

‘They’re Coming’: Precarity and the White Nation Fantasy among South African Migrants in Melbourne.

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Abstract: This paper explores the social reproduction of precarity among white South African migrants in Australia. Building on Griffiths and Prozesky’s (2010) elucidation of the white South African imaginary and its role in triggering emigration, we draw on ethnographic data on white South Africans living in Melbourne to argue that our informants reproduce what Hage (2000) terms a ‘white nation fantasy’. In documenting the ways our informants’ migration experiences can be read as a function of a threatened social imaginary, we suggest that their ‘successful’ resettlement in Australia points to the congruence of their ontological grounding with the white nation fantasy predominating in Australia. Ultimately, however, we argue that the sense of precarity our informants experience in Australia is intrinsically embedded in their reproduction of the white nation fantasy. Our case study therefore serves as a cautionary tale to inflexible constructions of whiteness globally.

One thing I want to say, it’s probably utterly irrelevant to what you came here for, but I have a memory from my childhood that is very embedded in my mind. In my bedroom, I had a map of Africa, and in 1975 I stood in front of that map because I had just heard on the news that Portugal had pulled out of Mozambique and Angola. And I was looking at the map, in my whole prejudiced South African thing, and I’m going “Okay, the blacks have got Angola, the blacks have got Mozambique. There’s still South West Africa left, and Rhodesia, and then it’s us.” And I told some friends about it, and they said it was impossible. It was just never going to happen; it’ll never ever be us. And I said “no, look, they’re coming down. They’re coming.”

And I say the same thing about Australia. I don't know if it's in 20 years' time or 50 years' time, Australia won't be Australia. I don't know if it's Queensland going to go to Indonesia, and Northern Territory is going to go to China, or how it's going to work, but it isn't going to be the same, it's just a feeling I have. They're coming.' (Colin 2014).

Since 1994, almost one million white South Africans have emigrated, with around 250 000 having settled in Australia. Colin is one such migrant, who recounted his experiences in an interview with the lead author at the **house he had built with his wife in on Melbourne's fringe**. The image is powerful: a 16-year-old boy perched on the southern tip of a continent in the violent throes of decolonisation, and realising, perhaps for the first time, that his future was uncertain. On the outskirts of Melbourne some 34 years later, Colin drew on that memory to make sense of his new world. This article investigates the ways in which a group of white South African migrants living in Melbourne have come to make sense of their lives since the fall of apartheid.

Building on the seminal work of Ghassan Hage (2000), in the first section we argue that our informants inhabit a white nation fantasy: a set of strategies involving the protection of an imagined national community in which issues of space and race converge. In articulating his argument, Hage (2000:18) explores the relation of 'third world looking' migrants to the hegemony of white Australia. We extend his analysis to the consideration of experiences of 'invisible' white migrants, in order to suggest that the ease with which many white South Africans have settled into Australia evidences the congruence of the social imaginaries among white people in both countries. Along with Griffiths and Prozesky (2010), we subsequently argue, however, that this fantasy produces modes of articulation that result in the experience of the social world as perpetually under threat. Consequently, in the final section we suggest that the 'success' of this migratory project is superficial as the precarity it engenders is the outcome of a consolidation of an imaginary that is unable to accommodate the cultural and demographic changes of a globalising world. In pursuing

this argument, we present our informants' experiences in a loosely chronological manner, beginning with a discussion of their senses of identity and emplacement in South Africa, and followed by their ontological positioning within their adopted home of Australia.

The findings presented are based on lengthy, semi-structured interviews conducted by the lead author in May-July 2014 with ten white-identifying South Africans living in and around Melbourne. Of these six men and four women, three were of Afrikaner, and seven of English, descent. Four derived from Johannesburg, three from Cape Town and the remaining three from Durban. They had resided in Australia for between two and 30 years, though most for at least a decade. All but one were Australian citizens, and all were professionally employed. To protect their identities, pseudonyms are used throughout. Owing to the small number of participants in this study, the claims made are not intended to represent the views of white South Africans as a whole. White South Africans are a diverse grouping with highly varied socio-political positionings and ideological orientations, which are by no means exhaustively accounted for across the ten individuals described. Participants were recruited through a notice placed in an online South African expatriate newsletter, or through snowballing from the initial participants. Individuals were not targeted on the basis of their views, and all who volunteered were included. However, our use of word of mouth recruitment likely contributes to the relative homogeneity of political positionings evident among our participants. Notwithstanding the contained nature of the research group, the position our informants inhabit allows for a fascinating consideration of the white nation concept in a trans-national context and is valid not least since we believe, following Strathern (1991: xix), that 'the single person is as complex to analyze as a corporation composed of many'.

White nation fantasy: Where race meets space

Werner is an Afrikaans-speaking man in his late fifties, who is married with two children. A highly successful businessperson in South Africa, since migrating to Australia, he has worked in several ASX-listed institutions. In a recorded interview that took place in his office in a CBD skyscraper, he commented:

I don't think there's anyone in the world who will deny the fact the Nelson Mandela is one of the better human beings... But you see all those movies about Nelson Mandela and all that, [but] where's our fucking movie? What about us? What about the price we paid? No-one ever fucking tells our story, and it's not as if we invented apartheid...but it's almost as if the last 350 years never happened, and they just conveniently take out all the white bits, and it's all now just black history.

In a pattern that emerged to varying extents among all our informants, in quick succession Werner's comments valorise then criticise 'black'ⁱ culture, with his praise for Mandela immediately overshadowed by his anger at the perceived injustices of South African historiography. In the same vein, Wendy, a corporate manager in her mid-fifties living in Melbourne's inner city, took pride in explaining that she had many Zulu friends as a child and speaks isiZulu. In the next breath, she described South Africa's post-apartheid government as 'manipulative' and 'fraudulent', suggesting this was because 'the black culture is the black culture across Africa. It is what it is'. Shifting this gaze to Australia, Frances who works in the corporate sector (and is married to Colin) enthused, on the one hand, over the 'million Asian restaurants' on Victoria Street in Richmond, before citing soon after her fear for Australia on account of her perception that 'every single investment property [is] being bought out by Indians or Chinese'. How can these seemingly contradictory invocations that oscillate between appreciation and deep fear of the ethnic other be reconciled?

Following Hage (2000), we find an exploration of the complex interplay of spatial categories with culturally-particular conceptualisations of race more compelling than simply dismissing these kinds of sentiments as ‘racism’. This is not least because all our informants actively rejected the notion that they were racist, and took great offence that Australians frequently presumed them to be so. Werner became quite agitated when recounting ‘the number of barbecues I’ve been at, and people get some beers in them, and it’s all “oh the fucking Abos”, and I’m like, “fuck off! Just because I’m a white South African doesn’t mean I’m a racist”’. Racialised thinking was repeatedly claimed to be anachronistic. Niles, a Catholic educator in his sixties, reflected: ‘I think people change, and I think that’s good. I don’t think one necessarily has to be racist all your life. You can change. Was I racist growing up? Certainly. Have I changed? God, I hope so.’ Classical definitions of racism as a cognitive belief in the inferiority of the ethnic other are not adequate here. Our informants do not hate Africans, and nor do they see them as inevitably lesser. Instead, mechanisms of racial categories operate around a powerfully imagined system of hierarchically ordered cultural spaces that collectively constitute the nation and its imagined community. More specifically, our informants understand themselves as occupying a privileged role in the nation, whereby expressions of racism can be understood as reactions to perceived threats to this imagined spatial power.

The ascription of different cultural formations to specific spatial locations produces an imagined ‘topography of the nation’ (Hage, 2000: 65). Everything has a right to belong insofar as it stays within its designated location. In his reflections on Mandela, Werner’s problem is less the commemoration of the anti-apartheid movement than its displacement of white with black history as the dominant historical consciousness of the nation. The lead author met with Meridee, a soft-spoken woman in her fifties, at a South African expatriate breakfast. Meridee and her husband moved to Australia with their daughters five years ago. Meridee was warm and friendly and, having valued the conversation, insisted upon parting from the lead author with a hug. Her gentle demeanor shifted, however, when discussing refugees in Australia, or, as she described them: ‘elements you

just don't want in your country'. She was concerned that if asylum seekers 'are not on the same page as you, they're going to want to push you towards their page, and you don't want that because what we've got here in Oz is perfect, we don't want anything else'. In rejecting 'their' presence in 'her' country, she constructs the Other as 'undesirable' and 'assumes a space where the undesirable is defined as such' (Hage, 2000: 37). In this way racist modes of thought are enacted predominantly when territorialised. Both Meridee's concept of the 'page' and Werner's 'history' operate as representations of a singular set of cultural characteristics assumed to constitute the central orienting matrix within the national field. In Meridee's declaration that 'we don't want anything else', we encounter two inter-related questions: firstly, who is this 'we'; and, secondly, how is it that Meridee comes to feel empowered to speak on their behalf?

Cultural Production of National Belonging

To understand the national 'we' on behalf of whom Meridee is speaking, the processes through which national belonging is produced must be considered. Hage's (2000: 45-6) differentiation between two modes of national belonging is useful in this regard. 'Passive belonging', he suggests, is the sense of feeling at home in the nation and 'expecting to benefit from its resources', while 'governmental belonging' encapsulates the belief that one has a right over the management of the nation 'such that it remains one's home' (Hage, 2000: 45-6). The assumption of this latter mode is evident within Meridee's confidence in speaking on behalf of the national 'we'; an implicit assumption that appeared to be shared by all our informants. Importantly, Meridee not only inhabits the space, but articulates the criteria for entry as subscription to 'our page', and in doing so bars those she deems unable to meet this standard from this specific mode of belonging. How, then, does Meridee come to occupy the 'managerial position' associated with governmental belonging (Hage, 2000: 65)?

At the outset, it is important to note that these two modes of national belonging are not structured around an immutable racial divide; rather, governmental belonging is a function of cultural entitlement. Hage (2000) explicates the processes of acquiring differential modes of national belonging through Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital. In this view, the nation constitutes what Bourdieu calls a field, an analytical construct and an 'existing relational social reality' in which struggles over the accumulation of capital take place (Hage, 2000: 53). Within the context of a nation, symbolic capital manifests as national belonging; that is, cultural capital is converted into national belonging according to certain rules or 'doxa' that are dictated by the dominant culture in the field (Hage, 2000: 207). In Bourdieu's formulation, the term doxa refers to the rules for the field, the metric against which individual cultural capital is judged and, therefore, according to which positions within the field are assigned. If the nation is a field, and governmental belonging is the highest form of symbolic capital, then the bearer is accorded cultural dominance of the field. However, since not all forms of cultural capital are valued equally, there are infinite gradations of governmental belonging. Those who dominate the field of power, Bourdieu (1984) calls the aristocracy. This, finally, is the 'we' in which Meridee positions herself. This is a social imaginary wherein the aristocratic credentials of whiteness are 'naturalised', and in which white people assume the right to determine the direction of the nation, while setting the doxa that dictate the value of cultural capital (Hage, 2000: 62). In speaking of what 'we want' or 'we don't want', Meridee participates in the articulation of the doxa that prescribes the possibilities for individuals within this field. By extension, the migration of Meridee and our other informants can be understood as at least in part characterised by a search for an enabling environment for the expression of the white nation fantasy. This imagined mode of dwelling involves the production of whiteness as the doxic axis of the nation, and can be most saliently observed in the normalisation of a white national subject. In other words, our informants experience and construct the social life of both nations through the inflections of an unmarked, but always white subject position. These inflections were particularly salient in white South Africans' historical recollections.

When prompted to reflect on their memories of life in South Africa, our informants offered historical accounts that privileged white experiences, while in many cases ignoring black histories. Rather than a malevolent, or even deliberate, act of discrimination, these accounts are products of a cultural logic rooted in the fantasy of white nationhood. At the outset of the interview, Werner spent an uninterrupted half hour recounting his version of South Africa's history, wherein the arrival of the Dutch was proclaimed as 'the whole start of the country'. He provided precise and extensive detail of specific battles in the Boer and World Wars, including the personalities and quirks of individual Afrikaner military leaders. Even more noteworthy was his account of the apartheid era:

In 1961 we decided to declare a republic and kick the Poms out, and if you then fast-forward to 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, which everybody agreed was the right thing to do, because at that stage we had an embargo against us, no-one would sell us anything, and in fact South Africa was the first country to actually get petrol fuel out of coal.

His history, which had been told in exacting detail up to this point, literally 'fast-forwards' over the entire apartheid era, with a petrochemical innovation isolated as the most remarkable event of that time. Mandela's release is framed as positive solely in terms of the lifting of economic sanctions. This rhetorical filtration of South Africa's history was enacted by all our informants in various ways. Niles recounted a story from his childhood where he 'was on a bus, and a friend talked about the coloured problem, and I said "what's the coloured problem"?' He described South Africa as a 'silo society' where 'you grow up in it, and you don't see it'. While with the benefit of hindsight Niles recognises the intentional obfuscation of the Other under a regime from which all white people benefitted, several other of our informants omitted to mention apartheid altogether.

The anthropological treatment of historical consciousness has long resisted the consideration of ethnographic accounts as universal renderings of objective truth (Appadurai, 1981). As Levi-Strauss (1966: 257) reminds us, 'historical facts are no more given than any other...it is...the agent of history who constitutes them by abstraction'. The pressing anthropological task is to construe how such social fabrications operate as a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1975: 30), or as a system of cultural hermeneutics that animates particular sociopolitical struggles. Malkki (1995: 241) has demonstrated persuasively that 'collective histories flourish where they have a meaningful, signifying use in the present'. This is the 'fantastical' part of the white nation fantasy. Hage (2000: 70) uses 'fantasy' in the Lacanian sense, not simply referring to a dream that people possess, but of an idealised space that subjects both produce and 'inhabit'. As such, we now wish to interrogate how the narratives provided operate semiologically to sustain a fantasy of white nationhood that structures the lived experiences of our informants.

The 'Ignorance Contract'

White South Africans' rationalised denials of the recent past are conceptualised by Steyn (2012) as an 'ignorance contract'; a tacit agreement to suspend awareness of past injustices. She argues that the selective history advanced by many white South Africans cannot be understood as collective forgetting, 'faulty cognition', or as the absence of knowledge (Steyn, 2012: 8). Rather, she sees the relation between knowledge and ignorance in sociological terms, not as the presence-absence of information, but as 'two kinds of presences', both of which are the product of deliberate practices (Steyn, 2012: 8-10). Echoing Malkki's invocation that history is produced when it has a 'signifying use', Steyn (2012: 8) argues that ignorance is a social construct with 'strategic value'. We suggest that this use or value can be understood as an attempt to reconstitute and inscribe the value of white cultural capital into the very contours of the national field.

The ignorance contract positions whiteness as central to the nation, because the white claim to aristocratic belonging is only tenable if whiteness is experienced as a veridical determinant of national belonging. At the end of his historical elucidation, for example, Werner shrugged and said '[blacks] might not like [white history], but it's part of the place'. Belonging is in this way claimed by the inscription of white history onto a predominantly spatial plane. White history was variously described by our informants as 'painted over' and 'given another flavour', with each of these metaphors rendering white history as a physical entity that is both prior to, and separate from, the 'new' history displacing it. The ignorance contract can be seen, then, as a form of symbolic violence (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) in regard to the ontological foundations of South African nationalism. To the minds of our informants, apartheid was 'permitted' to end only insofar as the white community could retain their governmental belonging. The collapse of the regime did not signal a concomitant collapse in the cultural expectation of aristocratic belonging. Instead, our informants' narration of apartheid's collapse consecrated, rather than challenged, their claim to belonging. In short, the white nation fantasy appears to have outlived apartheid.

The ignorance contract functions to conscript the new South Africa into the service of the white nation fantasy by reclaiming the national doxa for whiteness. That is, the historical narratives offered by our informants seek to preserve whiteness as the criterion against which national belonging is judged. This is a form of symbolic violence, as stated; however, there is one important modification to this. The contract's competing claim to cultural capital—that which our informants describe as 'black' history—is a rival attempt to construct categories for the adjudication of cultural capital within the nation. The conflict is over doxa, they are competing for the legitimate assignment of national belonging. The ignorance contract is, then, an expression of doxic violence, a struggle to dictate the very terms against which belonging is judged in the post-apartheid era. It can be read, then, as a reactionary discursive resistance to the cultural devaluation of whiteness within the national field. Ultimately, though, it is a destructive orientation, as white South Africans'

preoccupation with the past—replete as it is with a strong sense of precarity—remains fundamental to their imagination of national re-emplacement in Australia. But before we get there, we need to understand why the doxic violence was lost.

Shades of White: Parochialism and Cosmopolitanism

Inherent in narratives pertaining to the ignorance contract, and central to attempts at the re-sacralisation of whiteness, is a rhetorical partitioning of whiteness into two distinct forms, which we term parochial and cosmopolitan whiteness, respectively (cf. Hage, 2000 on ‘good’ and ‘evil’ white nationalists). Our informants frame the historical fact of the fall of apartheid not as a loss of white power, but as the displacement of **racist white parochials**, and the installment of white cosmopolitans, as the new national aristocracy (cf. Hage, 2000: 191-208). It is this latter category (seen as good, against the racist parochials), to which our informants see themselves as belonging. They discursively refashion the historical role of whiteness so as to rehabilitate the value of their cultural capital in cosmopolitan whiteness. In this social imaginary, it is not whiteness itself that has been devalued, but its parochial iteration.

The ignorance contract operates as ‘an oral history of transition between two moral orders’ (cf. Feldman, 1991: 47). Elements of these kinds of narratives encrypt the democratic transition as a reshaping, rather than a displacement, of whiteness. When Wendy described her younger self as ‘not abhorred by the racism’, she was signalling her ascent into a new cosmopolitan whiteness that rejects racism and is, therefore, the appropriate successor to apartheid’s horror. By producing this schism within whiteness, the contract operates both at an individual and cosmological level, positioning the bearer of whiteness within a broad historical trajectory that seeks to naturalise the retention of national aristocracy. Werner described apartheid as ‘bullshit policy’, and raged that he ‘had nothing to do with it’, while Rick claimed his family ‘wasn’t racist in any way’, but instead

‘were in the middle ground’. The negative evaluation in these narratives does not target whiteness itself, but distinguishes its ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms.

Schofeldt-Autman (2013: 54) compellingly explores how ‘the ability of whiteness to change appearance’ often coincides with ‘efforts to remain in power’. This suggests that invocations of cosmopolitanism are a continuation of, rather than a rupture from, the white nation fantasy. In characterising this fundamental sameness, Hage (2000: 89) argues that both ‘tolerant’ and ‘intolerant’ forms of whiteness involve a white subject who exerts controls over the ethnic Other, permitting the latter to exist in the national space within limits demarcated by the white subject. The only difference between these forms of whiteness is the level at which those limits are drawn. Both tolerant and intolerant forms of whiteness problematise the ethnic Other, with both camps assuming the position of ‘spatial power’ from which to pronounce judgements (Hage, 2000: 89). Because it refracts the social life of the nation through the subject stance of a central white self-image, the white nation fantasy only allows for the presence of the Other through such discourses of tolerance. We are dealing, therefore, with an imaginary of white control, and this is where—most glaringly in the context of the new South Africa, but also in Australia—it is revealed as fantastical. The fantasy cannot countenance the possibility that the acceptance of the ethnic Other is out of the acceptor’s control. So when Werner describes the democratic transition as ‘something we needed to do’, he is seeking to position the new political dispensation as created through the volition of white people. In this way, he is exerting an imagined control over that which was, of course, quite independent of his will. In this understanding, the end of apartheid did not involve a relinquishment of white power, but a shift in the way in which that power was wielded. Though Werner is ostensibly supporting apartheid’s demise, he is doing so only on his own terms, and in ways that present it as the decision of his cultural-national group. Thus this form of cosmopolitanism consecrates the white nation fantasy, even as it denies it. This attribute of the white cosmopolitan claim is most saliently demonstrated around articulations of crime and violence, to which we now turn.

The Boiling Crayfish: Etiologies of Innocence

Meridee described her decision to migrate as follows:

I don't know if you know about the parable of the crayfish... If you have a crayfish and you put it in a pot of water, and you bring the water to the boil, if the crayfish is in there from the beginning, the water gets hotter and hotter until he's boiled; they don't realise, they don't try to escape. But if you have a pot of boiling water, and you throw the crayfish in there, he'll jump out. And that is what we decided. We were the crayfish. The water was getting warmer and warmer, and we knew that if we didn't go, we would die.

The parable of the boiling crayfish was invoked in one way or another by almost all our informants. It distills most potently that which has variously been described as the 'besieged' (Steyn, 2001: 88), 'angst-ridden' (Griffiths and Prozesky, 2010: 31) and 'threatened' (Verwey & Quayle, 2012: 551) mentality of many white people in post-apartheid South Africa. This imagination of precarity is, arguably, a symptom of the failure of the white nation fantasy to cohere in the new South Africa, and thus the metaphor vividly expresses the incongruence between this imaginary and the social real. This is evident in our informant's selective construction of history, their sense of the inherent hostility of the new South Africa, and their consequent feeling of imperilment.

The perceived hostility of South Africa is most explicitly manifest in the prevalence of crime, which was the primary reason cited by our informants for emigrating. South Africa does have extremely high crime, with rates rising by 21% in the first five years of democracy (Louw & Mersham, 2001: 315), and the nation has at times exhibited the world's highest rates of murder, rape and violent robberies (Interpol, 1997). However, crime peaked in 2004 and has since established an

‘indisputable’ downward trend (van der Spuy and Shearing, 2014: 187), while emigration has been rising exponentially across the same period. This would suggest a disjuncture between the experience of living in a violent society, and the actual prevalence of violent criminality. To this end, Shirlow and Murtagh (2006b: 229) suggest that if ‘the experience of threat is not directly related to violence’, then the cultural logic behind ontologies of fear must be interrogated.

Crucially, among our informants crime is understood as a persecutory form of reverse-racism that unfairly targets the white community. In their narratives was a consistent refusal to associate South Africa’s crime rate with the injustices of apartheid. Consider Rick’s description of being a teenager in Cape Town during the democratic transition:

My first memories of those changes weren’t positive, to be honest. It was obviously quite a big change for us, and change is difficult. But we also went through a lot of crime. There was a lot of theft, a lot of violence going on, even in the suburbs... I suppose a lot of people were thinking, “if they still had the pass laws, we wouldn’t have this crime”.

The etiology that Rick advances here situates the genesis of crime in the removal of the strictures insulating white from black people, and not in the inequality and poverty inflicted upon the African community. Significant also is his specific mention of crime ‘even in the suburbs’, as distinct from the townships. This language is ‘coded’ (Schofeldt-Autman, 2014: 33) so that without explicitly mentioning race, he has unambiguously implied it.

In the same vein, Meridee’s account of crime is instructive because of what it omits:

[Whites in South Africa] will all be killed. And the thing is, being killed, well it's not nice to be killed, but they're not just being killed. They're being tortured in horrific ways for no reason other than being white.

To Meridee, the incitation for crime is the very fact of being white. In her reckoning, there is literally 'no other reason'. She went on to state: 'I hate to call it crime, because it's not crime... They really had come to kill us'. Her emphasis on the gratuitously horrific nature of crime—a characteristic common to such rhetoric (Altbeker, 2007)—further acts to reinforce the perceived barbarism of black criminals and the innocence of white victims. Such efforts at 'exculpating whiteness' are designed to 'foster amnesia of whites' apartheid victimisation of blacks' (Schonfeldt-Autman, 2014: 27). Meridee instantiates a revisionist tendency through obscuring the history of colonial exploitation that underpins much of South Africa's criminality. She cannot understand why black Africans might be angry towards white people, because she appears not to be fully cognisant of their experiences under apartheid. She has never recalibrated her social imaginary to acknowledge the injustice that her livelihood perpetuated, and so she cannot come to terms with the costs of it. This is not atypical, as Steyn (2001: 88) points out that, with exceptions, the South African white community 'colluded with one of the most rigorous examples of collective perceptual selection in modern history, screening out of awareness a great deal of what was happening around them'.

The etiologies of innocence produce a way of thinking that subsumes awareness of black suffering, while accentuating that of whites. Crime is experienced not through a temporal scale that would situate it within the broader history of structural inequality. Rather, it is constructed synchronically; apprehended as a singular event in time, as evidenced in Meridee's exclamation that 'I have done nothing to them, and we have lost everything'. Similarly denying the past, after a lengthy commentary on crime, Pieter declared '[apartheid] is all ancient history, this is the present, and we

are suffering now'. Such an ontology enables what Shirlow and Murtagh (2006a: 76) describe as 'monocultural imaginings of victimhood'.

The frustration evident in Pieter and others' comments is, we suggest, a response to the displacement of whites from the national aristocracy. Crime is experienced as intolerable not only for its intrinsic qualities, but because it represents the inability of whites to continue to assert control over the black majority. Werner's sentiments corroborate this link:

Security in South Africa is really bad for a number of reasons. It is not a social welfare state; unemployment is running at 55%. In fact, they brought in a law which is called the Affirmative Action [AA] law, which is quite ironic because it is the first time in world history an AA law has been encased to protect the majority as opposed to the minority. So just stop and think about that for a while. AA by definition is to look at your oppressed minorities, but this law was encased to protect the majority. So the whole thing doesn't make sense... They want it to mirror society, but, if you do the numbers, it's ridiculous. An organisation of a thousand people can only have like ten whites. It's fucked.

In Werner's seamless segue from crime to Affirmative Action, we can identify two important features. First is the distortion of scale. If AA seeks to have employee ratios correspond with the racial composition of society, an organisation of a thousand people could have a hundred whites, not ten. We make this point not to be pedantic, but to underscore the alarmism evident in our informants' accounts, which in turn reflects the experience of cultural loss. As aristocratic expectations are naturalised, their removal is experienced as the 'confiscation of entitlement, rather than equalisation' (Steyn, 2001: 89). The second point is Werner's reaction to the purpose of AA. Werner is cognisant that the rationale of the policy is to reflect racial demographics in employment

figures, yet, in his view the policy ‘doesn’t make sense’. Further, that whites must relinquish their aristocratic entitlements is seen as inconceivable: from Werner’s perspective, ‘it’s fucked’. It is in such viewpoints that our informants’ claims to white cosmopolitanism are laid bare as an attempt to jettison culpability for apartheid, while retaining its fruits.

The Dark Teleology

Hage (2000: 26) reminds us that the world is ‘traumatising as ever for those who lack the social means to cope with its rapid changes’. As such, we wish to explore the ways in which this rift between the imagined and the real has produced the sense of threat repeatedly alluded to by our informants. In their assessments of the position of the white community in South Africa, they unanimously felt that the future was bleak, with the nation careering down a path of generalised deterioration. ‘The underlying thing was that we saw no future in South Africa at all, and still don’t’, commented Wendy. ‘I could think of nothing worse than living in South Africa’. The perceived poor prospects were framed in terms of African governance: ‘It harks back to that old cautionary tale of what happened throughout the rest of Africa’, Werner claimed, ‘and [South Africa] seems to be going the same way. And in my heart of hearts, I really don’t want it to happen, but again, you have to be a realist’. This Afro-pessimism positions white and black within a broader set of dichotomies involving aptitude versus incompetence, with the declining fortunes of South Africa often explicitly linked to the displacement of white people from the national field. ‘It is already a failed state’, Meridee said: ‘I definitely see SA as being already failed, but even more failed ten years from now’. Even Niles, who now collects old Rhodesian stamps to remind him of what he describes as a happy childhood, leaned back into his chair and said with a sigh: ‘Africa’s a sad place’.

Within this context of perceived decline, our informants' sense of precarity was evocatively expressed through claims of genocide. Meridee was not alone in wishing that 'we could declare the whites of South Africa as refugees actually... It would be a shame to allow them to be murdered out'. Werner described the dangers of being white as so acute that people were having flamethrowers and scythes built into their cars to incinerate or eviscerate potential carjackers. 'They will all be killed', Jac, (Meridee's husband) told the first author: 'It is 135 murders on white farms per 100,000. It's the highest in the world. Really it's horrific'. As with the allegorical boiling crayfish, our informants articulated only two possibilities: death or escape. Their sense of displacement exhibits a totalising vision of loss in which there is scant acknowledgement of the continued voluntary inhabitation of South Africa by a vast community of white citizens, and little space for imagining the possibilities of white liminality, or belonging (cf. Gressier, 2015 on strident efforts to belong among white citizens of northwest Botswana).

In sum, the doxic war, the struggle to define what is culturally valourised in the national field, was seen as lost by our informants. Where the ignorance contract and the etiologies of innocence were prophylactic, designed to inoculate the white social imaginary against perceived threats, the dark teleology is palliative, it defends the imaginary, while recognising its defeat. Since apartheid ended, the white nation fantasy was doomed to crumble, because it was such a heavy distortion of the social real in the new South Africa. The sense of precarity stems from the shift in subjective positionality, where the displacement of white people from the centre of the national field was experienced as the dissolution of the field itself. As Pieter saw it: 'our home is ablaze'.

Escaping the Boiling Pot and Finding Home

Our informants turned to emigration as a way to sustain their fantasy of white nationhood by re-investing their cultural capital in a more propitious milieu. Griffiths and Prozesky (2010: 30)

contend that the challenge of migration is to find a new mode of dwelling. Though this 'is true of all human migrations... the search for dwelling is particularly complex and difficult in the case of white South Africans' on account of the distorted nature of the social imaginary upon which their sense of dwelling depends (Griffiths and Prozesky, 2010: 30). For our informants, however, migration has involved less the search for a new mode of dwelling than an environment more amenable to their existing mode; and they have located this agreeable alternative through the fundamental congruence between the national imaginary in Australia, and the one they failed to relinquish. Consequently, Steyn's (2001: 92) claim holds resonance in that 'because of the supranational nature of white racialisation, whites can emigrate to countries where white identity is more supported, where the parameters of the white world view remain more intact'.

Of Australia, Quinn claimed: 'It's a fair society, it's an honest society. Sure, I worry about some aspects of where it is heading, but I think that Australia has a bright future. Advance Australia Fair!' Notwithstanding frequently expressed anxieties about the nation's future, our informants spoke with considerable positivity about their adopted home, with Niles tellingly describing it as 'the promised land'. Our informants' sense of marginalisation in the post-apartheid era produces an experience of Australia as an Arcadian paradise. Somewhat paradoxically, however, their apparently successful migration experiences have reinvigorated senses of precarity that manifest in worry for the future of their adopted home. There are three aspects to this ontological orientation, which we now briefly discuss in turn. First, we describe how national identity comes to be reconstituted through processes of home-making. Second, we argue that the experience of **Australia as benign** underscores the ease with which white cosmopolitan immigrants can participate in the dominant cultural fantasy of white nationhood. Third, we explore how historical anxieties are reproduced in the present through a hyper-vigilance surrounding the protection of national and cultural space. For Hage (2000: 187), the aristocracy regards itself as the 'guardian of the national balance', and we seek to trace the ways in which our informants have assumed this mantle.

As in other migration discourse, the moment of arrival featured prominently in our informants' narratives, reflecting the emergent senses of home both practically and symbolically. Niles shut his eyes and kept repeating that he felt 'a profound sense of relief...we arrived with nothing... but a profound sense of relief'. He went on to recall that 'people were so kind; we had no money, but somebody knew the bank manager, and we chatted away, and he said "you have no money, but good prospects" and gave us a loan to buy the house'. Such trust on sight has, of course, strong echoes of the privileges of whiteness enjoyed in apartheid South Africa. Australia was seen as a calm place, lacking tension, and without major problems. People spoke of being able to 'relax', or 'let their guard down', and 'just be'. Whereas in South Africa they felt they were 'constantly fighting', arriving in Australia provided solace. Frances said that she fell in love with Melbourne on the St Kilda Road tram:

I loved the way the tram drivers were informal and joking. There was a sense of "it's so safe here, we can crack jokes, and we don't have to take life seriously". And that wasn't just a security thing... It was the tolerance for diversity. There wasn't anyone treating anyone else disrespectfully, and I really liked that.

For Frances and others, national home-making is enacted through localising practices, and a tram becomes a microcosm of the nation.

The emergence of Australia as home occurred in concert with a dis-identification with South Africa. Meridee sees herself as being sufficiently interpolated into Australian culture as to jettison her South African identity: 'I can now call Australia home, because when I go back to SA, I don't feel I belong there anymore, because I've accepted much of the Australian culture as part of me. So I don't really belong in SA; I belong here more'. She described herself as 'very proud' of how 'Australianised'

her daughters had become, because ‘we didn’t come to be different from anybody else. We wanted to be the same’. Similarly, Quinn says of going back to South Africa: ‘you see... there’s a mud hut, and this is a spear, and I look at it, and I say “well my family didn’t live like that... so it’s not me”. “Well then”, I think to myself, “well, was I ever even South African?”’

Ahmed (1999) conceptualises migration as a contingent rather than categorical ontological condition. She argues that the uncritical foregrounding of sedentary existence produces theories of migrancy as a taxonomical condition of loss (Ahmed, 1999: 330). As she points out, however, ‘there is no necessary link between forms of travel, migration and movement and the transgression and destabilisation of identity’ (1999: 338). This holds true for our informants, for whom sedentarist culture was not rejected, but reclaimed. Emigration is experienced as a re-spatialisation of a previously displaced identity. As Meridee said of life in Australia: ‘it’s almost like being back in the town I grew up in’. Migration was experienced, therefore, as the re-discovery of home, and the projection of unmoored identity-making practices onto a new national space experienced through a ‘sense of shared symbolic forms’ (Hage, 2000: 40). Where after 1994 many white South Africans became ‘angst-ridden and existentially homeless, for they were now strangers in their own land’ (Griffiths and Prozesky, 2010: 31), Australia emerged as a new land in which to stake claims to national homeliness. The question then becomes: what social processes enabled this re-identification, and how, in a country in which migrants are not infrequently subject to vilification, did this particular migrant group accumulate so much symbolic capital so quickly?

Being White in a White Nation

The sense of relief enjoyed in Australia is to some extent the outcome of the ‘suturing’ of the white social imaginary that was untenable in South Africa with the symbolic order of the dominant Australian social world (see Zizek 1989; Klein 1986: 149). If the boiling lobster and the dark

teleology indicate the chaos of the inner fantasy, then the Arcadian construction of Australia indicates its rehabilitation. In their adopted home, there were three domains of experience that proved to be productive axes for the visceral reconfirmation of their beleaguered fantasy.

First were their encounters with white Australians. Niles recounted how the councillor at his citizenship ceremony said ‘so nice to see people like you becoming citizens of this country’. The ‘flexible cultural capital conversion’ (Lan, 2011: 1669) involves here an instantaneous exchange of shared historical, cultural—and particularly racial—identities for symbolic capital, so that despite having been a citizen for only a matter of seconds, the newly naturalised Niles is given instant confirmation of his national belonging. Rick framed it similarly. One of his first memories of being in Australia was going to the Australian Open tennis tournament, which affirmed his sense of belonging because he had not previously ‘been to a stadium where it’s predominantly white people’. He went on to describe how ‘when you’re walking in the street, you’re now part of the majority, which is a strange and nice feeling’. We can witness here Rick’s rapid assumption of majoritarian status; he instantly recognises himself as occupying the nation’s mainstream.

Second were encounters with ‘multicultural’ Australia, which, in keeping with the construction of a renewed cosmopolitan whiteness, were always deemed positive. As cited above, Werner loved that ‘everyone is included’ in Australia, while Frances enthused over the fact that ‘the cultural diversity in Melbourne is so big’. Anderson and Taylor (2005: 461) describe Australian multiculturalism as ‘the accommodation of majority-white and minority-non-white cultures’. In this rendering, Werner’s insistence that everyone is included is indeed correct, but only within limits. As such, formulations such as Frances’s typology of Melbourne: ‘you have the Vietnamese in Richmond, the Italians in Carlton, the Jews in Caulfield’ function to incarcerate otherness in sanctioned zones of a striated national plane, which remains white in its essence (Hage, 2000: 128). At every juncture, the white

cosmopolitan finds confirmation of their protected cultural space through the acquiescence of a contained Other.

The third axis was the denial of racism. Niles's very reason for emigrating was his desire to raise his children in a place where 'race didn't matter'. Meridee was insistent that in Australia 'nothing is different from one race to the other; actually people aren't really interested in your race'. Yet, this is the same country that has witnessed in recent years the Cronulla riots, the Indian student bashings, Indigenous incarceration rates twelve times that of the rest of the population, and in which a recent study found that 19% of Australians have faced discrimination based on their skin colour (Scanlon Foundation, 2013). When pushed to reflect on the presence of racism in Australia, many suggested that if it does exist, they had not suffered it themselves. Somewhat surprisingly, in this way a question framed in general terms was interpreted as concerning whether *they* had suffered racism. In this view, racism was something that happened to white people, not something perpetrated by them. Consistent with such a perspective, Meridee was convinced that upon hearing her speak Afrikaans, a supermarket teller doubled the cost of her groceries, furtively adding some \$80 to the bill. How this would be possible she was unsure, but she was convinced that it had, although hastened to add that 'it was only the one bad experience'. What emerges from these stories is that whiteness is only experienced when it is felt to be debilitating, while consistent privilege is overlooked.

They're Coming, Again

The memories recounted by our informants—Niles's seamless bank loan, France's jocular tram drivers—are experienced through a lexicon of relief because they signal the reinstatement of the white nation fantasy. However, for all our informants, inherent to the reconstitution of this social imaginary is varying levels of anxiety relating to the perceived tenuousness of its hold on the national field. Colin's portent that 'they are coming' suggests he, not uniquely, occupies an

ontological position of considerable precarity. This is the result of the projection of an historical consciousness of cultural displacement onto the Australian context, and the foreseeing of a mimetic pattern that produces a hyper-vigilance around the policing of national and cultural borders. Such anxieties are readily fuelled by Australia's disproportionate paranoia of boat-borne asylum seekers. Over a decade since the Tampa affair brought refugees into the national spotlight, the Australian government's 2014 Operation Sovereign Borders was the latest in a string of policies that framed asylum seekers as an existential threat to Australian security requiring a military response. Significantly, many of our informants referenced this issue in articulating their concerns for Australia's future. Most were in favour of the latest policy crack down, yet some, such as Colin and Frances, deplored the government's draconian approach. This discourse, in either iteration, powerfully demonstrated the assumption of aristocratic status in the nation. The lead author asked Quinn what he thought Australia could be doing better, and Quinn responded by critiquing what he perceived as lax border protection: 'I'm very negative towards tree huggers', he declared, 'so anyone that's like "oh be kind to the boat people! Save the boat people!" But they are not like us'. Meridee similarly worried that Australia is 'bringing in people who do not, um, treasure our values, you know, agree with you.' As non-nationals, she felt they 'shouldn't have rights in the first place'. Interestingly, it was many of the same people who described white South Africans as refugees, who felt strongly opposed to 'letting in' others officially deemed as such. They did not hold this to be contradictory, though, because of their own perceived cultural acceptability. 'It might be strange saying that [we shouldn't let in refugees] because we've moved to Australia', Quinn commented, 'but we paid our way, we were at the right level to move across'. He later described himself as 'the cream', suggesting 'that's who you want to keep: keep the cream and keep out the rest'.

What was felt to be at stake in these articulations of an imagined threat was the loss of cultural autonomy. Our informants constantly sought to argue that the 'balance' of multiculturalism in Australia was 'perfect' and needed to remain stable. Quinn felt that 'it's working, so it's a good mix

that we have here, and we just mustn't take it for granted. I think that's where bringing in immigrants, it threatens the balance that we're currently enjoying in Australia'. This sense that Australians were naïve, not realising the threat that they were, as Meridee said, 'welcoming into our bosom', was widely held among our informants. Asylum seekers were alarming because they disrupted the fantasy of controlled national objects deferring to the will of the white subject. The metaphor of 'them' wanting to 'push you towards their page' evinces this spectre of impotence. As we have suggested, the Other is allowed passive belonging, but that is a privilege bestowed and carefully regulated by the white managers (cf. Hage, 2000: 55). Meridee described Australian culture as 'something to fight for; it's something to preserve for your children'. The exclusive white claim to management of the nation is dramatised and valourised as the noble defence of a loved national object. As such, the cosmopolitan form of the white nation fantasy allows white people to vigorously defend their aristocratic entitlement, while maintaining the illusion of multiculturalism, constrained as it is by the invigilation of national boundaries.

In the anxiety around asylum seekers, we witness a clustering of narratives of two imagined displacements: one violently completed; the other, almost imperceptibly, beginning. In both, the 'cultural provenance' of the nation emerges as a 'perennial domain of contestation' (Malkki, 1995: 121). This annexation of Australian political discourses involves the reenactment of unresolved, and in some ways unresolvable, cultural insecurities. Asylum seekers and black Africans are homogenised into a monolithic Other encroaching on white space. The refusal of this incursion is seen as a necessary preventative measure if, as Quinn said, 'you want to keep your country, nice and yours'. In this articulation, the nation is not occupied, but possessed, and needs to be protected against imagined agents of destruction. The significance of historical events is, in this instance, not in their historicity, but in their contemporaneity. For once again, 'they are coming', and white South Africans' haunting past forms a 'fearful symmetry' (Malkki, 1995: 142) with a precarious future.

Conclusion

We have argued that our informants inhabit a particular social imaginary that naturalises a hierarchical national order in which white people retain the exclusive right to assume managerial status over the nation. The white nation fantasy is based on the cultural production of white cosmopolitanism, which claims to break from the parochial whiteness of apartheid, even as it seeks to reproduce its fundamental structures of power. This fantasy proved ill-equipped to deal with the realities of the new South Africa, and eventually resulted in our informants' emigration. Melbourne provided a fertile field for the reconstruction of the fantasy, which was marred, however, by the projection of experiences of cultural displacement onto the Australian national space, resulting in the social re-imagination of precarity. Ultimately, this ability of the white social imaginary to shift is not only limited, but also self-destructive, because it obviates the possibility of positive engagement with the increasingly diverse communities found in all corners of the globe.

Our argument points to a central paradox of post-colonial whiteness: that the shift from parochialism to cosmopolitanism is experienced by white subjects as a benevolent and necessary response to a changing world, and yet it fails to move beyond its exclusionary claim to national belonging. In this way, individuals can identify passionately with the notion of a multicultural nation, and experience themselves as empathetic towards the experiences of cultural Others, while reproducing forms of national belonging that ever more subtly privilege whiteness. It appears, then, that whiteness itself remains in the throes of decolonisation, and that the shift from parochialism to cosmopolitanism is a preliminary and transitional phase to a more deeply reformed subject position better suited to these times. As such, our case study highlights the political urgency for new subjectivity configurations in South Africa, Australia and beyond that involve the relativisation of whiteness and the production of new social imaginaries that can reflect rather than resist an ever changing world.

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ⁱ While the designations black and white are problematic and connote an essentialised notion of race, they are constantly utilised by our informants. Even while the race concept has long been discredited within scholarly circles, its tenacity in popular usage renders it difficult to avoid these terms when discussing South African race matters.