# The Politics of Dwelling: Being White / Being South African

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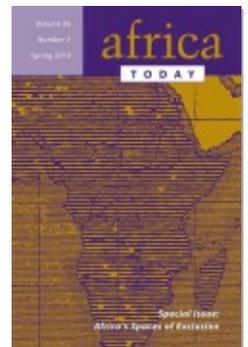
The fall of apartheid . . . swept away the home in which white South Africans thought they dwelt. The resulting existential home-lessness, a product of the artificial, distorted dwell-ing born out of the colonial endeavor . . . is a strongly motivating factor for many South Africans who leave the country.

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*This paper explores the incongruence between white South Africans' pre- and postapartheid experiences of home and identity, of which a wave of emigration is arguably a result. Among the commonest reasons given for emigrating are crime and affirmative action; however, this paper uncovers a deeper motivation for emigration using Charles Taylor's concept of the social imaginary and Martin Heidegger's concept of dwelling. The skewed social imaginary maintained by apartheid created an unrealistic sense of dwelling for most white South Africans. After 1994, the conditions supporting this imaginary disintegrated. Many white South Africans feel so strong a sense of unease they can no longer dwell in the country. Many try to escape through emigration, but carry unresolved questions of identity and belonging to their new "homes."*

We have all become experts on the past, here in the New South Africa. Among all that is new here, the past is the newest thing yet.

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*The Persistence of Memory* (Eprile 2004:272)

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## Introduction[1]

Consider a small personal anecdote: one day in South Africa in the late 1990s, a group of white work colleagues were having a tea break. One woman was vigorously complaining about a recent experience of having to visit the Home Affairs office in the center of Pretoria—the noise, the dirt, the inefficiency. "Really," she said, "you'd think we were in Africa!"

Our paper contextualizes this statement by examining the politics of dwelling in pre- and postapartheid South Africa, presenting a brief philosophical exploration of ideas from Charles Taylor and Martin Heidegger that contribute toward explaining the incongruence between many white South Africans' experiences of home and identity. The high rate of emigration of white South Africans, which according to a report by the South African

Institute on Race Relations is equivalent to that caused by "widespread disease, mass natural disasters or large-scale civil conflict" (Johnson 2009), and the rapidly growing white South African diaspora, are arguably among the most startling evidences of this incongruence. We explore why many whites seem to think they have to choose between being white and being South African. So that the argument is understood in its proper context, section one of this paper briefly sketches relevant aspects of the history and society of South Africa, concentrating on the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism and one of its effects, the system of apartheid. This section explains the ambiguity of the "white" category in apartheid racial classification. Section two describes the scale of the disconnection between pre- and postapartheid belonging for white South Africans by exploring one aftereffect of this political system, the emigration of white South Africans. Section three explains Taylor's concept of the social imaginary and Heidegger's concept of dwelling, and uses these notions to explore why so many white South Africans now feel disconnected from and homeless in the country of their birth.

Of necessity, our approach is general and sweeping; the full historical and political complexities of South Africa cannot be explained in detail here. Also, our exploration of white South Africans focuses on one facet of identity—race—and in the process brushes over other identity strands, such as class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, which contribute to making up a person's sense of self (Distiller 2004:6). We hope, however, to draw out enough relevant and representative points to trace a broad pattern in the lives of white South Africans born in the shadow of apartheid.

## Section One: A Brief History of "Whiteness" in South Africa

The history of South Africa is often told as a story in two colors, but this story rather simplifies and exaggerates the shades of the real world. The apartheid system desired unambiguous racial classification, though as a colonial society South Africa had a population drawn from widely varying cultural and racial backgrounds. As the center of its classification system, apartheid institutionalized *whiteness* as a racial and political construct of mechanical perfection. The Population Registration Act of 1950 assigned every South African to either the "white" or the "non-white" category, based on appearance, descent, or social acceptance. A person could not be considered white if one of his or her parents was non-white. Beyond the primary white/black distinction, the drive to absolute classification struggled with the boisterous reality of human interrelationship; non-whites were subdivided into either black (African) or colored (of mixed descent) categories,[2] and coloreds were distinguished from two further subgroups, Indians and Asians.[3] These subcategories were not nearly as practically and politically significant as the primary distinction between white and non-white. Whiteness was the talisman that granted access to privilege and power.

In reality, the uniform category of "white" in South Africa was a racial construct. None of the varied differences of language, religion, or cultural heritage found among the white population was reflected in this classification. This is a common tendency in colonization by Europeans, who "whitened as they expanded and conquered, developing a common identity by using Africans as the main foil against which they defined themselves" (Steyn 2001b:5). In particular, it whitewashes the strongly felt distinction between Afrikaans- and English-speaking white South Africans, who make up respectively 60 and 40 percent of the white population. As we argue in detail below, white South Africans formed a de facto community under the political and social conditions created by apartheid. *Community* is a contested term; in this paper, a community is a group of people sharing some sense of common life and identity—which sense is based on a political construct (which in this case had the overriding aim of privileging whiteness) and has a definite degree of emic reality. The concealing of the linguistic and cultural distinction between English and Afrikaner is ironic, since it is this divide that arguably led to the establishment of apartheid in the first place.

Afrikaners are white South Africans who speak Afrikaans, a creole Dutch language. They are descended from Dutch, German, French, and other European settlers who came to South Africa from the mid-seventeenth century on, many in search of religious or political freedom. The uncompromising desire for self-determination that powered the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the idea of separate development can be traced to these roots, as well as to the fledgling Afrikaners' repeated subjugations by the British. This first subjugation occurred when the Cape was seized from the Dutch in 1795; again when slavery was abolished there in the late 1830s, prompting an Afrikaner migration to the interior (known as The Great Trek); again in the late 1860s, when diamonds and then gold were discovered in the northeast of the country, where Afrikaners had established republics; and finally in the two bitter Anglo-Boer wars, in which the British used concentration camps and a scorched-earth policy to capture, subjugate, and starve the Afrikaners into surrender in 1902. Even in 1910, when Afrikaner-led parties won the (whites-only) election to rule the new Union of South Africa, it was as a dominion of the British Empire.

This history gave rise to a unique brand of fervent nationalism, centered on the Afrikaner *Volk*, which gradually developed as the twentieth century progressed.[4] Its overriding aim was absolute national self-determination for an Afrikaner state on the southern tip of Africa.[5] As the name suggests, Afrikaners, unlike many of the English settlers, saw themselves as settled in Africa, with no motherland to return to. Afrikaner nationalism became a political reality in the 1948 election with the defeat of the pro-British United Party by the National Party, running on a dual platform of race-based apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism (De Villiers 1998:307–308; Giliomee and Mbenga 2007:310).[6] The National Party appealed to deep-seated colonial racism and the Afrikaner quest for identity.

Practically, it was "whiteness" that became the access to privileged-class status in apartheid South Africa, regardless of language or cultural affiliation, though it was far more difficult to gain government positions if one was not of Afrikaans descent. And as social engineering reached more and more areas of life, it shaped practices, spaces, and identities along the white–black divide. So by "white South African," this paper means both English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites.

We are not arguing for a white ethnicity; rather, that such a constructed idea operated powerfully in the white social consciousness during apartheid. The English-speaking group was culturally diverse, consisting of descendents not only of British immigrants, but also of other, smaller, social groups, such as Germans, Portuguese, and Greeks. And, as pointed out by Goodwin and Schiff, Afrikaners themselves are descended from diverse European nationalities (not to mention that the genealogies of most of the older families include Malay and black ancestors too); the concept of a "pure" Afrikaner ethnicity was created to serve the interests of growing nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s (1995:48). Despite the diversity of the social grouping we are calling white, the lived experience of its members reflected "the material reality of the power of artificial homogenisation" (Distiller 2004:6).

As we discuss more in section three, apartheid created a world that seemed to confirm the superiority of whiteness, by manipulating the economy, media, and education systems. Apartheid South Africa gave whites "proof of the meniality of blackness, confirming the appropriateness of their social entitlement" (Steyn 2001a:87). It built on what colonialism had already achieved, homogenizing whiteness as defined over and against the other of "blackness."[7] So what made a white South African was not so much cultural or historical affiliation as membership in a politicized racial category, informed by the policies of apartheid.

These policies and their effects earned worldwide notoriety. Legislation prohibited miscegenation, separated racial groups geographically, reserved municipal grounds for separate races, and created separate beaches, buses, hospitals, schools, and university facilities. Interracial contact, even in international sport, was frowned upon. The guiding plan was the policy of separate development, otherwise known as Grand Apartheid, by which, in the rhetoric of the government, each race in South Africa was to be returned to its ancestral fatherland, there to fulfill its divinely authorized potential in peaceful isolation. Part of the apartheid project was to reinforce not only racial differences, but also ethnic differences within the black racial grouping, partly to help prevent unified black opposition, and partly in obedience to the philosophy of separateness. From 1970, the "black" category was subdivided into ethnic or linguistic groups, such as Xhosa and Zulu (Christopher 2002:3). Each black African ethnic group was assigned a homeland, a quasi-independent nation-state; in total, all ten of these homelands made up only 13 percent of the country's land, though black South Africans made up nearly 80 percent of its population.

Apartheid was abandoned as the official policy of the National Party in 1990, and ended formally in 1994 with the first democratic elections, in which Nelson Mandela became president. The belief long held by many South Africans and formulated in the 1955 Freedom Charter that South Africa belongs to all South Africans regardless of color was actualized in a new constitution. The real reasons for this momentous political transformation are much debated. In his autobiography, F. W. de Klerk, the last president of apartheid South Africa, presents the transition as the result of a few visionary Afrikaner politicians' voluntary abandonment of apartheid in the interests of South Africa's long-term stability (1999:xvi). Quantitative historical research, however, shows that this was not so much political martyrdom as economic necessity; apartheid was no longer viable, first because of skilled labor shortages, since education and training were restricted to the white minority, and second because of the economic effects of international sanctions; domestic social protest and working-class conflict had a lesser impact (Schwartzman & Taylor 1999; Seekings 2008:5). Though economically the fall of apartheid was inevitable, this did not mean that the white population in general was eagerly anticipating it. The world in which they lived had always been ordered along the black/white divide, and apartheid's cultural symbols and motivations, though becoming increasingly hollow, still informed the ways in which the white community understood themselves and their world.

This was not immediately apparent in 1994. The transition to multiracial democracy was largely successful and relatively free of the kind of revolutionary and racial violence and civil warfare that often accompanies a transfer of power of this nature. The whites did not see themselves as foreigners with European "homes" to which they could return. The Afrikaners regarded themselves as rooted in the land, and many English-speakers by now considered themselves South African. No one could imagine what form the society of the new South Africa would take, though there was widespread optimism that it would be a community in which everyone, black and white, could feel at home and live in peace. As the process of transformation gathered momentum, most South Africans were swept into the change; there seemed no other option than to accept it, some with joy, others with resignation, some with fear, others with cautious optimism.

## Section Two: White Reactions after Apartheid: Adaptation, Emigration

As the 1990s proceeded into the twenty-first century, however, drastic changes in the behavior of white South Africans appeared—which arguably reflected deep-seated psychological upheaval. The most startling of these was a wave of emigration.

In the early 1990s, emigration was frowned upon. Those planning to leave were known derogatively as PFPs, literally those "Packing for Perth."[8]

This tag became synonymous for any white South Africa regarded as too cowardly or too racist to make the effort to live in the new South Africa. This attitude has changed completely in the decade since the first election. Now the emigration phenomenon is so common in South Africa that to be "packing" is widely seen as sensible, not something to be ashamed of. The exact size of the emigration wave is difficult to establish, since the South African government no longer keeps records of emigration. Reports from other sources vary widely. For example, in 2005, the BBC quoted an estimate by the South African High Commission in London of the number of South Africans living in Britain at 1.4 million (BBC 2008); in 2009, the BBC reported the figure of 500,000 to 600,000 from an estimate by the "Global South Africans Network" (BBC 2009). Arguably more accurate estimates are given by the South African Institute of Race Relations' official figures, which show that the white population, numbering 5,068,300 in the 1991 census, shrank by about 850,000 between 1996 and 2005, and in 2007 was estimated at approximately 4,300,000. Most of those leaving are what the institute terms "affluent and educated." However the institute cautions that the figure estimated for the drop may be too small by as much as a factor of four (McCarthy 2008). A telling indication of white emigration can be found in New Zealand census statistics. In 1991, the number of South-African-born people living in New Zealand was 5655, but in 2006, it was 41,676.[9] That is an eightfold increase over a period of fifteen years (Statistics New Zealand 2008).[10]

If the numbers of émigrés are as high as these statistics indicate, then about 20 to 25 percent of white South Africans have left their country of birth since the 1990s.[11] The most popular destinations are Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. These countries are first-world and English-speaking, and the majority of their populations is white (Van Rooyen 2000:139).

On internet blogs, people explain their reasons for leaving, the difficulties of the emigration experience, and personal reflections about South Africa. Many accounts are tinged with homesickness and often bitterness at having to choose self-imposed exile; others are blatantly racist in character and deride the new South Africa; some try to give a neutral account of the process of settling into a new, foreign country.[12] Some give as their reason for leaving the firsthand experience of violent crime; for example, "Those closest to me lost three people to gunshot wounds to the head. Three people murdered in hijacking or robberies and three times I helped those closest to me put their broken lives back together" (Blogcatalog 2009). Others cite affirmative action, as in, "Another reason was because of BEE [affirmative action] I was immediately at a disadvantage to getting jobs because of the fact [I] am white" (*South African Expats* 2009). Still others starkly describe living in a constant state of fear; for example, "I hated being scared the whole time" (*South African Expats* 2009).

These blogs are supported by more formal sources. A 2004 report from the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development states that

the most common "official" reasons given for leaving are crime and affirmative action (McCarthy 2008). South Africa has one of the highest rates of violent crime in the world, and has been described by the BBC as the most dangerous country in the world that is not at war (BBC 2002). Violent crime is a particularly real and tragic motivator for people to leave if they have the means to do so.[13] These factors certainly contribute to the increase in emigration, but it would be an oversimplification to assume that they are the only reasons. Weak political leadership, uncertain long-term economic stability, poor government, and municipal operation coming together into a pervasive, pessimistic belief that "things are getting worse" (Johnson 2007; Rostron 2001) all contribute to a general sense of unease.

Many socioeconomic and political explanations account for the decision of so many white, privileged, and well-educated professionals to leave South Africa, but these explanations do not necessarily capture the existential and philosophical motivations for leaving—which, because they are largely unacknowledged and unarticulated, are not resolved by emigration, and perhaps it is these reasons that are the most interesting and the most telling.

This paper argues that the philosophical language of Heidegger and Taylor opens up a way of talking about the diaspora in meaningful philosophical terms. This language talks of white South Africans' failure to come to terms with the historical forces that shaped their identity and to recognize the legacy of a past that cannot be erased by emigrating. The next section discusses Charles Taylor's concept of the social imaginary and Martin Heidegger's concept of dwelling, and relates these notions to the reasons for and difficulties of emigration for white South Africans.

## Section Three: The Social Imaginary and Dwelling

According to Taylor, a social imaginary is something much broader and deeper "than the intellectual themes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode." It is not, to use the language of politics, an intellectualized theory like "democracy" or "conservatism," which can be traced in a society's political development by a neutral external observer, the political theorist: rather, it is "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor 2004:23).

The idea of a social imaginary captures something of the way in which human beings construct a coherent picture of their world, so that they and their lives make sense in it. Human beings always have a social imaginary, because we have a deep existential need to feel that our lives make sense. Though Taylor does not explore it explicitly, the dynamic within a social imaginary for the people who share it is always toward coherence: we need

to live in a world that makes sense. For some people in a given society, the symbols, practices, and assumptions of the imaginary fit together smoothly, and are satisfyingly coherent. If, however, some of the images, expectations, and norms of an individual's world clash with those of the imaginary, that person's emic experience of the imaginary will be anxious, fractured, and incoherent. Also, from an etic point of view, a society's imaginary can appear anachronistic to outside observers. Thus, South Africa's apartheid imaginary was profoundly at odds with the emancipatory, egalitarian mores that began to emerge ever more strongly in the West after the Second World War—so, to Western observers, the apartheid imaginary was deeply incoherent and anachronistic.

A similar attempt to explore how human individuals interrelate with their societies is that of Martin Heidegger, who in his later work developed the concept of "dwelling." In Heidegger's sense, dwelling is rooted in the evocation of a tangible relationship with the earth upon which one lives, but it extends much further. Dwelling is more than just living, and more even than simply living on the land one happened to be born on. It means relating to that land as a homeland, a dwelling place. To dwell is to be cared for in the dwelling-place, and to care for the things of the dwelling place (Young 2002:64). Dwelling is, in Heidegger's words, "to be set at peace . . . to remain at peace within the . . . free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature" (2001:147–148). A dwelling place is a home in the sense defined by Martin and Mohanty—of a place that feels culturally congruent and supportive of a "secure, safe, familiar, protected, and homogenous identity" (1987).

Dwelling, though connected inseparably with the land, is thus not just a relation to a particular region of physical space, but "an intercon-nected complex of natural and cultural features which add up to the notion of *place*" (Young 2002:101). To dwell is to live authentically, fully, and meaningfully within the interrelational space of what Heidegger calls the fourfold—made up of sky, earth, mortals, and divinities. Young unpacks this idea by considering the fourfold as the local world of the dweller (i.e., a local fourfold, for one's dwelling place is somewhere that is *near* to one).[14] For the later Heidegger, to dwell is to be authentic, faithful to the given ontological circumstances of one's world, and therefore peaceful within it. One experi-ences what Heidegger calls *homeliness* because one is truly at home in one place—and thus, inevitably, less at home in other places. This is why it is so difficult to leave one's dwelling place and move to another. The move is much more than just leaving one geographical site for another. One has to learn to "dwell" on other "earth," with different "mortals," under another "sky" and to learn the nature of other "gods." As Young writes, emigration is often a slow and difficult process, for it entails and demands a change in personality, a personality shaped by the place from which one has come (2002:102).

This is true of all human migrations; however, the search for dwelling is particularly complex and difficult in the case of white South Africans. One way to explain this difficulty is the nature of the social imaginary that grew

up among whites in apartheid South Africa. Unpacking this social imaginary will do two things: first, give a sense of the historical conception that white South Africans, particularly Afrikaners, have of their history as a people and nation, and second, discuss white South Africans' ability or inability to dwell in South Africa. The basic argument is that a social imaginary informs the way in which one dwells, and the social imaginary created by apartheid was a political construct, based on normative assumptions that presupposed a most perverse and extreme form of eugenics on a social scale. The apartheid social imaginary was real and coherent for many whites and blacks, from an emic perspective; etically, for outside observers, however, it was anachronistic and incoherent. On the social imaginary, however flawed, was built an artificial sense of dwelling, which favored whites in every respect and did not truly reflect South African society at all.

When South Africa transformed politically, literally overnight, into a plural, theoretically nonracial democracy, white South Africans found themselves in a new world. Their old social imaginary was exposed as a deeply embedded, immoral construct, fundamentally at odds with the new South Africa. This reality required them to adapt, to develop a new social imaginary. The social imaginary is the way we imagine ourselves at the most profound level, the values and judgments so deeply ingrained in us, both individually and as a society, that we do not even know we have them and cannot consciously articulate them. They cannot be changed easily or quickly. Though apartheid was not monolithic and did undergo subtle changes over time, and though the mounting pressure of resistance to it from inside and outside the country was undermining its political authority by the late 1980s, yet even in 1994 the deeper levels of the imaginary, the ingrained social practices nurtured by apartheid structures were largely untouched by these developments.[15] The result was that after the adjustments brought about by the 1994 elections, white South Africans found themselves in a condition perhaps best described as angst-ridden and existentially *homeless*, for they were now strangers in their own land.[16] This condition can be explored by delineating some of the components of their social imaginary.[17]

Taylor's characterization of a social imaginary has three basic components. First, it is an "imaginary": it consists in the way ordinary people *imagine* themselves and their social surroundings. For most people, it is not expressed in theoretical terms, but carried in images, stories, and legends. Second, it is "shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society," in contrast with theory, which tends to be the "possession of a small minority." Third, it "is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 2004:43).

A passage from the autobiography of F. W. de Klerk, the president of South Africa who removed the ban on the ANC and began the process that brought Mandela to power, illustrates the first of these characteristics. The passage captures the essence of the social imaginary that formed Afrikaner identity and explains the motivation for "separate development," the cornerstone of apartheid:

> My people . . . erected [a] monument . . . to the Afrikaner
> Voortrekkers—pioneers in Afrikaans—who had opened up
> the interior of South Africa with their flint-lock muskets
> and trains of lumbering ox wagons. The marble bas-reliefs
> that adorned its interior walls bore silent testimony to the
> tribulations that they had suffered in their quest to establish
> their own free republics in the interior of the sub-continent.
> The people depicted in the murals were the heroes of whose
> deeds I learned at my mother's knee. The dream that they had
> dreamt of being a free and separate people, with their own right
> to national self-determination in their own national state in
> southern Africa, had been the dream that had motivated the
> ancestors who stared sternly at me from our old family pho-
> tographs. It had been the central goal of my own father, who
> had been cabinet minister during the 1950s and 60s. It was
> the ideal to which I myself had clung until I finally concluded,
> after a long process of deep introspection, that, if pursued,
> it would bring disaster to all the peoples of our country—
> including my own. (De Klerk 2004: xviii–xix)

This passage shows the first characteristic of the social imaginary: it conveys
an evocative and romantic account of the self-mythologizing that informs
Afrikaner identity. De Klerk hears these as stories passed down from mother
to child. Historical figures are transformed into the heroes of tragic legend,
symbolizing a history of tribulation and suffering triumphantly overcome,
which justifies a belief in the destiny of the Afrikaner to eventually aspire
to "national self-determination." This mythology is given concrete form in
great symbolic buildings like the Voortrekker monument, which, even today,
towers on the skyline of Pretoria and serves as a reminder of this destiny to
all who gaze upon it.

The narratives of Afrikaner nationalism were made more powerful by
a strong link with religion, an attenuated form of Old Testament Calvin-
ism, heavily racialized (Steyn 2001b:28–29). Protestant theology interacted
with the frontier life of the Voortrekkers, leading Afrikaners to identify with
the biblical Israelites. Though the Voortrekkers did not understand them-
selves in these terms, their descendents in the 1920s and 1930s pressed the
scriptural parallel into the service of political and cultural nationalism (De
Villiers 1998:270; Du Toit 1983:951) to help foster a sense of stability, cul-
tural pride, and ethnic identity (Giliomee and Mbenga 2007:289–290). The
wandering of God's chosen people in the desert became a metaphor through
which the Afrikaners could express their identity and articulate their sense
of the world. "Home," instead of lying somewhere behind, as it did for other
colonizers, like the British, was for Afrikaners always somewhere ahead
(M. Ridge in Steyn 2001b:29), waiting to be achieved, the "ideal" that De
Klerk admits he "clung" to for as long as possible.

This mythology was particularly Afrikaans, but, as we argue above, white South Africans, under apartheid, formed a de facto community, defined by its whiteness. Even though English-speaking white South Africans did not think of themselves as Afrikaners, or share this particular mythologizing of the Afrikaner past, their whiteness under apartheid, which resulted from this mythologizing, led to their sharing in the racist discourses that privileged whiteness. The second of the characteristics of a social imaginary, according to Taylor, is that it is shared by a large portion of a society. Most South Africans—blacks as well as whites—shared the social imaginary of white privilege. This was the bitter success of apartheid. Constructing a self requires an Other, and so the blacks were part of the social imaginary, the disempowered, delegitimized Others, who gave whiteness its meaning. The white community formed a group united by the social imaginary of white privilege, one pervasively colored by the "dream" of Afrikaner nationalism.

This reveals one of the major incoherencies of the apartheid social imaginary. Apartheid self-determination was forged in the Afrikaner's hatred of the British, yet the political reality of apartheid incorporated English speakers into the white ruling class. The Afrikaner apartheid economic system benefited from the powerful English-owned industries, such as the gold and diamond mines, without the Afrikaners' having to admit any debt to the hated British. Similarly the English-speaking whites profited immeasurably from their privileged white status under apartheid regulations, while escaping the guilt of being the primary architects of this system.

English-speaking South Africans fell into the apartheid mind-set all the more easily because of their own history as a white colonialist society. The apartheid social imaginary drew on the broader colonial discourse. As Steyn argues, "Apartheid was a logical, if extreme, interpretation of the trope of modern Western whiteness" (2001b:xxxi), "the fullest expression of imperialism's logic" (2001b:24). Also feeding into the imaginary therefore were widespread ideas such as the importance of maintaining racial purity, and the role of the whites in bringing civilization to the natives; these ideas were particularly part of the British colonial heritage (Steyn 2001b:31). Together, the Afrikaners and English-speaking whites formed "a small group of people whose self-image and expectations were shaped by the general contours of the master narrative of whiteness" (Steyn 2001b:24). Another unifying factor, characteristic of Western colonial populations, was constant subliminal fear of being overwhelmed; whites were vastly outnumbered in South Africa by the indigenous population, making the social imaginary a "bulwark against what at some level was sensed to be the inevitable" (Steyn 2001b:25).[18] Since only whites could vote in elections, and from 1948 on these elections were won by the National Party, the imaginary implicit in the political and ideological manifesto of the Nationalists was thus legislated into the political system that informed the lives of all South Africans. In a world increasingly shaped in conformity with this social imaginary, arranged around the polarities of "white" and "black," other differences tended to fade, as people

identified with either the master minority or the slave majority. As institutionalized separation of the different racial communities solidified, stepping across the divide imaginatively became more and more difficult.

The third characteristic of the social imaginary, that its collective common understanding makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy, is born out of this divide. In apartheid South Africa, practices and their legitimating narratives rooted in the imaginary were particularly strong, perpetuated and maintained by the legalized and enforced master–slave narrative, which informed every aspect of life. The ideology and the material world it shaped were mutually reinforcing. Laws declared which racially designated toilet one could use or bench one could sit on, whom one could sleep with, what job one could get, and where and whether or not one could buy property. But at a deeper level, the imaginary legitimated certain common practices that were not legally enforced but widely accepted and practiced by both blacks and whites. A paradigm case is the black housemaid who left her family and children to work in the home of a white family. She could not bring her family to live with her in the suburb where she worked, because legally blacks could not own houses there. So she usually lived in a tiny outside room, so as to be available, sometimes seven days a week, to clean the house and look after the children. This segregation began in law, but other practices, below the level of legislation, became involved with and reinforced legal strictures. In many houses, great lengths were taken to ensure that the maid used only her own toilet, crockery, and cutlery, that she ate in a separate environment, and that she kept her head covered and her eyes lowered. She was often called by a generic white name because her African one was too troublesome to pronounce. She called her employers master (*baas*) and madam. It is an ironic reflection of white blindness to the personhood of their black Others that such maids would often be referred to by their white employers as "one of the family."

In another telling example, Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography, recounts the story of how, when he was a clerk working at a lawyer's firm in Johannesburg, a great show was made of inviting him to take tea with the white secretaries, to demonstrate that "the color bar" did not exist in the firm. He was carefully assigned his own cup, specially bought for him, which no one else would use (Mandela 1995:83).

These examples show how the social imaginary makes ordinary individuals, who definitely see themselves as "good people," capable of unjust, discriminatory behavior. Whites, through a myriad of day-to-day choices, perpetuated their preferential status (Steyn 2001a:88–89). The nature of a social imaginary is to remain latent, unexamined; if circumstances do bring its patterns to conscious examination, it is extraordinarily difficult to see past them and imagine the world any differently. Of course individuals always adapt and resist the imaginary to various degrees; liberals, both Afrikaans and English-speaking, tried to resist it in various ways, and new arrivals to apartheid South Africa, such as the many British and Portuguese

who immigrated in the 1970s (SouthAfrica.info 2008), had to adapt to it. However, none could escape untouched by it.

The social imaginary of white South Africa under apartheid was never tenable, because it was a narrative built on deeply prejudiced justification. Based on biases, it suffered from a fundamental lack of etic authenticity. Again, the De Klerk passage suggests this, when he speaks of the Voortrekkers "opening up" the center of the continent, as if no one had even been there before. Giliomee shows that this idea of the land as *originally uninhabited* first took root between the 1870s and 1913 (2003:279). This conception, which meant that the land was there for the taking, is a characteristic feature of the white South African social imaginary as it appears in historiography and literature. De Villiers captures the depth of feeling the land evoked in early Afrikaner settlers and in the reappropriated settler culture of Nationalist propaganda: "A hazardous land it was. But it was *their* land. I can still feel it in my bones, the way they loved it. The north was *theirs*. It was the refuge into which they poured all their battered hopes" (1989:90).

This belief can be read as part of an effort to find real dwelling, but the relationship with the land reveals a flaw inherent in the social imaginary. J. M. Coetzee, writing about South African landscape writing, says "in the words [the poet] throws out to the landscape, in the echoes he listens for, he is seeking a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow him an identity better than that of visitor, stranger, transient" (1988:8). Coetzee's poet speaks to the *land*, not to its indigenous inhabitants. The poet, in Heidegger's terms, is trying to find dwelling on this new earth, to meet its gods and make peace with them, but the effort is doomed to failure because it excludes the mortals of this realm.[19] Heidegger insists that true dwelling is dwelling that gives equal measure to each of the elements of the fourfold, which the incoherent colonial narrative does not.

This example points to the central argument, about why it has become difficult for white South Africans to dwell in South Africa—or anywhere else in the world, for that matter. White South Africans may be leaving because of surface issues that affect the immediate context of their lives in South Africa, namely crime and affirmative action. But the deeper issue is arguably that they are unable to *dwell* there, first because of the extreme nature of the white South African social imaginary and the world which formed it, and second because of the strength of that imaginary.

First, the imaginary supported by apartheid was incoherent, partial, and based on racial separation and the systematic oppression and effective economic enslavement of the majority of the population. When trends in the Western world were moving toward emancipation and equality of all genders and races, for example in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the civil-rights movement (1960s), and the continuing struggle for women's rights, South Africa clung desperately to its anachronistic program of systematic segregation and disenfranchisement. As Derrida famously put it, apartheid was racism's "last word," since "at a time when all racisms on the face of the earth were condemned, it was in the world's face that the

National party dared to campaign 'for the separate development of each race in the geographic zone assigned to it'" (1985:291). What this system created was a severely distorted attempt at dwelling, which was not true dwelling at all. Based on racial prejudice, apartheid was an ethic of ontological evil. True dwelling (in this sense, authentic dwelling) cannot happen if one does not acknowledge and respect the realities of the age in which one lives. One cannot truly dwell if various aspects of one's community's life and practices collide, and one cannot be fully human if the foundation of one's living is the denial of another's humanity.

Despite the sterility at its core, the apartheid imaginary was accepted by nearly everyone because it was legalized and as effectively enforced as an imaginary enshrined into a political and legal reality can be. Also, for whites, life was good under apartheid, for the most part. Material comfort made questioning the prevailing conditions inconvenient. As the speaker in the opening anecdote so unthinkingly reveals, apartheid South Africa wanted to occupy African soil without acknowledging its other inhabitants and their claims to dwell there too. The apartheid government cleared the land of "black spots," patterned it with towns with Afrikaans names and memorials to Anglo-Boer War battles, thereby entrenching the social imaginary; however, these territorial marks signposted a dwelling place that could be maintained only at the cost of enormous inhuman effort. The land has other names, and older gods, which have now risen to reclaim their birthright.

If white South Africans are to dwell authentically in South Africa now, they will have to admit that the Nationalist gods were idols, and evolve a new fourfold, a new social imaginary. That the adaptation this requires is extremely difficult is clear from a number of evolving phenomena in South Africa today, where adaptation to postapartheid society is shirked, rather than embraced. One such phenomenon is "semigration," moving into a "security village," where houses are not surrounded by high walls, but are set in idyllic green lanes (usually around a golf course), enclosed in a high electric perimeter fence, complete with security booms, armed guards, and restricted access. Semigration is a semirelinquishing of citizenship, because the inhabitants of these security villages in effect no longer live in the real South Africa (Ballard 2004:52).[20] A similar reaction is a move to the Western Cape (particularly Cape Town), which is run by the (predominantly white) Democratic Alliance. Another type of response is increased or reinforced racism. Rising crime and violence, and reports of maladministration and corruption, seem to confirm old racist attitudes about "them"; for these whites, the confirmation of their expectations makes "the world at least [retain] some vestiges of logical coherence and psychological familiarity" (Steyn 2001b:99). The task of adaptation reveals the real underlying cultural differences between Afrikaans and English-speaking whites—differences that the privileges of apartheid covered over. The changes brought about by the new South Africa do not, relatively speaking, seem to require English-speakers to reconstruct their sense of their white "self." In contrast, the strong link that Afrikaner Nationalism drew between Afrikaner cultural identity and

apartheid politics means that Afrikaners are having to undertake "exacting reconstructions" of their Afrikanerness (Steyn 2001b:83).

Therein may lie the reason why white South Africans struggle to adapt to the new South Africa: the strength of the old social imaginary. The master–slave, white–black narrative became so engrained in the South Africa consciousness, that even after the successful and relatively peaceful transition to democracy, it is still strong. Mamphela Ramphele judges the need to confront "the legacy of inferiority and superiority complexes on the part of black and white South Africans" as the most important of the shifts in perspective that have to happen if South Africans are to develop a shared vision of the country and its future (2001:69–70). Among white South Africans, the failure to make this shift shows itself in varied ways: some feel outraged by their relative disempowerment and lack of political representation, others suffer from undiagnosed "white guilt," and still others angrily cling to notions of racial superiority. All these reactions reveal that they are still trying to dwell in a place that no longer fits their social imaginary, which is no longer home.

## Conclusion

The speaker in our opening anecdote unthinkingly reveals the heart of white South African homelessness. Though white South Africans under apartheid lived on the African continent, they did not live in "Africa," because "Africa" signified for them everything that is "other" to what the system of apartheid wanted to create. The fall of apartheid has swept away the home in which white South Africans thought they dwelt. The resulting existential homelessness, a product of the artificial, distorted dwelling born out of the colonial endeavor and reaching its peak under apartheid, is a strongly motivating factor for many South Africans who leave the country.[21] How can one dwell in a place that is no longer home? But the crowning irony is that a *home* is what the apartheid social imaginary continues to deny many of these émigrés. They move to Britain or ex-British colonies, in search of a material lifestyle similar to that in South Africa, trusting that they will feel at home there, perhaps even subconsciously assuming fellowship with the Canadians, Australians, or New Zealanders simply because they too are white. Some features of white racialization are supranational, a legacy of colonization, so whites can emigrate to countries where some parts of white identity are more supported, where "the parameters of [a] white world view remain more intact" (Steyn 2001a:91–92). But because South African whiteness, in its unexamined assumption of privilege particularly, is still often inextricably based on the apartheid imaginary, many South African immigrants find truly dwelling in their new homes difficult. The greatest failure, one of the still developing tragedies of apartheid, is perhaps the fact that the Nationalists' attempt to carve out the Afrikaner utopia they dreamed of has resulted in the dispersal of an ever-increasing portion of the Afrikaner people,

with their culture and language, the victims of their ancestors' attempt at self-determination.

Using Taylor's and Heidegger's philosophical language gives insight into the existential and imaginative predicament of white South Africans, both at home and abroad. These insights do not claim to offer an infallible route out of this predicament. They do begin to outline a useful philosophical approach for investigating the politics of dwelling, both inside and outside the new South Africa.

## NOTES

1. Many South African coloreds have emigrated, arguably for the same reasons as many white South Africans; however, satisfactory discussion of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper.

2. For example, a white person was defined as "in appearance obviously a white person or generally accepted as a white person." The determination that a person was "obviously white" would take into account "his habits, education, and speech and deportment and demeanour [*sic*]." A black person would be of, or accepted as a member of, an African ethnicity, and a colored person is one that is not black or white. The Department of Home Affairs was responsible for the classification of the citizenry. Noncompliance with the race laws was dealt with harshly (see February 1981).

3. For a more detailed exploration of this development, see Giliomee and Mbenga 2007, pp. 288ff and Giliomee 2003.

4. The immediate twentieth-century comparison that often springs to mind is modern-day Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel.

5. The connection with the British was finally broken in 1961, when by referendum South Africa became a republic—which entailed the rejection of its Commonwealth status.

6. This was not without historical precedent. As early as 1904, Cape Afrikaner leader F. S. Malan was calling for a white *South African* South Africa, independent from Britain, formed "on the basis of the equality of the two white sections of the population. They had to share the same privileges and obligations." This was enshrined in the Union Constitution of 1910 (Giliomee 2003:275, 277).

7. It is perhaps not entirely by chance that this acronym is the same as that used for the Progressive Federal Party, the white liberal antiapartheid party taken up into the new opposition, the Democratic Party, founded in 1989.

8. Census figures for people giving their birthplace as South Africa: 1991, 5655; 1996, 11,334; 2001, 26, 061; 2006, 41,676 (Statistics New Zealand 2006).

9. Of course, the white population of South Africa has never been static. During the apartheid

years, many whites, including Afrikaners, left the country because they disagreed with the government's policies. Some, like Breyten Breytenbach, were active in the antiapartheid struggle. At various stages, there were small waves of emigration, for example, of young men aiming to avoid conscription in the 1980s (Battersby 1988; Jupp 2001:689). However, at no earlier time in South Africa's history has emigration by whites occurred so rapidly or in such large numbers.

10. It would be interesting for our argument to know the proportions of Afrikaans- versus English-speaking whites leaving South Africa. Unfortunately, these statistics are almost impossible to come by. Some figures are available for New Zealand: the number of New Zealand residents who can hold a conversation about everyday things in Afrikaans was 12,783 in 2001 (49% of the total of 26,021 South African-born emigrants) and 21,123 in 2006 (51% of the total of 41,676 South African-born emigrants) (Statistics New Zealand 2006). However, since many first language English speakers can speak Afrikaans well enough to hold an everyday conversation, these statistics are not easy to interpret. Afrikaans-speaking children born in New Zealand to Afrikaans-speaking parents are included in the figures—which further obscures the picture.

11. For an overview of the different experiences of South African émigrés the blog http://south africandiaspora.blogspot.com/ is an interesting place to start. It contains links to other blogs, some alarming in content (and, conveniently, it has a link to an online South African grocery store, SA Goodies). One particularly interesting Web site, http://www.africancrisis.co.za, describing itself as "Africa's Premier Hard News Web site," ensures that anything newsworthy on it derides and vilifies the African continent, particularly black Africans. The "Reader's Comments" section is particularly macabre. The overt message of the Web site is clearly to reinforce notions of white superiority and implicitly to suggest that Africa was a far better place when managed by its white colonialists and their predecessors, and that whites are better off leaving the continent. The title of the blog "I Luv South Africa . . . but I hate my government" (http://iluvsa.blogspot.com/2009/05/why-i-am-ex-expat-for-now.html, accessed 5 July 2009) clearly suggests what its contents will be. It contains entries that refer to the ANC and its political affiliates as an axis of evil, and is effectively a platform for white hate speech.

12. The relative ease of travel in the late twentieth century of course facilitates this migration, especially for white South Africans, whose privileged status under apartheid has left the majority of them educated and affluent.

13. The fourfold is not a realist description of the factors that make up our human lives, but rather an ontological topology of how human beings understand their sense of place and being-at-home.

14. This is still true: though economic practices in the new South Africa are now determined mostly by class, social practices still follow apartheid-era racial groupings. See Seekings 2008:8.

15. The phrase is borrowed from Sol Plaatje, another South African who found himself a stranger in his homeland, made homeless by political forces ([1916]1987:6).

16. Black South Africans, equally shaped by the apartheid social imaginary, certainly also experienced some form of existential upset in 1994; they too had to adapt to the New South Africa. Interesting though a discussion of this process would be, it is beyond the scope of this paper. See Steyn 2001 for a sociological study of the reactions of various racial groupings in South Africa.

17. J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1982) is a starkly evocative, though allegorical, exploration of this fear.

18. Coetzee continues: "It is not surprising . . . that this strain should begin to wane about the time [the 1960s] when . . . it began to be apparent that the ultimate fate of whites was going to depend a great deal more urgently on an accommodation with black South Africans than on an accommodation with the South African landscape" (1988:8).

19. In late 2008 in the Pretoria region, advertisements for two such security villages ran slogans like "Serengetwe [the name of the village], not Perth."

20. The strain of adapting the social imaginary arguably contributes to the increase in xenophobia among black South Africans since liberation. With the old imaginary displaced but no clear replacement yet formed, questions of identity, including the relationship between the "South African" and the "African" identity (Distiller 2004:9), remain complex and troublesome.

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