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Not all whites are farmers: privilege, the politics of representation, and the urban–rural divide in Zimbabwe

Rory Pilossof and Jacob Boersema

Introduction

The invasions of white-owned farms in Zimbabwe in 2000 captivated the international media and community. The violence, the images of black Africans storming white compounds, and the storyline of white farmers being assaulted by black militants, proved irresistibly newsworthy. In the media, Zimbabwe's white population was represented in a particular way: as victims who struggled against the terrors of the Mugabe regime that was trying to dispossess them of their land (Willems 2005: 94–5). White Africans were portrayed almost as an endangered species that protected all that was good in Zimbabwe. In this romanticized vision, whites were seen as the protectors of nature, the backbone of the agricultural economy, and the guardians of those who work in it.[1] Some white Zimbabweans, writing their memoirs and personal accounts, could be seen as having used this groundswell of international support and sympathy: authors such as Peter Godwin and Alexandra Fuller, for example, became internationally celebrated (Pilossof 2009).

Previously, scholars have questioned the media's framing – and the sheer quantity – of the coverage of these events, particularly in relation to the small number of white farmers in Zimbabwe and the limited scope of the violence (Chari 2013; Willems 2013).[2] In this article, we aim to explore this

Rory Pilossof is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Economics at the University of the Free State. He is currently working on two projects: the first is looking at imagined futures in colonial and postcolonial Southern Africa, while the second explores changing labour dynamics and shifts in occupational structures in Southern Africa. Email: rorypilossof@gmail.com

Jacob Boersema is a Lecturer in Sociology at Columbia University and a Faculty Fellow at the Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale University. He is currently completing his first book, *Unlearning Racism*, an ethnographic study of the white Afrikaans-speaking minority in post-apartheid South Africa. Email: jacobboersema@yahoo.com

[1]We do not want to deny or diminish the severity of the violence that happened, but do want to place it within a broader context. Violence and intimidation were integral parts of the land invasions (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO and the Justice for Agriculture Trust 2007). Since the land invasions began, over ten farmers have been killed on their farms, hundreds have been physically assaulted, and just about all, except for a few hundred who remain on their farms now, have been evicted from their homes and land.

[2]To illustrate this, we carried out a search using Google on 22 March 2008 and compared the findings of 'farm workers' and 'Zimbabwe', 'land reform' and 'Zimbabwe', and 'white farmers' and 'Zimbabwe'. Farm workers received 5,700 hits, land reform 21,000, and white farmers over 827,000. These fairly novel attempts at quantification have a number of complicated flaws, but these simple findings illustrate that white farmers have received an embarrassing avalanche of coverage and attention.

discrepancy further by looking at both continuities and differences between urban and rural whites in Zimbabwe. We explore the divisions between white farmers and urbanites, arguing against the simplistic misrepresentation of white power and privilege in Zimbabwe as exclusively tied to the ownership of land. Correcting such a biased and limited portrayal, this article presents a broader historical analysis of whiteness in Zimbabwe. The way in which this history is narrated has at its heart the idea of a white urban–rural divide: an idea that is underpinned both by different experiences of these groups and by the politics of representation.

The distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' whites is an important but problematic one. It is not always easily drawn, and we do not treat them here as simplistically distinct categories. In part, the distinction is rooted in unique experiences. Life in the countryside *was* very different to that in the city, and these social worlds also changed in the transition from settler rule to independence. Complicating matters further, urban and rural whites represented themselves and each other in specific ways, which makes these categories consequential for the politics of whiteness. The aim is to replace the limited and biased portrayal of whiteness in Zimbabwe with a dynamic picture of the historical interplay between urban and rural white communities in the country. Starting in 1960, we analyse the relations between urban and rural whites, the actual differences in experiences, and the role of representation in their relationship.

What this article adds to the literature on whiteness in Africa is that it shows *how* the visibility of whiteness matters for its politics. Whiteness has always been visible and marked in Africa. As Steyn has argued in the context of South Africa, this is what makes whiteness in Africa distinct from its counterpart in the West (Steyn 2007). The case of Zimbabwe illustrates how the politics of whiteness and representation are intimately connected. Whose power or privilege in the white community is visible or invisible and whose whiteness is represented as legitimate or illegitimate are central to the continuity and defence of whiteness. In Zimbabwe and Africa, and potentially beyond, the politics of representation is thus an essential part of the politics of whiteness and the continuous existence and defence of whiteness.

This article consists of six sections. We start with a short discussion of the whiteness literature and follow that with a methodological segment. In the third section we cover the problem of the urban–rural divide in Zimbabwe, and in the fourth we analyse how political shifts over time made it opportune for the different white communities either to claim solidarity or to represent each other in negative ways. We analyse the real differences of the social and racial worlds of urban and rural whites and the politics of representation between these two groups, and show how, in combination, these have shaped the contentious political history of urban–rural relationships in the last forty years. In the fifth part of the article, we demonstrate how the land invasions in the 2000s opened up a divide between urban and rural whites. In the sixth and final part, we analyse urban white privilege and present a critical analysis of it, specifically of how urban whites themselves understand it. We find that urban whites readily admit their white privilege and demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of it, but nevertheless vigorously defend it.

Whiteness in Zimbabwe

Until recently, the white population has been largely absent from studies of post-colonial Zimbabwe. This changed after the farm invasions of 2000. Authors such as David McDermott Hughes (2010) and Josephine Fisher (2010) adopted the concept of whiteness and showed how its history is intertwined with exploitation and domination. They also skilfully applied it to counter clichéd and colonial images of whites in the Western media and to explore the white experience more fully. For instance, McDermott Hughes demonstrates how Zimbabwean whiteness developed in relation to landscape rather than people. Deconstructing romanticized visions of white rural lifestyles, he shows how whites imagined the Zimbabwean countryside as a particular white landscape that symbolized white fantasy, violence and supremacy.

These academics, however, essentialize the white experience in Zimbabwe as rural. Whereas they expertly rectify mystified notions about the history of white domination, their continued emphasis on white farmers reinforces stereotypes already present in news stories. The continued focus on rural whites reinforces the impression that whiteness in Zimbabwe is primarily centred on land ownership, labour relations, and identities tied to the rural idyll. Moreover, they suggest a cohesion of the community that, as this article elaborates, has waxed and waned and is often completely absent (Hammar 2012; Pilossof 2014). We therefore conceptualize whiteness as 'a configuration of power, privilege and identity consisting of white racialized ideologies and practices, with material and social ramifications', as noted by van Zyl-Hermann and Boersema in the Introduction to this part issue. This definition emphasizes that whiteness is not the same as 'being white' or as 'white supremacy' but rather always a specific configuration of its three components: power, privilege and identity. Whiteness can never be a single thing: at various moments in Zimbabwe's history, the configuration of whiteness differed for different communities. Furthermore, whiteness as a concept cannot simply be transposed across geographical contexts. We challenge in particular the idea, dominant in studies in the United States, that whiteness is often unmarked or invisible (Dyer 1997). Whiteness scholars have emphasized how privilege is often an invisible force – an advantage for whites that is rarely recognized and addressed. By contrast, whiteness in Africa is often hypervisible, and this has specific implications for its study and effects. Following Steyn, who made a similar argument in relation to South Africa (Steyn 2007), we demonstrate that whiteness is highly visible in African countries such as Zimbabwe. But scholars have to contend with *how* whiteness is marked and displayed, and what the implications are of the representation of whiteness. Steyn points out the way in which white South Africans have benefited from their privileges and at the same time have alternately obscured, denied and defended them (Steyn 2004). In this article we follow a similar argument in the case of Zimbabwe. While whiteness is symbolized through the stereotype of the white farmer, this has implications for the whiteness of his or her urban counterparts, who are very aware of their privileges but still defend them.

The conceptual vagueness of whiteness in the literature on whites in Zimbabwe has, then, left us with a limited and partial picture of the community. A definition of whiteness that links power, privilege and identity to the way in which these are

represented can assist us in tracing how the configuration between these three has changed over time in Zimbabwe, particularly in relation to the urban–rural divide.

Methodology and sources

This article is based on four years of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with a range of whites in Zimbabwe. From 2010 to 2013, one of the authors undertook ethnographic research with white Zimbabweans. This research included interviews with farmers, ex-farmers and white urbanites in and around Harare, mainly focused on the farming experience since 2000. It was from this study that questions about the differences and divisions between urbanites and farmers emerged. To augment this body of data, and to get a better perspective on urban forms of privilege and power, the same author did follow-up interviews with twenty urban whites in Harare in 2014 and 2015. He also looked at the periodical called *The Farmer* to explore how farmers have presented relations between themselves and other whites. This magazine, produced by the main farming union, the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU), was the most widely read and distributed farming periodical in Zimbabwe. It was published weekly from the 1950s until 2002, and is a rich and fascinating source, if not without complication.[3] Ideally, *The Farmer* magazine should be read alongside publications produced by the white urban constituency after independence in 1980. However, post-independence, practically no such publications existed, due to political pressures and the deliberate actions of white urban communities withdrawing from politics and public forms of engagement. *The Farmer* is one of the few sources to remain that directly served the white farming – or any – community across the country. Other publications for and by whites, such as *Property and Finance* and *Illustrated Life Rhodesia*, disappeared just before independence, while others broadened their scope to become more multiracial. The aim in using these various sources is to try to weave together various white voices to identify differences, convergences and frictions. It is impossible to understand the differences and continuities between what may be termed 'urban' and 'rural' voices without looking at both. Thus, they are presented in conversation with each other to get a better sense of the complicated historical relationship between the representation and identity construction of these two constituencies.

Problematizing the urban–rural divide

Despite the volume of research on white farmers, they were always a small minority in Zimbabwe. They were never more than 10 per cent of the white population, in a setting where whites were never more than 5 per cent of the total population. Their numbers dwindled dramatically: there were almost 300,000 whites in

[3]Pilossof has used this magazine for different purposes elsewhere, discussing how issues of violence have been portrayed in the magazine (Pilossof 2012: 117–48), and using the magazine as a historical source in the journal *Media History* (Pilossof 2013). It is a complicated but valuable source, produced by the CFU, mostly for the white farming fraternity.

Zimbabwe in 1975, 120,000 in 1999, and only about 30,000 in 2010. Individual white commercial farmers numbered only 5,000 in 1975, 4,500 in 1999, and fewer than 200 in 2010 (Selby 2006: 59; Hammer 2010). In 2000, the total population of Zimbabwe was about 11 to 12 million (Central Statistics Office 2003: 5). The vast majority of the white population were not farmers but those who resided in urban areas – mostly Harare and Bulawayo, the two main cities.

As Caute has commented: 'Most white Rhodesians were not pioneering farmers hacking down the bush and bringing the barren, arid veld to life. They were townsmen before they left Britain or South Africa and townsmen they remained after their arrival in Rhodesia' (Caute 1983: 88–9). As this suggests, it is inaccurate to draw too clear a distinction between 'urbanite' and 'farmer' because, in actuality, the two categories overlap in various ways. Many urban whites had friends and family who were farmers, or owned land outside the urban setting, and visited and stayed in these locations. Many farmers had houses in cities, and tended to retire and/or send their children to school there. Therefore, the two communities are and were interwoven to some degree. Further cross-cutting and blurring whatever urban–rural divide may have existed, class, religion and political outlook laid down other fault lines in white communities. Many whites, both urban and rural, were (or increasingly became) wealthy and had a high standard of living, which made them very mobile, regionally and internationally. To depict white farmers, as some media did, as 'isolated' and 'introverted' was incorrect, nor were white urban Zimbabweans necessarily 'cosmopolitan' or 'worldly'. Most had a range of experiences that mitigated simplistic representations.

The divide between urbanites and farmers, although it had real valence, as the rest of this article will demonstrate, is thus not static or unchanging. Rather, these categories are cultural constructs that have been created historically and shaped by political events. This point has been widely accepted in the study of black labour migrants in Southern and Central Africa (Mormont 1990: 41), who were neither distinctly 'urban' nor 'rural' (Andersson 2001: 89–93). The dichotomy, in the case of labour migration, has been imbued with an array of ideological elements – with urban centres portrayed as symbols of human progress, whereas rural areas are seen as isolated backwaters providing materials and manpower, or alternatively with towns seen as sites of decay and perversion while rural scenes are depicted as pristine utopias (Andersson *et al*. 2009: 2; Ferguson 1999: 38–81). The point has been less clearly made in the region, however, for the divide between urban and rural whites. This divide, in the case of Zimbabwe, is similarly constructed and various moral significances have been similarly attributed to it. But this does not mean that it is completely unreal or lacking in consequence.

Critically employing the idea of the urban–rural divide, we argue that it should be read as both real and rhetorical, and that its implications ought to be examined and evaluated. The distinction between white urbanites and farmers has a long history, which is related to the colonial history of Zimbabwe, events during the liberation war, *Gukurahundi*, the land reforms in the 1990s, and the shocking nature of the land occupations post-2000. We start our historical analysis during the times of settler rule in 1960, and discuss the urban and rural social worlds, their economic positions, and their symbolic identification, all until 2000, when the land invasions happened.

From cohesion to division: urban-dwellers and farmers, *c.*1960–2000

There have been significant differences in the social and racial worlds of urban and rural whites. In the colonial period, in particular, they lived in separate social worlds. The farm itself became the place for activities such as hunting, fishing and horse riding. Farming families depended on the farm for entertainment. Beyond that, social life often revolved around the local whites-only country club. Members of farming communities were isolated by large distances so gatherings were often organized around events such as school functions, recreational activities, or regional agricultural shows and the like. At the same time, farmers lived in close proximity to black servants and workers, who mostly lived on the farms in compounds. Domestic workers, often working long days and weekends, would also be in the family home. Farming memoirs note how the farmstead served as a place where there was constant visitation from workers who needed assistance with health issues, financial worries, family concerns and so on (Buckle 2002; Beattie 2008).

For urbanites, the geographical realities allowed more interaction within the white community, but political and economic forces separated it from the black ones. Urban settings offered closer social contact between whites, but put up barriers and imposed and facilitated racial segregation. Whites lived in exclusive suburbs in urban areas, with good housing, gardens and social amenities. Cities also offered them greater variety in activities and less constraint in social norms than was possible on the farms (Godwin and Hancock 1996). Africans were largely confined to the rural areas, and those who did come to work in urban areas were made to adopt a migrant lifestyle and to live in hostels or domestic quarters while in town. Most lived in hostels that were meant to be exclusively male, while women and children were meant to remain in the rural areas. Increasing urbanization after 1950 resulted in the growth of large settlements for blacks adjacent to cities, and as the city grew these were often officially incorporated into the urban areas (Muronda 2008: 37–9). Settlements were euphemistically titled 'high density' (black) and suburbs were called 'low density' (white).

After the Second World War, white Rhodesian settlers were keenly aware of the need to speak with one voice, in particular when it came to the colonial metropolis in London. 'Whatever objections an individual might have [had] toward the commonly declared interests of the settler population,' wrote Kennedy, 'it was [felt] essential that they not be allowed to jeopardize the outward display of white solidarity' (1987: 181). White Rhodesians deemed unity vital for presenting a front to the British in negotiations about the status of the colony. As independence was claimed across the African continent, the white settler community hoped to retain political power in an independent Rhodesia.

During the period of political rebellion fostered by Ian Smith under the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) and the liberation war (1965–79), the state continued trying to promote unity – and display harmony – in the white community, and to have members of that community act as one in their defiance in the face of local and international pressures (Godwin and Hancock 1996: 15). The white community wanted to demonstrate that it could run the country independently of Britain, and could work with local African populations to allow a slow and gradual evolution of political integration that would eventually see majority rule come to Rhodesia. However, this could only happen, many white Zimbabweans argued, after a long and sustained period of white control.

Various whites in Zimbabwe believed that they could follow the South African example and have an autonomous white-run state, or at least be conferred with dominion status like that seen in Canada and Australia (White 2015).

White political power provided financial security for the white population. The government effectively set a 'floor' for the living standard of whites through which they could not easily drop. Wages were high for whites, and their quality of life was much better than that of blacks. Some whites were extremely wealthy, some relatively poor, but the vast majority could afford a standard of life on a par with or above that of whites in Europe (Godwin and Hancock 1996). Despite the need to present a united white political front and economic policies that benefited the whole white community, internal divisions between urban and rural whites lay just beneath the surface and gradually became more evident. Both urban and rural whites had the habit of representing each other in a negative way. During the 1960s and 1970s, farmers often viewed 'Salisbury as "Bamba Zonke" (take all), an unhealthy bloodsucker [city] populated by inferior types' (*ibid.*: 21). 'Take all' referred to the perceived manner in which urban whites were doing little for the country while living comfortably off the labours of the farmers. Farmers complained that urban whites were 'townies' – a derogatory term – and did not understand what life was like for farmers, particularly during the liberation war (Grundy and Miller 1979; Barker 2007).[4] Meanwhile, urban whites saw farmers as 'backward' and 'parochial'. Despite massive amounts of state support for farmers in the form of farming subsidies, price controls and tax incentives, urban whites felt that farmers were 'always whining' about issues such as labour, commodity prices and security, particularly during tough economic times (Clements and Harben 1962: 98; Godwin and Hancock 1996: 21).

Following independence in 1980, the illusion of a cohesive white community slowly unravelled. Many whites left Zimbabwe, not wanting to live under a black government. In total, over two-thirds of whites left, and, unlike their counterparts in Kenya, almost all went to South Africa rather than to the United Kingdom (Caute 1983; Godwin and Hancock 1996). This changed the socio-economic demographic of the white community. Those whites who stayed were on average wealthier than the ones who left. The total number of white farmers fell by only 33 per cent in the first decade after independence and the number of white urban business and factory owners fell even less (Selby 2006: 118). Whites with valuable assets, properties and investments found reasons to stay. They were also reassured by Robert Mugabe's early reconciliatory rhetoric and actions during the 1980s, which seemed to guarantee their safety and economic fortunes.

Whites who stayed felt a need to legitimatize their allegiance to the newly independent country, but urban and rural whites chose to portray this allegiance in different ways. Farmers started to represent themselves as vital to the national economy and committed to the new national project (Pilossof 2012). However, they also turned away from society and towards nature or 'the bush' as an expression of their 'Africanness' (Hughes 2010; Chennells 2005).[5] Urban whites largely

[4]See also 'They need help', *The Farmer*, 10 March 1986, p. 10; 'A day in the life of a Matabeleland rancher', *The Farmer*, 3 September 1987, pp. 12–13.

[5]'The bush' was still very important to white urbanites, often as a place to visit and spend holidays, with places such as Mana Pools, Kariba and Nyanga very popular destinations, and activities such as fishing and hunting often participated in.

withdrew from active politics and public engagement (Muzondidya 2009). They were confronted with the challenge of racially integrating, socially and economically, whereas they had lived the most segregated lives during settler rule. Neighbourhoods, schools, and sport and cultural venues desegregated and became sites for racial mixing. Most whites continued to live in the 'low-density' areas, but over time a small but growing new black elite joined them in these neighbourhoods. This had an economic effect: after independence, new interracial economic alliances and businesses were formed. As a consequence, a new urban black elite in cities rose alongside the existing urban white elite, whose sources of wealth were centred on business, finance and other forms of trade (Weiss 1994: 203).

Initially, urban whites were concerned about the impact of integration and the subsequent effect it would have on the quality of services such as schools. However, in our interviews, they remembered their school years as a time of harmony and successful integration. Karl, for instance, who is in his mid-thirties, was born in Zimbabwe to an Australian father and Zimbabwean mother, and studied in Australia and the UK before returning home to work for an international NGO. He went to a government high school and said that he never felt tension between white and black children there: 'The schools I went to were well integrated, as was my parents' social circle.' To Karl, school integration mimicked the social integration happening among adult white urbanites. In those days, he recalls, urban whites identified with the nation and this was generally accepted. 'Acceptance as a Zimbabwean always felt like it was a given.' Sue also remembered how being an urban white started to mean having mixed social circles, and participating and collaborating with black Zimbabweans through culture, the arts and the theatre.[6] She went to a racially mixed government school for primary education and said that she really enjoyed her school years. She felt 'no racial tensions' and 'only after the land invasions in 2000' did she become aware of racial issues.

Internationally, Zimbabwe came to be known as a postcolonial success in terms of racial integration (Muzondidya 2010). This image was primarily based on the representation of the new multiracial cities in the country. Urban whites started to identify themselves as 'new multicultural Zimbabweans', although at the same time many disengaged politically (Alexander 2007: 184). By contrast, political violence in the countryside confronted white farmers with a different reality, reinforcing the urban–rural divide. In Matabeleland and the Midlands, farmers became caught up in the violence of *Gukurahundi* from the early 1980s. Over fifty farmers were killed between 1980 and 1987. Nonetheless, the majority of farmers continued to do very well economically, a fact that increasingly stood out. By the early 1990s, Zimbabwe's economy had begun to face serious challenges. The country was forced to adopt an economic and structural adjustment programme (ESAP), an effort that was introduced – as it was across the continent – to resolve the economic woes caused by the state's excessive borrowing and a balance-of-payments crisis. A key tenet of ESAP was market liberalization. The plan encouraged capital flows out of urban areas into rural ones, for both farming and tourist ventures. It

[6]Sue, email correspondence, 28 January 2014.

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allowed white farmers access to hitherto restricted yet lucrative export markets (Muzondidya 2009: 192–3).[7] Farmers became more and more associated with white power and privilege, as there never was a wealthy landowning black class alongside white farmers to share their success.

Economically, the urban elite and the white farmers did well, but there was also a considerable proportion of the urban white community who felt that their financial security was eroding (Godwin and Hancock 1996). In particular, salaried whites battled with inflation and started to resent the success of white businessmen and, even more so, white farmers (Weiss 1994). In the early 1990s, these white urbanites started to openly accuse farmers of racism, casting them as the 'real' white racists. For their part, white farmers were aware of their problematic image. In 1991, *The Farmer* printed an article titled 'How others see us', where the 'others' referred to urban whites.[8] The article catalogued urban whites' sentiments about farmers. Farmers were depicted as being 'arrogant', 'simple', 'racially prejudiced' and 'the country's worst employers', even though they were also appreciated for growing food and bringing in valuable foreign currency. In return, farmers accused urban whites of being oblivious to the threat confronting farmers and how the realities of living in the rural areas had changed for the worse (Selby 2006: 160–77). Whereas ESAP had strongly benefited farmers, the passing of the 1992 Land Acquisition Act allowed the government to confiscate land for land reform without compensation. The government and its press began portraying white farmers as 'racist' and 'unZimbabwean' (*ibid*.: 122). The law focused public attention on the privilege of whites, but framed it in a specific way: as solely connected to land ownership. Many farmers were outraged by this move and declared that this policy would spell financial ruin for the country. They protested against the idea that they were the embodiment of white privilege and the main beneficiaries of the colonial system. In publications and press releases, they argued that over 80 per cent of white farmers had bought their land after independence, an argument that attempted to disconnect their present wealth from the historical injustices of settler rule (Pilossof 2016). However, during the 1990s, as economic problems in Zimbabwe mounted, farmers became synonymous with white privilege.

The urban–rural divide and the land invasions of 2000

The controversial and chaotic land invasions that started in 2000 put white farmers under direct assault from the government and its forces. Mugabe accused whites of controlling the land but also of being key supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Mugabe urged his party

[7]There were three key areas where white farmers decisively developed exports: horticulture, cut flower production, and wildlife-oriented enterprises. Incentives, such as favourable tax policies, were created to encourage exports, which again largely assisted farmers.

[8]'How others see us … A few surprises!', *The Farmer*, 19/26 December 1991, pp. 10–13. Up to this point, no other article in *The Farmer* after independence had sought to elicit the opinion of wider society about white farmers. Prompted by discussions at CFU council meetings, which raised concerns about the image of large-scale commercial farmers, *The Farmer* decided to conduct an informal survey in Harare.

to 'strike fear into the heart of the white man', and blamed the whites for the economic and political troubles facing the country (Selby 2006: 280). The scale of this assault and the violence associated with it caused widespread panic within the white community across the country (*ibid*.). Amid such a direct threat to their existence, farming representatives preached a message of unity and togetherness.[9] Farmers called for the white community to 'stand together' and 'be strong' in the face of this new challenge.[10] A number of letters from white urbanites were also published in *The Farmer* that expressed sympathy and support for the plight of the farmers:

> I cannot say that I know what the farmers must be going through, I only know that when and if Mugabe succeeds in stealing the farms he will then start on other businesses. That scares the hell out of me. Do not give up. You have plenty of support from whites and blacks in the cities … we know who feeds us.[11]

The land invasions created renewed feelings of shared white solidarity – or so the farmers initially felt. Farmers claimed that they experienced a warm and supportive reception from urban whites when they moved to the city. One farming couple who sought refuge in Harare during trouble on their farm wrote to *The Farmer* saying: 'Sir, may I bring to the attention of your readers the overwhelming support and encouragement farmers have received from the urban [white] community.'[12] Another farmer noted that 'the political climate has changed forever. Farmers are no longer universally seen as a selfish elite, but as victims of a murderous regime. We should be proud of our contribution to the economy and the upliftment of its people.'[13] The editor of *The Farmer* commented that people in town, black and white, were, 'perhaps for the first time ever … sympathetic toward the nation's farmers'.[14] Most farmers who left their farms moved into urban areas in Zimbabwe. Selby noted that of the 3,500 farmers evicted by 2005, approximately 2,000 were in Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare (2006: 319).[15]

The response of the urban white community was, however, more complex than this farmer-based perception suggests, as our interviews with urban whites demonstrate. Although the threat and violence led to some initial expressions of racial solidarity, as is evident from letters in *The Farmer*, many urban whites in our interviews offered a strong critique of the role of white farmers in the violence. Also, the

[9]B. Latham, leaders in *The Farmer*, 16 March 2000, p. 1 and 23 March 2000, p. 3; B. Latham, 'Who's who', *The Farmer*, 6 April 2000, p. 5.

[10]M. Malzer, 'We need unity not criticism', *The Farmer*, 30 October 2001, p. 5; C. Coleman and B. Coleman, 'Be prepared for anything', *The Farmer*, 25 September 2001, p. 5.

[11]S. Cocco, 'Land question', *The Farmer*, 16 March 2000, p. 13.

[12]B. Brown and B. Brown, 'In support of the farmers', *The Farmer*, 30 May 2000, p. 4.

[13]Dziso ne Nzewe, 'Land hunger, a product of unemployment', *The Farmer*, 11 July 2000, p. 3.

[14]B. Latham, leader in *The Farmer*, 16 March 2000, p. 1.

[15]Some have pointed to the large exodus of whites from Zimbabwe after 2000 as proof of a wider attack on this group (Hammer 2010). This is problematic, because, while many whites did leave, most did so for economic and stability reasons rather than through direct targeting and forced relocation. Many of those who left still maintain connections to friends and families and visit during holidays, when there is a noticeable influx of white people (sometimes referred to as 'Christmas whites' by those who have remained). Heard by author in conversation, Harare, December 2013.

violence never reached the city. Although war veterans initially targeted some white-owned businesses in the early 2000s, these actions were quickly stopped. The white urban populations were not subjected to the same treatment as farmers, their homes were not invaded, and there was no state-sponsored drive to evict and exile them. Urban whites blamed farmers for bringing the violence upon themselves, and dragging urban whites with them into the conflict. In a perspective that is radically different from that in the international media at the time, urban whites accused farmers of having failed to adjust to the new Zimbabwe and holding on to their white privilege and colonial attitudes.

In our interviews, urban whites argued that they had worked hard to become a different kind of white community – less predicated on colonial whiteness, more adapted to the period of independence, more multicultural. For two decades now, they had identified with an image of racial harmony and said they were comfortable with the new realities of shared amenities and public spaces. They felt that the farmers were undoing their efforts. Patrick, who is in his mid-thirties, grew up in Harare and had several uncles who were farmers, recalled:

> Town whites tended to be less sympathetic [towards evicted farmers] … with comments like 'Couldn't you see this was going to happen' or 'You guys made the wrong move politically [by supporting opposition parties] so what would you expect the government to do?' I think many thought the farmers had it coming, others thought the farmers deserved it, and I think still others thought that farmers were making life difficult politically and professionally for urban whites. I know some urban whites said farmers whinged a lot.[16]

Indeed, we found little evidence in our interviews of sympathy for the plight of the farmers. Urban whites argued that farmers – given how they had retained their power, settler identity and colonial attitudes – had called the attacks upon themselves. Derrick, an urban Zimbabwean of South African extraction and long-time human rights campaigner, felt that the suffering of white farmers was overplayed, particularly internationally. He argued that the farmers used their white privilege to mobilize international sympathy, while at the same time bringing the whole white community into disrepute for drawing attention to whites and (inadvertently) to their continued privileged position in the country. He also contended that farmers were not the only ones put under pressure in the years following 2000. Civil servants, opposition supporters, unemployed workers, the urban lower class and evicted farm workers also faced hardships.

White farmers certainly suffered, many urban whites admitted, but their wealth also assured them relative comfort after their evictions. Urban whites claimed that many farmers maintained a comfortable lifestyle due to the wealth they had accrued as farmers. Ben, a middle-aged lawyer who grew up in Harare and started working for farming advocacy groups in 2007, noted that farmers contended that they were earning more money in town, doing things such as importing fuel, than they ever did on the farm and that 'they should have moved into town ages ago'.[17]

[16]Patrick, email correspondence, 12 September 2013.
[17]Interview with Ben, Harare, 20 January 2014.

Urban privilege

White farmers had become symbols of privilege. But the attacks on farmers allowed white urbanites to escape scrutiny and to avoid being represented in public debates, despite being no less privileged than these farmers overall. In the final section of this article, we therefore analyse in detail how white urbanites account for their power and privilege – in other words, how they define and defend their whiteness. From previous research, we know that white farmers, rather like Western whites overall, defend their privilege through denial (Pilossof 2012). For example, farmers argued that they were actually not that wealthy and that their success had come from their own hard work. Sacrifice and commitment, they said, made them succeed in turning empty, derelict land into fertile farms, and this work had benefited the entire country, rather than just themselves, in terms of food production and foreign currency earnings. Their rhetoric of privilege, in this sense, was very similar to that of white farmers in South Africa (Bernstein 2013). We found that urban whites differ from farmers in the way they defend and rationalize their privilege; they are more aware of it and less in denial. Nevertheless, they put up a vigorous defence.

The majority of urban whites today acknowledge their race-based privilege. However, our interviewees identified this awareness about their privilege as a recent development, born out of the dramatic post-2000 events in the country. In the past, white Zimbabweans were rarely confronted with their privileged status at home. During the 1980s and 1990s, while the economy was seemingly functioning well, there was little racial and social tension, and those of privileged racial status were able to enjoy their standing and sense of entitlement with little embarrassment or concern. Tony, for example, is aware that he was given better treatment during the 1980s and 1990s merely because he is white. This was made particularly apparent to him during a trip to Tanzania in the early 1990s. He recalled:

> I remember being shocked when I [went to Tanzania]. I actually got treated so ordinary in Tanzania. Like I was saying 'Excuse me,' like I am white, at least say hello to me more when I am in the queue, or say, 'Yes sir, can I help you?' In fact, whites were treated better by blacks for many years in Zimbabwe.

Tony was always treated as if he were special for being white and deserving of white privileges, but in Tanzania whiteness was simply less revered than it was in Zimbabwe. His lack of awareness speaks to the success of urban whites' identification in the 1980s as 'multicultural Zimbabweans', an identity that helped camouflage their white privilege. In contrast to South Africa, majority rule thus did not immediately bring about racial awareness and the exposure of white privilege.

However, Tony argues that things changed after 2000 in Zimbabwe. The change in economic fortunes of the country and the shift in the politics of race focused attention on the economic power and privilege of whites. Mugabe's campaign against the farmers in particular stigmatized whites as a privileged, land-owning group. Tony interestingly presents this development as a 'good thing', because 'some of the beauty' was 'that you were no longer special', even though, he

says, it was all 'a bit hard to get used to'.[18] How was Tony able to see this as a positive development? One reason is that urban whites were not attacked in the same way that the white farmers were. But another reason is that their privilege continues to be unchallenged. Urban whites like Tony have become more aware, but this does not mean that they feel their privileges are being directly eroded.

Mugabe's campaign specifically targeted white farmers for their privileges, but it made all whites, including urban whites, aware of these in a way that they had not been previously. Today, urban whites acknowledge this privilege, for mainly political reasons. First of all, they admit that they have an advantage in distancing themselves from white farmers, most of whom still deny their privilege. Urban whites want to demonstrate that they are a different kind of white, that they are aware, and that they understand black grievances. Politically, then, their acknowledgement of privilege is about proving their commitment to post-white supremacy Africa. Tony's acknowledgement – a sigh, almost – that it is 'a bit hard to get used to' has a whiff of nostalgia for the old white supremacy days. Thus, the acknowledgement of privilege and urban whites' awareness does not mean that urban whites like Tony have fully embraced this awareness – just that it is politically opportune to be aware of it. Urban whites feel politically vulnerable and therefore experience pressure to perform their recognition of white privilege, and possibly its rejection. They present a different white identity, but how permanently they will be able to sustain this is hard to say.

Political changes made urban whites aware of their race-based privileges, but also gave them the sense of having lost the power to impose their will and assert their norms. Being white in social situations in the city is no longer always an advantage, and whites struggle to adapt to their changing position and to navigate their lower social status and position. Julie, an elderly white woman of Irish descent who moved to Rhodesia in the 1960s, similarly demonstrated this urban white effort to present a changed white subjectivity by explicitly identifying and rejecting white privilege. Specifically, she was mindful of being perceived as a 'white madam' – a woman of privilege who deserves to be treated with special regard. In the past, she explained in an interview, she would comfortably complain about poor or tardy service but today she feels 'reluctant to complain about things, because you are white, because you feel like it will be labelled as a racial thing'. She notes that the respect that used to be bestowed on her by blacks waned after 2000.[19] Like Tony, Julie senses a change in attitude among black Zimbabweans toward whites; whiteness has become visible and marked while simultaneously its status has diminished. She feels scrutinized and no longer entitled to make demands, afraid that this would be interpreted as imposing white privilege.

Urban whites demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the role of white privilege through their life course and in social interactions. For example, Karl, the international NGO officer already quoted above, told us:

> Yes, I have to acknowledge that I have probably been afforded access to a wider range of opportunities, been less restricted, judged differently or less harshly than I might have been if I was another race … In many small, but not insignificant, ways, I have probably

[18]Interview with Tony, Harare, 16 March 2014.
[19]Interview with Julie and Tom, Harare, 2 June 2014.

> been privileged by being white. Though, I have to say that any privilege that resulted from my race was not something that was ever expected or sought out.[20]

Karl acknowledges his white privilege and is very specific about its various layers and how it plays a role in his life: from educational and economic opportunities to social interactions. Like other urban whites, he demonstrates an understanding of how white privilege has historically benefited white Zimbabweans in society in various societal spheres. However, he argues that because he never expected or asked for racial privilege – but nevertheless accepted it – he should be absolved of any responsibility for the benefits he may have received.

Moreover, awareness and acknowledgement of white privilege – even if connected to the legacy of white supremacy – do not mean that whites do not try to legitimize it. Some urban whites, following old colonial and racist tropes, continue to argue that subservience is a 'natural attitude' for blacks. In their thinking, years of white supremacy and domination have left wealth in white hands but also inscribed a subservient attitude in the black mind. Frances is an elderly woman of British descent who was born on a farm but moved to Salisbury (Harare) for schooling and has lived there since. She felt that:

> because of ninety-plus years of white domination, black people were almost naturally subservient, [the] madam-boss syndrome. This, sadly, has almost been inbred in some communities and, yes, I do think that being white has privileged me. Especially now as an elderly white I am so often very humbled at the respect and courtesy shown me.[21]

Frances acknowledges that being white conferred a form of undeserved respect and connects this to the history of white domination in Zimbabwe. However, she does not problematize her privilege. Rather than questioning her place and position in society, she is naturalizing her privilege to manage her white guilt. The lay psychological affliction of the 'madam-boss syndrome' is projected on subservient black Zimbabweans to legitimize her needs. Frances also argues that white farmers in particular are comfortable with this black subservience and almost expect such an attitude. White privilege is thus also projected onto the farmers, leaving her own urban privilege further unquestioned and unproblematized.

Some interviewees argued that privilege is no longer limited to whites. It is as though they are claiming that, if privilege is shared between elites, it is less of a problem. They describe a shift from privilege defined by race to privilege defined by class. Sue is a woman in her mid-thirties who was born and grew up in Harare. She went to Australia for her university education but returned to Zimbabwe and spent many years working for a large arts festival. She says:

> I believe the lines are much more about income and social standing. I do, however, acknowledge that racism exists and therefore certain opportunities are only afforded to other whites, but feel that this is not unique to whites. Having lost my citizenship and with the current indigenization policies, I certainly do not feel that being white in Zimbabwe brings with it any privilege.[22]

[20]Karl, email correspondence, 12 February 2014.
[21]Frances, email correspondence, 4 March 2014.
[22]Sue, email correspondence, 28 January 2014.

Sue is bitter about her falling status in Zimbabwe after 2000, which caused her to lose her citizenship due to changes in the Citizenship Act. These changes stated that, even if you were born in Zimbabwe, if one of your parents was born outside the country you were no longer a citizen and had to reapply. Urban whites such as Sue describe their privileges as eroding and connect this to the rise of a new black elite that has wealth and privilege. Sue presents herself as a victim who has lost her status due to indigenization policies. The black political elite's wealth is depicted as the new symbol of privilege and power. She describes the state's nepotism, patronage and corruption as the main problems. In this white, post-settler discourse, the new ruling elite is blamed for the ills befalling the nation, rather than the historical injustices of white supremacy that lie beneath the surface.

Urban white privilege in Zimbabwe has remained invisible throughout much of recent history because white Zimbabweans are imagined to be farmers and are framed as such both in the media and in the academic literature. Historically, urban whites have perpetuated this myth – and possibly invented it – with the effect of masking their own privileged lives. However, in our interviews we saw that the political events in 2000 changed this. Urban whites have become aware of their privilege and today demonstrate a more thorough understanding of it. Yet despite their awareness and understanding, they still defend their privilege, although in a different way than the farmers do: not by denial but by naturalizing it or by pointing to the new black elite. The absence of denial raises important questions for our understanding of whiteness, where defence of white privilege is often equated with denial.

Conclusion

This article intervenes in the whiteness scholarship on Africa by exploring its relationship to the politics of representation in one particular case. It shows how the media – and scholarship – often present an essentialist and distorted picture of what it is like to be white in Zimbabwe, of the composition of the white community, and of the ways in which it wields its power and defends its privilege. It demonstrates that there is no underlying or overarching unity among the white community; solidarity within it has sometimes been illusory and has also waxed and waned over the course of a century. White farmers are only a small part of that community; although they have been connected in a variety of ways to its other – urban – constituents, political factors have increasingly created wedges to separate farmers from these town-dwellers. To overcome simplistic misrepresentations of white Zimbabweans, we have presented a more complete picture based on an historical overview of white urban and rural relationships and differences. We have exposed the origins and consequences of essentialized representations of whiteness, showing how the lived experiences and representations of whites play out against this historical backdrop.

We have aimed to illuminate whiteness in Zimbabwe in two specific ways. First, we show how urban white privilege has remained invisible because white Zimbabweans are imagined largely to be farmers and white privilege is considered to be intimately connected to land ownership. Urban whites have tended to

perpetuate this representation, which helped mask their own privilege as well as the privilege that many ex-farmers continued to experience even after they lost land during the post-2000 land reform process and moved to urban areas. Second, we show that the defence of white privilege happens through means other than denial. Our interview data shows that, despite urban whites' acknowledgement of their own advantage, they still defend and legitimize it. Politically, we can conclude that raising awareness and demanding acknowledgement of white privilege might be a necessary but insufficient condition to undo it. Whites will need to move beyond acknowledgement, become less defensive, and take more robust steps to undo the advantages they have enjoyed.

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Abstract

Whiteness has always been visible and marked in Africa. This is what makes whiteness in Africa distinct from whiteness in the West. This article explores the question of how the visibility of whiteness matters for its politics by focusing on the case of Zimbabwe. Much of the work on whiteness in this country, concentrating solely on the white farming community, presents the white population as a homogeneous group. This article uses the urban–rural divide to challenge such a portrayal and to explore the relationship in Zimbabwe between the politics of representation and the politics of whiteness in the postcolonial era. Based on four years of ethnographic research, it investigates urban and rural whiteness together because they are interrelated. We make two specific observations: first, that urban privilege has remained invisible because white Zimbabweans and white privilege are imagined to be connected to the land and to being a farmer. Urban whites have perpetuated this stereotype, which helped mask their own privileged lives. Second, we demonstrate that the defence of white privilege happens through means other than simple denial. Our interview data shows that, despite urban whites' acknowledgement and understanding of white privilege, they still defend and try to legitimize it. Finally, we conclude that raising awareness and demanding acknowledgement of white privilege might be a necessary but insufficient condition to end it.

Résumé

La blanchité a toujours été visible et marquée en Afrique. C'est ce qui distingue la blanchité en Afrique de la blanchité en Occident. Cet article explore la question de savoir en quoi la visibilité de la blanchité importe pour sa politique en se concentrant sur le cas du Zimbabwe. L'essentiel de la recherche sur la blanchité dans ce pays, exclusivement axée sur le paysannat blanc, présente la population blanche comme un groupe homogène. Cet article utilise le clivage urbain–rural pour remettre en cause cette description et explorer la relation, au Zimbabwe, entre la politique de la représentation et la politique de la blanchité au cours de la période postcoloniale. Basé sur quatre années de recherche ethnographique, il examine la blanchité urbaine et la blanchité rurale ensemble parce qu'elles sont liées. Les auteurs font deux observations spécifiques : d'abord, que le privilège urbain est resté invisible parce que les Zimbabwéens blancs et le privilège blanc sont imaginés liés à la terre et au fait d'être agriculteur. Les blancs urbains ont perpétué ce stéréotype qui a contribué à masquer leur existence privilégiée. Ensuite, les auteurs démontrent que la défense du privilège blanc se fait par des moyens autres que le simple déni. Les données d'entretiens montrent qu'en dépit de leur reconnaissance et de leur compréhension du privilège blanc, les blancs urbains continuent de le défendre et de tenter de le légitimer. Enfin, les auteurs concluent que la sensibilisation et la demande de reconnaissance du privilège blanc peuvent être une condition nécessaire mais insuffisante pour y mettre fin.