of Afrikaners, some critics also contended that the song and its popular appeal were illustrative of Afrikaners seeking ways to express a new type of Afrikaner identity. Van der Waal and Robins (2011, 779), for example, argued that the song “[reasserted] the imagined boundaries of white Afrikanerdom”. This was not done in an explicitly political register, but instead in the more acceptable language of cultural and linguistic pride. Similarly, Tim du Plessis, previously editor of *Rapport*, the Afrikaans newspaper with the highest circulation figures in the country, saw the De la Rey phenomenon as emblematic of “a gear shift taking place” amongst Afrikaners – a group of people who were becoming increasingly comfortable in expressing or asserting their Afrikaner identities. He explains,

Like the Soweto generation of 1976, who brushed aside the “quiet diplomacy” approach of their parents, the *De la Rey* generation of 2006 is telling [an older] generation: “If you feel hesitant to reclaim your Afrikaans identity, then make way. We don’t.” (Du Plessis 2007, 65)

This “new confidence” is well-illustrated by Deon Opperman, Hertzog Prize⁹-winning playwright and director of *Ons vir jou*, who said about the production,

I’m tired of it being unacceptable to call myself an Afrikaner. I’m tired of standing back and watching as the history of my people is slowly being destroyed and discarded. That’s why we decided to create a musical that plays off during the Boer War. (Opperman as quoted in Basson 2008, 13)

Most scholars and public commentators agreed that the De la Rey phenomenon was an attempt by Afrikaners, born out of their shared angst, to reclaim their Afrikaner identities and their “proud” collective heritage. Yet, what they disagreed about was both the significance and the telos of this movement. For Du Plessis (2007, 65), the De la Rey phenomenon was merely a phase in the Afrikaners’ transition from being old Afrikaners to becoming “new Afrikaners”. Grundlingh (2011, 158, 160) admitted to the song’s seemingly sectional nationalist appearance, yet, ultimately rejected its seriousness, describing it as “a temporary flare-up”. Van der Waal and

⁹ The most esteemed Afrikaans literary award.

Robins (2011, 776) classified it as “a new form of identity politics”, although remaining vague about its content, ambition and possible direction. Now, more than a decade after *De la Rey*’s release, it might be productive to revisit this debate and again contemplate the song’s historical significance. One implicit assumption in most analyses of the De la Rey phenomenon is that it was an exceptional event – a fluke. Any real engagement with questions about the song’s position within a much larger Afrikaans culture industry was conspicuously absent from the debate.¹⁰

Re-invention

If a “distinct” Afrikaner identity was first forged within the cultural sphere, through cultural rituals and through the consumption of Afrikaans media, what kind of subjectivities are, in the present moment, being produced by an Afrikaans culture industry, where Afrikaans-language commodities are mostly manufactured, sold and consumed by Afrikaners? Many scholars have written positively about the ways in which Afrikaners have, in recent years, celebrated the Afrikaans language and their culture, especially at Afrikaans arts festivals and through Afrikaans music (Vestergaard 2001, 35; Blaser 2004, 197; Visser 2007, 25; Truscott 2011). They argue that these celebrations have presented Afrikaners with opportunities to refashion their “old Afrikaner identities” into “new Afrikaner identities”. Blaser, for example, writes, “A new generation [of Afrikaners] has been identified and even named the ‘Zoid generation,’ after the successful rock singer, Karen Zoid. They seem to enjoy the liberty which freedom from the ethnic laager affords” (2004, 197). This, of course, raises the pertinent question whether it is even possible to celebrate an Afrikaner ethnic culture outside of an ethnic laager. Is what we are witnessing merely a case of “new Afrikaners” trading one laager for another?

If a single song like *De la Rey* had the capacity to forcefully express Afrikaners’ shared anxieties and to reaffirm Afrikanerdom’s imagined boundaries, what are the effects of the larger Afrikaans culture industry’s recent burgeoning? The De la Rey phenomenon garnered attention because of its conspicuousness; it was a confident and blatant attempt to reclaim an Afrikaner identity – an attempt bordering on cultural chauvinism. Yet, I would argue that the song was hardly unique in its effect. In this study, I pay attention to the more

10 One exception is Bezuidenhout’s (2007) treatment of the song, situating its significance within the changing Afrikaans music landscape.

“inconspicuous surface-level expressions” (Kracauer 1963) of Afrikaans film and the context in which they arise. I argue that the flourishing of the Afrikaans film industry – and also the Afrikaans culture industry in general – can be understood as symptomatic of Afrikaner fears about a language, a people and an identity in decline. In addition, I show how the industry has continually reaffirmed and naturalized Afrikanerdom’s imagined boundaries, while producing and reinforcing Afrikaner sectionalism – the kind of sectionalism so well illustrated by the emergence of the Solidarity Movement.

Chapter outline

In Chapter 2, I present an overview of the Afrikaans culture industry. By drawing on interviews with some of the industry’s key figures and on a wide range of secondary sources, such as newspaper and magazine articles, and a host of other media texts, I attempt to explain why the culture industry has been flourishing in recent years, while also considering its social significance and possible consequences. I pay particular attention to Afrikaners’ historical and present relationship with the Afrikaans language, the way in which Afrikaans has become constructed as endangered and how we can understand Afrikaans as a brand that seems to appeal specifically to Afrikaners. I consider the ways in which different institutions in the culture industry have simultaneously attempted to “save” and capitalize on the Afrikaans language, how the preservation and promotion of Afrikaans have shifted into the private sphere, and what its effects might be. Ultimately, I argue that the Afrikaans culture industry after apartheid has opened up new ways in which Afrikaners can, through the collective consumption of Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities, imagine themselves as members of a collectivity or a community of Afrikaners.

I admit that the overview I present in Chapter 2 is necessarily simplified, since I cannot possibly give full recognition to all the industry’s complexities, nuances, exceptions and subversions. In Chapter 3, I continue the argument developed in Chapter 2 by focusing in more detail specifically on the Afrikaans film industry. In this chapter, I pay close attention to the production, exhibition, content and social significance of the Afrikaans film at different historical moments – from the production of the first Afrikaans film in 1916, to 2015. In this chapter, I discuss some films in greater length than others; the films I pay more attention to are, in many cases, not of superior aesthetic quality, but have either proven to be popular amongst audiences or bear some other social or historical significance. I place emphasis on continuities

and discontinuities between apartheid and postapartheid filmmaking, on present-day market calculations that influence film content, and on the media institutions involved in the film industry and their motivations. For the period between 1916 and 1994, I rely mostly on secondary sources and the films that I discuss are the films that other theorists have regarded as emblematic of specific moments. Yet, most of this chapter's emphasis falls on the Afrikaans film's more recent history from 2007 to 2015. For this discussion, I draw primarily on the content of the 61 films that were produced during this period and on interviews with numerous stakeholders in the industry, including producers, directors, actors, distributors, critics and funders. My analysis is further informed by my experience of having attended the annual Silwerskermfees [Silver Screen Festival], the only Afrikaans film festival, twice (2014 and 2015), and also by having spent time as an observer on two film sets.¹¹

In Chapter 4, I shift my attention to one particular Afrikaans film, and I chronicle the life of Darrell Roodt's *Treurgrond* (2015), from inception to reception. This film, which deals with the inflammatory contemporary South African issues of land claims and farm attacks, appears as a rarity on the Afrikaans film landscape because of its explicitly political content. It is for this reason that I have chosen to discuss *Treurgrond* more extensively than the films I discuss in Chapter 3; in addition, the film's content also resonates strongly with many of the themes I address in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. I show how *Treurgrond* uses familiar tropes and stereotypes, present in many other recent Afrikaans films, to convey its political message. I describe the ways in which the film romanticizes the Afrikaners' "way of life", how it constructs Afrikanerdom as under threat, how it produces and reproduces fear in its audience, and how it presents Afrikaner solidarity as the only means through which Afrikaners can live a meaningful life in South Africa. For my reading of the film, I draw on my experience of having spent a week on *Treurgrond's* film set and on interviews I conducted with the film's producers, director, screenplay-writer, and numerous cast and crew members. I also discuss some of the insights I gained from closely following the film's reception on social media.

11 The two films were *Treurgrond* (Roodt 2015) and *'n Man soos my pa* (Else 2015). In the latter, I also appeared as an extra.

2

The Afrikaans culture industry after apartheid

Shortly after South Africa's democratic transition, the Department of Arts and Culture (1996) published a white paper which addressed the healing role that arts and culture should play in a fractured society. It warned that "[c]ulture should not be used as a mechanism of exclusion, a barrier between people, nor should cultural practices be reduced to ethnic or religious chauvinism." Considering the task at hand, it stated, "Ours is indeed no simple task, given the ease with which the arts, culture and heritage may be abused for sectional purposes. The opportunity now presents itself for us to rise above the pettiness of selfish practices" (DAC 1996). The white paper reveals some of the optimism with which many greeted the new South Africa and the faith that was placed in arts and culture as an emancipatory force that could both bolster the government's nation-building project and attenuate divisions within society. In the two decades following the white paper's release, to what extent did the Afrikaans culture industry succeed in living up to these expectations?

Following apartheid's demise, the Afrikaans language was forced to part with the privileged position it once held under the National Party's guardianship and has, subsequently, contracted in a number of its functions. However, despite growing concerns about the language's perceived compromised future, Afrikaans has proven its vitality in multiple market-driven domains. In this chapter, I trace the expansion of the Afrikaans culture industry after apartheid. I argue that this process was fomented, at least in part, by paranoia about Afrikaans's "fading position" in postapartheid South Africa. Furthermore, because Afrikaners still command a vast material and cultural capital, they have been the prime producers, sellers and buyers of Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities. Thus, together with the growth of the Afrikaans culture industry, an array of physical, digital and psychological spaces has opened up where white Afrikaans-speakers can be a majority. I argue that the expansion of these spaces has laid the foundation for the formation of new Afrikaner subjectivities and enclaved identities and contributed to the production and strengthening of separatist tendencies amongst certain Afrikaners. Instead of being an emancipatory

force, facilitating Afrikaans-speakers' forceful integration into a new South Africa and "rainbow nation", it has succeeded in reaffirming and naturalizing the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom.

A language, a home

The genesis of the Afrikaans language can be traced back to the colonial creolization of the Dutch language, which was first introduced to the African continent by 17th century settlers (Shell 2001, 58-64; cf. Lewis 1996). In conjunction with the expansion of a polyglot slave society at the Cape, various loosely related Dutch dialects spontaneously developed, bearing linguistic shards of the different languages spoken at the Cape and serving, initially, as a lingua franca amongst slaves. These dialects were further shaped by the domestic encounters between imported slaves, Khoisan serfs, and the European settlers and their descendants. As these creolized Dutch dialects increasingly became spoken by slaves and slave-owners alike, it spread across the Cape and later also penetrated further into southern Africa. Initially, because of its origins, whites sneeringly referred to Afrikaans with terms that either pointed towards "poorness" or "colouredness" (Hofmeyr 1987, 96-97). Such examples include "*kombuistaal*" [kitchen language], "*plattaal*" [flat language], "*hotnotstaal*" [hotnot language] and "*griekwataal*" [Griqua language].

It was only at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century that expansive efforts were undertaken by settler descendants to rid the Afrikaans language of these conceptions of "poorness" and "colouredness", and to reinvent it as an *algemeen beskaafde taal* [general civilized language] (Hofmeyr 1987, 104). Increasingly, a group of white Afrikaans-speakers perceived Afrikaans as *their* language, often disregarding or misrecognizing other varieties of Afrikaans (Van Rensburg 1999, 84). After South Africa became a union in 1910, Afrikaans began to be used in various print forms and Afrikaans books, newspapers and magazines proliferated. Afrikaans was also increasingly used in churches, in schools and in courts of law, which facilitated the standardization of the Afrikaans language and also led to the acceptance of Afrikaans as an official language of state in 1925 (Webb and Kriel 2000, 21). Another important moment in the development of the Afrikaans language was the translation of the Bible into Afrikaans – something that church leaders had been strongly opposed to for many years due to the "inferior" status of Afrikaans (Webb and Kriel 2000, 21). In addition, the growth of Afrikaans and Afrikaans cultural commodities also

prepared the ground for new subjectivities and a sense of community to arise amongst white Afrikaans-speakers (as I discussed in Chapter 1). Indeed, it was within this realm of language and culture that Afrikaner nationalism was first articulated as Hofmeyr (1987) suggests in her aptly titled paper, “Building a Nation with Words”.

During its advance towards standardization and official state-language status, the survival of creolized Dutch dialects, and later the Afrikaans language, were threatened by British-introduced Anglicisation and related pressures of cultural imperialism and cultural homogenisation. Although these pressures were compounded by the British colonization of the two Boer Republics in 1902, they were mostly attenuated when the National Party gained power in 1948 and, as part of its Afrikaner-nationalist project, promoted Afrikaans as language of bureaucracy (Louw 2004a, 43-44). Afrikaans became the language most closely associated with the apartheid administration or, as Giliomee (2012, 546) describes it, “the language of Afrikaans and the Afrikaner-controlled state [were] locked in a tight and suffocating embrace.” Through various policies, the National Party took up arms to veer off the onslaught of English language and cultural imperialism to secure the vitality and longevity of the Afrikaans language and the “Afrikaner culture”. Subsequently, fifty-fifty Afrikaans-English bilingualism was legally enforced in the state bureaucracy and Afrikaans was used as a lingua franca in government, education, media and business. In addition, the National Party also took care to ensure, and expand, a sustainable future Afrikaans language community. Schools, universities and other institutions of tertiary education were built, offering Afrikaans as medium of instruction and learners who did not speak Afrikaans had to learn the language at public schools. Moreover, the state also intervened in corpus planning, sponsoring the development of dictionaries and the codifying of spelling and grammatical rules (Louw 2004a, 45). The pervasiveness of the National Party’s commitment to the Afrikaans-language was even extended to Afrikaans product labelling and the announcements at airports, and bus and train stations being made in Afrikaans.

When the National Party lost state power in 1994, it also lost its guardianship over the Afrikaans language. This uncoupling of Afrikaans from the state has resulted in a decline in Afrikaans’s privileged public position ever since. This can partly be ascribed to the implementation of the 1993 interim constitution and the final 1996 constitution that made provision for eleven official languages. Although a clause in the interim constitution stated that the rights and status associated with any of the official languages may not be curtailed,

the clause was later shelved during the drafting of the final constitution, leaving Afrikaans to compete with ten other official languages on a much more level playing field. Since the country's democratic transition, it has also become apparent that the cost of simultaneously sustaining and promoting eleven official languages, in more than a mere superficial symbolic sense, is much higher than the state can afford. Consequently, English has, in many ways, become postapartheid South Africa's *de facto* lingua franca.

Yet Afrikaans is not only experiencing pressure due to shifts in the local linguistic landscape, but, to some extent, South Africa's increased Anglicisation after apartheid also reflects global patterns through which local cultures and languages are threatened by Anglo-American cultural diffusion (Louw 2004b, 330). Because of their policies to protect the Afrikaans language and "Afrikaner culture", it was only after the National Party lost state power that South Africans have experienced the full force of US media and cultural commodities being unleashed onto the country. In addition, the growing reach of trans- and multinational corporations using English as a lingua franca has added further pressure on South Africans to Anglicise.

These changes in South Africa's linguistic landscape have contributed to a fear, often expressed by Afrikaans-speakers in the media, of Afrikaans's status declining, followed by its disappearance. In addition, many are sceptical about the ANC government's commitment to the safeguarding of the Afrikaans language. Various Afrikaans-language activists have criticized the ANC government for their alleged failure to promote multilingualism as outlined in the constitution and, by implication, their failure to promote the Afrikaans language. Some have even gone as far as to argue that the ANC has its knife in for Afrikaans, accusing the government of actively encouraging the decline and ultimate demise of the language.

One frequently cited example of the ANC's perceived hostility towards Afrikaans, is the contraction of Afrikaans as a language of instruction at some schools and universities. Since South Africa's democratic transition, multiple single-medium Afrikaans schools have been forced to add English as a medium of instruction to accommodate more black students (Giliomee 2014, 585).¹²

12 According to one study on the Anglicization of Afrikaans schools after apartheid, which findings were published in the Du Plessis Report (as quoted in Giliomee and Schlemmer 2006, 242), of the schools that formed part of the study, 1 396 were Afrikaans single-medium in 1993. Of these, 839 (about 60%) were still Afrikaans single-medium in 2003. Rademeyer (2014, 6) cites another study, conducted by the South African Institute of Race Relations, which found that there were 1 761 Afrikaans single-medium schools in 2008, compared to 1 489 in 2012.

At least in part as a countering measure, there has been a recent upsurge in the establishment of Afrikaans private schools. One of the instigators of this process is the *Beweging vir Volkseie Christelike Onderwys* (Movement for National Christian Education) (BVCO), which was established in 1994 and has 38 affiliated schools, offering a Christian education with Afrikaans as the exclusive language of instruction.

What seems even more worrisome to Afrikaans-language activists is the extent to which Afrikaans as a language of instruction has been squeezed out of universities. Multiple former Afrikaans universities have anglicised completely, and others are offering parallel or double medium classes in Afrikaans and English. At the moment, courses instructed in Afrikaans are only offered at four universities and growing pressures exist for these universities to anglicise entirely. Certain Afrikaans-language activists (see Alexander 2001; Giliomee 2014) believe universities offering Afrikaans as a language of instruction is indispensable for the survival of Afrikaans as a professional, scientific and literary language. Schlemmer and Giliomee (2001, 118), for example, ask, “Who is going to take [Afrikaans] seriously if it does not perform on an intellectual and professional level? In such an instance, Afrikaans will be beheaded just like other indigenous African languages.” To counter Afrikaans’s “beheading”, the Solidarity Movement has established a new, albeit small, private university, *Akademia*, where Afrikaans is used exclusively as language of instruction. Although *Akademia* only offers a limited number of courses, it hopes to expand its offering in the coming years (Krisisberaad 2015).

In sum, there is a perception of and a concern amongst Afrikaans-speakers about Afrikaans’s vulnerability after apartheid. And the language’s future appears neither as sure nor as bright as it might have once seemed under the National Party’s guardianship. Within this context, it has become common for Afrikaans-speakers to raise their concerns, both formally and informally, regarding Afrikaans’s “fading position.” However, more than the mere survival of a language seems to be at stake. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, many are not only concerned about the demise of Afrikaans as a public language, but also with the accompanying demise of the Afrikaners as a discernible ethnic community. According to Giliomee (2014), and many others, the vitality of the “Afrikaner identity” depends heavily on the vitality of the Afrikaans language.

Table 1.1

A breakdown of South Africa's first-language Afrikaans-speakers according to race (SSA 2012, 26)

Black African	Coloured	Indian or Asian	White	Other
602 166	3 442 164	58 700	2 710 461	41 591

However, Afrikaans is not only spoken by Afrikaners. In fact, black Afrikaans-speakers outnumber white Afrikaans-speakers by around 60% to 40%.¹³ Yet, it seems that anxiety regarding the decline or the “expected death of Afrikaans” is, for the most part, not shared by black Afrikaans-speaker (Van der Waal 2012, 457). For example, a trend has been identified amongst Afrikaans-speaking coloured people, particularly those belonging to the middle class, to send their children to English schools (Anthonissen 2009). Webb (2010, 111) argues that Afrikaans has remained a symbol of white identity in postapartheid South Africa. Speaking in general terms, black Afrikaans-speakers tend not to bear the same emotional attachment to the Afrikaans-language or regard it as such an integral part of their being and selfhood, as their white counterparts (Webb 2010, 111-112).¹⁴ In addition, many Afrikaners still regard the Afrikaans language as *their* language. A good example of this tendency is J.C. Steyn's (2014) 621-page tome on the history of Afrikaans, *Ons gaan 'n taal maak* [We are going to make a language], published by the Solidarity Movement's publisher, Kraal-Uitgewers. In this book, Steyn offers a white-washed history of the Afrikaans language, completely ignoring its creole origins, conflating Afrikaans culture and Afrikaner culture, and, except for a few profiles of black Afrikaans-speakers, gives virtually no recognition to the fact that Afrikaans is not spoken exclusively by white people.

13 Today, there exists numerous varieties of the Afrikaans language. The standardized version of Afrikaans, which received privileged treatment during apartheid, is mostly spoken by Afrikaners. The majority of black Afrikaans-speakers speak a multitude of non-standardized varieties of Afrikaans, characterized by a more fluid vocabulary and grammatical structure, and also showing much greater regional variation than standardized Afrikaans. “Standard” Afrikaans still enjoys a higher status than non-standardized varieties of Afrikaans, which are seldom seen in print, or heard in formal settings, on television or on the radio.

14 I do not wish to generalize this claim. I am aware that there are black Afrikaans-speakers who have a deep love for the Afrikaans language and are – like many of the language's white speakers – deeply concerned about the future of Afrikaans. I am also aware of the important voices of black Afrikaans-language activists, like Jakes Gerwel, Neville Alexander and, more recently, rap-artist Hemelbesem.

For some white Afrikaans-speakers, the “declining status” of Afrikaans, one of the cornerstones of Afrikanerdom, has significantly contributed to their feelings of estrangement from South Africa as a nation and their related perceptions of being marginalized under the country’s current democratic regime. These feelings are further exacerbated by other factors that are often evoked to prove that South Africa is a hostile environment for Afrikaners to live in, as I have shown in Chapter 1. Add to these concerns the changing of street and place names, the recent upsurge in the defacing and vandalism of Afrikaner monuments and statues, and postapartheid reinterpretations of history that are challenging and, in some ways, delegitimizing conventional Afrikaner nationalist history – intimately tied with the Afrikaner civil religion – that previously gave legitimacy to Afrikaners’ presence in Africa.

While Afrikaner nationalism, and the content of the Afrikaner civil religion, enabled Afrikaners to imagine and mould South Africa into a social and psychological space where they could experience a sense of belonging and security, today, such imaginings are perceived as near impossibilities. This is well-illustrated by a report recently released by the FAK (N.P. van Wyk Louw-sentrum 2015), which bemoans the “rewriting” of history in prescribed school history books. In this report, the history writers are charged on a number of accounts, including romanticizing pre-colonial Africa, demonizing Jan van Riebeeck and other settlers, underemphasizing the Voortrekker’s Great Trek, overemphasizing the involvement of blacks in the Anglo-Boer War, mistakenly describing the Afrikaners as an “imagined community”, glamorizing the anti-apartheid struggle, denying Nelson Mandela’s involvement in acts of terror and exaggerating the prosperity of postapartheid South Africa’s democracy. In its conclusion, the report reproaches the ANC for having a cultural imperialist vendetta against Afrikaners, “The Afrikaners’ historical self-image, cultural self-confidence and pride must be destroyed. The ANC’s imperialist treatment of Afrikaner history comes down to cultural murder” (N.P. van Wyk Louw-sentrum 2015, 44).

Afrikaners are today, more profoundly than ever, confronted by the “diasporic dimension” (Steyn 2005, 126) of their position in Africa and many have been experiencing “an acute sense of loss of the familiar, loss of certainty, loss of comfort, loss of privilege, loss of well-known roles” (Steyn 2001, 156). They belong to a small white minority in an African country, cut loose from their predominantly European ancestry and ruled by an ANC government many perceive as hostile. And in different ways, on different grounds and to different degrees, many white Afrikaans-speakers are articulating narratives of victimhood under South Africa’s democratic regime. Under these

conditions, the Afrikaans language is perceived as a possible safe haven for its white speakers; it offers them with a sense of community, belonging and control in an environment that is often experienced as both unpredictable and hostile. For Afrikaners who have lost control over the state, language has become a potential substitute for land (Kriel 2006, 56) – a substitute for territory and for the state, an enclave of familiarity and homeliness. This begins to explain certain Afrikaners' current attachment or loyalty to Afrikaans and their anxieties about the language's potential demise.

Afrikaans, Inc.

This loyalty, however, is not fixed and has been produced and reproduced in postapartheid South Africa. The Afrikaans culture industry has contributed significantly to the current panic and paranoia about Afrikaans's "fading" position. For example, over the last two decades, Afrikaans newspapers have, with great devotion and regularity, published a flood of articles about every conceivable "injustice" committed against the Afrikaans language or against its speakers, and have dedicated extensive space to opinion pieces about the language and its future, including letters to the editor (cf. Steyn 2004). And when, in 2015, Stellenbosch University, a historically Afrikaans university, released a statement that English would henceforth be its primary language of education and administration, *Die Burger*, the second largest Afrikaans daily newspaper, had posters on lampposts with the words, "R.I.P. Afrikaans". In addition, the position of Afrikaans in postapartheid South Africa has been discussed, debated and deliberated on Afrikaans radio stations, at Afrikaans arts festivals, on Twitter, at school debating competitions, and in the comment sections of internet news platforms and Youtube videos. Indeed, it has become a case of paranoia begetting paranoia.

This panic and paranoia have solidified the perception held by many Afrikaners today that the ANC's attitude towards Afrikaans is either one of apathy or antipathy and that it is futile to look towards the government to bolster the preservation of the language. Instead, the argument goes, the longevity and vitality of Afrikaans depends heavily on the language's ability to prove its value in the marketplace and also, by extension, Afrikaans-speakers' determination to continue speaking the language and their willingness to consume Afrikaans-language commodities. The culture industry has, therefore, been instrumental in disseminating the idea that Afrikaans – or



Photo 2.1 & 2.2

Two examples of how Afrikaans has been used to brand Afrikaans music albums, *Trots Afrikaans* [Proudly Afrikaans] and *Afrikaans is Groot* [Afrikaans is Big]

Afrikanerdom – is under threat, while, at the same time, also packaging, selling and profiting from what is perceived as a means to curtail this threat.

In a sense, Afrikaans can be considered a kind of brand to which consumers have become attached and to which they have developed a sense of loyalty, and what they gain from consuming its products goes beyond mere tangible benefits (Robertson 2015, 541-542). Consider, for example, the way that Afrikaans products are often marketed with the slogan “*Trots Afrikaans*” [Proudly Afrikaans], where it is implied that through buying and consuming these products, one is also demonstrating one’s commitment to the language. Another example is the Afrikaans music show franchise, *Afrikaans is Groot* [Afrikaans is Big], where the name implies that through buying a ticket to a show, or buying a DVD or an album, one is also contributing towards making Afrikaans big. Apart from the immediate benefits they obtain from consuming products of the Afrikaans brand, consumers are also investing in the sustainability of the brand, so that they can continue to consume its products in the future. Even in cases where branding is done with less explicitness – when products only bear the imprint of the Afrikaans brand by virtue of being in the Afrikaans language – the same psychological process might be at work. In addition, it is noteworthy that Afrikaners have been the primary consumers of the products of the Afrikaans brand. This might be because, in general, white Afrikaans-speakers have, as I showed, a different relationship with Afrikaans than black Afrikaans-speakers, and because paranoia about Afrikaans’s disappearance is wider spread amongst

Afrikaners. Yet, it might also be because Afrikaners have managed to maintain much of their economic power after the end of apartheid and can, therefore, afford to buy these products.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Afrikaans culture industry has mostly been patronized by Afrikaners – which make up only about 40% of all Afrikaans-speakers – the Afrikaans brand has proven to have commercial value and both Afrikaans and Afrikaans-language media and cultural products have become increasingly saleable commodities in postapartheid South Africa (Wasserman 2009, 70). The vitality of the Afrikaans language in the commercialized sphere is illustrated by, for example, the Afrikaans family magazine, *Huisgenoot* [Home Companion], having by far the highest circulation figures of all magazines in the country. There is also a plethora of widely popular Afrikaans magazines available, catering for different demographics and niche markets.¹⁵ Moreover, Afrikaans newspapers are competitive¹⁶ and locally published Afrikaans books outsell their English counterparts. It is also not unusual for stores to have separate sections for Afrikaans products like books, CDs and DVDs – which is far less common for other indigenous languages. Since 2004, the South African Music Award (SAMA) for bestselling album by a South African artist has been awarded to Afrikaans singers five times¹⁷ and multiple Afrikaans artists have managed to produce multi-platinum albums and DVDs.¹⁸ The Afrikaans television channel, kykNET, is also the most watched channel on the entire bouquet of channels offered by the satellite television network, DStv (Meiring 2015). All of this is remarkable, considering the small size of the Afrikaans-speaking consumer market. Yet, most remarkable of all is possibly the proliferation of Afrikaans festivals in the postapartheid era. Starting with the annual Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK), first held in 1995, Afrikaans festivals like Aardklop, Vrystaat Kunstefees, Innibosfees, Woordfees and a multitude of smaller festivals, catering in different degrees to the Afrikaans-speaking public's low- and high-brow needs, have mushroomed all across the country.

15 *Huisgenoot* has circulation figures of more than a quarter of a million; Afrikaans women's magazines *Sarie* and *Rooi Rose* are the magazines with the fourth and fifth highest circulation figures in the country (Moodie 2015).

16 The Afrikaans newspaper *Rapport*, for example, is the South African newspaper with the third largest circulation figures (Moodie 2015).

17 These albums include Steve Hofmeyr's *Toeka* (2004), Lianie May's *Boeremeisie* (2009), Bok van Blerk's *Afrikanerhart* (2010), Theuns Jordaan's *Roeper* (2013) and Riana Nel's *Die Regte Tyd* (2015).

18 According to Van der Merwe (2015, 229), Afrikaans pop music alone accounts for 30% to 40% of all locally produced music sales.

The flourishing of Afrikaans in multiple market-driven domains has also opened up new ways for businesses to capitalize on the comparative affluence of a large section of the white Afrikaans-speaking demographic. A high number of businesses are targeting a relatively wealthy niche market of Afrikaans-speakers by advertising in Afrikaans newspapers, magazines and on kykNET. Companies are also willing to sponsor Afrikaans festivals in an attempt to appeal to this lucrative audience. One such company is Absa Bank, which is, amongst others, the largest sponsor of the KKNK. Steve Booysen, previous chief executive of Absa, explained Absa's persistent support for these cultural events, saying that any attempt to withdraw their sponsorships "would be very short-sighted... People will not move their accounts because of high bank charges. They will move them for emotional reasons" (as quoted in Barron 2009, 10).

Another initiative that has been able to capitalize on Afrikaans people's emotional attachment to Afrikaans is Virseker, a short-term insurance product of Auto and General. In one of their advertisements on kykNET (see Virseker 2012) they state, "*Ons verseker jou huis, jou kar en jou taal, vir seker.*" ["We insure your house, your car and your language, for sure."] Not only do Virseker employees answer their telephones in Afrikaans and provide all their services exclusively in Afrikaans, a percentage of their customers' monthly premiums is donated to the Virseker Trust – a fund that is used to finance efforts to preserve and promote Afrikaans. Large contributions have, for example, been made to the development of the Solidarity Movement's private Afrikaans university, Akademia. Lauding the Virseker initiative, Dirk Hermann (2011), deputy general secretary of the Solidarity Movement, said, "To use Afrikaans to empower a community is part of the historical DNA of Afrikaans. Sanlam, Volkskas, Santam, Federale Volksbeleggings and many others were born from this very DNA."

The Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging [Afrikaans Language and Culture Association] (ATKV), a non-profit organization, is another example where Afrikaans has been used to "empower a community". The ATKV owns seven holiday resorts across the country, which offer, according to the ATKV's website (2016), an "Afrikaans holiday experience". Members of the ATKV, who pay membership fees, get preference when booking holiday accommodation. They also receive other benefits and a free copy of the ATKV's magazine, *Taalgenoot* [Language Companion]. These profits and funds are then used by the ATKV to breathe new life into the Afrikaans language. The ATKV sponsors a plethora of Afrikaans festivals and shows, and runs their own publisher, Lapa, which publishes exclusively in Afrikaans. In addition, the

ATKV is committed to promoting the Afrikaans language among school children and hosts a wide variety of debating, music, spelling and other competitions.

The media conglomerate, Naspers, has also contributed expansively to the preservation and promotion of the Afrikaans language in postapartheid South Africa, while at the same time doing well, and possibly better than anyone else, to capitalize on this niche market of Afrikaans-speakers. The influence of Naspers on the production, marketing and consumption of Afrikaans media and cultural commodities in postapartheid South Africa can hardly be overestimated. Naspers, initially known as De Nasionale Pers and later Nasionale Pers [National Press], was established in 1915. At first, De Nasionale Pers focused on printing and publishing Afrikaans newspapers and magazines but added book publishing to its portfolio in 1918. Subsequently, Nasionale Pers grew into one of the most powerful media hubs on the continent. Nasionale Pers also held close relations with the apartheid government and its publications served as mouthpiece for the National Party and as ideological vehicle for apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism (Botma 2008, 45; Jacobs 2004, 348). In 1986, Nasionale Pers began extending their reach beyond print media and launched South Africa's first pay-TV channel, M-Net. After its success, Nasionale Pers launched the digital pay-TV satellite service DSTv in 1995, which offers a wide variety of pay-TV channels. By July 2015, DSTv had already managed to attract 5.4 million subscribers in South Africa alone. In 1997, Nasionale Pers also founded the internet service provider MWEB. In the following year, Nasionale Pers changed its name to Naspers and has since established itself as one of the leading multinational media companies in the world with large investments in media and technology companies in China, Russia and elsewhere.

Naspers has, however, been reluctant to abandon its roots completely and has since South Africa's transition to democracy done much to preserve and expand the customer base of relatively affluent Afrikaans-speakers that it had built up during apartheid. To do this, Naspers had to reposition itself under a new regime as Wasserman argues,

For a media company like Naspers, the need to mobilize capital in the name of the language remained imperative... A new discourse had to be found within which the mobilization of Afrikaner capital could still take place, but within the new 'common sense' of multiculturalism, majority rule and

a non-racial understanding of Afrikaans as a language and ethnic marker.
(Wasserman 2009, 63)

Naspers, therefore, developed an approach through which they could on the one hand protect the economic interests of the company, while on the other hand also balance it with their political interests by safely distancing themselves from their previous involvement in apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism (Wasserman and Botma 2008; Wasserman 2009). In attempts not to alienate themselves from their lucrative Afrikaans audiences, Naspers has shown their vigorous support for Afrikaans group rights, while also asserting their support for the new political regime and multiculturalism (Wasserman 2009, 65). Operating within the discourse of language rights means that Afrikaans media could continue to profit from selling Afrikaans-language products, without having to address the language's historical baggage. And by focusing on the ideal of an inclusive Afrikaans language community, the Afrikaans media could also expand its consumer base to include black Afrikaans-speakers (Wasserman 2009, 75).

With this approach, Naspers has successfully preserved and extended its power over the Afrikaans culture industry in postapartheid South Africa. Through News24, their print media arm, Naspers has acquired a near monopoly on Afrikaans print media, with only smaller and regional newspapers and magazines falling outside of their reach. They have also established the largest online Afrikaans digital news platform, Netwerk24. Another subsidiary of Naspers is NB Publishers, the leading publisher in the country. Human and Rousseau and Tafelberg, imprints of NB Publishers, are two of the largest publishers of Afrikaans books; another one of NB Publishers' imprints, Pharos, specializes in publishing Afrikaans and Afrikaans-English dictionaries. In addition, Naspers owns pay-TV operator, M-Net, which owns three television channels with programming exclusively in Afrikaans: kykNET, kykNET Nou! [kykNET Now!] and kykNET & kie [kykNET & others].

Various companies, publications and channels in the Naspers group have acted as founding and premier sponsors of some of the largest Afrikaans festivals in the country. Most notably, News24 was the founding sponsor of the KKNK in 1995. These arts festivals serve as a hub for Afrikaans cultural activity: apart from Afrikaans music and theatre, they also offer interviews with writers, book tents, the screening of Afrikaans films and usually one or two Afrikaans print publications are involved as sponsors. Of the involvement

of Naspers in Afrikaans arts festivals, then CEO of the company, Koos Bekker (as quoted in Botma 2006, 146) said,

The purpose of the arts festivals is to create an environment where new works of art get a chance to show off, so that they can go on tour, so that we can write about them, so that books can be published about them, so that artists can become famous, so that we can put their mugs on the cover of *Sarie*.¹⁹ It is a thing that serves your own interest at the end. If you strengthen and help build the community, then those things come back to you in the form of more sales, more commercial income and a healthier climate to work in.

This illustrates that Naspers is not only concerned about finding a market in which to sell certain Afrikaans media and cultural commodities in the short run but is also involved in strengthening and broadening the whole ecology of Afrikaans-language activities to ensure a market that will keep buying these commodities in the long run – in effect, building a sustained loyalty to the Afrikaans brand.

The possible decline of Afrikaans therefore poses a great threat to Naspers. And even though the language might be flourishing in the commercial sphere, concerns regarding its sustainability are often expressed. Giliomee (2014, 592) warns that the apparent flourishing of the Afrikaans language could be misleading and might just prove to be the bright colours that become visible after the sun has already set. With Afrikaans declining in schools and universities, the question remains whether a large enough new generation of Afrikaans-speaking consumers is being produced to sustain the language's continued existence. Will a generation of Afrikaans-speakers who grew up on a diet of rainbow nation instead of Afrikaner nationalist ideology choose to consume Afrikaans commodities with the same loyalty and vigour as their parents? And, since a growing number of Afrikaans-speaking parents are sending their children to English-medium schools, will they even continue to identify themselves as Afrikaans-speakers in the future?

It is for this reason that Naspers is committed to ensuring that Afrikaans will flourish in all spheres and in all its functions, high and low, building a large and sustainable language community, while at the same time also investing in the Afrikaans language itself to guarantee that it will be able to meet this community's current and future language needs. Thus, the promotion and

¹⁹ Afrikaans women's magazine.

preservation of the Afrikaans language in postapartheid South Africa have firmly shifted into private domains. This shift has been mediated by the capital of a group of mostly white Afrikaans-speaking consumers, who have managed to maintain much of their economic power since the end of apartheid. If the National Party used to be the guardian of the Afrikaans language, Naspers has now firmly established itself as the party's successor in this regard. Afrikaans newspapers like *Die Burger* have, for example, actively participated in Afrikaans's language struggle and have been critical of what they describe as the ANC's government's hostility towards Afrikaans (Wasserman 2010, 22). Two former CEOs of Naspers, Ton Vosloo and Koos Bekker, have also taken a firm stance against the scaling down of Afrikaans at some of South Africa's universities (Giliomee 2014, 575). In 2015, Naspers announced that it would contribute to a prize of R500 000 that will be awarded annually to an academic researcher, publishing in Afrikaans and whose work contributes to strengthening Afrikaans as an academic language. Since 1999, Naspers has also been instrumental in founding, sponsoring and managing the Afrikaans online literary website LitNet, which, amongst others, publishes accredited academic writing in Afrikaans in its online journal, *LitNet Akademies* [LitNet Academic].

Imagined communities, produced communities

Through these various endeavours to simultaneously "save" and capitalize on the Afrikaans language, another process might have been set in motion. If Afrikaner nationalism was first articulated within the realm of language and culture, what are the implications of Afrikaans's flourishing in private domains for the present? More than merely congealing the Afrikaans language, Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities also serve as powerful "force[s] of world making" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 28). And at least to some extent, it is laying the conditions for the strengthening of two relatively discrete imagined communities of Afrikaans-speakers: one white and one coloured.²⁰

Anderson argues that, historically, print media such as the novel and the newspaper produced monoglot language communities in Europe and served

²⁰ I am aware that more than 700 000 Afrikaans-speakers are neither white nor coloured (based on figures from SSA 2012, 26). As far as my knowledge goes, the culture industry has made no explicit attempt to manufacture products specifically targeting members of this group. For this reason, I am mostly concerned with white and coloured Afrikaans-speakers in this section.

as the first forms through which imagined communities were re-presented; these imagined communities laid the foundation for the formation of nations in Europe at the end of the 18th century (2006 [1983], 25, 44). Developments in and the diffusion of electronic media has, however, completely changed the field of mass media and related processes of mass mediation, offering an even wider scope of sources and resources through which people can, in a more extensive way, construct themselves and their worlds (Appadurai 1996, 3). Today, communities are no longer imagined through print media alone, but through a wide assortment of media and cultural commodities. This process has further been strengthened by neoliberal conditions, where social identity is almost entirely fashioned through processes of commodification and consumption, and where the difference between buying and living is increasingly shrinking. And as John and Jean Comaroff argue about cultural commodities in general, so too does Afrikaans-language commodities have the distinct ability to “(re)fashion identity, to (re)animate cultural subjectivity, to (re)charge collective self-awareness, to forge new patterns of sociality, all within the marketplace” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 26). In this sense, an upsurge in the buying and selling of these commodities has laid the foundation for the emergence of new subjectivities and for the crystallization of new, enclaved, social identities.

Moreover, the collective consumption of these commodities has created the conditions for Afrikaans-speakers to imagine and fashion themselves as members of either a white or coloured Afrikaans-language community. Although the existence of these two relatively discrete communities is in some sense residual of apartheid classifications, these two communities have continuously been imagined and re-imagined, produced and re-produced through Afrikaans media and cultural commodities in postapartheid South Africa. Sellers of these commodities seem to be more interested in reaching the language’s lucrative white consumers than expanding their market to also include comparatively poorer coloured consumers. Consequently, these two groups are often catered for as two distinct demographics. The result is that there exist very few instances where white and coloured Afrikaans-speakers converge, in more or less equal numbers, as consumers of the same Afrikaans-language commodities.

This is well-reflected in the Afrikaans magazine industry on which Naspers has a near monopoly. *Huisgenoot*, for example, was first circulated in 1916 and played a pervasive role in the process of imagining the Afrikaner nation into existence. Today, *Huisgenoot* is circulated weekly and still addresses a predominantly white audience. How *Huisgenoot* is consistently producing its

audience of white Afrikaans-speakers is probably best illustrated by the fact that only white celebrities appear on the front cover of the vast majority of its issues. The same goes for an assortment of other Afrikaans magazines like *Sarie*, *Rooi Rose*, *Finesse* and *Vrouekeur*. This stands in stark contrast to the women's magazine, *Kuier*, which was introduced by Naspers in 2012. This is the largest magazine aimed specifically at coloured Afrikaans-speakers, it sells at about half the price of *Huisgenoot*, appears fortnightly and coloured celebrities appear on the cover of nearly every issue. Similarly, the daily tabloid, *Kaapse Son*, is aimed mostly at the Afrikaans language's coloured speakers, which is evident in the newspaper's use, but also production, of slang terms associated with this speech community. *Kaapse Son* sells at a much lower price than daily broadsheet newspapers and the bulk of its readers live in the Western Cape. The only place where there does seem to be a significant convergence between Afrikaans's white and coloured speakers is with the daily newspaper, *Die Burger*. Although it used to be a mouthpiece of the National Party during apartheid, the newspaper managed to cast off some of its burdensome history and reaches more coloured than white readers. White buyers of the newspaper, however, still outnumber its coloured buyers and might also be the focus point of advertisers (Wasserman and Botma 2008, 11).

Another instance where Afrikaans-speakers are produced as two relatively discrete language communities, is Afrikaans arts festivals. Today's Afrikaans arts festivals mark a clear departure from earlier Afrikaner-organized *volksfeeste* [national festivals]. Typically, these festivals were organized to consolidate Afrikaner or white identities. Two of the greatest examples of such festivals are the Oxwagon centennial celebrations of 1938 (cf. Moodie 1975) and the Jan van Riebeeck tercentenary celebrations of 1952 (cf. Witz 2003), which both included high-budget re-enactments of historical events. The Afrikaans arts festivals that have emerged in postapartheid South Africa are, however, markedly different. The majority of these festivals claim to be multi-cultural and multi-ethnic and only concerned with the protection, promotion and the celebration of the Afrikaans language and therefore ostensibly removed from any form of identity politics.

Overt efforts to promote Afrikaans arts festivals as free from identity politics might, however, be the result of many festivals having been criticized in the past for either being exclusive or an attempt by Afrikaners to draw the laager. The KKNK, for example, has often stood at the receiving end of such criticism. In 1997, the festival was under attack when audience members pelted Miriam Makeba and her band members with beer cans, while they

were performing and they had to be rushed off stage. A reporter later related the incident in the *Mail and Guardian* (Eyal 1997). He said that he had heard one member of the audience saying, “Kaff*rs wil alles oorneem; kyk hoe lank speel hulle!” [Kaff*rs want to take over everything; look how long they play!], and another describing the music as “kaff*r musiek” [kaff*r music]. In the following year another reporter, Lauren Shantall (1998), also wrote in the *Mail and Guardian* about her impressions of the KKNK,

[A] more apt title for the festival would have been the Klein Karoo Afrikaans Festival. Its flimsy claims to any kind of national identity are supported neither by the artists - who were overwhelmingly white and Afrikaans-speaking, and the audiences, who were, as in other years, also overwhelmingly white and Afrikaans-speaking.

Concerned about the occurrence of these kinds of incidents and receiving criticism of this nature, the KKNK and many other festivals, especially the larger ones, have taken steps to stress their inclusive nature. The KKNK is described on its website (2016) as “the country’s first festival with Afrikaans-speakers – a diverse, inclusive language community that transcends racial classification, apartheid and ethnic boundaries – as its audience”. There are also constant attempts to attract larger black audiences to these festivals. Yet, stressing these festival’s inclusive nature often amounts to nothing more than a weak attempt at buying legitimacy under the current political regime and to insulate them from criticism. The vast majority of their attendees and especially ticket-buying customers remain white Afrikaans-speakers.

The extent to which coloured and other non-Afrikaner Afrikaans-speakers are excluded from these festivals is well-illustrated in the following extract from a poem, *Kuns en culture* [Arts and culture] by coloured poet, Ronelda Kamfer (in Krog and Schaffer 2005),

Dis weird hoekom ek skaam is vir ’n taal wat ek praat
Dis even nog meer weird dat ek en my vriende
Nooit na die “kultuur”-events toe genooi word nie
Daar is ’n groot panic attack aan die gang oor ’n taal
Maar hulle sal nooit ons hulp vra nie

[It’s weird that I’m ashamed of a language that I speak
It’s even more weird that my friends and I
Are never invited to the “culture” events

A big panic attack is happening because of a language
But they will never ask for our help]

One possible exception is the relatively small Naspers-sponsored festival, the Suidoosterfees, held annually in the Western Cape. During its inception in 2003, it was envisioned as a festival that should appeal to a coloured audience. Although *Die Burger* went through a vigorous process to market the festival, it failed to take off (Botma 2006, 152). It was only after the festival was moved from its initial venue in Bellville to the Artscape theatre in Cape Town that it succeeded in drawing a larger and more inclusive audience (Wasserman and Botma 2008, 11).

Nowhere, however, is the production of two discrete Afrikaans-language communities more apparent than with the production and consumption of Afrikaans music. This was made patently obvious during the 2015 annual Ghoema Awards. The Ghoema Awards is the largest Afrikaans music award ceremony that honours artists for their contribution to the Afrikaans music industry and is broadcast live on kykNET. The name of the awards pays homage to the creole origins of the Afrikaans language, since the *ghoema* drum is an instrument associated with a type of music which originated among slave communities in the Cape. These songs, referred to as *ghoemaliedjies* [ghoema songs], were often used to mock people in positions of authority or ones pretending to be important and also served as a means to take some of the sting out of distressing situations encountered in everyday life (Martin 2013, 113). Today, the *ghoema* beat is closely associated with genres of music “considered typically coloured” (Martin 2013, 251) – such as *ghoemaliedjies*, *vastrap* and *moppies* – and is also central to the music of the Kaapse Klopse (Cape Minstrels) (Meltzer et al. 2010).

On the face of it, the naming of the awards might show some indication on the side of the organizers to acknowledge the Afrikaans language’s multi-racial origins and also, possibly, some effort to reconcile two discrete language communities. However, the 2015 Ghoema Awards were condemned in the Afrikaans media for failing spectacularly in this regard. According to Michael le Cordeur (2015), previous chairperson of the Afrikaanse Taalraad [Afrikaans Language Board], it was an “All White Show”, where only white Afrikaans artists performed. A journalist (Nel 2015a) who attended the event also bemoaned the fact that there were very few coloured people in the audience. Karen Meiring, head of kykNET and also one of the organizers of the event, defended the awards by emphasizing that the artists that performed were

also the artists that were nominated for awards. “Hence,” she said, “they were mostly white” (as quoted in Nel 2015b).



Photo 2.3

Winners of the 2015 Ghoema Afrikaans Music Awards

The 2015 Ghoema Awards’ inability to represent and project an image of Afrikaans as an inclusive language should not be considered merely a failure on the part of the organizers. It also points to the fact that the commercial Afrikaans music industry is over-run with white artists, whose CDs and DVDs are bought and whose concerts are attended by predominantly white audiences. In postapartheid South Africa, music has become another means through which two Afrikaans-language communities, with very few examples of cross-over, are produced and reproduced.

In sum, since Afrikaners have maintained much of the material wealth they had accumulated under apartheid, this demographic also has access to a wide variety of Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities. Although these commodities are often overtly marketed to all Afrikaans-speakers in an attempt to buy legitimacy, Afrikaners are in most cases – because of their relative wealth – the target market. The implication is that many of

the domains in which Afrikaans-language commodities are produced, sold and bought have become Afrikaner-majority enclaves, where Afrikaners can continue to construct themselves and their collective identities through acts of consumption.

The rise of a digital Afrikaans haven

The largest Afrikaner-majority enclave today is the digital space occupied by the Afrikaans satellite channel, kykNET. M-Net, owned by Naspers, established kykNET in 1999, which has since grown to the channel with the most viewers on the entire DStv Premium bouquet, outperforming a wide variety of sport, news and entertainment channels. In recent years, kykNET has also established itself as by far the largest and most influential stakeholder in the Afrikaans film industry and it seems that the future of the Afrikaans film industry depends heavily on kykNET's sustained involvement (see discussion in Chapter 3). In a manner that mimics Naspers's more general approach to Afrikaans media and cultural commodities, kykNET has been setting itself up as guardian of Afrikaans television and film. In a pertinent way, the rise of kykNET illustrates the process through which the Afrikaans language has become uncoupled from the state and re-established itself in the marketplace. Moreover, the history of television also offers a lens through which to track changing Afrikaner subjectivities since the medium's introduction in 1976.

Nixon (1994, 43) describes the ban on television in South Africa before 1976 as "the most drastic act of cultural protectionism in the history of the medium". The National Party's anxiety primarily arose from their view of television as a vehicle of language and cultural imperialism, which they believed would have eroded the Afrikaans language and, by extension, the Afrikaner national culture. In addition, television was also associated with US "melting pot" ideology and it was feared as "an agent of cultural miscegenation" (Nixon 1994, 46). For these reasons, the introduction of television in South Africa was resisted for as long as possible. When it was finally introduced on 5 January 1976, exposing South African audiences to Afrikaans programming was high on the state-controlled SABC's agenda. Initially, the SABC offered only one channel (TV1), with 51% of its programming in English and 49% in Afrikaans (Olivier 2011, 233). Most English-language programmes were imported, while Afrikaans programmes were either produced locally or foreign programmes were imported and dubbed into Afrikaans. Under the

watchful eye of the National Party, Afrikaans audiences became used to a wide variety of Afrikaans programming, including news, drama, comedy, game shows, and children and actuality programmes. In 1982, another channel was introduced that broadcasted programming exclusively in African languages. Segregation, therefore, also occurred in the realm of broadcasting television.

Hyslop (2000) argues that from around the 1970s, certain shifts away from the nation-state as the foundation of their identity began to occur amongst white South Africans. This was, amongst others, the result of South Africa's increased exposure to the global world, since it became ever more difficult to insulate South Africans from global processes of change. Consequently, new forms of subjectivity emerged in South Africa and members of the country's white society's active support for apartheid began to dwindle (Hyslop 2000, 38). Television, amongst others, served as a powerful agent in transforming the subjectivities of white South Africans. It forcefully inducted South Africans into the global culture industry and made them acutely aware of the extent to which they had been ostracized from the international community. Every four years, for example, South Africans were reminded of their absence in international sports when they tuned into the televised broadcasting of the Olympic Games (Krabill 2010, 27).

Hyslop argues that imported television programmes reflected America's relatively liberal ethos of the 1970s that was "dramatically out of kilter with the prevailing white South African representations of race, gender and sexuality" (2000, 39). And, during the mid-1980s, at the apex of apartheid's State of Emergency, *The Cosby Show*, a show with a predominantly black cast, was the most popular television programme among white audiences. This, in itself, might have already been indicative of transforming white subjectivities. On the other hand, it also provided an opportunity for whites to rethink their identities in relation to the rest of the South African population (Krabill 2010, 102). Furthermore, television was also significant in the sense that although it replicated some of apartheid's power dynamics, as Krabill (2010, 27-28) argues, it also offered a communicative space that "became the first social space created and shared by all South Africans."

In anticipation of apartheid's demise in the early 1990s, the SABC was extensively reformed and restructured. In 1991, it was reorganised into commercial business units, which shifted regulation from the state to the market (Barnett 1999a, 280). After South Africa's transition to democracy, the SABC was further transformed: the state's control was relaxed, the SABC was established as an independent public service broadcaster and the regulatory

body, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), was founded (Barnett 1999b, 650). During South Africa's entry into a postapartheid era, multiple attempts were made to rethink South Africa as a nation and television was specifically called upon to address, project and produce a rainbow nation and to manufacture unity between a previously conceived diverse people (Saks 2010, 14; Barnett 1999a, 275).

To serve this purpose, the SABC underwent an extensive language policy revision, starting in July 1994, when it announced that English would serve as its anchor language (Truter 2003, 46). Two years later, in February 1996, the SABC relaunched all its stations, which would from thereon be known as SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3. Changes were conceived as presenting a final break with apartheid television broadcasting and the newly branded channels reflected the rainbow nation aspiration. Afrikaans, for example, had to find a home for itself on SABC2, where it has shared a channel with multilingual programmes and programmes in English and the Sotho languages ever since.

Table 2.2

Percentage of SABC programming according to language. (Media Monitoring Africa 2012, 12)

Language	Time	SABC 1	SABC 2	SABC 3
Afrikaans	6%	0%	15%	3%
English	76%	69%	64%	95%
Ndebele	0%	0%	0%	0%
IsiXhosa	3%	10%	0%	0%
IsiZulu	5%	15%	0%	0%
Sesotho	3%	0%	7%	0%
Setswana	2%	2%	4%	0%
siSwati	1%	4%	0%	0%
Tshivenda	3%	1%	7%	0%
Xitsonga	1%	0%	3%	0%
Sign Language	0%	0%	0%	1%
Multilingual	0%	0%	0%	1%

Without the National Party's guardianship, the production of Afrikaans programmes declined substantially and the practice of dubbing foreign programmes into Afrikaans ceased completely. English became the SABC's new lingua franca and Afrikaans had to compete for equal television screen time with nine other indigenous languages. Consequently, the SABC has been a frequently cited example of the ANC's failure to promote multilingualism as outlined by the constitution. Although more Afrikaans programmes than programmes in any one of the other indigenous languages have always been broadcasted on the SABC, it was especially the Afrikaans-speaking community – a community that was previously well catered for under the apartheid regime – that was left disgruntled.

Apart from changes occurring within the SABC itself, South Africa's entire television landscape also experienced an overhaul. M-Net, a subscription-funded channel was introduced in 1986. This was followed by the launch of South Africa's first digital, satellite television service, DStv, in 1995, which initially offered a bouquet of seventeen channels. In addition, the privately owned e.tv, a free-to-air television channel, was launched in 1998. Having these profit-driven competitors severely threatened the SABC and its mandate to produce educational and culturally valuable content. Many advertisers moved to M-Net and DStv, because it gave them easier access to a much more lucrative audience of relatively affluent South Africans. The public broadcaster was left in the uncomfortable position of struggling to preserve its distinctiveness: to not merely imitate the commercial broadcaster, but to persist in producing culturally valuable, although possibly economically less rewarding programmes (Teer-Tomaselli 2008, 86-88). This problem was further exacerbated by the SABC's severe budget constraints. Consequently, local programming was cut considerably and replaced with much cheaper, foreign-produced, English-language programmes.

Afrikaans programmes have received similar treatment. Although it seems that most Afrikaans-language activists have now given up on trying to pressure the SABC into expanding its offering of Afrikaans programmes, this was not the case during South Africa's transition to democracy. During this period, Afrikaans cultural organizations, unsatisfied with the SABC's downgrading of their language, began losing their trust in the national broadcaster and encouraged Afrikaans-speakers not to pay their TV licences; some Afrikaans-speakers had their television sets sealed and advertisers were encouraged to withdraw their advertisements (Truter 2003, 49-51). Tabema (Taakgroep vir die Bemagtiging van Afrikaanse Kykers) [Taskforce for the Empowerment of Afrikaans Viewers] was brought to life in 1995 in

an attempt to hold the SABC accountable and to counter its Anglicisation. Professor Koos du Toit (1997, 13), a member of Taberna, said about the 1996-rescheduling of the SABC's programming, "The planners had another goal – they were ideologically driven and wanted to get back at Afrikaans, because of apartheid." Several language activists also raised their concerns in the Afrikaans press and elsewhere. One such activist, Dan Roodt (also cited in Chapter 1), wrote a letter in Afrikaans to Peter Matlare, then executive head of the SABC, in which he said, "Please take note that the Afrikaans public is fed up with the SABC's audacious, unconstitutional and Anglo-centric attitude" (as quoted in Samuel 2001).

Willie Esterhuizen (2015), who wrote and directed some memorable Afrikaans comedies for the SABC in the late 1980s and 1990s like *Orkney Snork nie* and *Vetkoekpaleis*, claimed in an interview that work has dried up for him at the SABC because of his skin colour. "The SABC does not care what programmes are being made, they just want to make sure the right people are making it... Except for *7de Laan* (soap opera) and *Noot vir Noot* (music game show), there is almost nothing for Afrikaans viewers on the SABC and for the youth and young children absolutely nothing." In one scene in his film, *Poenas is Koning* (2007), Esterhuizen articulates some of these frustrations by parodying the SABC. The title character, a musician struggling to launch his career, participates in a talent competition presented by the SABC. The competition is judged by two black judges wearing ANC-branded attire. When he enters the audition room, the judges greet him with hostility and after he puts up a short performance, one judge interjects,

Female judge: Stop that racket. You are exactly what we don't want.

Male judge: I agree.

Female judge: Hello? When are you and your people going to realize that there has been a change here?

Male judge: The tables have turned.

Poenas: *Wat beteken dit?* [What does that mean?]

Female judge: There is no place for you here at our national broadcaster.

Male judge: No place.

Female judge: We only tolerate some Afrikaans crap, because they sell so many damn TV ads.

Male judge: So make like a rocket and disappear.

Female judge: Get out of here.

Male judge: Out of Africa.

Poenas: Fuck you both.



Photo 2.3

The SABC talent show judges in *Poena is Koning* (Esterhuizen 2007)

After which Poena is escorted out of the building by a security guard while screaming, “Julle is almal ’n klomp dose! Druk julle kak TV-programme in julle gatte op!” [You are all a bunch of cunts! Stick your shitty TV programmes up your arses!] Esterhuizen (2015) describes this scene, where the SABC is depicted as having little respect for an Afrikaans-speaking artist, as autobiographical and also representative of how many Afrikaans-viewers feel about the SABC.

A growing dissatisfaction among Afrikaans-speakers with the SABC left the door wide open for kykNET to establish itself as a safe haven for Afrikaans audiences. Shortly after its launch, Jan du Plessis (as quoted in Le Roux 1999), who was programme head of M-Net at the time, said they had invested a lot of capital to get kykNET off the ground and had faith in the Afrikaans-speaking community’s seriousness with their language. They also anticipated that kykNET’s presence on DStv would draw new subscribers to the pay-TV service. Within their first few years on air, they bought the rights to the Afrikaans material in the SABC’s archive and also made attempts to buy every Afrikaans film that has ever been produced, ultimately buying the broadcasting rights to a collection of about 200 films.

Apart from relying on its archive, kykNET commissioned and bought a wide variety of new Afrikaans-language programmes to fill up its channel’s daily

programming. For the first few years of its existence, kykNET's offering of Afrikaans dramas²¹ was the channel's main selling point. Although kykNET's viewers increased, some SABC2 programmes remained favourites among Afrikaans viewers, like the soap opera, *7de Laan*, and the 7 o'clock news. This started changing when kykNET introduced two of its own soap operas: *Villa Rosa* in 2004 and *Binnelanders* in 2005. kykNET also launched its own news programme, *eNuus*, in July 2010, which has since assembled an audience larger than that of SABC2's 7 o'clock news. The result is that less and less kykNET viewers feel the need to ever switch their television sets to the Afrikaans programming on SABC2 and many simply "park" their televisions on kykNET (Meiring 2015).

Subsequently, kykNET has experienced immense growth in recent years. Karen Meiring, previously organizer of thirteen KKNK festivals, claimed in an interview that since she became head of M-Net's Afrikaans channels in 2009, kykNET's viewers have quadrupled (Meiring 2015). kykNET has also succeeded in attracting much attention from advertisers, seeking to reach a lucrative niche market of relatively wealthy Afrikaans-speakers. Once commenting on kykNET's growth figures, Meiring said,

With growth figures like these it is a no-brainer that marketers should market in Afrikaans on kykNET if they want to reap the fruit. We are sitting with a fantastic and affluent market and if you want to speak to these people's hearts, minds and wallets, Afrikaans should be your language of choice. (as quoted in De Bruin 2011)

Due to the channel's popularity and because of additional revenue gained from advertisers, kykNET has recently branched out into two more Afrikaans channels: the music channel, kykNET Nou, and kykNET & kie.

Despite its success, kykNET has often been criticized for not doing enough to promote the inclusivity of the Afrikaans language. This might be justified considering the fact that the vast majority of kykNET's viewers are indeed white Afrikaans-speakers. Yet, in order to capitalize and to continue capitalizing on this demographic, kykNET has steered far away from any form of identity politics, denying the possibility that it is a space where viewers are drawing the laager and frequently emphasizing its inclusivity. This is well-illustrated by a statement of the previous head of kykNET, Theo Erasmus,

21 Like Song vir Katryn, Dit wat stom is and Plek van die Vleisvreters

The channel has really developed into a feel-good brand with very few political connotations or baggage. The audience is very diverse – ranging from extremely liberal to rather conservative – and to cater for all the segments has become quite a challenge. (as quoted in Harber 2004, 18)

To uphold this image of inclusivity, and to insulate the channel from criticism, kykNET has a few black presenters and most of their dramas have at least a few black cast members. They are, however, in most cases the minority and it is uncommon to hear them speak a variety of Afrikaans other than what is often described as “standard Afrikaans.”

There are also a number of “whites only” programmes. One such example is the reality dating show, *Boer Soek 'n Vrou* [Farmer Seeks a Wife], where farmers are matched up with dating partners. It is one of the most watched programmes on kykNET, yet in all of its eleven seasons, there has only been one black contestant. On the face of it, it seems that kykNET values its loyal subscribers to such an extent that they do not want to alienate them with, what could be conceived by some, as offensive images of representatives of the entire Afrikaans-language community – white and black – engaging in intimate acts like dating. On the whole, kykNET has been confronting its viewers with images of South Africa that many Afrikaners would perceive as familiar and unthreatening. And its programming is spiced with just enough new South Africa flavours to buy some political legitimacy, but not enough to spoil the taste for many of its viewers. kykNET represents a world where the majority of people are white and speak “standard Afrikaans” – a world that is worlds away from the rainbow nation the SABC has set itself up to project and produce.

kykNET is, however, not uninterested in developing an audience outside of its already existing white audience. Although kykNET has been praised by Afrikaans-language activists for its contribution to promoting the language, many have been concerned about the fact that Afrikaans-speakers from lower income groups – of which coloured Afrikaans-speakers make out the majority – do not have access to the channel’s programming, because they cannot afford to pay the relatively expensive monthly DSTv subscription fees. kykNET’s response was to launch another Afrikaans channel, kykNET & kie, in April 2013. kykNET & kie is available on some of DSTv’s cheaper bouquets and shows reruns of current kykNET programmes, archived materials and also some programmes produced specifically to appeal to coloured viewers. One example is the programme, *Ons Stories* [Our Stories], which showcases kykNET-commissioned short films. About its first season, Karen Meiring

(2015), in an interview, said, “Our point of departure was that it had to be coloured stories. In other words: coloured script writers, coloured producers.”

Another attempt by kykNET to draw more coloured Afrikaans-speakers to its channel is the soap opera, *Suidooster*,²² which stars a predominantly coloured cast and premiered in November 2015. Speaking volumes about the dearth of coloured people represented in Afrikaans programmes, one journalist rejoiced in *Kuier* (Van Wyngaard 2015, 19),

For the first time in many years, the Cape culture minus the overwhelming presence of gangsters is going to be depicted on TV. And for the first time in many years, two coloured families... with their different ways of speaking Afrikaans, lifestyles and backgrounds, are going to be central figures.

One should not, however, romanticize kykNET’s recent attempts to represent a more inclusive Afrikaans-language community in its programming. kykNET was established in 1999 and, for most of its existence, did not feature any programmes where Afrikaners were not a majority – even though Afrikaners make up only 40% of all Afrikaans-speakers. With this in mind, kykNET’s recent strategy appears more like an attempt to expand a nearly saturated market, than it reflects any real commitment to promoting the inclusivity of the Afrikaans language. Moreover, by tailoring its programmes to either a white audience or a coloured audience – through “coloured stories” and “white stories” – kykNET and kykNET & kie, similar to many Naspers publications, are in the process of producing and strengthening the differences between two Afrikaans-speaking audiences.

To recapitulate, kykNET has established itself as a digital television channel for Afrikaans-speakers who can afford to pay the relatively hefty monthly DStv subscription fee. And because of the relative wealth of Afrikaners today, kykNET has succeeded in luring away from the national broadcaster a large portion of this demographic and herding them together in the private domain of pay-TV. This resulted in kykNET emerging as by far the largest Afrikaner-majority enclave today. Whereas the SABC has shown some commitment to projecting images of a postapartheid, inclusive, South African nation, kykNET has no such commitments. Instead of solidifying an overarching national identity, kykNET has been producing, and strengthening certain existing, separatist tendencies.

22 It is simultaneously broadcasted on both kykNET and kykNET & kie..

A new laager

While the National Party was once the custodian of the Afrikaans language, the preservation and promotion of Afrikaans have now firmly shifted into the marketplace, where its vitality is sustained through consumption. As a brand, Afrikaans has proven its commercial viability. The Afrikaans culture industry, including print media, television, music, arts festivals and film (as I will show in Chapter 3), are all flourishing in the private sphere. In addition, through the production, selling and consumption of the culture industry's commodities, multiple physical, digital and psychological spaces have been opening up where Afrikaners can be a majority. And since consumption is also an act of self-fashioning and has the ability to charge or recharge collective self-awareness, it has provided the means for Afrikaners to imagine, and to continue imagining, themselves as a collectivity or a community – as a distinct group with its own distinct culture.

At least to some extent, kykNET, Naspers and multiple other producers and sellers of Afrikaans-language commodities have been, although often denying their involvement in any form of identity politics and explicitly presenting themselves as politically neutral, complicit in generating and reinforcing Afrikaner enclavism, producing and reproducing difference, and opening up Afrikaner-majority spaces where a compromised form of apartheid can persist. Instead of being an emancipatory force, bolstering the government's nation-building project, interpellating Afrikaners as members of the "rainbow nation", the Afrikaans culture industry has been reaffirming the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom.

Similar to the De la Rey phenomenon, we are witnessing a flood of instances of Afrikaners redrawing the laager, albeit in less conspicuous ways, reclaiming and re-inventing their Afrikaner identities. And with so many Afrikaners experiencing a sense of victimhood and disillusionment in postapartheid South Africa, it is understandable why many find this laager, this cultural home of familiarity and homeliness, alluring. Under these "nervous" conditions, Afrikaans and its commodities are increasingly acting as "a substitute for the lost, never-to-be-found-again state" (Kriel 2006, 56) – a *volkstaat* of the mind. For many, the consumption of these commodities has and will remain merely an expression of their Afrikaner identities within private domains. Yet, it could easily be transformed into a sort of collective pseudo migration: a gradual emotional detachment and

withdrawal from South Africa, its realities, the state and the “rainbow nation.”²³ Indeed, it is hard to deny the Afrikaans culture industry’s involvement in producing the kind of sectionalist aspirations and identity politics expressed by, for example, the Solidarity Movement.

23 Sections of the public increasingly withdrawing into enclaves and private spaces is not restricted to certain Afrikaners, but has also become, as Caldeira (2000) points out, a global phenomenon.

3

A hundred years of Afrikaans film (1916-2015)

Nowhere is the Afrikaans language's vitality in market-driven domains better illustrated than the Afrikaans film industry's unexpected revival and vast expansion during the last decade. For nearly forty years, the Afrikaans film industry thrived under the guardianship of the National Party and its extensive subsidy scheme, with sometimes more than twenty Afrikaans films released in a single year. Yet, at the dawn of South Africa's democracy, funding for Afrikaans films had almost dried up completely and the death of the Afrikaans feature film seemed imminent. After the release of Katinka Heyns's *Paljas* in 1998, the Afrikaans film industry seemed to have met its end. Not a single Afrikaans film was released on the commercial circuit for nine years. And then, on 11 May 2007, Afrikaans made its surprising comeback to the silver screen with the release of the low-budget production, *Ouma se slim kind* [Grandma's clever child] (Kuhn). What followed was a revival of the Afrikaans film industry that, from 2009 onwards, also started benefitting considerably from the government's newly introduced revised subsidy scheme. As more films were released, it became patently clear that there was a South African audience willing to support Afrikaans films and that producing these films could be a lucrative business. In 2015 alone, twelve Afrikaans feature films were released on the mainstream circuit, with sometimes as many as three Afrikaans films on the circuit simultaneously. Leon van Nierop, arguably the most respected Afrikaans film critic, says about the vitality – and the resilience – of the Afrikaans film industry, “At the end of 2015, at a time when it looks like Afrikaans is increasingly being marginalized, the Afrikaans film is at one of the best places it has ever been” (2016, 11). In addition, the Afrikaans film industry has been thoroughly integrated and has been feeding into the broader Afrikaans culture industry.

In this chapter, I present an overview of the Afrikaans film industry, its shifting social significance and its continuities and discontinuities over the last century. I focus on the production, exhibition and content of Afrikaans films in different historical moments. I discuss the ways in which Afrikaans cinema, before the advent of apartheid, provided a public spectacle, which made possible a form of mass participation through which Afrikaners could imagine themselves as a collectivity. I also consider how Afrikaans film,

during apartheid, influenced Afrikaner subjectivity and identity-formation, how it contributed to the hardening of racial boundaries, and how it produced and reinforced Afrikaner nationalist sentiments.

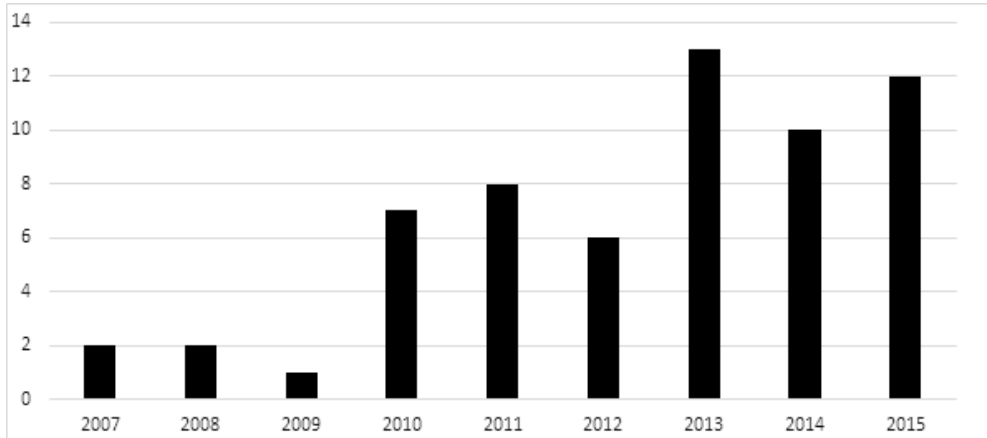


Figure 3.1
Number of Afrikaans films released on the commercial circuit per year since 2007. (Chart data based on my own calculations)

Against this historical backdrop, I consider the significance and possible consequences of the industry's revival during the last decade. The argument that I develop is that Afrikaans films, like other Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities, are mostly consumed by white Afrikaans-speakers and that the industry has managed to thrive mainly because it has successfully tailored its products to the imagined needs and expectations of this demographic. Because this demographic is relatively small, any film that deviates from these expectations runs a significant risk of failing to make a profit at the box office. Consequently, the Afrikaans film industry is producing its own loyal audience by confronting them with comforting images of a mostly white South Africa, where blacks seldom figure as anything beyond decorative props, where the importance of apartheid and its effects are minimized or ignored, and where the realities of life in postapartheid South Africa are rarely explored. In other words, the Afrikaans film industry has failed to develop, like many had hoped, into a medium through which a rainbow nation could be envisioned or even to act as platform from which dialogue for nation-building could be facilitated. Instead, the Afrikaans

film industry has been complicit in producing and naturalizing enclaved Afrikaner identities.

The foundational years

An Afrikaans film culture emerged in the first half of the 20th century and coincided, more or less, with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. During this period, Afrikaans films were rarely perceived or utilized as a medium of entertainment and was, instead, used for either educational purposes or as propaganda, or both. Cinema made its first appearance in what is today known as South Africa shortly before the end of the 19th century in the form of news films that were locally filmed, distributed and exhibited (Le Roux and Fourie 1982, 2). Although still mostly unorganized and operating on a relatively small scale, during the following few years, the first steps were taken towards the formation of a South African film industry. Cinematic theatres were established across the country and in 1910, *The Great Kimberly Diamond Robbery* became the first dramatized feature film shot on South African soil. The expansion of the local film industry gained momentum when in 1915, I.W. Schlesinger founded African Film Productions, which managed to consolidate South Africa's film production industry under a single company (Gutsche 1972, 311-312). In the subsequent years, African Film Productions maintained a virtual monopoly on the production of silent films in South Africa. In addition, Schlesinger extended his control over the local film market by also founding a distribution company, African Consolidated Films, and by acquiring several exhibition venues under the name of another company, African Consolidated Theatres.

In 1916, African Film Productions produced what is generally considered the first Afrikaans film. *De Voortrekkers* (Shaw) is an historical epic drama of which two cuts were released: one had flash cards written in a mixture of Afrikaans and Dutch, while the other had English flash cards. With a two-hour run-time, the film chronicles the Voortrekkers' migration from the Cape in 1837 to settle in the northern parts of South Africa, depicting their encounters with the Zulu king, Dingaan, their victory over the Zulus at the Battle of Blood River in 1838 and Dingaan's subsequent assassination (Maingard 2007, 25). Gutsche (1972, 313) later described *De Voortrekkers* as an ambitious project that displayed a production value comparable to some of the films produced by Hollywood's best-equipped studios at the time. Much attention was paid to ensure the film's historical accuracy, for example, 20 000 assegais and other Zulu war paraphernalia were assembled and used

on set; they used 500 rifles of the time period of the Voortrekkers, including Andries Pretorius's actual rifle; forty oxwagons were built specifically for the production (Gutsche 1972, 313-314).

The film bore further significance, since its screenplay was written by Gustav Preller, journalist of Pretoria-based newspaper, *De Volkstem*, and strong advocate for the use of Afrikaans as a written language (Giliomee 2012, 364-365). Writing the film's screenplay complemented another of Preller's projects: previously, he had written a whole series of articles on the Voortrekker leader, Piet Retief. With this project he aimed to both encourage his readers to read Afrikaans, but also to instil in them a nationalist pride. This project of his was so successful that he managed to launch "a full-scale Voortrekker industry" (Hofmeyr 1987, 109), attracting imitators who also joined in the process of mythologizing Afrikaner history by writing romanticized biographic accounts of a wide range of Afrikaner heroes (Hofmeyr 1987, 110).

The first public screenings of *De Voortrekkers* were held on 16 December 1916 in Krugersdorp's Town Hall as part of the town's Dingaan's Day celebrations for which an estimated 40 000 Afrikaners from across Transvaal had gathered with oxwagons (Gutsche 1972, 315). The film was enthusiastically received by Afrikaner audiences and was, subsequently, widely distributed in South Africa. *De Voortrekkers* had a remarkably long shelf life and its annual screening – in theatres and church and school halls – all across the Union on Dingaan's Day became a sort of institution (Gutsche 1972, 316). In the years to come, Dingaan's Day would grow in its significance. Since the Battle of Blood River provided the Afrikaners with historical "proof" that they were God's elect people, Dingaan's Day celebrations were composed of a particular blend of Christian and nationalist elements. According to Moodie (1975, 21), Dingaan's Day rituals united Afrikaners as a people with a unique identity and a shared common destiny, and it also reminded them of their "sacred separation" from the English and Africans. At a moment when the foundational stones for the development of a distinct Afrikaner nationalism was being laid, *De Voortrekkers* became a vehicle through which Afrikaners could imagine themselves as members of an Afrikaner community.

Walter Benjamin (1968) argues that the development of late-19th century technologies through which works of art could be mechanically reproduced fundamentally changed the nature of and shifted the public's relationship with the work of art. Of these technologies, he deems film – and the means through which it is reproduced and exhibited – as the most important (Benjamin 1968, 221). Cinema, unlike any other art form that has preceded it,

is capable of presenting the public with “an object for simultaneous collective experience” (Benjamin 1968, 234) and, through the mass spectacle that it offers, inspires a kind of mass participation. In addition to the ritualistic form of mass participation made possible by cinematic exhibitions, film also acts as a mass medium that makes “a society imaginable and intelligible to itself in the form of external representation” (Mazzarella 2004, 346).

Thus, *De Voortrekkers*, along with the Afrikaans print media in circulation at the time, became one of the first instances where Afrikaners were confronted with a mediated depiction of themselves as a people. In addition, central to these early screenings of *De Voortrekker* was the sociality which accompanied it: groups of Afrikaners, across the country, congregating to watch it on a specific day, like a ritual. Anderson (2006 [1983]) reminds us that the collective consumption of mediated communication has been paramount to the formation of national consciousness, which, in turn, creates and sustains imagined communities. For Anderson, the novel and the newspaper were the primary vehicles that shaped national consciousness historically, yet, like these media forms, film also has the ability to “categorise reality” and to “address [its] audience” – an imagined community (Schlesinger 2000, 21). Thus, *De Voortrekkers*, both through its content and through the viewing experience it offered, interpellated Afrikaners as subjects sharing a collective Afrikaner identity.

Despite *De Voortrekkers*’ favourable reception, African Film Productions did not produce another silent film with Afrikaans flashcards. In the years that followed, Afrikaans made significant strides as a language of print, it expanded as a public language and was accepted as an official state language in 1925. In May 1931, fifteen years after the release of *De Voortrekkers*, African Film Productions released the Afrikaans short film or featurette, *Sarie Marais*, which was the first South African film with a soundtrack. The film depicts a Boer-prisoner held captive on Ceylon, who longs for his girlfriend living in the Transvaal. At the end, they are reunited. While these events transpire on screen, the folksong, *Sarie Marais*, makes up the accompanying soundtrack. *Sarie Marais* would in 1937 form part of the first volume of Afrikaans folksongs published by the FAK.

Later that year, African Film Productions produced another Afrikaans sound film, *Moedertjie* [Mother dear]²⁴ (Albrecht 1931), which was the first South African film with dialogue. Based on J.F.W. Grosskopf's one-act play, *In die Wagkamer* [In the waiting room], *Moedertjie* tells the tragic tale of a mother's chance encounter with her son at a train station. He had left the family farm months ago, seeking greener pastures in the city. Corrupted by city life, however, he stole money from his employer and is, consequently, being accompanied to jail by a police officer. The shame of his mother seeing him in handcuffs is more than he can bear and he commits suicide by jumping in front of a train.

Events unfolding in *Moedertjie* reflect many of the anxieties that existed in Afrikanerdom at the time of the film's production. Mass urbanisation was taking place and a rural way of life, which many claimed served as the very foundation of a unique *Boerevolk* [Boer nation] or *Afrikanervolk* [Afrikaner nation], was in decline (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion). Anxieties about a disappearing way of life were well-expressed in an array of Afrikaans-language novels, published between the 1920s and 1940s, that were concerned with farm life – so-called “*plaasromans*” (pastorals; literally: farm novels). Consider, for example, the following sentiments expressed by one of the most prolific writers of the *plaasroman*, C.M. van den Heever (1935, 53), “When we see the Afrikaner fleeing to the city, fleeing away from the soil because they can no longer make an existence there, we are filled with anxiety, because a part of our *volkskultuur* [national culture] is being undermined.” In the generic *plaasroman*, the countryside spirit makes possible an authentic life, whereas life in the city is dominated by the English and portrayed as materialistic, self-centred and empty (Van Zyl 2008, 140).

Thus, in the tradition of the *plaasroman*, *Moedertjie* became the first in a long line of Afrikaans films that would rely on this exaggerated dichotomy between the city and the farm or, the city and the countryside. *Moedertjie* had its premiere on 2 October 1931 in the Capitol Theatre in Pretoria and was enthusiastically received by audiences. Subsequently, the film was screened all-over the Union, wherever projection equipment was available. It also became a custom to show *Sarie Marais* and *Moedertjie* together in the supporting programme to annual screenings of *De Voortrekkers* on Dingaan's Day (Gutsche 1972, 324).

24 Instead of continually interrupting the flow of the text, from here on forward, I only provide English translations of Afrikaans film titles in cases where it gives some insight into the content of the film

Up to this point, the Afrikaans film industry had been operating on a relatively small scale. It was, however, the Voortrekker Centenary Celebrations of 1938 that managed to catapult the industry into a new era. During these celebrations, *De Voortrekkers* was screened extensively in the Transvaal (Gutsche 1972, 316). Nationalist fervour was raised even further with the production of the film, *Die Bou van 'n Nasie/They Built a Nation* (Albrecht 1938), which was filmed in both Afrikaans and English with an alternating cast. This full-length epic feature film includes events from South Africa's colonial history, starting in 1486 when Bartolomeu Dias first sailed around the Cape and ends with the establishment of the South African Union in 1910. Thematically, the film is concerned with how Europeans tamed South Africa and its people and, by doing so, managed to bring civilization to the African continent (Maingard 2007, 55). The film ends with shots of farmers working on the land, representing a certain romanticized pastoral aesthetic. The scale of the film was enormous for its time and 3 500 white and 8 000 black extras were used during its production (Le Roux and Fourie 1982, 30). The film was another production by African Film Productions and was commissioned by Oswald Pirow, Minister of Railways and Harbours. Its release was meant to coincide with the Voortrekker Centenary Celebrations, to stimulate a national consciousness and to attract international publicity (Gutsche 1972, 346; Le Roux and Fourie 1982, 31).

Another film that capitalized on the heightened nationalist spirit during the Voortrekker Centenary Celebrations was Hans Rompel's *'n Nasie hou koers* [A nation stays on track], which was released in 1939, a year after the celebrations. Assigned by the Voortrekkers youth movement, Rompel produced a documentary film that recounts the symbolic oxwagon trek. He organized a camera crew to film the trek from the various parts in South Africa where it started to its climax with the laying of the foundation stone of the Voortrekker Monument (Gutsche 1972, 344). The film's final cut runs for just under five hours. Upon its release, *'n Nasie hou koers* garnered a greater sustained enthusiasm than any South African film that came before it – with *De Voortrekkers* being a possible exception (Gutsche 1972, 344). By 1940, after a year in circulation, the film had been exhibited a total of 285 times in 144 different venues to audiences totalling at least 50 000 people (Gutsche 1972, 263). In conjunction with the intensification of nationalist sentiments amongst Afrikaners, the demand for Afrikaans films also expanded.

After his success with *'n Nasie hou Koers*, which was in every way an amateur production, Rompel seized the opportunity to found his own amateur production company, which became part of the Reddingsdaadbond [Rescue

Act Alliance] (RDB) in 1940 and was known as the Reddingsdaadbond Amateur Rolprent-organisasie [Amateur Motion Picture Organization] (RARO). The RDB was called into life following the Eerste Ekonomiese Volkskongres [The First Economic Congress of the People] held in 1939. At the time, there were growing concerns about the little control Afrikaner-owned capital had over large industrial undertakings and the urban economy – a situation that was largely fuelled by Afrikaners’ lack of entrepreneurial spirit and their strong anti-capitalist sentiments. In addition, there were also concerns about Afrikaners living in poverty. What emerged out of the Volkskongres was an adapted capitalist philosophy, *Volkskapitalisme*. Instead of enriching individuals, its goal was to assist Afrikaners, as a group, to capture their “legitimate” share of the economy. To attain this goal, the RDB was established to “mobilise mass support for Afrikaner business” (O’Meara 1983, 137). It was, however, recognized that Afrikaners’ economic consciousness could only be transformed if Afrikaners’ cultural or national consciousness was also transformed. Consequently, the RDB was conceived as an “all-embracing movement” (O’Meara 1983, 139) that should impact on every aspect of the Afrikaners’ daily lives. Moreover, it aimed, through cultural mobilization, to soften divisions within Afrikanerdom and draw together Afrikaners of all creeds and all classes. Subsequently, the RDB made large investments in cultural projects like plays, concerts, traditional dances and films. RARO was founded in addition to Volksbioskope Maatskappy Beperk [People’s Bioscopes Company Limited], which was established as an alternative film distribution network for Afrikaans films. When Afrikaans films were not available, poor quality Hollywood films were screened accompanied by supporting programmes consisting of Afrikaans documentary and news films.

Hans Rompel, heading RARO’s operations, was not only a filmmaker, but also a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond, an outspoken Afrikaner nationalist and a film critic with a lucid vision for a vibrant future Afrikaans film industry. His two-volume book, *Bioskoop in Diens van die Volk* [Bioscope in Service of the People], published in 1942, is part critique of the existing South African film industry, and part manifesto to establish a *volkseie* [people’s] cinema capable of producing “indigenous films that breathe the Afrikaans spirit” (Rompel 1942b, 48) and that can be used as instruments of propaganda. One of Rompel’s (1942a; 1942b) central contentions is that the soul of South Africa had not previously been captured in South African film, because it had not been profitable to do so. The industry, he argues, was firmly in the hands of “Big Business” that had no consideration for anything beyond profit.

Big Business was also opposed to any form of experimentation, because it implied risk and could lead to great financial losses.

Therefore, Rompel (1942b) maintained, the task of developing a *volkseie* cinema could not be left in the hands of Big Business and should, instead, be the responsibility of amateur film producers like RARO. Amateur film production is not only much cheaper than commercial production, its films will also, inevitably, bear a much closer resemblance to the *volksgevoel* [consciousness of a people], because the amateur would always be someone from the *volk*. Moreover, because amateurs would be immune to the temptations of profit, it would be much harder for them – as opposed to a commercial production company – to lose contact with the *volksgevoel*. Commercial companies, on the other hand, might produce films that perform well at the box office, but according to Rompel their success is merely a reflection of the *volksmaak* [preference of a people], which is very different from the *volksgevoel* congealed in amateur films (Rompel 1942b, 57).

This amateur production model would in addition, according to Rompel's vision, foster the development of a specific and unique Afrikaans film aesthetic. For example, Americans are used to an accelerated life tempo that also feature in Hollywood films and is often imitated by South African filmmakers. Afrikaans films should, in contrast, be cut in such a way as to imitate South Africans' slower life tempo (Rompel 1942a, 40). The budget constraints of amateur productions would also add to a unique film aesthetic, because insufficient lighting equipment will force amateur filmmakers to shoot their films in the outdoors and, in effect, the whole of South Africa would become the filmmaker's studio. This would also reflect the central role nature plays in the Afrikaner's *volkslewe* [life of a people], since the Afrikaners have never been "a *volk* for films about big palaces, night clubs [and] pubs" (Rompel 1942b, 58).

Ultimately, the Afrikaans cinema envisioned by Rompel never developed beyond its infancy. RARO organized film competitions and produced a series of short documentaries and news films that were used in supporting programmes, and the silent feature films, *Newels oor Mont Aux Sources* and *Ons staan 'n dag oor* in 1942 (O'Meara 1983, 139; Le Roux and Fourie 1982, 31). Yet, RARO and Volksbioskope failed to outlive the Second World War. Because of the war, a lack of supplies first curtailed and later ended all their activities (Gutsche 1972, 345). After the war, the RDB was no longer in a position to fund RARO, because, although greatly successful in overcoming divisions in Afrikanerdom and mobilizing support for Afrikaner business,

the RDB failed to generate the necessary income to sustain itself. Within the first few years of its existence, the RDB lost many of its initial members and by 1952, the RDB had effectively ceased to exist and was finally disbanded in 1957 (O'Meara 1983, 141). RARO was never revived. Amateur filmmaking, at least on the scale that Rompel had imagined it, failed to take off in South Africa and, instead, Big Business would come to dominate the Afrikaans film industry within the next few years.

Apart from RARO's emergence and demise in the 1940s, the Afrikaans film scene experienced some other shifts during this period. Certain films still followed, albeit with less rigour, an earlier tradition of Afrikaner nationalist – even propagandist – films, consciously attempting to represent or to put forth some kind of “volksgevoel” on the screen. Pierre de Wet's *Geboortegrond* [Birth Soil] (1946), for example, belongs to the *boereplaas* [boer farm] genre of films and chronicles the life of a man who, after a dispute with his father, decides to leave the family farm and to resettle in the city. He, however, feels imprisoned by city life. The film's climax comes when he, ultimately, returns to the family farm where he can, once again, experience the freedom of the outdoors. Another film by De Wet that reinforced nationalist sentiments was Simon Beyers (1947), which is based on actual historical events. During the 17th century, Simon van der Stel imported fifty girl orphans from the Netherlands to become the spouses of the unmarried men of the colony. The film follows one such couple, Maria and Simon Beyers, and conveys the message that it is the will of God that the Afrikaners should multiply and inhabit and rule over the whole of South Africa (Van Staden and Sevenhuysen 2009, 176).

Towards the latter half of the 1940s, however, filmmakers increasingly started shifting towards producing popular, light-hearted entertainment. Although these films continued to address an Afrikaner audience, it reflected the *volksmaak* with more clarity than it reflected the *volksgevoel*. Some of the films that were released in this period include: *Die Wildsboudjie* (1946), about a *dominee* [reverend] becoming involved in illegal hunting; *Die Skerpioen* (1946), chronicling the adventures of Adriaan Hugo, an Afrikaner Sherlock Holmes; the farcical *Kaskenades van dr. Kwak* (1948), about a doctor that lands up in a small town in the countryside where no one ever gets sick; *Kom saam vanaand* (1948), the first Afrikaans musical.

Apartheid cinema

The development of Afrikaans as a standardized language was largely driven by Afrikaner-funded print media in the 1910s and 1920s. Cinema, however, was controlled by English-dominated capital well into the 1950s (Tomaselli 1989, 35). Yet, in the 1940s already, an Afrikaans film audience began taking shape in conjunction with a growing demand for Afrikaans-language films. For example, pioneer filmmaker Pierre de Wet, who rose to stardom in the 1940s, would later remark that he made films for his people who were “hungry to hear their own language in the bioscope” (as quoted in Britz 1990). The Afrikaans audience during the 1950s was large and stable, guaranteeing nearly every Afrikaans film – as long as it provided light entertainment and served as a visualization of Afrikaner ideals on the screen – a long enough run on the local circuit to eventually break even (Botha 2012, 43). Aware of the magnitude of this emerging market, African Film Productions began shifting its attention to Afrikaans-speaking audiences and established S.A. Rolprentmaatskappy [S.A. Motion Picture Company], a division of the company that would specialize specifically in the production of Afrikaans films (Le Roux and Fourie 1982, 37). During the coming years, the production of Afrikaans films would increasingly become profit-driven and the majority of films would be made to resemble the *volksmaak* as closely as possible.

One of the key figures that initially drove the commercialization of the Afrikaans film was Jamie Uys, who arrived on the film scene in 1951 with his directorial debut, *Daar Doer in die Bosveld* [Far Away in the Bushveld]. Uys later became, arguably, the most successful filmmaker in the history of South African cinema. *Daar Doer in die Bosveld*’s narrative unfolds against a peaceful rural backdrop. Uys plays the role of a naïve and pure of heart rural-dweller trying to impress a woman from the city. Despite his clumsy ways and absent-mindedness, he wins her heart and they get married. The film was well-received by the public and Uys managed to attract some Afrikaner capital for his subsequent independent film productions (Botha 2012, 12). By 1955, Uys had accumulated enough capital to establish his own production company, Jamie Uys Filmproduksies [Film Productions]. Later, his company would also benefit from an investment from the life assurance giant, SANLAM. As a company that was built with Afrikaner capital, SANLAM justified the investment as its contribution to a “*kultuursaak*” [a cultural matter] (Scannell 1968, 115). When Uys left Jamie Uys Filmproduksies in 1966, its name was changed to Kavalier Filmproduksies, which became one of the most prolific production companies of the 1960s and 1970s.

While Uys was setting up his film company, Schlesinger's African Film Productions, African Consolidated Films and African Consolidated Theatres were, in 1956, bought out by the American company, 20th Century Fox. By 1969, SANLAM had started to broaden its activities in the film industry to also include distribution and exhibition, and established a shell called SATBEL (Suid-Afrikaanse Teaterbelange). Initially, SATBEL bought out the exhibitor, Ster Films, and, during the early 1970s, also bought out 20th Century Fox and renamed its operations Kinekor (Shepperson and Tomaselli 2002, 65). Ster Films and Kinekor would later merge to form Ster-Kinekor, which is the largest cinematic exhibitor in South Africa today. SANLAM expanding its operations in the South African film industry is significant, because for the first time Afrikaans films were almost exclusively financed, produced, distributed and exhibited through Afrikaner-dominated capital (Tomaselli and Van Zyl 1992, 400).

Apart from Afrikaner capital that stimulated the growth of the South African film industry, the industry also benefitted from the state's formalized involvement. Again, Jamie Uys was an important figure and served as the first chairman of the Motion Picture Producers Association (MPPA) that was established in 1956. In the same year, the association persuaded the National Party government to introduce a financial subsidy scheme that would assist local filmmakers. After its introduction, the subsidy scheme underwent multiple revisions. In its original form, the entertainment tax that viewers paid to watch a local production would, in turn, be paid to the film's producers (Tomaselli 1989, 32-33). Consequently, some of the risk of production was eliminated and local film producers stood a much better chance of recouping their production costs and also to make a profit. Instantly, filmmaking became a much more lucrative business in South Africa, resulting in an explosion in local productions of varying quality. In an attempt to weed out inferior films and to increase competitiveness in the local film industry, the scheme was modified in 1962 so that producers received no subsidy on the first R10 000 earned at the box office. This amount was further increased to R50 000 in 1964. From thereon forward, producers received 44% of gross box office earnings above the R50 000 threshold (Tomaselli 1989, 33). The threshold would later be raised. In essence, what the subsidy scheme achieved was to dissuade filmmakers from producing films that would only have a limited popular appeal and, instead, incentivized them to produce films that reflected the *volksmaak*.

Towards the late 1960s, there was rising unease about the fact that local English films were out-performing Afrikaans films at the box office and

therefore profited more from the subsidy scheme. To salvage the situation and to protect and promote the Afrikaans language, the subsidy on Afrikaans films was increased in 1969 from 44% of box office earnings to 55% (Tomaselli 1989, 34-35). The immediate outcome of the revised subsidy scheme was that it effectively put an end to the production of Afrikaans-English bilingual films that had become popular at the time. Jamie Uys, for example, had used bilingual films to satirise the conflict between Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans in films like *Fifty-Vyftig* (1953), *Hans en die Rooinek* (1961) and *Lord Oom Piet* (1962). Under the new subsidy scheme, however, only films with at least 95% of its dialogue in Afrikaans would qualify as Afrikaans films. Thus, in the years that followed, Afrikaans- and English-speakers would mostly be catered for as two distinct audiences.

During the 1970s, an additional subsidy scheme, which became known as the “B Scheme”, was introduced to cater for yet another audience: black people. The vision was to cultivate a cinema capable of addressing themes that would resonate specifically with black audiences. These films were produced on shoe-string budgets. The dialogue was usually in one of South Africa’s African languages and cast members were, more often than not, amateurs. Exhibitions of these films were held in church, school and community halls. Ultimately, the B Scheme resulted in a superfluity of inferior quality films made by white filmmakers, who usually had little to no experience and, in most cases, did not even understand the language in which they were making films (Botha 2012, 115).²⁵ Ultimately, the film subsidy scheme, introduced by the National Party, produced various audiences, differentiated according to ethnicity and language, and, in this way, also came to reflect Verwoerd’s separate development policy (Maingard 2007, 7). Thus, film in South Africa, like all shared communicative practices (Schlesinger 2000, 18), also contributed to simultaneously strengthening group identities and hardening the boundaries between groups.

In the years to come, with larger subsidies available, Afrikaans cinema entered its golden era. From 1969, the year in which the adapted subsidy scheme was introduced, to 1976, the year in which television was introduced, nearly a hundred Afrikaans films were released on the mainstream commercial circuit (Le Roux and Fourie 1982, 211-215). High-grossing films were awarded

25 There were some notable exceptions. Modisane (2013), for example, provides a detailed analysis of a sample of black-centred “renegade” films, of which the majority were produced during apartheid, and argues that these films played an important role in “[stimulating] critical public engagements on blackness” (Modisane 2013, 175).

greater subsidies and the majority of these films relied heavily on tried and tested formulas. Afrikaans cinema became a closed circuit and films were “made by Afrikaners for Afrikaners with little or no attention paid to their potential to say something important about society” (Pretorius 1992, 375). Since the size of a film’s subsidy depended on the film’s ability to comfort its audience by affirming and reproducing hegemonic ideas, very few filmmakers attempted to challenge its audiences (Tomaselli and Van Zyl 1992, 400).

The situation was further exacerbated by the introduction of state censorship. In 1963, The Publications and Entertainment Act became the first law that made specific provision for the censoring of South African produced content. A few notable Afrikaans films landed under the Publication Control Board’s (PCB) scissors. For example, a scene was cut from Jans Rautenbach’s *Die Kandidaat* that dealt with the question whether coloured people could be considered Afrikaners (Tomaselli 1989, 15). During the following year, *Katrina* (1969), another film by Rautenbach, also ran into trouble with the South African censors. The film traces the love affair between a white man and a coloured woman. Two alternate endings for the film were shot: one showing the couple emigrate, while the other depicts the white man rejecting his coloured lover based on their cultural differences. The PCB demanded the use of the latter (Tomaselli 1989, 15). Tommie Meyer’s *Die Springbok* (1976), a film about a coloured man who pretends to be white and is chosen to play for the national Springbok rugby team, was initially banned by the PCB (Tomaselli 1989, 16). After three scenes were cut from the film, the decision was overturned, and the film was released (Van Nierop 2016, 198). Despite these and a few other exceptions, the apartheid state never achieved the same level of notoriety for censoring Afrikaans films that it achieved for censoring Afrikaans literature. For Afrikaans films, anticipatory self-censorship was the norm, since few investors were willing to fund films that were at risk of either being banned or being commercial disasters (Botha 2012, 121).

The state subsidy scheme and the PCB, therefore, forced filmmakers into steering clear of overtly political films. Experimentation was not profitable, and filmmakers had to suppress many of their creative impulses. Tomaselli says about the South African filmmaker’s predicament,

A director who is self-conscious about goals, intentions, and social relations is considered to be commercially irresponsible and lacking in business integrity. To inject a film with a personal signature or an overt political

content is frowned upon since this contravenes the dictum which lubricates industry practice: give the public what it wants. (Tomaselli 1989, 83)

The result for the Afrikaans film industry was that the vast majority of films produced between the 1960s and 1970s were Afrikaner fantasies, conveying conservative messages that reflected the Afrikaner's attachment to racial and linguistic purity, and to a pastoral way of life (Botha 2012, 51). Afrikaners were depicted in an idealized form, while other sections of South African society were mostly ignored or fulfilled subordinate roles as the appendages to a majority-white world (Blignaut 1992, 106). Especially popular were films of the *boereplaas* genre. Typically, in these films farm life is depicted as the Afrikaners' "traditional" way of life – a way of life that forms the very foundation of Afrikaner group cohesion. And, until the mid-1970s, before the introduction of television, the figure of the "evil city" also remained common to most Afrikaans films (Tomaselli 2006, 143-145).

Although proportionally less than during the foundational years of Afrikaans cinema, a few filmmakers still had ambitions to produce films with a purpose beyond mere escapist entertainment. Jamie Uys, for example, was commissioned by the FAK to make *Doodkry is min* [Impossible to suppress], which was released in 1961, the same year that South Africa became a republic, and premiered at the Voortrekker Monument. The film celebrates the Afrikaans language's vitality, despite numerous efforts to "suppress" its growth and development. Christelike Afrikaanse Radio en Film Organisasie [Christian Afrikaans Radio and Film Organisation] (CARFO), established by the Dutch Reformed Church, also took advantage of the favourable climate to produce films with an overtly Christian message and, between 1959 and 1977, produced a total of 13 full-length feature films.

During this period, there was, however, one Afrikaans director who was committed to showcasing "alternative portrayals of the Afrikaner mind-scape" (Maingard 2007, 136). Jans Rautenbach emerged as a film auteur, adding his voice to the Sestigers [Sixtiers] literary movement of the time, directing political films that exposed and explored cracks in Afrikanerdom. In this regard, three of his films – all of which garnered substantial controversy – stand out: *Die Kandidaat* (1968) is mostly set in a boardroom, where members of the Afrikaner elite debate the content of Afrikaner identity; *Katrina* (1969) explores questions of race and racism through the relationship between a white priest and a coloured woman pretending to be white; *Jannie Totsiens* (1970) is set in a mental asylum, which acts as an allegory for the apartheid state, and the patients reflect different voices within Afrikanerdom.

Rautenbach, however, failed to stimulate a larger film movement and his later films did not showcase the same political sting as his earlier work.

When television was finally introduced in 1976, Afrikaans cinema was transformed as the responsibility of apartheid's "ideological and cultural legitimization" (Tomaselli 1989, 178) shifted from film to television. Cinema was slowly succumbing to the domination of television as the demand for cinema decreased, resulting in fewer and fewer Afrikaans films being produced. Numerous directors, who had previously worked in the film industry, now moved their attention to television productions, which was a much more profitable and stable industry (Pretorius 1992, 377). In addition, a substantial number of films that were produced in the period following the introduction of television were based on television series and their characters, for example, *Nommer asseblief* (1981), *Verkeerde nommer* (1982), *Die Bosveldhotel* (1981), *Skollie* (1984), *Vyfster: Die Slot* (1985), *Liewe Hemel Genis!* (1986) and *Agter Elke Man* (1990). By 1984, the *Rapport* Oscars, an annual award ceremony first held in 1975 to honour the stars of the Afrikaans film industry was discontinued because of the low quantity of Afrikaans films that were being released (Pretorius 1992, 382).

In conjunction with the introduction of television, the experience of going to the cinema also changed. Because South African audiences were being exposed to easily accessible, high quantities of diverse televised entertainment, the novelty of watching a film in a cinema or at a drive-in declined (Blignaut 1992, 107). Later, with the introduction of the VHS tape, the consumption of films, also of Afrikaans films, began to shift towards private spaces and the sense of community and public participation that were evoked around watching Afrikaans films in public spaces alongside one's fellow Afrikaners began to decline. Indeed, the social architecture associated with the consumption of Afrikaans films began to shift. While drive-ins slowly disappeared, and the majority of cinematic theatres closed, especially the ones located in rural areas, cinema complexes were erected in shopping malls located in wealthy urban areas, which became the primary public film exhibition sites in South Africa.

Although many of the films produced during the 1980s were based on television series or on well-established generic formulas, there was also an increase in the number of films that offered some form of social criticism. Koos Roets's *Die Groen Faktor* (1984) is a political satire that deals with a National Party candidate that starts turning green; the film comments on the destructiveness of Afrikaner racism. In *Broer Matie* (1984), another film

by Jans Rautenbach, a white farmer dies, and the church board has to decide whether a coloured man should be allowed to lead his funeral as the farmer requested in his will. *Fiela se Kind* (1987), directed by Katinka Heyns, tells the story of a white boy who is reared by a coloured family before he is placed in the care of an Afrikaner family of woodcutters. At the time, the film was unique for its sympathetic depiction of a coloured family. Regardt van den Bergh's *Boetie gaan Border toe* (1984) and its sequel, *Boetie op Manoeuvres*, follow Boetie who unwillingly joins the South African Defence Force (SADF). Although these films were made in co-operation with the SADF, Van den Bergh still managed, to some extent, to satirize the "pomposity of the patriarchal Afrikaner" (Pretorius 1992, 388). Although, thematically, the Afrikaans film was experiencing a renewal of sorts, private funding available for the production of these films continued to decline. Afrikaans films, it seems, were no longer seen as the viable investment option it used to be.

An apparent end and revival

With South Africa's democratic transition approaching, the writing appeared to be on the wall for the Afrikaans film. In 1992, Katinka Heyns, critically acclaimed director, declared the death of the Afrikaans film industry and stated that "unless some serious effort is made, its chances of ever being revived are slim" (as quoted in Pretorius 1992, 1). The fate of the Afrikaans film industry seemed to be confirmed when the subsidy scheme based on box office returns, conceived and implemented during apartheid, was finally rescinded in 1995 and replaced with an interim annual film fund of R10 million that was distributed amongst various projects (Botha 2012, 165). This money never reached Afrikaans productions, and, without the apartheid state's guardianship, Afrikaans filmmakers had to rely solely on private funds. It quickly took its toll on the industry and between 1994 and 1998, a mere three Afrikaans-language films were released on the mainstream circuit.

The first Afrikaans film that saw the light in democratic South Africa was Willie Esterhuizen's *Lipstiek Dipstiek* [Lipstick Dipstick] (1994). Esterhuizen took advantage of the demise of South Africa's longstanding censorship regime and directed the first Afrikaans film to show nudity and simulated sex. Characters in the film also use a wide range of expletives with a frequency that was never possible before. By the end of its theatrical run, *Lipstiek Dipstiek* was the highest grossing Afrikaans film of all time. In 1997, Koos Roets directed *Kaalgat tussen die Daisies*, a film about a *dominee* and his cross-dressing coloured assistant who manage an erotic dance club together. In

the following year, Katinka Heyns's *Paljas* was released. The film is a period piece that features a boy who loses his ability to speak. When a circus arrives in town, a clown is left behind. He becomes acquainted with the boy and teaches him sleight of hand tricks. Healed through this interaction, the boy starts speaking again. The church board, however, suspects the clown of being a follower of Satan and embarks on a moral crusade ordained by the *dominee* to kill him. It is telling that, in different ways, all three Afrikaans films released during this period presented a critique of and an attempt at breaking away from a kind of respectability and conservatism that many still associate with Afrikanerdom. It is also significant that the church, one of the foundations of Afrikanerdom, was criticized or even blatantly mocked in all three these films. For example, in *Lipstiek Dipstiek*, the *dominee* is depicted as a pervert dressed in women's clothing. *Kaalgat tussen die Daisies's* *dominee* also runs his erotic dance club in a dress. All three films can, therefore, be read as reflective of a certain impulse to unshackle and to purify Afrikanerdom from a particular stigma.

Such subversive explorations through the medium of Afrikaans film were, however, short-lived. In 1998, veteran director and cinematographer, Koos Roets, reflected on the Afrikaans filmmaker's predicament, "We are dying of misery. There is little commercial work and along the line of drama... absolutely nothing" (as quoted in Hoffmann 1998, 83). Even *Paljas* – despite being a success at the box office, receiving praise from critics and being South Africa's entry for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film – failed to revitalize the Afrikaans film industry. Instead, the industry entered a prolonged period of hibernation. The machine that had been churning out Afrikaans films with regularity over a period of four decades seemed to be dead for good.

In the years following South Africa's democratic transition, state and private funds trickled down to the country's film industry and a handful of mostly English-language films were released every year. Yet, many argued that with proper state support and adequate private funding, a vibrant and democratic local film industry, representative of all the country's citizens, could emerge in South Africa. Furthermore, so the argument went, these films could fulfil a progressive and healing role in South Africa's postapartheid society. Saks (2003, 152), for example, imagined that local cinema could act as a medium to envision the new South African nation "through a progressive/continuous state of vision and critique." Similarly, Maingard (2003, 131) hoped that local cinema would serve as an emancipatory force in postapartheid society: that

cinema would challenge state-imposed apartheid identities, open up and explore new subjectivities, and recognize and articulate difference.

It was also in this period, shortly after South Africa's democratic transition, that the government started investigating new avenues through which the South African film industry could be restructured and developed. In 1996, the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology published their Film Development Strategy, which acknowledged the benefits of having a vibrant local film industry, but also stated that film is a high-risk industry that depends on state subsidies in many other countries (Botha 2003, 182). The document recommended that a statutory body should be established that could spearhead the development of the local film and video industry. Subsequently, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) was founded in 1999, which has provided funding to train a new generation of local filmmakers ever since and also made funds available for the development, production, distribution and marketing of numerous local productions (NFVF 2010, 43). Initially, however, NFVF funds were not directly channelled towards the production of Afrikaans films.²⁶

Thus, in the period following South Africa's democratization, state funding did not reach the Afrikaans film industry and the demand for Afrikaans films were deemed too low for private investors to risk financing film productions without an additional state subsidy. Some Afrikaans directors, like Katinka Heyns and Willie Esterhuizen, shifted their attention to producing content for television, at first for the South Africa Broadcasting Commission (SABC) and M-Net, and later also for kykNET. Other filmmakers moved abroad or began working on and producing local English-language films. Unlike Afrikaans films, English-language films were still drawing large enough investments – both from private funders and the NFVF – to ensure their continued production and, during the years to come, even some films in other indigenous languages were produced. For example, while the Afrikaans-language film was going through its slump, Darrell Roodt's Zulu-language film, *Yesterday* (2004), was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and Gavin Hood's locally funded *Tsotsi* won the award in the subsequent year. A few South African films also managed to rake in large profits at the box office, most notably Leon Schuster's English-language films. Schuster is one of South Africa's most prolific and successful

26 Although some filmmakers who would later become pivotal players in the revival of the Afrikaans film industry, like the producer Danie Bester and the screenwriter-director Sallás de Jager, benefitted from NFVF-funded training programmes.

filmmakers; producing, writing and acting in all his films, he has dominated the box office for local films for at least the first two decades of South Africa's democracy. Schuster's *Mr Bones* (2001), for example, holds the record for the highest grossing South African film of all time.

After the release of *Paljas*, three Afrikaans films were produced on shoestring budgets, none of which were released on the commercial circuit. *Lyklollery* (Coertze 2001) is described by Leon van Nierop (2016, 243) as such an "incompetent comedy" that it extinguished any glimmer of hope that the Afrikaans film might have had at the time of making its return to the silver screen. The production of *Skilpoppe* (Odendaal 2004) was funded by M-Net and was part of M-Net's Original Feature project, which was launched in 2002 and was a small and tentative attempt by the satellite channel to breathe new life into the local film industry. Although better received, *Skilpoppe* was not believed to have enough popular appeal to justify a release on the commercial circuit. Darrell Roodt's *Meisie* (2006) suffered a similar fate and premiered on SABC2.

And then the screen lit up once more. On 11 May 2007, after nine years of hibernation, Afrikaans made its comeback to the silver screen with the film, *Ouma se Slim Kind*. A period drama that started out as a student short film, *Ouma se Slim Kind* is set in the 1940s against a rural South African background and tells the tale of a mentally handicapped white boy that is left orphaned after a horse cart accident. Fate then delivers him into the caring hands of a black boy and an old white lady, and they all live together in a farm house. The film's director, Gustav Kuhn, had been fortunate enough to find private investors to fund the film, although he admitted that bringing the film to screen was a task made laborious by insufficient funding. Post-production, for example, had to be halted several times in order to raise additional funds (Liebenberg 2007, 4). After its completion, the film suffered from inadequate marketing, received a limited release and, ultimately, failed to recoup its productions costs, raking in a meagre R318 362 at the local box office. Despite its tepid reception, however, *Ouma se Slim Kind* announced the revival of the Afrikaans film industry and many of the individuals working on the film would later become central figures in the expansion of the revived Afrikaans film industry.

Later that same year, director Willie Esterhuizen, thirteen years after the release of his previous feature film, returned to the silver screen with his fourth film, *Poena is Koning* [Poena is King]. Slowly, the Afrikaans film industry was gaining momentum. In the following year, two more films were

released: *Bakgat!* [Cool!] (Pretorius 2008) and *Vaatjie sien sy gat* [Vaatjie sees his arse] (Esterhuizen 2008). All three films star a majority-white cast and were overtly targeted at a younger generation of white Afrikaans-speakers – many of which had never seen an Afrikaans film screened in a cinema before. Largely derivative of Hollywood formulas, all three these films feature sex-obsessed white male protagonists and a plethora of sexual gags and innuendos. At least to some extent, these films can be read as attempts at exploring – but also constructing – new Afrikaner identities. It is also noteworthy that Esterhuizen's *Poena is Koning* and *Vaatjie sien sy gat* are two rare examples of recent Afrikaans films that make an attempt at political commentary. In both films, a young white protagonist has to negotiate a hostile world, where his continued ill-luck leads him into ever-deeper trouble. Both title characters, Poena and Vaatjie, are, for example, wrongfully accused of committing a crime and have to convince antagonistic and predominantly black authority figures, such as police officers and judges, of their innocence. Although not the sole source of Poena and Vaatjies's troubles, South Africa is depicted as a country that is not always kind to its white citizens. These two films, together with *Bakgat!*, received lukewarm to cold reviews from critics, but were still modest box office successes, especially considering their small budgets.²⁷

It was also in 2008 that the whole South African film industry received an overhaul and state funding became a significant factor in revitalizing the Afrikaans film. In 2004, as part of its Customised Sector Programmes that aims to develop certain priority sectors, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) introduced the Film and Television Rebate Programme (FTPRP). The programme was meant to act as an incentive for foreign producers to film their productions on South African soil, to stimulate co-productions between South African and international producers and also to contribute to the funding of local productions. Ultimately, the goals of the programme were to inject capital into an industry that could stimulate growth, create jobs and “[facilitate] dialogue for nation building” (NFVF 2010, 45). Since the cost of producing any Afrikaans film has never exceeded R25 million, this rebate scheme had no significant effect on the Afrikaans film industry. In 2008, however, the DTI introduced a revised rebate scheme and the threshold for local productions was lowered to R2.5 million (NFVF 2010, 45-46), which has had a far-reaching effect on the Afrikaans film landscape. Currently, local producers are reimbursed with 35% of their production costs. If their

²⁷ Films directed at adolescent audiences reached its peak with the release of a sequel to *Bakgat!* in 2010 (Pretorius). After that, films for this demographic began to lose their novelty and the third instalment in the *Bakgat!* franchise (Nieuwoudt 2013) proved to be a box office flop. No films catering for this specific audience have been produced ever since.

production costs exceed R6 million, they receive a 25% reimbursement for the exceeding amount (DTI 2015). Acting as a cushion for risk, many producers began seizing the opportunity the rebate scheme had created and, before long, the revival of the Afrikaans film industry was in full swing.

By 2010, the Afrikaans film industry's rapid expansion was further complemented by the satellite channel kykNET's growing involvement. In the years since, kykNET has managed to establish itself as by far the largest and most powerful stakeholder in the Afrikaans film industry and much of the industry's recent growth can be attributed to support from kykNET. Because kykNET has made such a large contribution to the growth of DStv, there is an incentive to protect and to expand its near monopoly on Afrikaans content: in the face of increasing global competition on a variety of platforms, a strong and loyal base of Afrikaans subscribers will continue to play a crucial role to ensure DStv's longevity. Like Naspers, kykNET is seeking to sustain and expand its market of Afrikaans-speakers and a sustainable and flourishing Afrikaans film industry will continue to serve kykNET's needs. With kykNET broadcasting three channels 24 hours a day, they require a steady stream of new Afrikaans content. Because kykNET owns the broadcasting rights to almost every Afrikaans film and continues to purchase these rights from new films, kykNET will benefit from an increase in the quantity and quality of Afrikaans films. In addition, the skills that filmmakers acquire in the film industry promise to trickle down to and improve the quality of kykNET's regular programming. A lively Afrikaans film industry will also sustain the commercial consumption of the Afrikaans-language, which will ultimately contribute to sustaining and expanding kykNET's audience.

Initially, kykNET became involved in the industry by hosting the first kykNET Silwerskermfees [Silver Screen Festival] in 2010. It was held in Prince Albert at the Jans Rautenbach Skouwburg and managed to attract a small audience. During this festival, the history of Afrikaans cinema was chronicled and certain highlights, like the work of directors Jans Rautenbach, Manie van Rensburg and Katinka Heyns, were screened. As the Afrikaans film industry expanded, so did the Silwerskermfees. In 2011, the Silwerskermfees was moved to Camps Bay, where it has been held on an annual basis at The Bay Hotel. During the festival's second year, kykNET also launched a short-film competition for aspiring filmmakers. Every year, successful applicants receive a small budget to produce a short-film under the mentorship of a more experienced filmmaker appointed by kykNET, after which the finished product is screened at the Silwerskermfees. This initiative gives kykNET the opportunity to identify and develop new talent. The Silwerskermfees has also

become a sought-after place for filmmakers to preview their new films and a space where aspiring, inexperienced and veteran filmmakers come together to discuss ideas, challenges they are facing and the general state of the industry. An award ceremony was also instituted at this festival, honouring the stars of the Afrikaans film industry. Like most other Afrikaans festivals, with the possible exception of the Suidoosterfees, the Silwerskermfees draws a mainly white audience. And the winners of its awards are also almost always only white.

Finding an audience, producing an audience

With more financial support and also the support of kykNET, Afrikaans films were being released with ever greater regularity and filmmakers were experimenting with low budget films, testing audiences' preferences. During this period, *Jakhalsdans* (2010) proved to be one of the largest box office successes and introduced audiences to a trope that would dominate the Afrikaans film industry in the years to come: city-dwellers fleeing the city and finding either peace or love or both in the countryside (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion). Yet, it was only at the end of 2010 that a film was released that would significantly alter the way filmmakers thought about Afrikaans films. Released during the December holidays, the musical, *Liefeling: Die Movie* [Darling: The Movie] (Kruger 2010), became the highest grossing Afrikaans film ever²⁸ and drew audiences totalling nearly half a million. *Liefeling's* success can be attributed to the fact that the film was well-tailored to appeal to Afrikaners of all ages. Its soundtrack offered audiences a nostalgic trip, featuring Afrikaans music from the distant past to the present. Some of the older songs include traditional FAK folksongs, Koos du Plessis's iconic *Kinders van die Wind*, Sonja Herholdt's *Ek verlang na jou* and numerous other songs that had become popular amongst white audiences during apartheid – songs that many Afrikaners today would consider as part of their cultural heritage. In addition, the soundtrack also featured more contemporary music like Kurt Darren's hit song, *Kaptein*. Much-loved young Afrikaans singer, Bobby van Jaarsveld, starred in the lead role alongside an ensemble of other Afrikaans musicians, young and old. Instead of merely reproducing an audience that had been built up during apartheid, *Liefeling* managed to produce a new, postapartheid audience for itself by simultaneously attracting

28 Six years later, *Liefeling* would be dethroned as the Afrikaans film with the highest box office earnings by *Vir Altyd* (Smith 2016).

a younger audience, while also celebrating the Afrikaner's "cultural heritage" and evoking a sense of collective Afrikaner nostalgia.

Any doubt that there was an Afrikaans-speaking audience willing to pay to see films in their own language quickly disappeared. In the years following *Liefing*, filmmakers would increasingly build an audience for their films around casting Afrikaans singers. To a large extent, the success of the Afrikaans music industry acted as a springboard for the Afrikaans film industry. With relatively small marketing budgets and only a few Afrikaans film stars who could draw audiences to theatres, producers attempted to use the names and music of Afrikaans singers to attract local audiences. In various ways, filmmakers attempted to capitalize on the built-in audiences that many Afrikaans musicians and their music seemed to have. And, since mainstream or commercial Afrikaans musicians are mostly supported by Afrikaners, these Afrikaners also became the target audiences of many Afrikaans films. What followed was the release of a series of musicals, films about singers, films that starred singers in cameo roles and films that dealt with music in such a way as to at least legitimize the casting of a singer. Yet, not only did the Afrikaans music industry feed into the Afrikaans film industry, but the film industry also fed back into the music industry. Consider for example Sean Else's 2011 directorial debut, the musical *Platteland* [Countryside]. Else co-founded Mozi Records with Johan Vorster and directed numerous music videos for their artists. He said in an interview about their motivation to produce *Platteland*,

We decided that we wanted to give our artists more exposure and market them more. The music videos that I directed for them had really pushed our sales. Because we saw the success of our music videos, we wanted to create another platform for our artists. (Elsie 2015).

With the availability of the revised DTI rebate, they seized the opportunity and created the musical *Platteland* around a number of Afrikaans singers and their singles.

For at least the first few years following the revival of the Afrikaans film, none of the films that were produced made any overt or observable effort to expand its possible audience beyond Afrikaners. Although whites do not make up a majority of Afrikaans-speakers, this relatively lucrative demographic remained Afrikaans filmmakers' primary target audience. According to Treffry-Goatly (2010, 39), South Africa's cinema-going audiences are mostly white, although only representing about 11% of the country's total population. Going to the

cinema is an expensive luxury that, in most cases, only South Africa's middle class can afford, and white people continue to make out the vast majority of the Afrikaans-speaking middle class. Thus, as with the consumption of other Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities, white Afrikaans-speaking audiences have become – and have also been catered for – as the primary consumers of Afrikaans films.

By 2012, the romantic comedy genre was also in ascent, starting with the release of *Semi-Soet* [Semi-Sweet] (Rous 2012), which became the second-highest grossing Afrikaans film of all time. The film seems to have struck a nerve with Afrikaner audiences and numerous filmmakers have, with varying degrees of success, attempted to imitate its formula in the years following its release. *Semi-Soet* (for a more detailed discussion see Chapter 4) features a female protagonist working for a marketing consultancy firm and is, as she admits, “married to [her] job”. Her love interest is a ruthless capitalist, also known as “The Jackal”, who specializes in hostile takeovers. Together, they end up on a wine farm where they are forced to pretend to be engaged. Away from the city, closer to the soil, swept up by the farm-life's slower rhythms, they fall in love. The film proved to be popular with both younger and older audiences and offered a contemporary interpretation of a rural aesthetic so often found in earlier Afrikaans films – many films would later attempt to harness a similar aesthetic, like *Stilte* (Roodt 2012), *Klein Karoo* (Van den Bergh 2013), *Die laaste tango* (Meyer 2013), *Pad na jou Hart* (Smith 2014) and *Vrou soek Boer* (Kraak 2014).

Semi-Soet was also the first of a long list of Afrikaans productions that made extensive use of product placements to fund itself. For example, of a much later film, *Trouvoete* (Roodt 2015), Leon van Nierop (2015:67) would remark in a review, “Every few minutes, the screenplay comes to a complete standstill for a few commercials.” Companies began to see Afrikaans films as a medium through which to reach a lucrative audience of Afrikaans-speaking consumers.

Since the years following the release of *Liefeling*, the average Afrikaans film has attracted a much larger audience than locally-produced English- or other indigenous-language films and, every year, Afrikaans films tend to dominate the list of highest grossing local films at the box office. Because of their popularity, Afrikaans films tend to have much wider commercial releases as opposed to other local films, which often have to explore alternative

exhibition sites. Afrikaans films' DVD sales also generally outperform the DVD sales of other local films.

Diane Hay is an employee of Indigenous Film Distribution (IFD). Founded in 2009, shortly after the introduction of the DTI revised rebate scheme, IFD negotiates locally produced films' exhibition with theatrical exhibitors like Ster-Kinekor and NuMetro. Hay, in an interview, explained the popularity of Afrikaans films, "It is a loyal audience. It's an audience with very strong cultural roots. They watch Afrikaans films and feel, this is our content... this is our stuff" (2015). Indeed, many Afrikaans-speakers – especially Afrikaners – regard going to the cinema to see an Afrikaans film as fulfilling part of their duty to contribute to the vitality and longevity of the Afrikaans language. In a sense, loyalty towards Afrikaans film has, therefore, also been produced by an ongoing discourse about Afrikaans being an endangered language. Consequently, in clear contrast to about a decade ago, investors today are more inclined to fund Afrikaans films than any other local films due to their commercial viability. In addition, some directors who had previously specialized in English-language films have chosen – or have been forced – to shift their attention to making Afrikaans films. Consider, for example, Academy Award-nominated and English-speaking Darrell Roodt, who has recently directed numerous Afrikaans films, ranging from drama and thriller to romance and romantic comedy. Another director, Regardt van den Bergh, who made his directorial debut with *Boetie gaan Border toe* in 1984 and then went on to make a number of English-language films in the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s, made his return to the Afrikaans film industry in 2010.

However, despite the popularity of Afrikaans film amongst this Afrikaner audience, filmmakers are in no way assured that their Afrikaans film will be profitable or even break even at the local box office. In fact, multiple Afrikaans films have, in recent years, failed to recoup their production costs. This has especially been the case with dramatic films or films that did not provide their audiences with light-hearted escapism. This can, at least in part, be explained by the fact that exhibition on the commercial circuit has become increasingly competitive. Hay (2015) explained, "Six, seven years ago, it was easy to hold a screen for eight weeks minimum. Now you are lucky if you get four to six weeks." When a film fails to draw a large enough audience during its first week on the commercial circuit, it will be shown at fewer theatres and on fewer screens in the second week and might even be entirely removed from the circuit by the end of its third week on the circuit. Many Afrikaans films have followed this path, since they are competing head-on for screen-time with Hollywood blockbusters with enormous budgets. As a matter of

fact, the budgets of many Hollywood independent productions still dwarf the budgets of the most expensive Afrikaans films. Consequently, Afrikaans films do not come close to offering audiences the same cinematic experience offered by Hollywood studios. In addition, Afrikaans films only have a relatively small potential audience and the market has become so saturated that Afrikaans films are also competing with one another and, at times, two or three Afrikaans films have been on the commercial circuit simultaneously. An Afrikaans film on the local circuit is no longer the novelty that it once was. Concerned about these developments, there was even a panel discussion at the 2014 Silwerskermfees titled, “The dangers of oversupply”.

The box office success of Afrikaans films is also threatened by the continuous proliferation of other entertainment forms and platforms. Consider, for example, the growth of a variety of internet-based entertainment forms over the last decade: the rise of Youtube and the increasing popularity of video on demand in South Africa. Similarly, satellite television has also seen significant growth in South Africa. And the vast expansion of kykNET has, at least to some extent, contributed to the relative saturation of the market for Afrikaans-language entertainment. With three channels broadcasting exclusively Afrikaans content 24 hours a day, it can be assumed that the demand – or even hunger – for Afrikaans entertainment is no longer as extensive as it used to be with, for example, *Liefeling*’s release in 2010.

Audiences’ preferences for sites to consume Afrikaans films might also be undergoing some changes. For example, a growing number of people now have access to the Afrikaans films broadcasted by kykNET on a regular basis and kykNET might even be posing a threat to Afrikaans films’ success at the local box office. There is also DStv BoxOffice, where DStv subscribers can pay to watch a variety of films, including Afrikaans films, shortly after their release. Although this service offers an alternative site for revenue, it is luring audiences out of cinematic theatres into private spaces of consumption. Exploring these new exhibition sites will, quite possibly, become gradually more important for the future distribution of Afrikaans films. In fact, many Afrikaans films are already being made available on video on demand services – some have even been made available to viewers abroad at the same time as their local theatrical releases. The consumption of Afrikaans films seems to be moving deeper into private domains, continuing a process that already started in the 1970s with the introduction of television and later also VHS tapes. The kind of public spectacle that cinematic theatres provide, and through which Benjamin could imagine mass participation happening, is in decline. Indeed, Mitchell (2012) argues that the technologies of mechanical

reproduction have, in recent years, been supplanted by what he calls the technologies of “biocybernetic reproduction”, which includes high-speed computing, the internet, virtual reality, videos and digital imaging. The simultaneous collective cinematic experience is being replaced by more individual, private and home-based forms of consumption.

Yet, for the moment, box office revenue still makes out a substantial part of most film’s income. With small budgets, a limited potential Afrikaans-speaking audience and an increasingly competitive commercial circuit, filmmakers have been forced to be ever more precise in their market calculations when producing a film. Consider, for example, the 2015 film, *Ballade vir ’n Enkeling* [Ballade for a Loner] (Krog). Based on the 1980s television series of the same name, it was re-imagined and set in present-day South Africa. The original series had developed a relatively large fan-base and it was particularly the soundtrack of the series that had struck and continued to strike a nerve with audiences. A few months before the film’s release, Danie Bester, producer of the film and multiple other Afrikaans films, said in an interview,

The nostalgia is very big, especially with the music... [W]e have to ride that wave. For a filmmaker, it’s actually quite expensive to make a movie. You put a lot of effort into it and it takes you a long time. And sometimes one needs to look at existing properties. You want to be sure that there is an existing market or at least that there is a market that will be interested in your film. (Bester 2014)

Other films have, with varying levels of success, tried to do the same. Examples include: *Wolwedans in die Skemer* (2012), based on a 1980s radio serial; *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* (2013), which features a soundtrack composed of popular singer Laurika Rauch’s music; *Faan se Trein* (2014), based on a 1970s stage play of the same name; *100m Leeuloop* (2013), based on Robbie Wessels’s hit song, *Leeuloop*.

In addition, to ensure a film’s profitable theatrical run, the marketing of Afrikaans films has also become more important. In the Afrikaans film industry, *Pad na jou Hart* [Road to your Heart] (2014) is generally considered the industry’s biggest marketing success story. Ivan Botha and Donnalee Roberts, who both made a name for themselves starring in the soap opera *7de Laan*, wrote, starred in and co-produced the film. With only a limited budget, they went through extensive efforts to market their film, which went

on to become the second highest grossing Afrikaans film of all time. Roberts explained,

We went on a seven-thousand-kilometre road show. We went to holiday resorts and beaches all along the coast. Then we went on a schools marketing tour for almost two months and then we went to cinemas for the first six weeks after the film's release, where we met thousands of people personally. Every Friday, Saturday and Sunday we would go to the cinemas to thank our audiences for supporting South African and Afrikaans film. If they didn't know what to watch, we tried to twist their arms.

More than any other Afrikaans actors currently working in the Afrikaans film industry, Botha and Roberts have established themselves as stars, capable of drawing large audiences. At the beginning of 2016, a film which they had also co-written, produced, starred in and marketed, *Vir Altyd* [Forever] (Smith), was released and became the highest grossing Afrikaans film of all time. In their marketing efforts, Roberts and Botha received excessive support from the Afrikaans media. Weeks before the release of their films, they were featured on magazine covers, and interviews with them and feature articles about them appeared in several publications.

Other Afrikaans films have also benefitted from the free promotion offered by the Afrikaans media. Filmmakers and actors are regularly interviewed on kykNET programmes and often make their appearance at Afrikaans culture festivals. In addition, it has become a custom for a whole range of Afrikaans films to be screened at these festivals. In this way, the Afrikaans film industry has also fed off and has been feeding into the broader Afrikaans culture industry, which has stimulated a whole culture around the Afrikaans film industry and the consumption of its products. In addition, film reviewer Leon van Nierop has made an important contribution to sparking renewed interest in the Afrikaans film and its appreciation. In 2011, he presented a radio documentary series on Radio Sonder Grense (RSG) titled, *Die geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse rolprent* [The history of the Afrikaans motion picture]. He presented the kykNET-commissioned television series, *Daar Doer in die Fliek* [Far Away in the Movies], which chronicles the history of the Afrikaans film. Van Nierop (2016) also published a popular book based on the series, bearing the same title.

Rotating on the same spot

The enthusiasm that the Afrikaans film industry's revival has garnered has not been shared by everyone. Some critics have been much more disparaging of both the films released in recent years and the general direction in which the industry has been heading. One such critic is Chris Broodryk, who wrote,

Most of these films border on extravagant escapist entertainment that indicates a form of cultural forgetfulness. The majority of Afrikaans films do not comment on apartheid and do not link critically with the daily realities of a post-transition South Africa and what it means to be 'Afrikaans' or an 'Afrikaner'. (Broodryk 2014)

Another such critic is the director Oliver Hermanus, who had previously co-written and directed the dramatic film, *Skoonheid*, which premiered at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival. *Skoonheid* deals with a middle-aged Afrikaner man that falls in love with his friend's son. Amongst others, the film depicts an all-male sex orgy and reaches its climax with the protagonist raping the son of his friend in a hotel room. Despite the film receiving positive reviews and praise for taking on what some might perceive as a taboo subject, it was a flop at the local box office, becoming one of the lowest grossing Afrikaans films of the last decade. Two years later, in 2013, Hermanus wrote an opinion piece, published in some Afrikaans newspapers, where he lamented the state of the Afrikaans film industry. About the average Afrikaans film, Hermanus said, "It is not the kind of film that I, a 30-year-old coloured South African, can identify with – it is culturally limiting and rooted in the lives and history of white South Africans" (2013, 3). The most successful Afrikaans films, according to Hermanus, are the ones "that take the Afrikaner back to the countryside", films where "[b]lack faces disappear" (2013, 3).

Indeed, these critics are right to suggest that the majority of films released in recent years were specifically tailored to the imagined needs and expectations of an Afrikaner audience. Most recent Afrikaans films' content have either played on the past or provided the average Afrikaner with some sense of familiarity. Consider, for example, how films like *Liefeling* or *Ballade vir 'n Enkeling* harnesses a form of collective nostalgia in order to reach Afrikaner audiences. Another film that, in a different way, draws on a sense of collective nostalgia and could even be read as a celebration of Afrikaner heritage, is Katinka Heyns's critically acclaimed period drama, *Die Wonderwerker* [The Miracle Worker] (2012). In the film, Heyns sketches a

romanticized portrait of renowned Afrikaner poet and intellectual, Eugène Marais, an enigmatic genius with the apparent gift to perform miracles.²⁹

Also consider the wide range of escapist films that have achieved great success at the local box office. These films, typically, project images that Afrikaners would find comforting: images that affirm purported Afrikaner values and feature likeable white middle class protagonists. Diane Hay (2015), employee of Indigenous Film Distribution, said, “Successful Afrikaans films in particular are Afrikaans films that represent family values – films that are clean cut, nice, tidy and light-hearted.” Often in these escapist fantasies, rural life is presented as an escape from the debauched and fundamentally empty life in the city. To some extent, these films are a realization of Hans Rempel’s vision – before the end of the Second World War – of an Afrikaans film industry producing images of Afrikaners in nature and close to the soil. In these escapist films, while they are on the farm or in the countryside, Afrikaners are enclaved and depicted as experiencing a sense of freedom; they are isolated from and unperturbed by the English language, by politics and by black people.

Afrikaans films are, just like they were during apartheid, still firmly rooted in white life and white experience, and the vast majority of these films are telescoped through the perspectives of white characters. This is clearly illustrated by the dearth of scenes filmed in the last decade in which no white characters are present. Since the revival of the Afrikaans film industry in 2007, a staggering number of Afrikaans films had all-white casts and the rest, typically, only featured black actors in minor roles. A notable exception is the 2014 gangster film, *Four Corners* (Gabriel), which stars a majority coloured cast. Although the film received much critical acclaim and was South Africa’s entry for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, it joined *Skoonheid* as one of the lowest grossing Afrikaans films in recent history.

In most of the other Afrikaans films, black characters only enter the narrative through their relationships with white characters. Thus, they are never the heroes of their own stories, but instead appear as assistants or appendages to white protagonists, as their domestic worker, their friend, their colleague or their mentor. In most cases, they are hardly ever shown to have a life beyond the vision of the white characters. There are, for example, hardly

29 Another period piece glorifying a chapter in Afrikaner history, was Sean Else’s *Modder en Bloed* [Mud and Blood] (2016). The film is about the first Springbok rugby team’s upset-victory over a British team on St Helena during the Anglo-Boer War.



Photo 5.1 & 5.2

The theatrical posters of two 2015 Afrikaans films, both featuring all white ensemble casts

any instances where black characters are shown when they are at home, as members of a family, as individuals with their own stories and histories, as romantic partners, as husbands, wives, parents, as people with their own flaws, hopes and dreams. They rarely have their own character arcs and merely appear as decorative props or as plot devices. They tend to be so superficially characterized that no black South Africans would be able to identify with or see themselves in these characters. Most Afrikaans films in which black characters appear are examples of what Shohat and Stam (1994, 215) term “pseudopolyphony”, where representatives of a particular group are cast in a film, but where their voices are simultaneously marginalized and disempowered.

Similarly, apartheid and its effects have been conspicuously absent from Afrikaans films. Films set in the present rarely give credence to the fact that apartheid ever took place and the ways in which it might still continue to structure South Africans’ lives are mostly ignored. Racism, racial tension, inequality and what it means to live under a democratic state are hardly ever

explored - with most Afrikaans films bordering on democracy denialism.³⁰ Even films set during apartheid tend to either ignore or to minimize the ways in which the apartheid state affects the lives of its characters. The musical *Pretville* [Funville] (Korsten 2012), for example, represents this tendency in its most extreme form. The film is set in an alternate 1950s South Africa. Without irony or satire, *Pretville* depicts an “historical” South Africa in which apartheid never happened, where whites and blacks live together in harmony and where the town’s mayor is a coloured man. Afrikaans filmmakers’ common assumption seems to be that Afrikaners are mostly pessimistic about politics and tired of hearing about apartheid.

Thus, Afrikaans films have not developed, like many had hoped, into a medium through which a rainbow nation could be imagined or even into a medium that could stimulate the kind of dialogue essential to nation-building. It has hitherto consistently transposed its audiences to a white-majority world so very different from postapartheid South Africa today and therefore continued to normalize Afrikaners’ enclavism. Like the films produced during apartheid, Afrikaans films continue to heed to existing audiences’ expectations. And filmmakers like Hermanus, who have attempted to challenge these expectations, learned that a filmmaker runs a significant risk of sustaining severe financial losses whenever trying to deviate from tried and tested formulas.

Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1972 [1944]) concerns about the deleterious social effects of the growing reach of mass media products in the 1920s and 1930s, and their general scepticism about the culture industry’s liberating potential, also seem applicable to the Afrikaans film industry after apartheid. For the most part, Afrikaans filmmaking has been dictated by “the inertia of a society” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972 [1944], 98), succeeding in producing, reproducing and preserving the status quo. Even after apartheid – with the relaxation of state censorship, with the emergence of new social conditions and with the introduction of new technologies – the logic of the market has ensured that Afrikaans film has continued to act as a medium through which the boundaries of Afrikanerdom can be imagined. Thus, even though its mechanisms have changed, the Afrikaans film industry has remained a

30 One notable exception is Henk Pretorius’s *Fanie Fourie’s Lobola* (2013), which tells the story of a white man that is desperate to find a date for his brother’s wedding. While they are in a cake shop, his brother dares him to ask the next woman that walks in to be his date. A Zulu woman walks in. He asks her, and they eventually fall in love. In a farcical register, the film pokes fun at stereotypes, and purported racial and cultural differences. With dialogue in English, Zulu and Afrikaans, it was also an attempt to attract an audience beyond Afrikaners.

machine “rotating on the same spot” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972 [1944], 106). And there is, of course, a deep irony in the fact that South Africa’s democratic state has continued to partially fund an industry producing consequences that are so clearly at odds with the aims of the state.

kykNET

There are signs that the Afrikaans film industry has been undergoing some fundamental shifts in the last five years. Like some critics, kykNET has also become concerned about the direction in which the Afrikaans film industry is heading. And, in addition to hosting the annual Silwerskermfees – which has grown considerably in the last few years – kykNET has also introduced expansive efforts to commission and produce Afrikaans-language films. Although their initial involvement in funding films was small and somewhat haphazard, since 2014, kykNET has taken great steps to extend their reach in the industry and formalized a process through which filmmakers can approach them to acquire financing for their films. All the films funded by kykNET are funded through a process of pre-buying, where the broadcasting rights to a film is bought before it goes into production. With more capital at their disposal, so kykNET’s rationale goes, filmmakers will be able to produce films of a higher quality. In addition, once kykNET has agreed to pre-buy a film, they make an entire team of experts available to assist filmmakers with screenplay development and sometimes one or more of kykNET’s employees also serve as producers of the film. Because kykNET has three channels with relatively large Afrikaans-speaking audiences at its disposal, they also assist filmmakers to market their films.

Thus, in addition to the DTI rebate available to all South African filmmakers, kykNET has begun offering Afrikaans filmmakers a second layer of cushioning against the risks of producing a film. By being in a position to give a competitive edge to productions they deem worthy, kykNET is now in a powerful position to steer the course of the Afrikaans film industry. With the market for Afrikaans films becoming more competitive and with more and more films benefitting from kykNET’s support, producing a financially successful Afrikaans film without kykNET’s support is becoming increasingly unlikely. In 2015, for example, the top five highest grossing Afrikaans films had all benefitted from kykNET’s financial support. In the future, the

Afrikaans films that are made and the Afrikaans films that are not made might increasingly depend on what productions kykNET chooses to fund.

Since they receive a large number of applications and only fund a limited number of films per year, kykNET has an extensive sifting process in place. About this process, Anneke Villett, kykNET's first commissioning editor for films, said in an interview,

[N]ow we can really think about what it is our viewers want to see and what we think our viewers should be seeing. We can now start to make decisions in terms of what we think is necessary for the industry... We want to stimulate the industry so that the diversity of products and the quality of products available for the Afrikaans audience will be higher and higher, because we see ourselves as the guardian of Afrikaans entertainment... They [Afrikaans audience] are loyal viewers. Sometimes they are almost too loyal. So much so that they accept content that is sub-standard. And our goal is to give them world class entertainment, so that they will never go away. So that they will always stay. (Villett 2014)

In a way that mimics the approach of the larger Naspers conglomerate, kykNET is dedicated to ensuring the sustainability of the Afrikaans film industry. Thus, kykNET performs its own form of market calculation that differs from the market calculation performed by the average production company. The films they choose to fund are not only the films that will spin out millions at the local box office but are also the films that fit into their long-term vision for the industry – the type of films that will build a sustainable audience for Afrikaans entertainment.

Consequently, some of the films they are funding are not mere escapist entertainment, but are, what Villett (2014) calls “culturally important”. They, for example, partly funded three dramatic historical pieces by veteran directors, who had all directed their previous Afrikaans films in either the 1980s or the 1990s. In 2012, Katinka Heyns made her return with *Die Wonderwerker*. In 2014, Koos Roets made his comeback to the Afrikaans film landscape with *Faan se Trein*. And in the following year, after 31 years' absence from the film industry, Jans Rautenbach's *Abraham* was released. This also explains why kykNET has increasingly become involved in multiple book to film adaptations.³¹ In addition to sustaining an existing audience,

31 They have, for example, partly funded adaptations of novels like *Dis ek Anna* (by Anchien Troskie), *'n Pawpaw vir my Darling* (by Jeanne Goosen) and *Vaselinetjie* (Anoeschka von Meck).

kykNET has also made attempts to produce a younger audience for Afrikaans entertainment and have contributed funds for the production of multiple films that specifically targets younger viewers.³²

With kykNET willing to make more funds available for the production of Afrikaans films, much of the risk is taken out of exploring new genres and themes. Indeed, in 2015, there was a slight shift in the Afrikaans film industry away from romantic comedies and light entertainment towards the production of dramatic films with more serious themes. And, for the first time since the Afrikaans film's revival in 2007, the industry could no longer be accused of merely producing escapism. Consider the following 2015 films that all benefitted from kykNET's support: *Ballade vir 'n Enkeling* (Krog) tells the story of a boy who is involved in a shooting accident, his father dies and he is sent to juvenile detention, where he is sodomised; *Die Pro* (Velts) deals with a teenager drowning during a surfing accident; *Dis ek Anna* (Blecher) chronicles the life of a girl who is molested by her stepfather over a period of time and years later she returns to murder him; *'n Man soos my pa's* (Else) main plot deals with an alcoholic father and his relationship with his son. These films were all well-received by most critics. Yet, in addition to these films, kykNET also partly funded a number of more formulaic romantic comedies like *Knysna* (2014), *Moorivier* (2015) and *Strikdas* (2015).

In the last few years, kykNET has, therefore, begun to show their interest in expanding and diversifying the Afrikaans films on offer, particularly shifting away from merely producing popular light entertainment. Simultaneously, however, kykNET has been cautious not to alienate the majority-white audience that regularly consumes Afrikaans entertainment and also the majority-white audience that watches kykNET. Thus, the films produced with kykNET funds have continued to be firmly rooted in white experience, featuring predominantly white casts and continuing to address an Afrikaner audience.³³

32 They either commissioned or partly funded the adaptation of four prescribed books: *Die Ongelooftlike Avonture van Hanna Hoekom* (Van den Bergh 2010), *Lien se Lankstaanskoene* (Odendaal 2013), *Suurllemoen* (Strijdom 2014) and *Die Pro* (Velts 2015). In addition, they also partly funded a film about a teenager special agent, *Agent 2000* (Nieuwoudt 2014), and a film about a girl making her own dress for the matric ball, *Hollywood in my Huis* (Van Rooyen 2015).

33 This might, however, also be changing. kykNET, for example, partly funded *Free State* (De Jager 2016), an Afrikaans-English bilingual film that was produced in association with an Indian production company. *Free State* was also released in India. Another film that received funding from kykNET was *Sink* (Innes 2016), which tells the story of a Mozambican woman whose child dies in the care of her white employers and she faces a choice to either continue working for them or return home. According to the film's producer, Johan Kruger (2015), the film was made with low expectations of success at the local box office and they, instead, hoped

For example, of the otherwise well-received *Ballade vir 'n Enkeling*, one (re)viewer, Wamuwi Mbaio, remarked on Twitter, “*Ballade vir 'n Enkeling* joins a long list of films that advance an alternative SA in which there are only three black people.” Although some of these films can clearly be differentiated from the elaborate escapist fantasies offered by many other Afrikaans films, they have continued to deny or misrepresent certain realities of life in a democratic South Africa.

Afrikaners, film and postnationalism

According to Anderson (2006 [1983]), nations are never fixed, but instead, come into existence and are sustained – and imagined and re-imagined – through the continued circulation and consumption of shared media and cultural forms. For the Afrikaners, one such medium or cultural form has been film. In this chapter, I showed that even though its mechanisms have changed, the Afrikaans film industry has, for the most part, been rotating on the same spot. Indeed, for a century, Afrikaans films have continued to confront – or to comfort – its mostly white Afrikaans-speaking audiences with moving images of mostly white Afrikaans-speaking people, living in an apartheid-like world, or a *volkstaat* of the mind.

Even before the institutionalization of apartheid, film, together with print media, was one of the earliest mediums available through which Afrikaners could imagine themselves as members of a nation of Afrikaners. Through Afrikaans films that explicitly addressed themes of the Afrikaner civil religion, and through the sociality arising from Afrikaners’ collective participation in the cinematic ritual of watching film, the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom were being drawn. Later, apartheid’s cinema mostly provided Afrikaner audiences with light entertainment that reflected and naturalized Afrikaner enclavism and apartheid ideology, and reaffirmed Afrikanerdom’s imagined boundaries. Today, even though strict state censorship has become a distant memory, social conditions have changed significantly and even though a host of new institutions and key figures with new motivations have entered the Afrikaans film industry, the industry has, for the most part, been rotating on the same spot.

to reach an international audience. And, indeed, in 2016, *Sink* (R1 million) was outperformed by other Afrikaans films that received kykNET funding and were more firmly rooted in white experience, like *'n Pawpaw vir my Darling* (Roets) (R4 million), *Vir Altyd* (Smith) (R15.5 million) and *Modder en Bloed* (Else) (R2 million).

Thus, after a century, the Afrikaans film industry has remained relatively autonomous – or more or less a closed circuit – consisting of films by Afrikaners for Afrikaners. This is peculiar at a moment when film theorists are increasingly shifting their attention to the globalization of communication and mediation, addressing questions of the transnational movement of moving images. In fact, no recent Afrikaans films have managed to ensure a noteworthy international theatrical release. Yet, there is one group of people living beyond South Africa's borders that have become a notable audience for Afrikaans films: members of the Afrikaner diaspora. In countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada, where large populations of South African emigrants live, Afrikaners have managed to form their own diasporic communities, establishing their own churches and social circles, and hosting their own cultural festivals. In recent years, significant efforts have been made to reach these audiences through special screenings of Afrikaans films, mainly in Australia and New Zealand. Ivan Botha and Donnalee Roberts also travelled to Australasia to attend the screenings of their film, *Pad na jou Hart*. About this experience, Botha said in an interview,

We had an unbelievable experience in Australia, watching the film with Afrikaans audiences. I remember in Perth, we watched the film in a five-hundred seat theatre full of home-sick Afrikaners. And you could see how they reacted to all these nostalgic things. In the film, there is a scene where they [a family] are all sitting around the table and the mother character lifts the lid off a dish and it is leg of lamb and baked potatoes. The whole audience gasped as though they could smell and taste it. (Botha 2014)

Apart from such special screenings, there is range of ways available for members of the Afrikaner diaspora to gain access to Afrikaans films: buying, copying and circulating DVDs, watching films online, and legal and illegal downloading. Through watching these films, members of the Afrikaner diaspora can continue to feel themselves connected to and sharing a bond with other Afrikaners, since, as Higson (2000, 59) argues, the shared consumption of mass communication can “play a central role in re-imagining the dispersed and incoherent populace as a tight-knit, value-sharing collectivity, sustaining the experience of nationhood.”

To a certain extent, we can even think of all Afrikaners as diasporic. Although Afrikaners are dispersed across South Africa and across the globe, many continue to consider themselves members of a nation of Afrikaners, even though there is no physical *volkstaat* or a collective ambition to create one. Yet, instead of these social bonds between Afrikaners weakening or

disappearing, the shared consumption of Afrikaans films – and of Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities in general – have continued to reanimate and to strengthen these bonds. If the flow of mass media across state borders “can decentre nations and produce transnational subjectivities” (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002, 17), the consumption of Afrikaans films across the South African state can similarly decentre the “rainbow nation”, while at the same time produce Afrikaner postnational subjectivities. Thus, Afrikaans film has, through its content, continued to reflect and to naturalize Afrikaner enclavism, while it has also, through its circulation and consumption, opened up a communicative space mainly shared by Afrikaners, where they can continue to imagine or to fashion themselves as members of a postnational nation.

4 Story of a South African farm attack

Since the dying years of apartheid, so-called farm attacks and farm murders have become commonplace in South Africa. In public discourse, these crimes have often been politicized and understood in racial terms, with some arguing that they constitute a form of white or Afrikaner genocide. Acclaimed director Darrell Roodt's (2015) thriller, *Treurgrond* [Soil of Mourning], is an Afrikaans feature film that takes farm attacks as its subject matter; through a subplot, the film also offers commentary on land restitution. Due to its highly political nature, *Treurgrond* appears as an exceptional film amongst the many Afrikaans films that have been produced during the last decade. *Treurgrond's* uniqueness should, however, not be overstated, since it features many of the same tropes and stereotypes that have become popular in recent Afrikaans films. Most notably, *Treurgrond* offers a similar romantic depiction of farm life found in a plethora of other films. Yet, while other films' narrative structures might depend on the realization of this fantasy, *Treurgrond* chronicles its demise.

In this chapter, I explore key motifs in *Treurgrond* and how they relate to popular constructions of Afrikaner identity and of Afrikaners' position in postapartheid South Africa (discussed in previous chapters). By shifting between the textual content of the film and the context in which it was produced and received, I show how *Treurgrond* conjures up apocalyptic images of beleaguered Afrikaners no longer welcome in Africa. These images fit neatly into ubiquitous narratives circulating today about Afrikaners' victimization under a democratic regime and the purported attack on their lives, culture, heritage and language. By focusing on one film and the world that exists around it, I attempt to lay bare the logic through which farm attacks and farm murders have been mythologized in white South Africa, how these mythologies have inspired collective fear and how it has been used to mobilize Afrikaners as an ethnic community.

A synopsis of *Treurgrond*

Treurgrond opens with a series of quick cuts. A white man and woman are speeding in a car. Anxiously, the woman tries to make a phone call. Sirens are heard. Police cars and an ambulance appear behind them. They are part of a convoy. The man in the car prays frantically, slamming his hands on the steering wheel. The convoy speeds along a dirt road. Aerial shots show vast expanses of farmland. The vehicles come to a halt in front of a farm house amidst clouds of dust. A farm attack has taken place. The screen fades to black.

There is a break in the film's chronology: it is six months before the attack. The audience is re-introduced to the same farm, but this time it is an Edenic paradise. Combining vistas and close-ups, Roodt brings to life a utopian vision of Afrikaner farm life. Lukas van Staden is a solemn, but kind-hearted farmer, equally concerned about the plight of his farm workers and the well-being of his family. Farming runs in his veins. Under his command and with the assistance of his black subordinate, Daniel Lebona, the Van Staden family farm has thrived.

One day, a shadow is cast over the farm when Daniel's son, Edwin, sues Lukas for ownership of the farm, contending that the Van Stadens had stolen the land from his ancestors. To save the farm, Lukas summons his younger brother André, who practices as a lawyer. While awaiting the trial, another shadow is cast over the farm as a wave of brutal farm murders are committed in the surrounding area, traumatizing farmers and farm workers alike. When the day arrives, André successfully defends his brother's property in court, even though the judge concedes that the farm, as Edwin has suggested, once belonged to the Lebonas.

Lukas and his wife are thrilled by the judge's verdict, but their celebration remains short-lived. One night, while the couple looks after André's two children, intruders enter the farm. Daniel, the farm worker, hears a noise outside and when he leaves the house to investigate, he is unceremoniously killed. The film reaches its climax with the graphic slaughtering of Lukas, his wife and his niece. His nephew survives the attack.

The following morning, Edwin is the first to appear on the crime scene. Stunned, he walks through the house. Blood is smeared against the walls and three bloody corpses lie on the floor. Shots from the film's opening sequence



Photo 4.1

Treurgrond's protagonist, Lukas van Staden (Steve Hofmeyr), pleads for his and his family's lives during a farm attack

are repeated. *Treurgrond* concludes on a sombre note with the three white victims of the attack being buried on the farm. The Van Staden farm, which was once a paradise, has turned into a place of terror and the soil, which for decades gave life to the Van Staden family and their workers, has become the soil of mourning.

The making of a crime story

On 30 October 2017, thousands of white South Africans across the country participated in possibly the largest white protest ever on African soil. What became known as Black Monday was organized as an opportunity for South Africans to articulate their frustration with an “epidemic” of farm attacks and farm murders that has, since the dying years of apartheid, swept across the nation. In popular parlance, especially in the rhetoric of activists, the categories “farm attack” and “farm murder” are often racialized and only applied to cases where the victims are white. While whites still make out the vast majority of South Africa’s commercial farmers, black farmers, their families and black farm workers, contrary to some popular perceptions, also fall victim to these crimes. It should be noted that farm attacks and farm murders are examples of only a handful of crimes in South Africa that disproportionately affect white people, and also that the number of murders committed on all farm dwellers only make out about 0.5% of the total number of murders annually committed in South Africa (SAHRC 2014, 44). Nonetheless, these crimes have provided fodder for some of the wildest and surprisingly widely-supported conspiracy theories in white South Africa, such as that blacks are taking revenge for apartheid and that a low-intensity white genocide is afoot.

Discussed in conjunction with questions around land expropriation, these crimes have also sometimes been interpreted as part of a strategy to drive whites off the land.

Unlike the majority of recent Afrikaans films, *Treurgrond* is socially aware and engaging, and with its release became a provocative voice in an already inflammatory debate. Making a film that takes farm attacks as its subject matter was an idea conceived by one of *Treurgrond*'s producers, André Frauenstein. He explained,

Treurgrond wants to depict the suffering and anxiety of a community. It wants to say: this is what we fear. This is how easily it can happen. This is how vulnerable we are... You read about a farm murder in the paper and you turn to the next page. You've made up your mind. You've moved on. Life goes on. But here you are going to sit for an hour and a half and you're going to be exposed to the reality of farm murders. (Frauenstein 2014)

Tasked with directing the film was Darrell Roodt, one of South Africa's most renowned filmmakers. He first rose to prominence with critical, politically engaged, anti-apartheid films like *Place of weeping* (1986), *The stick* (1987), *Jobman* (1990) and most notably, *Sarafina!* (1992), a highly influential film about the 1976 Soweto uprisings, starring Whoopi Goldberg. More recently, he directed *Yesterday* (2004), which tells the moving story of a mother infected with HIV and explores her daily struggles with patriarchy, sexism, parenthood and poverty. The film received an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film.

Steve Hofmeyr, an Afrikaans singer and actor, stars in *Treurgrond*'s lead role as the farmer, Lukas van Staden – a casting choice that many of the film's critics took offense with (see for example Croucamp 2015; Maas 2015; Weys 2015). Hofmeyr is known for courting public controversy and has often been disparaged for his racist comments on social media. He has also been heavily involved in campaigns against farm murders and acted as a flag bearer for the Red October campaign that marched to the Union Building in 2013 and handed a memorandum to the South African government in which they accused the ANC of failing South Africa's white citizens, emphasizing the oppression and slaughter of white people that have occurred under their rule. Such claims are outlandish considering that the majority of white South

Africans live in some of the safest spaces in the country and are not even proportionately affected by crime.

To fund the film, *Treurgrond* made extensive use of product placements, with a total of 44 products, to various degrees of subtlety, “placed” throughout the film, demonstrating the wide support there was for the production of the film. In addition, credited as the film’s primary investment partners are the civil rights group AfriForum and the Transvaal Agriculture Union (TAU), two organizations that have led the campaign against farm murders, going as far as Geneva (in 2015), where they appealed to the United Nations during a forum on minority issues to intervene in South Africa. AfriForum also paid a widely publicized visit to the USA (in 2018), where they sought sympathy for the plight of South Africa’s white farmers and, as to be expected, drew criticism for being a racist organization that racializes farm murders. Another notable partner that funded and, therefore, also endorsed the production of *Treurgrond* was *Rapport*, the Afrikaans newspaper with the highest circulation figures in the country.

In the rest of this chapter, I explore key motifs in *Treurgrond* and how they relate to popular constructions of Afrikaner identity and of Afrikaners’ position in postapartheid South Africa. Although it is true that English farmers also suffer from farm attacks (see for example Steinberg 2002) and that some white English-speakers are also disturbed by these crimes, they have tended to be a much more muted presence in the “struggle” against farm attacks and their particular experiences fall beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, by shifting between the textual content of the film and the context in which it was produced and received, I explore what *Treurgrond* might reveal about Afrikaners and their self-positioning in postapartheid South Africa. I show how *Treurgrond* weaves together a narrative about the twin “horrors” of land expropriation (subplot) and farm attacks (main plot) to conjure up apocalyptic images of beleaguered Afrikaners no longer welcome in Africa. Yet, with all its emphasis on the violence inflicted upon white victims, I show how there is a deafening silence in *Treurgrond* about the physical and structural violence – like the colonial dispossession of land, apartheid’s forced land removals and numerous other human rights transgressions – through which South Africa has been “stitched together” (Steinberg 2001, 1).

The farm: then

That *Treurgrond* is set on a farm is significant, because the figure of the *boereplaas* [literally: farmers' farm] has long held a special place in the Afrikaners' collective consciousness. During the heydays of Afrikaner nationalism, it was generally held that a distinguishable Afrikaner identity was rooted in rural life (Van der Merwe 2001, 161), and many Afrikaners referred to themselves as *Boere* [farmers] or as members of a *Boerevolk* [Boer nation]. Afrikaner novelist and intellectual, C. M. van den Heever, wrote in *Die Afrikaanse Gedagte* [The Afrikaans Idea],

Over the years, a *Boer* culture was built up in the platteland [countryside], where it was isolated from foreign influences. Here the language, which represents a reflection of inner life, remained unadulterated. Its symbols and development were inspired by the veld atmosphere. Religion and habits held dear by all of us who know that life, was handed down from father to son, just like the earth they cultivated. (Van den Heever 1935, 29)

Here, Van den Heever captures the essence of what is commonly considered to be the Afrikaner nation's myth of origin. The vitality of the *Boerevolk* was supposedly tied to their relationship with the earth – the soil to which they were “mystically united through a dark love” (Van den Heever 1935, 16). The city, in contrast, was mostly associated with the English language and was germane to a way of life that Van den Heever describes as “the hollow rattling of a highly mechanized Western civilization” (1935, 86). This romantic origin myth completely erases South Africa's colonial history of land dispossession and the historic, but also the continuing, exploitation and violence suffered by many black farm workers on white-owned farms.

There is an irony to the fact that at the very moment that Afrikaner nationalism began its ascent, the rural way of life in which it had its purported roots was quickly fading due to accelerated industrialization and urbanization at the beginning of the twentieth century (Van der Merwe 2001, 161). Although no longer a reality for a growing number of Afrikaners, the romance of farm life continued to have a central place in Afrikaners' collective consciousness. Nowhere is this better illustrated than the abundance of Afrikaans novels published between the 1920s and 1940s that formed part of the *plaasroman* [pastoral; literally: farm novel] tradition. Its popularity, Coetzee argues, was the result of a fear that the *Boerevolk* would fade away, that the Afrikaner would leave the land, be “swallowed up in the cities” (1988, 4) and “lose his economic independence and cultural identity” (1988, 134). In the tradition

of the *plaasroman*, the farm was presented as the bastion of a distinct way of life and of Afrikaner values, such as an absolute dependence on God, a close relation to the soil, strong familial ties and deep interpersonal relationships with one's fellow Afrikaners (Van der Merwe 2001, 161). These values were often presented as under threat from the evil city's materialism and debauchery, its foreign and sinful ways, its individualism and selfishness, its liquor, prostitution and gambling (Coetzee 1988, 83).

Beginning in the 1940s, romanticized depictions of the *boereplaas* began to fade in Afrikaans literature. Van der Merwe (2001, 162) argues that Afrikaans novelists gradually shifted from "a total loyalty", to a "loyal resistance" and ultimately to a "total resistance" to the farm. This resistance reached its apex with the literary movement of the *Sestigers* [Sixtiers]: with their piercing criticism of traditional Afrikaner ideology, the farm became one of their most "conspicuous target[s]" (Van der Merwe 2001, 172). However, even as the *plaasroman* literary tradition was in decline, the *boereplaas* continued to have an overwhelming presence in Afrikaans cinema. Hans Rompel, one of the earliest Afrikaner filmmakers, wrote a two-volume manifesto for the establishment of a "*volkseie*" [people's own] cinema (1942a; 1942b). Rompel advocated for the production of Afrikaans films that would "breathe the Afrikaans spirit" (Rompel 1942b, 48), contending that rural life offered the ideal ideological content for such films. Tomaselli (2006) traces how "Eden films" dominated Afrikaans cinema well into the 1970s.

At some point, the romanticized *boereplaas* began to fade, although it never faded completely, from the Afrikaners' collective consciousness. By the 1970s, many Afrikaners had attained middle class status and the future of the *Boerevolk* seemed secure in the hands of the National Party. Fewer Afrikaners felt the need to look nostalgically to an imagined past and, instead, associated farm life with "backwardness and underdevelopment" (Van Zyl 2008, 135).

The farm: now

Today, more than two decades after South Africa's democratic transition, the majority of the country's commercial farmland is still owned by white people (Aliber and Cousins 2013, 141) and many of them are concerned that their way of life might be under threat. Since the prospect of South Africa's democratization was on the cards, farmers have feared that they would be forced to hand their land over to the state. Especially worrisome to some whites during the country's transition was one particular sentence

in the ANC's Freedom Charter of 1955: "Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it." During the negotiations for South Africa's democratization, the National Party demanded that a state-led land distribution program be balanced with the protection of property rights and that, in cases where the state's acquisition of farms did take place, landowners be compensated with competitive market prices (Walker 2008, 55-7). Their demands were met, and the 1996 Constitution made the radical redistribution of land that many blacks were anticipating at the dawn of democracy a near impossibility. Land reform, subsequently, progressed at a crawling pace.

At the turn of the millennium, large scale land invasions occurred in neighbouring Zimbabwe and through their mass mediation, fear was forcefully projected into the imaginations of white South Africans: could similar events transpire in South Africa? Had the time for whites in Africa finally run out? Could whites lose control of their farms like they had lost control of the South African state? More recently, the political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), has placed the issue of radical land reform firmly on the political agenda again. What has especially stirred white anxieties about the EFF's popularity is what they present in their founding manifesto as one of the pillars for economic emancipation: "Expropriation of South Africa's land without compensation for equal distribution in use" (EFF, n.d.). The EFF's demands have also led the way for numerous other voices that are calling for the expropriation of white-owned farmland.

White anxieties have been further fueled by a sharp rise in farm attacks and farm murders in the 1990s and the steady trickle of reports on these crimes that continue to appear in the media. One explanation sees these crimes as merely symptomatic of South Africa's much larger crime crisis: because farms are isolated, have little security measures in place and because farmers often stash money and weapons in their houses, farms are a soft target for crime. Activist groups like AfriForum have, however, insisted that farm murders are exceptional crimes and are, therefore, deserving of prioritized state interventions. They are exceptional crimes, so the argument goes, because of the high number of these crimes that are committed on an annual basis. According to a recent report by AfriForum, commercial farmers are 4.5 times more likely to be murdered than the average South African (Gous 2017)³⁴, which if correct, would make farming in South Africa

³⁴ According to AfriForum's figures, farmers fall victim to murder at a rate of 156 per 100 000; according to police statistics, the rate for all South Africans is 34.1 (Gous 2017).

one of the most dangerous professions on the planet. These figures, however, are inflated and based on invalid statistics (for a discussion, see SAHRC 2014, 44-46). Moreover, available evidence suggests that occurrences of both farm attacks and farm murders have significantly decreased since the early-2000s and certainly do not support any claims of a “rising epidemic” (see for example SAHRC 2014; Agri SA 2018).

In addition to their quantity, farm murders are also exceptional, so the argument continues, because of the excessive violence that often accompanies them. Van Zyl and Hermann (2011) compiled a book, *Treurgrond* (the title of the book inspired the title of the film), published by the Solidarity Movement's Kraal-Uitgewers, which presents a detailed list of the white victims of farm attacks committed between 1990 and 2010. Admittedly, many of the attacks chronicled in the book are horrific. One farmer was burned with boiling water, his head sliced open before he was strangled to death with a shoelace. His wife and two children watched helplessly. Then his wife's ankles were cut to the bone and the attackers tortured his son by dripping a melting plastic bag all over his body. From the house, only a television and DVD player were stolen. Another farmer's head was chopped open before he was stabbed to death with a garden fork. His wife and three-year-old daughter were both shot dead in the back of the head, execution style. A 72-year-old woman was raped next to the corpse of her murdered husband, before she was stabbed, and her throat slit. A 64-year-old man's finger and toe nails were pulled out with pliers. He was whipped and then burned with an iron across his whole body. The following day, blood stains were found all through the house; the police suspected that he had been dragged from room to room, while the perpetrators cleared every cupboard and drawer in his house. Although I do not want to underplay or normalize the cruelty of any one of these vicious acts of violence, it is important to place these crimes within a larger context. One characteristic of South African crime, which sets it apart from crime in many other countries with high crime rates, is its often excessively violent nature (Du Preez 2013, 187; Steinberg 2001, 1). Any available evidence suggesting that the average farm attack or farm murder is more violent than the average assault or murder occurring elsewhere in the country is merely anecdotal (Du Preez 2013, 189).

Although there appears to be nothing exceptional about farm attacks and farm murders – except that white people are disproportionately affected by them – they have often been constructed as such by activist groups, especially AfriForum, and in the media, especially the Afrikaans media. Claims to the exceptionalism of these crimes have also been foundational to explanations

that see them as politically or racially motivated, or, more conspiratorially, as acts of “*volksmoord*” [genocide; literally: murder of a nation]. However, clear political or racial motives have only been observed in a handful of farm attack cases (Du Preez 2013, 188; SAHRC 2014). In addition, the most recent available study on the matter found that black farmers and black farm workers also fall victim to these crimes and make out about 40% of the total number of farm attack victims (cited in SAHRC 2014, 47).

That many Afrikaners today view the farm as the bastion of a unique Afrikaner way of life, provides some explanation to why the “epidemic” of farm attacks and farm murders have become symbolically loaded and interpreted, not only as an attack on farmers, but also as an attack on Afrikanerdom as such. In popular Afrikaner consciousness, the twin “horrors” of land expropriation and farm attacks have become two of the most tangible ways in which many Afrikaners have come to understand, imagine and talk about their “marginalization”, “alienation” and “victimization” in postapartheid South Africa. The ANC’s apparent unwillingness to stifle land expropriation talk and their purported negligence when it comes to farm attacks have contributed to many Afrikaners’ sense of abandonment.

If the romanticized *boereplaas* once held a central position in the Afrikaners’ collective consciousness, what is its current status? According to Van Wyk Smith, the farm has lost much of its romance, “If the farm was often fetishized in South African white writing... it is now a war zone, a limbo of menace and insecurity. Its isolation, simplicity, unprotectedness, scanty population, once the very spars of its appeal, are now the very makings of its vulnerability and insecurity” (2001, 19). Yet, in the years following Van Wyk Smith’s writing, the romance of the farm and of rural life more generally was revitalized and the *boereplaas* has had its second coming. Indeed, Van Zyl (2008) argues that what she calls a “nostalgia for the *platteland* [countryside]” can increasingly be observed amongst Afrikaners; she traces the recent eruption of these nostalgic yearnings to the political and socio-economic transformations that took place following South Africa’s democratic transition and the purported victimization that many Afrikaners experience because of it (Van Zyl 2008, 136). Consequently, many Afrikaners are experiencing anxiety and long for a romanticized period in their history in which they were, or at least believe they were, in control. This is in line with Boym’s (2001, xvi) claim that outbreaks of nostalgia, as collective expressions of a longing for a lost object, often follow revolutions. Like the Afrikaners of the first half of the twentieth century, this kind of nostalgia might be symptomatic of concerns about the disappearance of a particular way of life. If farms are indeed the last bastion

of Afrikaner values, the resurgence of the romance of the farm might reflect anxieties about the “fading” of Afrikaner culture and identity.

The ubiquity of this nostalgia is, for example, reflected in the numerous Afrikaans travel magazines available today that have a strong focus on the countryside or in the massive popularity of the kykNET reality dating show, *Boer Soek 'n Vrou* [Farmer Seeks a Wife]. Yet, nowhere in recent years has the romance of the farm been better showcased or a collective nostalgia for the countryside been better expressed than through the Afrikaans film industry. Some examples include the following films:

Jakhalsdans (Roodt 2010): A woman, who has struggled to make ends meet after the death of her husband, settles in a small Karoo town with her young daughter. She works as a teacher at a school, which is being forced to close down due to a lack of funding. She decides to save the school by organizing a fundraiser: a music concert starring some of the country's most popular Afrikaans singers. She realizes that one of the town's inhabitants, a hermit, is a famous Afrikaans singer that has become disillusioned with fame and fortune, who quit live performances and settled in the countryside. She convinces him to leave his life of seclusion to perform at the concert. The film romanticizes the strong social bonds that exist amongst the inhabitants of the countryside. With the help of the whole town and the farmers of the area, the fundraiser concert is a big success, which symbolizes the triumph of the countryside spirit.

Susanna van Biljon (Cawood 2010): Susanna is a shy woman from the countryside, working in a small convenience store, with the dream of becoming a pop star. Following her dream, she leaves for the city, where a music producer identifies her talent. Her music career starts taking off and she is invited to perform at Huisgenoot Skouspel, one of the largest Afrikaans music shows in the country. Her performance is well-received, and she has the whole audience on their feet. However, disillusioned by the pretentiousness of the industry, she decides to end her music career and she moves back to the countryside, where the man of her dreams, a farmer, has been waiting for her all along.

Stilte [Silence] (Roodt 2012): The protagonist is an overworked, yet successful Afrikaans singer. She is dating her producer, who is arrogant and more concerned with making money out of her career than with her well-being. One night, criminals break into her home in the city and both her parents are murdered. After the attack, she stops speaking. She moves to her uncle and

aunt's farm to heal. While staying on the farm, she comes to terms with the death of her parents, falls in love with the local reverend, rediscovers God and starts speaking and singing again.

Die Laaste Tango [The Last Tango] (Meyer 2013): The protagonist is an overworked police investigator from the city. One night during the arrest of a serial killer he takes his frustrations out on the culprit and nearly beats him to a pulp. To avoid a scandal, he is sent off to a small town in the Karoo to rest. At first, he has trouble acclimatizing to the slower rhythms of the countryside, but his healing process starts in all seriousness once he buys himself a broad-brimmed hat and a two-tone shirt and assists a local farmer. At long last, he is back to his old self again and falls in love with one of the local women.

Semi-Soet [Semi-Sweet] (Rous 2012): An overworked woman is employed by a marketing company in the city. A wine farm is in search of a marketing representative that lives out their family values. To get the contract, she pays a weekend-long visit to the farm with a man who pretends to be her fiancé. She is, however, unaware that he is secretly using her in an attempt to gain control over the marketing company she works for through a hostile takeover. Closer to the soil, under the slower rhythms of farm life, against the backdrop of the farm's scenic beauty, the pretending couple falls in love.

Vrou Soek Boer [Woman Seeks Farmer] (Kraak 2014): The protagonist is an overworked woman who is employed in what is depicted as the vicious world of finance. She breaks off her relationship with her boyfriend after she learns that he cannot change a flat tire. Defeated, she asks her friend, "Can't I just date a real man?" Her friend suggests that she might be having difficulties finding a suitable partner because she cannot cook. Out of the blue, the protagonist is informed that she has inherited her aunt's bakery in the countryside and decides to leave the city and manage it herself. Finding the environment alien at first, she slowly adapts. Learning to bake acts as her rite of passage. Ultimately, she falls in love with the farmer of her dreams, "a real man".

Pad na jou Hart [Road to your Heart] (Smith 2014): The protagonist is an arrogant businessman from the city, who works at a company founded by his father. He tries to persuade the board of directors to break with the company's "outdated" ways and replace its manual workers with machines. His father dies. He inherits the family company under the condition that he travels from Johannesburg, completes a series of tasks that his father set up

along the way and arrive in Cape Town in time for his father's funeral. Each task is supposed to teach him a particular life lesson, such as that people are more important than money. A significant moment occurs when he makes a stop at his uncle's farm. To complete the task his father set out, he takes off his suit and works on the farm. While undergoing this ritual, a crack appears in his façade and his arrogance begins to fade. While he is on the farm, his uncle also criticizes his business outlook for being too individualistic: "Your grandfather taught your father and I that no man is an island. You are only as strong as the person beside you. But more importantly, the person below you. Where do you think Vecto Petroleum [their family company] or this farm would be without the people who built it with us?" After he completes his journey, he returns to the city and makes a public announcement: it will be business as usual for Vecto Petroleum, none of the company's labourers will be laid off. The farm is romanticized as a paragon of business activity, since it is not driven by the blind strive for profit, but rather operates like an organism where every individual's well-being is catered for. Ultimately, the protagonist succeeds in integrating "the spirit of the farm" into his life in the city.

As in the tradition of the *plaasroman*, all these films, to varying degrees, depend on a dichotomy between the city on the one hand, and the farm or the countryside on the other. Life in the countryside is depicted as authentic and wholesome, and while the city might initially appear glamorous, all these films depict life in the city as pretentious and lacking any real content. There is, however, redemption for city-dwellers who have been caught up in the city's senseless rat race, like the Prodigal Son, these characters can recover their true selves by returning to the soil (Coetzee 1988, 80), which often involves the performance of manual labour – coming closer to the soil – and a shift from an individual to a communitarian consciousness.

The Garden of Eden

Treurgrond features many of the same tropes that have become popular in recent Afrikaans films. The Van Staden farm is a Garden of Eden with Lukas the farmer acting as custodian of this idyllic microcosm. His position as custodian is established through the film's particular articulation of what Coetzee (1988, 85) refers to as the "myth of natural right to the land", which often featured in the *plaasroman* tradition. This myth papers over the actual violent history through which white settlers acquired land in South Africa; instead, this myth has the founding father acquire his natural right to the land

by shedding his blood, sweat and tears into unoccupied virgin soil. According to this myth, every subsequent generation must re-establish their right to the land through good stewardship and when they die, their bones are left in the soil. In this way, inherited ownership becomes the sacred trust between different generations (Coetzee 1988, 85). Similarly, Lukas is shown to have a natural right to the farm. That his father and many of his ancestors are buried in the farm's cemetery, strengthens his own intimate bond with the soil.

Lukas's natural right to the farm is further established by his good stewardship. He is a successful farmer with an earnest passion for working on the farm. Consider, for example, this interchange between him and his wife:

Lukas: It's getting late. I need to plough the top fields before sunset.

Nellie: I don't understand why you don't just ask the workers to drive the damn tractor.

Lukas: That's the reason why I became a farmer. That tractor (points into the distance) is my favourite.

Nellie: You're still just like a little kid.

His good stewardship is also reflected in the enduring relationships he has with his farm workers and the community of people living on his property. His relationship with them mainly manifests as a form of benevolent *baasskap*, which is a form of paternalistic labour management that can be translated with boss-ship (literally), authority, dominance or domination. The term first gained currency under apartheid, when many considered it an ideal labour management system, because of the commonly-held assumption that blacks lacked the capacity to make good decisions and to take care of themselves, and were, therefore, in need of the "paternalistic guidance of the white *baas*" (Suzman 1999, 57). The term has often been used in descriptions of farming communities to denote the deeply unequal relationships existing between farmer and farm worker, where the white *baas* holds traditionally sanctioned authority over everyone living and working on his property, making decisions, overseeing all practical and social matters on the farm and commanding respect. *Baasskap* can sometimes also appear as well-intentioned; in fact, it can encapsulate "a range of behaviour, from benevolent care-taking to discipline and punishment" (Sylvain 2001, 733).

The Van Staden farm is managed according to the *baasskap* ethos and the film even romanticizes the way in which *baasskap* manifests in Lukas's relationship with those working and living on his property. This is well-illustrated in Lukas's interactions with the black farm school teacher, Katie.

One afternoon, while she is walking home from the school, Lukas drives past her and offers her a ride home. As they drive, she thanks him for the desks and chairs that he bought for the school. She also mentions that the school is over-crowded, hinting that they need a new classroom. Later, when Lukas discusses with his wife the possibility of sponsoring the building of a new classroom, she is immediately annoyed with Katie's presumptuousness and says, "She is milking you for money, Lukas." The film hints at the possibility that Lukas, the kind-hearted white farmer, might be the victim of the parasitic black people dwelling on his farm – that the white man's burden imposed upon him might be weighing too heavily on his shoulders. Following the climactic farm attack, a sobbing Katie approaches Lukas's brother, André, during the funeral. "What will become of us?" she asks, implying that without the white patriarch to take care of them, all the black people living on the farm will be cut loose and set adrift. She receives some consolation when André assures her that the Van Staden farm will live on, that one white patriarch will go on where the previous one left off, just like Lukas went on where his father had left off.

The first serpent: land claims

The Garden of Eden comes under threat when a serpent enters its gates. During a scene in the film's first act, Lukas and Daniel, the farmer and his loyal farm worker, stand side by side on a freshly ploughed field. Lukas picks up a clump of soil, tastes it and predicts that it is going to be a good year. Ominous music starts playing. A moving car comes into view and stops a few paces away from them. The door opens and Daniel's son Edwin steps out. "Fancy car", Lukas observes, as he and Daniel watch Edwin leisurely making his way towards them. Edwin wears a suit and sunglasses that seem uncomfortably formal and out of place. When he reaches them, he retrieves from his pocket a white piece of cloth and, taking his time, wipes the dust from his black leather shoes. Brusquely, he hands Lukas an envelope. Edwin is suing Lukas for ownership of his farm, because, he claims, the Van Stadens had stolen the land from his ancestors.

This revealing scene highlights the contrast between Lukas and Edwin, between the kind-hearted farmer and the materialistic and arrogant black land claimant. When Lukas puts the soil in his mouth, it becomes part of his being, while Edwin, in contrast has no intimate relationship with the soil and he refuses to have it stick to him. In addition, his own father does not endorse his efforts to acquire ownership of the farm. As soon as he leaves,

Daniel says to Lukas, “I don’t know what has gotten into him. It’s since he moved to Johannesburg that he suddenly changed. I hardly recognize him.” It is implied that Edwin has been corrupted by the evil city. Later in the film, Daniel says to Lukas, “These young people of today [referring to Edwin], they want everything without working for it. When I see him again, I’ll give him a proper hiding with my sjambok... Edwin doesn’t know what it is to farm. He will pull all our hard work through his ass.” Unlike his father, Edwin is not the “good black man” who, like a child, acknowledges Lukas’s baasskap unconditionally and accepts his own subordinate position within the farm’s microcosm. Instead, he is depicted as posing a threat to the protagonist, to the farm and to the entire community of people living on the farm. Edwin is the villainous serpent in the Garden of Eden.



Photo 4.2 & 4.3

Lukas tasting the soil; Edwin wiping the dust from his shoes

When finally, Edwin and André appear in court for the fate of the Van Staden farm to be determined, the judge’s verdict is, “[E]vidence was submitted

to the court that the farm in question did, in fact, belong to the Lebonas. In accordance with the Land Claim Law of 2003, however, this court finds insufficient merit to return the farm to the Lebonas. The court therefore finds that the farm, in this case, is the property of Mr. Van Staden.” The content of this vague verdict is never elaborated on and it remains unclear why Edwin lost the case. For a fleeting moment, *Treurgrond* admits to the fact that colonial dispossession and apartheid, with its forced removals and other atrocities, did take place, that the entire romance of the Van Staden *boereplaas* was built upon stolen land and that Edwin is completely justified in seeking ownership of his ancestral land. However, just as quickly as this truth slips into the film’s narrative, it slips out again and the film continues to underplay the importance of Edwin’s historical claim to the land. The implication seems to be that whatever injustices happened in the past should remain in the past and also that the intimate relationship that white people have with the land matters more than black people’s relationship with it. It is also implied that white people are more competent cultivators of the South African soil than black people, and that they are, therefore, the more deserving inheritors of the earth. Just before they appear in court, André explains to Edwin, “There is no mine or yours, Edwin. The farm is a community. Lukas looks after the education of the children, the families that work there. Without Lukas, there is no farm.” As long as politics and history remain at the farm’s gate, the *boereplaas* can continue to be a utopia: a place where farmers’ sacred relationship with the soil remains intact, where a particular way of life can continue, where a whole community of farm dwellers can keep on receiving according to their need. When attempts are made to restore historical injustices, when politics are allowed to enter the farm gates, paradise is lost. It should go without saying that the wealth disparity between farmers and farm workers on South African farms is immense and that the safeguarding of racial privilege is clearly at stake in André’s interchange with Edwin.

The second serpent: farm attacks

In addition to politicized history, a second serpent enters *Treurgrond*’s Garden of Eden: farm attacks. The audience is first introduced to the violence of farm attacks through the eyes of Captain Helena Schoeman, head of a special task force established to combat the “rising” number of farm murders, and her partner Morena, a forensic photographer who is new to the job. They arrive at a house on a farm where two murders were committed. In the kitchen, a man’s dead body lies in a puddle of blood. His eyes were gouged out with a screwdriver and left in the fridge. Deeper in the house, they see a

woman's dead body with her hands and feet sawed off. As they walk, Morena takes pictures, clearly disturbed by the horrific scene unfolding before him. Meanwhile, Captain Schoeman calmly describes the crime scene into a voice recorder. The pair make their way into the bathroom, where they find two bloody feet and a handsaw in the bathtub. Morena leaves the bathroom and rushes to vomit outside the house.

That evening, Captain Schoeman and Morena have a drink at a hotel, where they discuss the day's events. "Is it always this awful?" he asks. She smiles sardonically, "It gets worse my friend." It is left to the audience to imagine a bloodbath, a massacre, that could be considered "worse" than the carnage they had paid witness to only moments earlier. "What really gets me," says Captain Schoeman contemplatively, "is how they always find more gruesome ways to commit these murders. What ever happened to a good old-fashioned stabbing or a gun shot? No, they just need to torture the people. The bastards think they are very creative." What she implies is that already excessively violent farm murders are becoming even more so. Farm murders are presented as an escalating crisis. In addition, she also alludes to the complete inhumanity and senselessness that ostensibly underlie these crimes – the perpetrators are, apparently, using farm attacks as a means of creative expression.

The rest of the pair's conversation revolves around how she deals with being constantly exposed to the aftermath of these horrific crimes and how Morena will need to toughen up if he wants to survive in his new profession. Conspicuously absent from their conversation, is any theorizing about who the people are responsible for farm attacks and what their motives might be. In fact, not once during the entire film are questions raised about the identities and motivations of the attackers. Even the climactic massacre of the Van Staden family is presented simply as violence for the sake of violence; the audience only sees an out-of-focus shot of the killers and never even catches a glimpse of their faces.

Even though farm attacks, according to the film, are perpetrated by a faceless force, its target seems nonetheless clear: white people. The film features four separate farm attacks during which a total of at least seven white people die. Daniel is the only black person that dies, and his death is peculiar, because while the whites are attacked inside their homes, Daniel is not. During the night of the attack on the Van Staden farm, he hears a noise and when he runs outside to investigate, he is killed. The very brief moment the film dedicates to showing the attack on the black farm worker stands in jarring contrast to the several minutes it dedicates to the gratuitous violence inflicted upon the



Photo 4.4 & 4.5

Morena vomits after witnessing the aftermath of a farm attack

white family. Daniel is not the target of the attack, but merely collateral. In this way, *Treurgrond* endorses the myth that whites are the primary targets and victims of farm attacks.

But more than merely an attack on whiteness, *Treurgrond* also presents farm attacks as an attack on Afrikanerdom. When Lukas meets Captain Schoeman, he passionately declares, “Every time a farmer is murdered, something dies inside each of us. A piece of our language. A piece of our religion. A piece of our history. And ultimately, a piece of who we are. There are very few of us left.” Farm attacks are, ostensibly, an attack on Afrikaner identity, on the Afrikaans language, on Christianity, on Afrikaner nationalist history and on Afrikanerdom as such; it is an attack on the *boereplaas*, the “genesis” of an Afrikaner way of life and the romance it represents. Lukas falls just short of outright calling farm murders acts of genocide.

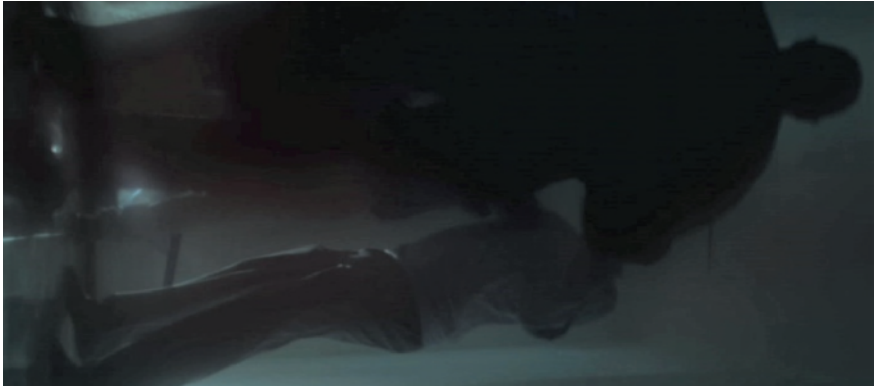


Photo 4.6

The only shot featuring farm attackers

Whites in “peril”

Fear, or more specifically white fear, has been fuelled by mass mediations of farm attacks since the initial upsurge in these crimes during the early 1990s. The Afrikaans print media tend to give a disproportionate amount of coverage to farm attacks, especially those of the most violent kind, compared to other crimes committed on South African soil. It is, for example, common for pictures of white individuals who have survived farm attacks and who have sustained severe injuries to appear on the cover pages of Afrikaans newspapers. Similar attacks on black farmers and farm workers are rarely reported on in Afrikaans newspapers. White consumers of Afrikaans media being confronted with evidence of their fellow whites or their fellow Afrikaners falling victim to brutal crimes produces amongst them collective fear, but also what Comaroff and Comaroff refer to as a “culture of vicarious victimhood”, where mass mediated crimes are often collectively experienced, creating a sense that “we are all victims... we have all lost our freedom to violence” (2006, 233). The internet and social media have also contributed to compounding collective fears and a shared sense of victimization. Numerous websites and social media groups have mushroomed in recent years, where South Africans can express their “victimhood” and mobilize themselves against an “onslaught” of violence – groups with names like Boere Krisis Aksie [Boer Crisis Action] and Stop White Genocide in South Africa. These responses seem to confirm Donham’s claim that “[n]othing ‘primordializes’ identity more efficiently than the experience of violence, especially violence that appears to have been directed at one’s group as a group” (2011, 8).

Treurgrond feeds into this already existing culture of fear and vicarious victimhood through its mass mediation of fictionalized farm attacks. When it premiered on 29 May 2015, predominantly white Afrikaans-speaking audiences across the country left theatres with lingering images of innocent, kind-hearted Afrikaners being viciously and senselessly slaughtered, images of mutilated white bodies, amputated limbs, blood and gore. By harnessing the medium of film, by conjuring apocalyptic images of Afrikaners in peril, *Treurgrond* has also reproduced some of the gravest anxieties and fears existing amongst many Afrikaners today, such as that their “distinct” way of life, their language and their culture have become obsolete in postapartheid South Africa, that their “unique” contribution to the country is no longer respected or valued, that history has finally caught up with them, that they have overstayed their welcome in Africa. The film might have even evoked fears amongst its audiences that have historically been associated with the *swart gevaar* [black peril]: such as, on the one hand, that South Africa might spiral into a situation of growing lawlessness, heading towards a revolution (Brown 1987), and, on the other hand, that Afrikaners will undergo a loss of identity and distinctiveness and, ultimately, be assimilated into or be engulfed by a sea of blacks (Lubbe 1991).

Restoring order

Like numerous other recent Afrikaans films, *Treurgrond*'s narrative relies heavily on the romance and nostalgia that many Afrikaners today associate with the *boereplaas*. However, instead of depicting the realization of this fantasy, *Treurgrond* shows its demise. Thus, on the one hand, *Treurgrond* comforts its predominantly Afrikaner audience with utopian images of rural life, inspiring collective nostalgia, while, on the other hand, confronting them with the apocalyptic annihilation of this utopian microcosm, inspiring collective fear that a way of life they hold dear is in peril (cf. Titlestad 2016).

But everything is not lost, it seems. Despite *Treurgrond*'s tragic denouement, the film does offer a faint glimmer of hope. Lukie is Lukas's young nephew, who survives the farm attack. Together with his sister, they visit Lukas and his wife on the day before the night of the fateful attack. Lukas spends his last day on earth showing Lukie around on the farm. That night, Lukas puts Lukie and his sister to bed and asks them what they want to be when they grow up, to which Lukie responds, “Can I be a farmer?” That night, everyone in the house is murdered except for Lukie and the film seems to hint at the possibility that Lukie will one day take over the Van Staden farm. He acts as

a symbol of resilience, of farmers that will continue to be farmers, despite the challenges they might face. But he can also be seen as a symbol of Afrikaner vitality, of a group of people who will continue to reproduce itself as a distinct people for generations to come and who will restore order and the romance of the *boereplaas*.

At the end of the film, after the drawn-out sentimental burial of the white victims of the climactic farm attack, an advertisement appears on the screen that invites audience members to join AfriForum in the struggle against farm murders. Another advertisement for AfriForum appears earlier in the film, when Ernst Roets, deputy CEO of AfriForum, portraying himself addresses an audience of farmers and farm workers. He says:

We cannot sit back and wait for the government to react while our wives and children are being murdered. We have to get involved ourselves. That is why AfriForum is setting up community safety measures in towns. We need the community to get involved. The good news is that our research shows: where our communities are involved, it has an impact on crime in general and on farm murders in particular.

Ultimately, the film presents communities “standing together” as the only viable alternative to waiting in fear. But the “we” that Roets refers to could be interpreted as not only signifying farmers, but indeed all Afrikaners. In this sense, the message of the film is in clear congruence with the claim, mentioned in Chapter 1, of the Solidarity Movement (of which AfriForum is a central part) that the ANC government and the democratic state do not have the Afrikaner community’s interest at heart and that the only way in which Afrikaners can continue to live a meaningful life as a minority in South Africa is if they regain authorship of their own narrative by retreating into an ethnic enclave or *laager* – like their ancestors did in the years following the Anglo-Boer War – and rebirth an Afrikaner nation.

5

Conclusion

During the first half of the 20th century, an Afrikaner nation with a “distinct” racial identity was imagined into existence. While material dispossession and later economic organisation lay the foundation for this collective imagining, this process was mainly fomented within the cultural sphere, through cultural rituals and through the collective consumption of Afrikaans-language media forms. Today, more than two decades after apartheid’s demise, there have been numerous voices calling for a re-invention of an Afrikaner identity and for the rebirth of an Afrikaner nation – or a postnational Afrikaner nation. At the moment, the Solidarity Movement seems to be the loudest of these voices, but there are others, like language and cultural activists Dan Roodt and Hermann Giliomee, and even anti-apartheid struggler, Frederik van Zyl Slabbert (1999), called for Afrikaners to give new content to their Afrikaner identities.

In this study, I explored the ways in which the Afrikaans culture industry provides some of the means through which this postnational Afrikaner nation can be imagined. I showed that, although there have been attempts within the industry to promote its products as inclusive, Afrikaners and black Afrikaans-speakers rarely converge, in more or less equal numbers, as consumers of the same products. I considered how the Afrikaans culture industry has been complicit in producing and reproducing Afrikaner separatist or enclaved subjectivities, how it has been reaffirming and naturalizing the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom, and how it has prepared the ground for the formation of a new postapartheid Afrikaner laager. Although I developed an argument about the nature and social consequences of the postapartheid Afrikaans culture industry in general, my focus was especially on the mechanisms of the Afrikaans film industry, and how it animates social life through the content, circulation and consumption of its products.

In Chapter 2, I argued that the Afrikaans language has remained central to many Afrikaners’ conceptions of selfhood and that its perceived decline has contributed significantly to their perceptions of being marginalized and victimized under a democratic regime. I described how a loyalty towards the Afrikaans language as a brand has been stimulated by an ongoing discourse about Afrikaans being under threat and that the consumption of Afrikaans-

language media and cultural commodities has often been constructed as a way to keep the language alive and to contribute to its vitality. The Afrikaans culture industry, I argued, has been instrumental in disseminating the idea that Afrikaans is under threat, while, at the same time, also packaging, selling and profiting from what some perceive as a means to curtail this threat. While the National Party was the custodian of the Afrikaans language during apartheid, the preservation and promotion of Afrikaans have firmly shifted into market-driven domains and various private companies have been involved in endeavours to simultaneously “save” and capitalize on the Afrikaans language. The media conglomerate Naspers, especially, has made extensive efforts to build a market of Afrikaans consumers, while also investing in the development of the language itself, ensuring that it will be able to provide in the needs of future Afrikaans-speakers.

I also showed that the majority of Afrikaans-language media and cultural commodities are targeted at and consumed by Afrikaners. And, since consumption is also an act of self-fashioning and has the ability to charge or recharge collective self-awareness, I argued that it has provided the means for Afrikaners to imagine, and to continue imagining, themselves as a collectivity or a community – as a distinct people with its own distinct culture. Thus, instead of being an emancipatory force, facilitating Afrikaans-speakers’ forceful integration into a new South Africa and “rainbow nation”, and solidifying an overarching South African national identity, the Afrikaans culture industry has succeeded in reaffirming and naturalizing the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom.

In Chapter 3, I turned my attention to Afrikaans film. I showed that, for a century, the Afrikaans film industry has continued to confront – or to comfort – its mostly white Afrikaans-speaking audiences with moving images of mostly white Afrikaans-speaking people, living in an apartheid-like world. During the first half of the twentieth century, Afrikaans cinema acted as one of the mediums through which Afrikaners could imagine themselves as members of a nation of Afrikaners. Through the collective participation in the cinematic ritual of consuming Afrikaans films, and also through the explicit Afrikaner nationalist content of many of these films, the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom were being drawn. During apartheid, the majority of Afrikaans films comforted Afrikaner audiences with light entertainment that continued to reflect and to naturalize Afrikaner enclavism and apartheid ideology.

More recently, the Afrikaans film industry has continued to reaffirm Afrikanerdom's imagined boundaries. Even though social conditions have changed, and even though the consumption of Afrikaans films has largely moved into private spaces, the machine is rotating on the same spot. Like Afrikaans films during apartheid, recent films have consistently transposed its audiences to a white-majority, apartheid-like world so very different from democratic South Africa. The vast majority of recent Afrikaans film are still firmly rooted in white life and white experience, with narratives being telescoped through the perspectives of white characters and black characters only appearing as decorative props. I further showed that the Afrikaans film industry has remained a closed circuit. Its products are mostly produced by Afrikaners for Afrikaner-majority audiences and through its circulation and consumption, it has opened up a communicative space mainly shared by Afrikaners. Although no longer inciting the same kind of public participation as the cinematic experience of an earlier historical moment, through the consumption of these films in increasingly private spaces, Afrikaners, a group of people dispersed across the globe, can continue to imagine themselves as members of the same community or *laager*.

In Chapter 4, I showed how the medium of film has been used in an attempt to politically mobilize this *laager*. In this chapter, I focused on one particular film, *Treurgrond*, and showed how the film, like many other recent Afrikaans films, follows in the tradition of the *plaasroman* by depicting Afrikaner farmers as living a unique way of life in close contact with the soil. In this way, *Treurgrond* re-establishes a romanticism around the *boereplaas*, which is, according to what is frequently presented as the Afrikaner's myth of origin, the cradle of Afrikanerdom. Yet, *Treurgrond* shows that a force of destruction has been unleashed that, through farm murders, is in the process of destroying a group of Afrikaners' way of life and, in addition, poses a significant threat to Afrikanerdom as such.

I argue that in this way *Treurgrond* also manages to generate and to reinforce more general Afrikaner anxieties of being victims in postapartheid South Africa, with their language and culture being "under attack". The film mythologizes farm attacks by suggesting that these crimes are not only an attack on the inhabitants of farms, but also on Afrikaner identity, on Afrikaans, on Christianity, on Afrikaner nationalist history and on Afrikanerdom. Ultimately, in line with the vision of the Solidarity Movement, *Treurgrond* seems to suggest that the democratic state lacks the capacity to protect its

citizens and their interests, and that the only way in which Afrikaners can continue to live a meaningful life in South Africa is within a new ethnic laager.

If a new Afrikaner laager has, intentionally or unintentionally, been forged through the activities of the Afrikaans culture industry, as I showed in Chapter 2 and 3, *Treurgrond* seems to be an explicit attempt – similar to some of the projects launched by the Solidarity Movement – to politically mobilize this laager. Whether this new laager is fit for the same kind of mobilization as an earlier Afrikaner laager is yet to be seen. At the moment, however, it seems unlikely. Indeed, both the capturing of state power and the formal secession of Afrikaners from the South African state appear to be out of the question. In addition, one could even question the achievability of the kind of Afrikaner identity politics promoted by the Solidarity Movement. Considering recent developments, there is not much to suggest that the laager that has been taking form in the private sphere will become politicized and move into the public sphere anytime soon. In fact, I would argue that the vast majority of Afrikaners do not seem to be interested in any kind of mobilization that requires a commitment beyond buying and consuming commodities and paying membership fees. What I have described as a new Afrikaner laager – or a postnational Afrikaner nation – might ultimately prove to be politically impotent.

Yet, this is not to suggest that the formation of a new Afrikaner ethnic laager in a new South Africa has been without consequences. Giliomee (as discussed in Chapter 1) contends that Afrikaners have a duty to re-invent their Afrikaner identity, to preserve and to hand over their cultural heritage to a future generation of Afrikaners. He says, “If they were to accept this challenge, they would become part of a new, democratic South Africa in their own special way” (Giliomee 2012, 715). I would, however, argue that recent efforts to re-invent an Afrikaner identity in the cultural sphere – through the activities of the culture industry and through the consumption of its products – has had the opposite effect. Instead of easing Afrikaners’ integration into a new South Africa, it has isolated them, galvanizing their withdrawal from the democratic state and “rainbow nation”, pushing them ever deeper into Afrikaner-majority physical, digital and psychological enclaves.

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This book is based on Adriaan Steyn's Master's thesis *A new laager for a new South Africa: Afrikaans film and the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom*, winner of the African Studies Centre, Leiden's 2017 Africa Thesis Award. This annual award for Master's students encourages student research and writing on Africa and promotes the study of African cultures and societies.

Because the Afrikaans language no longer receives preferential treatment from the state like it did under apartheid, many are concerned about the language's possible demise. However, at the same time, the Afrikaans culture industry seems to be flourishing in all its facets. Nowhere is this better illustrated than with the burgeoning Afrikaans film industry. After entering a period of hibernation at apartheid's end, the Afrikaans film industry was revived in 2007 and subsequently entered a period of rapid expansion. This study is an attempt to make sense of this industry's seemingly surprising recent success and also to consider some of its consequences. It shows how Afrikaans filmmakers, by tailoring their films to white Afrikaans-speakers, continue to affirm the imagined boundaries of Afrikanerdom and allow their audience to imagine themselves as members of the same collectivity or *laager*.

Adriaan Steyn was born and raised in Bloemfontein, South Africa. He completed his BA, honours and MA degrees at Stellenbosch University in Social Anthropology. He currently lives in Cambridge in the USA, where he is doing his PhD at Harvard University in African and African American Studies.



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