

Dear Agrarian Studies Readers,

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this work in progress. The ideas in this paper emerge from a manuscript titled *Nature Conquest and White Imperial Debris* that I have been working on this year at Agrarian Studies. The book focuses on a community of white farmers in western Zimbabwe who abandoned cattle ranching in the 1980s in favor of a new form of land tenure called wildlife production. I argue that these farmers, in contrast to other agriculturalists in Zimbabwe, have attempted to reinvent themselves as key contributors to the nation by highlighting their expertise in conservation. At the same time, they articulate their claims to belonging by emphasizing their own mastery over the landscape: first, through hunting and the ability to discipline wild nature, and second, by perfecting the science of wildlife management.

This particular piece is an amalgam of different sections of the book, but draws primarily from a chapter on the cultural poetics of whiteness. Here, I attempt to illustrate that metaphorical language drawn from nature is critical to people's understandings of race, citizenship, and nationhood. Although this is an important theme of the book, I have struggled with how to theorize, as well as engage with on the most basic level, these darker, more nebulous areas of racial discourse and practice. I would be grateful for any suggestions you might have to better integrate, frame, or even eviscerate these ethnographic materials.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and I look forward to seeing you on Friday.

Yours,

Yuka Suzuki

the leopard's black and white spots

'Ingwe ikhotha amabala ayo amhlophe lamnyama.'

'The leopard licks all its spots, black and white.'

- Ndebele proverb

J. N. Pelling, who authored several textbooks and dictionaries for the Ndebele language in the 1970s, classifies the above proverb under the category, 'behavior which is commendable.' According to Pelling, the observation that leopards lick all of their spots, regardless of color, upholds the idea that there should be no favoritism. The idiom gained broader currency in 2000 as one of a collection of images and expressions circulated by Zimbabwe's opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Through an array of media, MDC activists highlighted the state's many failures, including widespread corruption, the obliteration of a once prosperous economy, and the siphoning of wealth to ruling party (Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front, or ZANU-PF) elite at the expense of increasingly impoverished Zimbabweans. They forged dialogue in urban spaces already humming with deep disillusionment—the fiction of democratic nationhood had long since evaporated, and state claims to legitimacy no longer held any validity. At the same time, threats of violence from ruling party supporters were very real. As a result, veiled metaphors and double entendres figured prominently in the opposition campaign. It was in this context that the leopard surfaced as one image of the ideal nation, where favoritism does not exist, and basic rights are guaranteed to all, regardless of race, ethnicity, or political affiliation.

To imagine an absence of favoritism in contemporary Zimbabwe is no simple task. Thirty years ago, when Zimbabwe won its independence, the newly elected prime minister, Robert Mugabe,¹ addressed the nation and appealed for a 'new amity between the races, of forgiving and forgetting the past, and building a new nation together.'² The proposal shocked the country, and white Rhodesians who had seen Mugabe as the devil incarnate until that very morning began to believe that he of all people might represent the best hope for restoring peace and stability to the country.³ The newly formed government instituted a ten year period during which the security of white property would be guaranteed by law. Top-ranking ex-combatants were then dispatched across the country to visit white farmers and convince them that they would be genuinely welcome in the new Zimbabwe.⁴ The logic for national reconciliation clearly lay in economic necessity, but was framed in terms of moral idealism and cross-racial, cross-ethnic collaboration.

Today, the official rhetoric has changed. A brilliant orator and strategist, Mugabe has transformed his bid to retain power over the past decade into a war on race. Effortlessly conjuring specters of colonialism, he has labeled white Zimbabweans as 'enemies of the state,' accused the United Kingdom of outright neo-imperialism, and denounced Morgan Tsvangirai, the opposition party leader, as Tony Blair's 'tea boy.' The most spectacular outcome of this shift occurred in 2000, as liberation 'war veterans' occupied thousands of white commercial farms across the country over the course of a few short months.⁵ Despite repeated court rulings declaring the invasions constitutionally illegal, they continued to escalate until all but 200 of the nation's 4,500 white commercial farms were occupied. This marked a calculated gamble on the part of the ruling party, which was widely held to be the orchestrator behind the invasions. By restoring land to the spotlight, ZANU-PF deployed the most powerful weapon in its artillery: the issue of land, symbolizing centuries of struggle and domination, offered the most direct and incriminating evidence of disproportionate white privilege. Thus, according to Mugabe, the invasions represented 'the last round of the liberation struggle, and the final chance to rid the country of all vestiges of colonialism.'⁶ While the majority of Zimbabweans recognized these developments as an attempt to divert attention away from the country's real problems, the stakes for white farmers have been high. Nearly all have lost their properties, and dozens have been killed through beatings, shootings, and live torchings since the invasions began.

Faced with the destruction of a way of life, farmers have fought to retain their place in the country, to assert their individual histories, and to claim the rights of citizenship to which they feel entitled after generations of settlement in Africa. This self-conscious project is by no means a recent undertaking, but one that has consumed white Zimbabweans' entire existence in the three decades since Independence. In the context of a rapidly vanishing population, they have drawn upon increasingly creative ways through which to redefine and reassert their claims to belonging. The challenge is considerable, for how does one critique a country as a former settler bearing the stigma of history? How does one defend a way of life based on visible inequalities in wealth? And finally, what forms of ideological work are necessary to keep intact a worldview that has become increasingly indefensible?

This paper draws from my work in a community of white farmers in western Zimbabwe to explore such questions of citizenship, race, and nationhood. In particular, I focus on the metaphorical uses of nature as a recurrent element that percolates throughout everyday discourse and social worlds. The proverbial leopard represents one form of this use of nature as a tool of political critique. To present another example, the zebra appeared just as frequently in politics and popular culture to symbolize the ideal racial nation. Like the leopard for its spots, people employed the zebra for its beautifully defined, vivid stripes, and the idea of black and white occurring naturally, side by side, in equal representation. In the articulation of nationhood, animals can serve as powerful indexical tools.

On the other hand, in constructing the state's political authority, ZANU-PF claims the cockerel as its party symbol. Such identifications are not objects to be taken lightly. In Mlilo, the valley where I worked, a white farmer was arrested several years ago on treason charges for killing five of his own roosters. He had two hunting clients staying with him, who had complained that the roosters woke them up too early each morning. The farmer decided that it was easier to get rid of the roosters than to risk incurring the displeasure of his clients. Local authorities, however, tipped off by someone who had witnessed the event, interpreted this as an act of insurrection against the state. While this response might seem excessive, their intuition about the vulnerability of such political representations was absolutely correct. Symbols designed to strengthen party solidarity can be manipulated in equally effective ways to undermine the state. Thus, a second Ndebele proverb offering the wisdom, 'Even when there is no cock, the sun rises'—translating into the idea that 'No one is indispensable'—

gained equal popularity during this time.⁷ Not surprisingly, this saying was featured prominently among the MDC's posters. The reference to Robert Mugabe, of course, was patently clear.

There is something particularly arresting about the use of animals in these contexts. Here, nature is deliberately politicized, but displayed as an ideal because black and white appear organically, in the absence of human design, and thus represent the way things should be. White Zimbabweans rely upon similar strategies in articulating their claims for citizenship and rights, as well as their understandings of race and essential difference. In the sections that follow, I illustrate how whites annex nature as an accomplice, how metaphors from nature are used as denigrating insults, and how human distinctions are reified through their relationships with their pets.

encountering whiteness

While during the past decade, a growing number of scholars have examined the construction of 'whiteness' in identity politics,⁸ along with the distinctive cultural worlds of settlers under colonial administrations,⁹ the experiences of white communities in Africa remain relatively unexplored. Moreover, while a handful of works have provided accounts of settlers in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa specifically,¹⁰ often in the form of autobiography and memoir,¹¹ there is a noticeable absence of studies addressing contemporary issues of citizenship and belonging.¹² The question of how whites conceptualize their subjectivities in the context of an overwhelming black majority is crucial not only for theorizing identity, but also because whites continue to be central actors in post-colonial economic and social landscapes. By drawing attention to racial discourses in Mlilo, as well as the micropolitics through which race is continually negotiated, my objective is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the processes through which racial distinctions are drawn, and inconsistencies are reconciled at the intersection of discourse, ideology, and practice.

Among Western scholars, white Zimbabweans have typically been regarded as anachronistic and distasteful reminders of colonialism—a burden that had to be tolerated even in the liberational context of independence. With the exception of a few individual scholars, publishers, and activists, the majority of white Zimbabweans have been summarily ignored or dismissed, even as many foreign academics depended upon them in their

research. They therefore constitute what Susan Harding has termed the repugnant cultural Other, and as such are perceived as unsympathetic figures. Her description of listening to the stories of Christian fundamentalist preachers resonates closely with my own experiences among white farmers. As Harding recounts, 'I just gripped my chair, and took [Reverend Campbell's] words in straight. I was willfully uncritical as well in the sense that I wanted to understand, as best I could, his words from his point of view, to assume his position, to make his speech mine.'¹³ The phrase 'willfully uncritical' captures the position that I attempted to adopt, although not always with success.

I arrived in Zimbabwe in 1998 with the intention of studying Campfire (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources), one of the most well-known Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programs in the world. At the University of Zimbabwe's Centre for Applied Social Sciences, an institute devoted entirely to the study of CBNRM, I met a researcher who, upon hearing about my project, claimed that there were already too many people working on Campfire.¹⁴ Scholarly production on the program was becoming an industry in and of itself. What would be far more interesting, he challenged, would be to study one of the wildlife conservancies that seemed to be cropping up everywhere in the country. He could point them out on a map, but knew nothing about them. Access to these communities was limited because they were privately owned white commercial lands, and this created a significant gap in knowledge about changing landscapes of conservation in the country. With a mischievous gleam in his eye, he proposed that because I was neither black nor white, I might have more success gaining entry into these conservancies.

Thus, a few months later, I made the nine-hour drive to Mlilo, armed only with the contact details of a prominent family in the community, which had been given to me by the director of the Wildlife Producers Association in Harare. Jon and Marie Van den Akker looked doubtful as we sat on their verandah and I explained to them why I wanted to live in the valley. 'If you want to study anthropology,' Jon suggested helpfully, 'you should go down into the communal areas there, and take a look at the real traditional culture. Those are nice people, hey?' He spoke with genuine enthusiasm. Nonetheless, within half an hour of my meeting them for the first time, with astonishing ease and graciousness, they invited me to come and live with them for as long as I planned to stay in the valley.

Despite Jon's conviction that 'real' culture existed elsewhere, I quickly discovered that white farmers were tireless pedagogues when it came to explaining the 'Rhodesian way of life.' 'Yuka,' Jon had a habit of announcing as he settled into his favorite chair on the verandah, 'I want to tell you a story.' And one story would become four or five stories, one after another, as Jon fiddled with engine parts in need of repair, fingers stained with oil, glancing up occasionally from his work to check if I was still listening. Within these narratives, many of which I initially would have dismissed outright, I gradually came to find an overpowering persuasion. They had a moral force that somehow managed to eclipse the knowledge that they served a specific purpose. As Vincent Crapanzano observes in the context of South Africa in the early 1980s, 'White South Africans seem always to be talking about their country, its problems, and its image abroad. It is their subject. Few, if any, of the 'new' countries of the world have produced as large a self-descriptive language. Self-description is, like rugby, a national pastime.'¹⁵ The same holds true for white Zimbabweans twenty years later. The feeling that they are misunderstood by the outside world is universal, and the desire to present counter-narratives is never-ending. These narratives are sophisticated and eloquent works of oratory, and constitute one of the most powerful forms of currency available to white Zimbabweans today. On several occasions I witnessed white farmers hold development workers, tourists, and missionaries in thrall, as expressions of polite disbelief among listeners shifted to skepticism, and eventually, reluctant head-nodding. Thus, a well-executed story had the potential to transform its narrator into a forceful contemporary authority, rather than a lingering curiosity from the past.

'animals stick to their own kind'

In the 1970s, Mlilo became the first site in the country to engage in a form of land use known as wildlife production. By the 1990s, two decades later, hundreds of tourists, hunters, scientists, and conservationists were journeying to this destination each year, drawn to an economy that revolved principally around wildlife. This material success relies upon a rich symbolic template based on a particular fantasy of 'Wild Africa.' In the 19th century, images of the continent as the world's last wilderness, branded on the Western imagination by the works of Rousseau, Mungo Park, Richard Burton, and David Livingstone among others, offered the promise of escape to a place that was the very antithesis of Europe. The longing for a lost

Eden thus propelled the age of African exploration, and fused the dream of a place of untouched and exquisite, yet savage beauty, with resplendent material resources.¹⁶ This vision continues to cast its spell in the present, taking contemporary form in what Edward Bruner has described in the context of Kenya as 'the darkest desires of the tourist imaginary.'¹⁷ The thick, glossy brochures of safari companies draw heavily upon the romance of a lost era of legendary 'Great White Hunters,' invoking expeditions undertaken in this region by explorers such as Thomas Baines, George Phillips, and Frederick Courteney Selous. Thus, the prosperity of Mlilo's economy depends upon the ability to convince tourists of the unassailable authenticity of its wild setting.

In principle, tourism operates along two dimensions: photographic safaris and hunting safaris. The luxury bush camps and safari lodges in Mlilo appeal to foreign tourists who delight in the prospect of 'rustic chic' accommodations, which take the form of thatched tree houses or canvas tents equipped with cots and viewing panels. During the day, armed with guidebooks, video cameras, and species check lists, they take part in 'game drives' within Hwange National Park and the Mlilo Conservancy. While these camps charge rates between \$300 and \$400 per night, placing them beyond the budgets of many Americans and Europeans, the main source of profit in Mlilo comes from the hunting side of the industry. Safari companies run by enterprising farmers find their market in an exceptionally wealthy clientele from the U.S., Australia, Germany, India, and Japan among other countries. Clients must have advanced expertise in shooting, and the physical endurance to withstand hunts ranging from ten days to three weeks. During this time, individuals typically pay a rate of \$1,500 or more per person per day for the hunt itself, which includes the services of a professional hunter, a tracker, 4 x 4 vehicles, and a videographer upon request. When a client successfully kills an animal, trophy fees range from \$1,000 for smaller species, such as impala and zebra, to \$25,000 or more for elephants, leopards, and lions.¹⁸ Despite the parallels between hunting and photographic tourism, the two areas of engagement remain distinct and oppositional in the minds of their participants, who approach nature consumption from very different perspectives.

In this world, where tourism had eclipsed all other economic pathways by the end of the millennium, wildlife constitutes the central axis around which farmers' lives revolve. Wildlife demographics, both in terms of numbers and species present on a property, as well as the

maintenance of infrastructure that ensures their continued presence, monopolize people's obsessions and anxieties, and follow them to their nocturnal dreams. Nature thus becomes an indispensable part of people's social worlds, always fluid in its meanings and symbolisms, but unwaveringly constant as a point of reference. My first insight into the importance of nature in the context of racial identification came soon after I arrived in Mlilo. Marie's nephew, a shy, rather awkward 40 year old man, had just announced his love for a younger black woman who worked as an assistant for a neighboring white farmer. She had already moved into his house, bringing her two children, and they intended to get married as soon as possible. Marie now relayed to me that time and again, she had urged her brother and sister-in-law to arrange for their son to see more women, with the color white here of course implied. Farming communities were small and isolated, and opportunities to meet 'suitable' young women miniscule. It was the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children's chances of meeting appropriate partners were improved in the face of such odds. At the time, only a month had passed since I had moved into the household, and the project of educating me in the significance of racial difference was still very much an ongoing one in which the whole family took part. Consequently, this story, too, ended in a moral lesson about race and the careful policing of boundaries. On this occasion, Marie chose a metaphor as her mechanism of explanation. 'Just look outside,' she gestured towards the window that overlooked the vast expanse of bush beyond the house. 'The wildebeest don't mate with the zebra, even though sometimes they graze in the same place. Animals stick to their own kind. That's the way nature is, and that's what nature intended for people too. Black and white mustn't mix because it's not natural.'

The analogy was one that I had not heard before, and it intrigued me. Marie had invoked a distinctly apolitical metaphor from nature to naturalize her ideas about race, in the process removing agency and culpability from the equation, and neatly sanitizing the racial ideology that formed her worldview. Moreover, she had used animal species which one might imagine as being roughly equal, both herbivores of similar size, thus avoiding an allusion to hierarchy. Wildebeest and zebra keep separate circles not because one is superior and the other inferior, but simply because they are different.¹⁹ The logic of nature therefore neatly reproduces the logic of Marie's social world, resonating with her belief in the fundamental correctness of its rules.

The intertwining of race and nature in this context acts as a strategy of persuasion. While most of us would rightfully question the validity of Marie's observation, the seductiveness of such simple, natural reasoning engenders a moment's hesitation. Through the use of nature, Marie's argument wins a credibility that would have been categorically denied had she presented her ideological and cultural reasons for segregation. Here, as Moore, Pandian, and Kosek have suggested, discourses of race and nature are mapped onto one another in the exercise of power; the two invoke each other, build on each other, and speak through each other to disguise the workings of symbolic and material forces.²⁰ This follows Stuart Hall's insight that the 'hope of every ideology is to naturalize itself out of History into Nature, and thus to become invisible.'²¹ Thus, social constructions of race, woven into the basic fabric of ideology, depend upon representational strategies of naturalization to achieve their seamlessness. Marie skillfully employed her intuitive understanding of such processes to accredit her worldview with a logic seemingly removed from politics and culture.

The distinctiveness of the wildebeest and zebra metaphor, which I had never heard urban white Zimbabweans use, led me to think about the question of how race is constituted according to local specificity, in the actual microcosms where racial identities are articulated and reproduced. In his study of urban whites living below the poverty line in Detroit, a city which is over 80% black, John Hartigan draws attention to what he calls 'the localness of race' in a setting where blackness, rather than whiteness, is dominant.²² Racial identities in this city, he suggests, are constituted through a distinct cultural poetics, composed from local stories, concerns, events, and remembered histories. A similar cultural poetics shapes discourses of race in Mlilo: collected and polished over generations, the repertoires from which white farmers draw the highly chromatic language, emotions, morals, and humor surrounding the meaning of race are inexhaustible.

hillbillies and cosmopolitans

To return to the question of how race is experienced according to locale, one of the most important lines of differentiation within white communities lies in constructions of rural versus urban identity. A comparative framework may be useful here as we refer once again to Hartigan's work, which argues that in American society as a whole, 'a comfortable conviction holds sway among middle-class whites that racism is concentrated in the *lower* classes...while

certainly present in working-class whites, it bubbles up most vigorously from the hearts of poor whites, as allegorized in the cultural figure of 'white trash.'²³ In Briggs, the poorest white neighborhood in Detroit, certain whites are labeled 'hillbilly,' a term which inscribes a 'stigmatized intra-racial distinction,' conversely accrediting a sense of refined sophistication to those who impose the label.

Strikingly, many white Zimbabweans in Harare derided the commercial farmers in the western part of the country by using the same term. 'Watch out for those hillbillies,' several people joked when they heard where I was conducting research. 'Those guys are stuck in the 19th century.' Although such comments were framed humorously, they belied a subtle anxiety among urban whites who were eager to distance themselves from their rural counterparts. They were insistent that white farmers, especially from 'backwater' regions of the country like Mlilo, should not condemn white Zimbabweans as a whole. Thus, the 'hillbilly' stereotype not only indexed the lack of electricity and satellite television among farmers, but more importantly, invoked an opposition of cultural and intellectual distinctions, not least of which, of course, was how one approached the question of race.

Urban white Zimbabweans often present themselves as cosmopolitan, liberal, and comfortably accepting of the racial integration of the social spaces they occupy, whether at supermarkets and cinema theaters, or banks and offices.²⁴ Farmers, on the other hand, whose interactions with black workers take place in the comparatively private sphere of the farm, have less accountability in the eyes the public. It is therefore assumed that they are more racist, or 'racialist,' the term more commonly used in Zimbabwe. In July 2002, when a farmer named Philip Bezuidenhout in Odzi ran over one of the 'war vets' who blocked his truck, ZANU-PF rejoiced, for the ruling party had long hoped for retaliatory action by farmers that would provide real-life validation of its ideological campaign against whites.²⁵ Soon afterwards, however, it came to light that Bezuidenhout was married to a black woman. This dramatically altered the meaning of the incident, and people were suddenly uncertain as to how to interpret the event. For the nation, the fact that Bezuidenhout was married to a black woman seemed to automatically nullify the assumption that he was racist—or at least to throw significant doubt upon it—and therefore the death must have been a tragic accident after all. ZANU-PF had lost its easy target, especially when Bezuidenhout turned up at court with a black defense lawyer.²⁶

What becomes particularly salient in this case of confusion is the way in which the parenthetical brackets of 'white' and 'black' severely constrain the possibilities of interpretation, and fail to allow for the rich nuanced texture of these particular events. In her analysis of race in contemporary Brazil, Donna Goldstein refutes the common belief that the country's 'color-blind erotic democracy' is synonymous with the absence of racism. Brazilians assume, for example, that 'white men who prefer dark-skinned women are 'logically' not racist because they sexually desire them.'²⁷ However, as she goes on to demonstrate, the historical objectification of mulatto women as sensuously erotic only serves to re-entrench negative racial essentialisms in Brazilian society. The hierarchy of race is therefore reproduced *beneath* the surface of public ideology, attesting to the existence of multiple modes in racial discourse. In the next section, I turn back to Mlilo to shed light on the interplay of these multiple modes as they come together in locally specific understandings of race.

natural lexicons

The cultural poetics that white farmers in Mlilo draw upon in constructing race predictably emerge from the lexicon that lies closest at hand. It is hardly surprising, then, that Marie selected the social behavior of wildebeest and zebras to explain her understanding of racial difference. Taking the example of a different metaphor, the representation of Africans as 'black baboons' is a familiar one to all who have lived in southern Africa. Why baboons, when they are greyish-brown in color, rather than black? The answer is simple, for baboons have always assumed the categorical role of vermin in African settler history. The denigration of different groups through comparison with animals is an old trick, but one that is tirelessly utilized, with powerful effect. Robert Mugabe himself has been known to rely upon this trope in condemning gay individuals as 'worse than dogs.'²⁸ Such animal analogies often undergo evolutions in meaning over time; for example, the association of raccoons, or 'coons,' in 18th century American society with what were perceived to be irresponsible, dandified free blacks in the North was gradually replaced in the mid-1800s by the Whig party's appropriation of the animal to identify with rural white common people. In this context, raccoons became thoroughly white in symbolism, epitomized by Davy Crockett's coonskin cap, and the use of live raccoons to signify party loyalty.²⁹

In Mlilo, knowledge of the 'black baboon' metaphor was always present, but the only time I heard whites apply the term as a derogatory reference was when Marie and Jon had two older houseguests visiting from South Africa. These men were vague acquaintances who used the house as a convenient stopping point en route to Zambia, and their crude, vulgar personalities and unabashedly racist jokes and comments clearly set the rest of the family on edge. In contrast, the context in which I heard the term used most frequently during my research was when people in Mfula, the neighboring black communal area, explained to me how they believed whites saw blacks. As we shall see in the following section, politicians who visited the region were particularly adept at its usage, and skillfully employed the phrase to invoke moral reprehensibility on the part of racist whites, without having to make reference to any specific incriminating action or incident. Thus, the metaphor is a provocative one, and its use in association with whites automatically sets into motion a chain of associations and emotions for black villagers.

On the other hand, when siNdebele-speaking Zimbabweans refer to whites, they use the term 'Mukhiwa.' The mukhiwa is a particular type of tree, and its equation with whites has become so strongly entrenched that 'khiwa' is now a noun root connoting anything related to whites. For instance, isiKhiwa, rather than isiNgisi, is the word popularly used for English. When asked about the etymology of this term, black people referred to the wild figs that come from the tree, which are pale pinkish in color, resembling a white person's skin. In opposition, however, white farmers believe it derives from the color of the wood itself, which is pure white once the bark is removed. The wood of the mukhiwa tree is soft and crumbles under the slightest pressure, yielding no benefit as wood products such as furniture or sculptures. As one white farmer relayed to me, 'It's a rubbish tree...good for nothing, and that's why they like to call us Mukhiwa.' Interestingly, during the entire course of my research, I never once heard this particular explanation given by black farmers.

What might we make of these two examples, in which negative representations of each group are accentuated and given life through opinions projected onto the other? Whites assigning certain racial logics to blacks, and blacks attributing specific racial worldviews to whites, give voice to thoughts that would be considered impermissible under normal circumstances. This is not to say that all white farmers have moved beyond racially denigrating insults, for such is certainly not the case. Similarly, it is within the realm of possibility

that black Zimbabweans find the coincidence between their choice of tree for designating whites and the poor quality of the wood a convenient and playful one, even though they choose not to highlight that particular characteristic by way of explanation. In this context, the meaning of race seems to depend just as much on the invention and reproduction of race as it is understood to occupy the imaginations of the Other, as well as on racial judgments and values emerging from one's own cultural worldview. Ironically, then, the production of difference is heightened by reminding oneself of representations which are imagined and reflected onto the other. This should hardly surprise us when we consider the individual discourses of self-deprecation that emerge in the wake of colonialism. What is surprising, however, is that this process flows in both directions. Focusing once again on the perspective of white settlers, their discomfiture with what they perceive to be negative critique by black farmers—although they never admitted outright that such opinions mattered to them—renders their own assertions of history, belonging, and moral correctness all the more essential in their self-preservation.

the governor's faux pas

In this section, I recount one occasion in which the black baboon metaphor was employed, but not necessarily with the desired effect. In Mlilo, the most visible public index of a white farmer's morality is determined by the role they take in caring for their workers, as well as the relationships they build with neighboring communal areas. In Mlilo, where wildlife ranching requires very few workers in comparison to commercial agricultural farms, white farmers' reputations are built through a spectrum of interactions with communal areas that are critically observed and carefully catalogued in black farmers' memories. Mlilo shares boundaries with four different communal areas; typically, a white farmer and his sons concentrate most of their energies on the communal area directly bordering its property. Some maintain hostile relationships, as in the case of one farmer who became notorious for brandishing guns and unleashing graphic, unrepeatable threats on each occasion he discovers communal farmers grazing cattle on his property, a pattern which eventually earned him the nickname of 'the devil.' In most cases, however, farmers are at least occasionally obliging when it comes to responding to requests for the provision of transport, loans, technical assistance in building and fixing boreholes, providing bricks for the

construction of schools, and contributing game meat for community celebrations. I found it striking, for example, that during many mealtimes when I had been invited over to farmers' houses, we were interrupted by a phone call from the local schoolmaster who was requesting a ride from his school to the main road.³⁰ Although they expressed exasperation, farmers were surprisingly accommodating when it came to these kinds of requests.

From 1996 to 1998, the Van den Akkers had assisted in the technical aspects of the construction of a health clinic in the communal area that neighbored their property. The sparkling white clinic was a source of immense excitement for the community, for which the closest health care facility up until then had been an unpaved 26 km distance to the east. Although the Mfula clinic had already been operational for two years, in September 1999, the village hosted an official clinic opening to celebrate the completion of its construction.

The celebration was of unprecedented magnitude in Mfula, with the attendance of the Deputy Minister of Health, the governor of Matabeleland North, both provincial Members of Parliament, nineteen district councilors, the Hwange District Administrator, traditional chiefs from the entire province, and five representatives from a church congregation in Britain which had raised funding for the clinic. In recognition of their considerable technical assistance, Jon Van den Akker and his three sons were ushered to seats in the center of the second row, immediately behind the major politicians. Members of the Mfula community had prepared for months for this event, and the schoolchildren's songs were painstakingly rehearsed, the women's dances seamlessly coordinated, and the politicians' speeches mellifluous and verbose. The audience, numbering well over three thousand, settled in comfortably for the long program that was already two hours behind schedule before it even started.

When it became Governor Mabena's turn to speak, he stood, short and rotund, and commenced in siNdebele to congratulate Mfula on the community's cooperative efforts in building the new clinic. Halfway through his speech, which had subtly shifted from the topic of health care to the subject of the state, he switched abruptly into English, and declared, 'There are people here who think we're all baboons on this side of the fence. They call us baboons, and they want to chase the baboons to the other side of the hill to the driest land in the area, and keep us there so that they do not have to be bothered by the baboons.' The interpreter was clearly distressed, and haltingly translated the words into siNdebele. There was a collective intake of breath, and the sleepy lull that had descended upon the audience

instantly evaporated. 'We must tell these people that they *cannot* chase us off the land!' Mabena shouted triumphantly in an atmosphere now electrified with tension. Then, just as abruptly, he switched back into siNdebele and espoused the glory of the country—a rote regurgitation of ZANU-PF propaganda—for the remainder of his speech.

The Van den Akkers sat rigidly tense, the audience shifted nervously, and the British fundraisers were puzzled as to what had just transpired. With the deliberate code-switching, Mabena had targeted the white Zimbabweans present as clearly as if they had been marked with bull's-eyes, effectively slapping them in the face during an occasion that was meant to honor them for the part they had played in constructing the clinic. The Van den Akker men barely waited until the end of the speeches to leave the premises. They unceremoniously dumped the thirty crates of soft drinks they had brought for the festivities from the backs of their trucks, and drove off in a swirl of dust.

Later that night, a telephone call interrupted us during dinner. It was the retired district councilor, uncle to the young traditional chief, and the unofficial head of the Mfula community. He was calling from a telephone—the only other one in the village besides the one in the clinic—that a Norwegian NGO had installed in his house over a year ago. He apologized profusely for the morning's incidents, and expressed his outrage at Mabena's bad behavior in destroying the spirit of celebration and collaboration at the clinic opening. 'These politicians!' he spat disgustedly, saying that the village was writing a formal letter of apology to Jon and his family, which would be signed by all. According to Jon, who relayed the substance of the conversation to the rest of the family afterwards, the councilor narrated the course of events that happened later that evening:

'Mabena came back, but all of us, we chased him away. 'This man gives us meat all the time for all our events,' we said to him, 'and now it's finished because of your speech at the opening. You, Mabena, have six farms and you haven't tried to resettle anyone on them, and you go and *shupha*³¹ this old man who helps us.'

Addressing Jon again, the councilor continued, 'We saved the cool drinks you brought, and we want to have another party tomorrow night. This time just with you, this time no politicians.' Jon gruffly declined, making it known that his deep irritation would not be so quickly dispelled. He appeared disgruntled as he got off the phone, but it was clear as he walked back to the

table that he was somewhat mollified. When I asked him if it made him happy to know that the people felt this way, he responded:

Ja, but I've always known this. It just goes to show again that the politicians are just doing their own thing. They have nothing to do with the people—they don't care. They just use them during elections to vote for them and do their dirty work, and then they go and do whatever they want. No one uses people like they do in Africa.

During the next two days, for a community of such isolated households, it was astonishing how quickly the story spread in Mlilo, flying across scratchy telephone lines and relayed during visits to the post office. It seemed inevitable that this too would be incorporated into the artillery of narratives which oppose institutionally racialized post-colonial mythology.

In this development of events, it was entirely likely that the retired councilor was simply being politically strategic: I corroborated later on with other Mfula villagers that Mabena had in fact faced considerable hostility when he returned to the celebration in the evening, but realistically, the councilor was not above a little embellishment in his own narration of events if it meant repairing relations with his white neighbors. Nonetheless, I could not help but feel excitement at the possibilities of subversive alliance between black and white Zimbabweans that challenged dominant representations of racial politics in the nation today. Upon telling the same story with gusto to a young black political science professor at the University of Zimbabwe, however, I was crestfallen at his response. With a laugh, he dismissed the villagers' reaction to Mabena as not surprising in the least, declaring, 'Oh, that's just because Mabena's unpopular to begin with. It's a well-known fact that he's one of the two most despised governors in the whole country.' Thus, what the white farmers had imagined to be the villagers' courageous defiance of a powerful politician because he had insulted their white 'friends,' was after all an action within the scope of political acceptability, backed by a notorious lack of support for Mabena on a regional scale. The symbolism of the act therefore turned out to be not so provocative, and the possibilities not quite as daring. These subtleties, if fleetingly felt, will undoubtedly be sublimated as the narrative of this story is repeated and entrenched in white farmers' memories.

pet peeves

In this final section, I depart from poetic metaphor and narrative to think about pet-keeping, as a realm in which animals are understood to closely mirror and constitute human subjectivities. Pets factor greatly into farmers' lives, with most families having at least five or six pets at any given time in Mlilo. These ranged from the conventional to the unusual: there were civet cats, donkeys, sixty-year old African grey parrots, impalas, and in one family's case, fully grown lions.

One evening, as I sat with Christie Hallowell in her small house, located at the other end of the valley from the Van den Akkers', one of her neighbors drove up to the house, sending the dogs into a barking frenzy. 'I had to go to the hotel, so I decided to stop in and say hello,' she announced as her head appeared at the door.³² Two dogs, one large and one small, jostled her as they angled to get inside. 'Oh, look at you two. Are you inside dogs or outside dogs?' she addressed the animals at her feet.

'Zoe's an inside dog, Prince is an outside dog.' Christie replied, and called to the little Jack Russell Terrier, 'Come, Zoe!' while patting her knees with both hands. Zoe came dashing inside and catapulted herself into Christie's lap. Prince, who was a Dalmatian, watched this scene and gave a plaintive whine as the door slammed shut on his face. Neither of the women seemed troubled by the unfairness of this differentiation.

The distinction drawn between 'inside dogs' and 'outside dogs' led me to wonder about the ordering of pets in Mlilo, and the implicit division of labor and hierarchy among them. For outside dogs, Mlilo is not an easy place to live. Many die prematurely, killed by baboons and bitten by poisonous snakes, or from swallowing sharp thorns that slowly choke them to death.³³ Pecky, a stalwart terrier who had once stood his ground against a lion while other larger dogs cowered, met his death when he was snatched by a crocodile off a shallow embankment by the river. The dogs who survived often had large zig zag scars on their stomachs where they had been ripped open by sharp baboon teeth, and then stitched back up.

These dogs, for whom the smooth slate stones of a verandah is the closest they would ever get to a house, lead a very different life from the inside dogs, who have the freedom to

go outside, but always return at night to sleep in cushioned baskets or at the foot of their owners' beds. While outside dogs eat from a large shared bowl of dry dog food or *sadza*,³⁴ house dogs dine on canned dog food and bits of toast handed down to them from the table. Inside dogs often wear sweaters that are custom-knitted for them, despite the fact that their beds already have warm blankets, while the other dogs, with no sweaters, are left to fend off the elements outside. When I began to look more closely, the ways in which the distinction between the two types of dogs was continually reinforced were astonishing. Outside dogs sit on the flatbeds of Land Cruisers; inside dogs sit in the passenger cabs. The 'working' dogs accompany farmers on their daily rounds of the property, while the 'non-working' dogs go to Bulawayo on shopping trips with their owners. These boundaries prove to be surprisingly impermeable, with the single exception occurring for puppies, who are considered liminal because of their youth. Even if destined to become outside dogs, puppies are cosseted and allowed to come and go as they please, until they grow into adolescents.

The designation of a dog as inside or outside, moreover, depends not on the breed or size, but rather, on the human individual with whom the animal is primarily identified. In most cases, rural white Zimbabweans conceptualize pet ownership as a much more individualized domain, rather than an experience shared by the household as a whole. In the Van den Akker family, for example, each of the three sons had his own dog, who was a constant companion, so that one could gauge exactly which men were present by first looking for their dogs.

Quite predictably, gendered differences also come into play in determining the type of animal one might choose as a pet. Cats remain firmly within the feminine realm, even though they too are divided into inside and outside animals. Interestingly, outside cats are considered 'more wild' than outside dogs, illustrating once again how intractability and deviance are characteristics ascribed to cats. Inside cats, on the other hand, are characterized as much more indolent and self-indulgent than the dogs whose presence they must tolerate inside the home.

Another important sphere in which pet-based practices form the basis of constructed difference involves the issue of ethnic background. Unlike whites of British descent, Afrikaners never allowed any kind of dog inside the house, because in their tradition, dogs are animals that belong outdoors. The English claimed this practice as yet another example of essential

difference between the two groups, implying with a subtle shake of the head that their way—to allow animals indoors—was the kinder, more sociable, civilized way of treating animals.

Given the absolute convictions people have about what constitutes proper care for pets, it should hardly surprise us that white Zimbabweans also extend this moralizing terrain to construct arguments about socially important *racial* differences as well. They express frequent distress for dogs in the communal lands, which they claim are terribly neglected and starving most of the time.³⁵ Many of these dogs are, in fact, very thin in appearance, with their rib cages clearly defined, even from a distance. At the same time, though, as they walk to and fro between people's houses, trot along main roads, and sleep under trees, these dogs seem remarkably self-directed and autonomous. Most of them have never known the restraint of a leash, and are accountable to no one. Thus, we might make the argument that these dogs are actually healthier and happier than their counterparts in the commercial lands. By representing them as victims of neglect, however, whites claim for themselves the practice of responsible, compassionate, and humane management of non-human creatures. The flip side of this equation, of course, is that blacks are, by implication, irresponsible and callously indifferent to animal suffering.

Finally, and perhaps most intriguingly, I encountered time and again the theory that dogs have the ability to recognize the difference between blacks and whites.³⁶ This belief circulated among both groups, who pointed out that dogs belonging to white farmers are uniformly hostile to black strangers, while they greet white strangers with friendly curiosity. Because of the almost universal affinity for canines among landowners in Mlilo, it is virtually impossible to arrive at any house without being surrounded by a profusion of madly barking dogs. Black Zimbabweans who arrived in their vehicles at the Van den Akkers' house—Hwange National Park officials, Members of Parliament, and the local police inspector—often refused to leave their cars, and sat in the dirt driveway until Jon personally came out and called off all of the dogs. He usually did this with poorly concealed impatience, which the visitors pretended not to see. I could read from Jon's face that he attributed this action to ignorance and cowardice on the part of blacks, even when they were highly educated. 'Ja, man. They would sit there forever, they're so afraid of these dogs,' he remarked on one occasion after a member of the Rural District Council (RDC) had repeatedly honked his horn from the driveway, eventually rousing Jon from his afternoon nap. In this context, dogs were

represented as animals who instinctively recognized superior beings, and were neatly co-opted within white Zimbabwean ideology. Their affections and loyalties belonged to whites because their owners commanded it, but more importantly, because they deserved it.

¹ Robert Mugabe later became the president of Zimbabwe when the position of prime minister was abolished in 1987.

² De Waal, Victor. 1990. *The Politics of Reconciliation: Zimbabwe's First Decade*. Africa World Press.

³ Godwin, Peter and Ian Hancock. 1993. *Rhodesians Never Die: The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia, c. 1970-1980*. Oxford University Press.

⁴ Samora Machel, president of Mozambique and Mugabe's mentor, famously advised him at Independence: 'Keep your whites.'

⁵ While many of these groups were led by well-known ex-combatants, the majority of 'war vets' were in fact too young to have participated in the liberation war. The term was used in an attempt to lend the land invasions some of the celebrated moral standing ascribed to those who fought for liberation.

⁶ This period has been called the 'Third Chimurenga,' translated as the 'Third Uprising.' The First Chimurenga occurred in 1896 in an armed uprising against the British South Africa Company; the Second Chimurenga refers to the war for independence, which took place between 1965 and 1980.

⁷ 'Lalapha okungekho qhude kuyasa.' from Pelling, J. N. 1977. *Ndebele Proverbs and Other Sayings*. Mambo Press.

⁸ See Perry, Pamela. 2003. *Shades of White: White Kids and Racial Identities in High School*. Duke University Press; Rasmussen, Birgit Brander, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray, eds. 2001. *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*. Duke University Press; Hartigan, John. 1999. *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*. Princeton University Press; Frankenberg, Ruth. 1999 (1997). 'Local whitenesses, localizing whiteness.' in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Duke University Press; Kinchloe, Joe, Shirley Steinberg, Nelson Rodriguez, and Ronald Chennault, eds. 1998. *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*. St. Martin's Press; Hale, Grace Elizabeth. 1998. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. Vintage Books; Dyer, Richard. 1997. *White*. Routledge; Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic, eds. 1997. *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*. Temple University Press; Fine, Michelle, Lois Weis, Linda Powell, and L. Mun Wong, eds. 1997. *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society*. Routledge; Hill, Mike, ed. 1997. *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*. New York University Press; Wellman, David. 1993. *Portraits of White Racism*. Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Examples include Stoler, Ann. 2002. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. University of California Press; Cooper, Frederick and Ann Stoler, eds. 1997. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. University of California Press; McClintock, Anne. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. Routledge; Blee, Kathleen. 1991. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. University of California Press.

¹⁰ See Steyn, Melissa. 2001. 'Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be': *White Identity in a Changing South Africa*. Albany: State University of New York Press; McCulloch, Jock. 2000. *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902-1935*. Indiana University Press; Goodwin, June and Ben Schiff. 1995. *Heart of Whiteness: Afrikaners Face Black Rule in the New South Africa*. Scribner; Weiss, Ruth. 1994. *Zimbabwe and the New Elite*. London: I. B. Tauris and Co.; Godwin, Peter and Ian Hancock. 1993. *Rhodesians Never Die: The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia, c. 1970-1980*. Oxford University Press; Kennedy, Dane. 1987. *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939*. Duke University Press; Crapanzano, Vincent, 1985. *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*. Random House.

¹¹ The genre of autobiographies and memoirs written by white southern Africans has grown rapidly over the past few years. Noteworthy examples include Scott, Robyn. 2009. *Twenty Chickens for a Saddle: The Story of an African Childhood*. Jonathan Ball Publishers; St. John, Lauren. 2008. *Rainbow's End*. Scribner; Godwin, Peter. 2004. *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa*. Grove Press. Fuller, Alexandra. 2003. *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood*. Picador USA.

¹² An important exception to this is Antjie Krog's work, including *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*. 2000. Three Rivers Press.

¹³ Harding, Susan. 2000. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton University Press. p 56-7.

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- ¹⁴ The researcher I met at the University of Zimbabwe was Vupenyu Dzingirai, who became an Agrarian Studies fellow three years later. I am grateful to Vupenyu for his guidance in shaping my research.
- ¹⁵ Crapanzano, Vincent, 1985. *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*. Random House. p. 27.
- ¹⁶ The representation of Africa as a paradise has always been an ambivalent one, existing simultaneously with the image of the continent as a forbidding wasteland.
- ¹⁷ Bruner, Edward. 2001. 'The Maasai and the Lion King: authenticity, nationalism, and globalization in African tourism.' in *American Ethnologist* 28(4):881-908.
- ¹⁸ A client's wish list of species—usually no more than four animals per hunt—is negotiated with the safari outfit prior to his or her arrival in Zimbabwe. This constitutes an essential step in the process because each property has different hunting quotas issued by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management each year. The most popular companies often have their yearly quotas 'sold out' well in advance of the beginning of the hunting season.
- ¹⁹ Wildebeest and zebra are commonly found grazing together in their natural environment, which biologists believe increases both species' ability to sense danger and protect themselves from predators. Upon hearing this story, a few people have asked the question of whether part of the value of the metaphor came from the implicit understanding that one of these species is typically considered much more beautiful than the other. This is certainly possible, although Marie made no reference to differences in appearance. The primary usefulness of this comparison for her lay in the fact that zebra and wildebeest maintain social distance even while occupying the same physical space.
- ²⁰ Moore, Donald, Anand Pandian, and Jake Kosek. 2003. 'The cultural politics of race and nature: terrains of power and practice.' in Donald Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian, eds. *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. Duke University Press. p 1-70.
- ²¹ Hall, Stuart. 1988. 'The toad in the garden: Thatcherism among the theorists.' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. University of Illinois Press. p 35-57.
- ²² Hartigan, John. 1999. *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*. Princeton University Press.
- ²³ *ibid*, p 8.
- ²⁴ This self-representation by urban whites regarding their degree of acceptance of racial integration proved inconsistent with many of their actions and sentiments that surfaced during unguarded moments. In my experience, rural whites were often much more comfortable being around blacks—although this comfort was not necessarily synonymous with tolerance or respect—because black Zimbabweans constituted a more integral part of their everyday lives.
- ²⁵ The 'war vet' in this situation was one of the newly arrived occupants on Bezedenhuit's farm. He and a number of other land invaders crowded around Bezedenhuit's truck as he tried to drive past, and refused to budge from in front of the truck.
- ²⁶ This is, of course, too simple an interpretation; some have observed that black Zimbabwean women involved in marriages to white farmers are often mistreated. White men who marry black women are therefore not necessarily exonerated from charges of racism.
- ²⁷ Goldstein, Donna. 2003. *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. University of California Press, p 109.
- ²⁸ 'Fighting for gay rights in Zimbabwe,' *BBC News Online*, October 23, 1999.
- ²⁹ Roediger, David. 1999. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. Verso.
- ³⁰ Primary schools in the area are often located 4 or 5 km from the main road, which might entail walking for an hour or so before one could find a ride, or catch a bus to Bulawayo or Hwange.
- ³¹ In siNdebele, 'shupha' means to bother or harass. The term is one of many words that white farmers incorporate into their everyday English conversation vocabularies.
- ³² The local hotel was frequented by Mlilo farmers, who met with friends in the bar, held Commercial Farmers Union meetings in the conference room, and used it as a drop off point when ordering supplies to be delivered from Bulawayo.
- ³³ Among the outside dogs, the ones trained for tracking and hunting enjoyed the most prestige, but they also tended to have the shortest lives because of the many risks in their line of work. One couple, for example, who imported two dozen hunting hounds from Britain to start a business that specialized in leopard hunts, found that by the end of two years, only five of their dogs remained alive.
- ³⁴ Sadza is made from ground white corn meal, and constitutes the main staple of the Zimbabwean diet.
- ³⁵ Historically, these dogs were called 'kaffir dogs.'
- ³⁶ This idea is a potentially slippery slope but seems to be quite common, not only in Zimbabwe, but in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and the United States.