



# The post-heroism of *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers*

Danielle Britz & Chris Broodryk

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There is much scholarship on the linkages between Afrikaner nationalism and South African (Afrikaans-language) filmmaking. Within the context of a sustained post-apartheid renegotiation of Afrikaans or Afrikaner nationalism in the popular imagination, in this article we argue that two feature film historical dramas from the production company Bosbok Ses Films, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* (2013) and *Verraaiers* (2013), resonate thematically and aesthetically with Thomas Elsaesser's notion of post-heroic cinema. While a number of pre-1994 Afrikaans-language films celebrated Afrikaner nationalism as personified in the figure of the hero, this article positions and uses Elsaesser's post-heroism as a critical lens through which to demonstrate the ways in which these two films call attention to a post-hero whose actions and behaviour (often inadvertently) renders a productive renegotiating of the hero figure within a post-apartheid cinematic context. To supplement Elsaesser, we also draw on Johan Degenaar's writing on political pluralism. In this article, we find that an Elsaesserian post-heroic approach to the two films allows the following constitutive components of post-heroic cinema to surface: atemporality as opposed to linear narrative time, parapraxis (productive failure) as opposed to traditional iterations of heroic acts and valour, and conceiving of the film screen as a surface in flux as opposed to the screen as a mirror. The article's contribution to existing scholarship on contemporary Afrikaans-language cinema is three-fold: it is the first to utilise an Elsaesserian approach to Afrikaans film and as such to foreground and investigate the figure of the post-hero, it provides a critical account of two independently-made feature films that remain under-researched in current South African film scholarship, and it contributes to discourse around the ways in which popular media inform and respond to the renegotiation of Afrikaans (or Afrikaner) identity. **Keywords:** Afrikaner nationalism, atemporality, Bosbok Ses Films, parapraxis, post-heroism, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux*, *Verraaiers*.

## Introduction

There is considerable scholarship about Afrikaner nationalism in Afrikaans-language filmmaking and the nationalist hero figure in several South African (predominantly Afrikaans) films produced under apartheid. In Martin Botha's (*South African Cinema 1896–2010* 77) assessment, Afrikaans-language filmmaking of specifically the 1960s and 1970s avoided the issue of apartheid and offered stereotypical, one-dimensional representations of the Afrikaner. Of the nearly 229 feature films made between 1969 and 1979, "less than 5 percent could be considered cinematically innovative", writes Keyan Tomaselli (*The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film* 90), indicating that most of these feature films tended towards an aesthetic tedium. Some post-apartheid Afrikaans films such as *Verraaiers* (2013) provide a different kind of central protagonist, which certain scholars may term a "tragic hero" (Jansen van Vuuren, *Kavaliër tot Verraaiër, Zombië tot Legoman: mites en die ideologiese uitbeelding van die held in geselekteerde rolprente en dramareeks oor die Anglo-Boeroorlog* 49) to describe such a character instead of "hero". We contend that within the dynamic political landscape of contemporary South Africa, conceiving of this new hero figure as simply 'tragic' fails to fully grasp such characters' implied renegotiation of Afrikaner identity, and in the

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case of *Verraaiers*, his political activity. In addition, the notion of the tragic hero is, as in the case of Anna-Marie Jansen van Vuuren's (*Kavalier tot Verraaier* 57) research, linked to conceptually prohibitive screenwriting formulae. We propose that Thomas Elsaesser's notion of a post-heroic cinema enables a critical reading framework that captures these characters' complexities and locates these complexities within a kind of film that is narratively and aesthetically markedly different from traditional Afrikaans mainstream filmmaking.

This article is situated in a range of scholarship that has critically investigated Afrikaner identity since 2007, when the popular but divisive Afrikaans song "De la Rey" by Bok van Blerk was released (Vanderhaeghen 29). By evoking the figure of reluctant Afrikaner Anglo Boer War hero General Koos de la Rey, the song was a nostalgic invocation of selfless heroism against an insurmountable danger (such as British armed forces) at a time where critical reflection on and renegotiating of the Afrikaner carried considerable cultural currency. As Gary Baines (258) describes it, "De la Rey" resonated with younger Afrikaners' sense of victimhood in and alienation from the so-called 'new' South Africa.

In this article, we briefly explore the historical links between Afrikaner nationalism and period-specific Afrikaans-language heroic cinema. We then demonstrate how two Afrikaans-language feature films, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* (My Regards to Mannetjies Roux) and *Verraaiers* (Traitors)—both produced by the film company Bosbok Ses—constitute thematic and aesthetic articulations of post-heroism in Afrikaans cinema. We foreground some of the links between Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaans-language cinema and draw on Elsaesser's scholarship on post-heroic narratives in European cinema to critically discuss the ways in which *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* constitute its post-heroism. In addition, we refer to South African philosopher Johan Degenaar's writing on political pluralism to further inform our discussion. In this article we demonstrate that an Elsaesserian post-heroic approach to the two films allows a number of constitutive components of post-heroic cinema to surface, such as the use of atemporality as opposed to linear time. This post-heroic cinema also foregrounds productive failure (parapraxis) over heroic acts of valour and conceives of the screen as a surface of flux.

The official website for the South African film production company Bosbok Ses Films lists their four Afrikaans feature films released between 2011 and 2013: the coming-of-age period drama *Roepman* (Star Gazer, 2011); the treason drama *Verraaiers* (Traitors, 2012); the music drama *Musiek vir die agtergrond* (Background Music, 2013); and another coming-of-age period drama, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* (My Regards to Mannetjies Roux, 2013). *Roepman*, *Verraaiers*, and *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* were all directed by Paul Eilers.

Based on a popular stage musical written by Chris Torr, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* uses Laurika Rauch's eponymous Afrikaans song as an impetus for its narrative by constructing a family drama based on key lyrics. In contrast to the song's nostalgic reminder of the traditional *volks* song genre associated with traditional Afrikanerdom, the anti-nostalgic *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* casts an anti-nationalistic cinematic gaze on its characters and events. In the film, teenager Engela (Lizelle de Klerk) visits her uncle Frans (Ian Roberts) and his wife Koba (Anna-Mart van der Merwe) at their Karoo farm during the school holidays. When Engela's mother Anna (Steffie le Roux) arrives unexpectedly, the family is confronted by the truth of Frans's infidelity and the revelation that he is in fact Engela's father. *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* emphasises the interiority of its characters, locating its character relationships set in 1970s South Africa within a larger mytho-political framework of rugby. In the analysis that follows, we will demonstrate that Frans is a post-hero and that the film itself can be positioned as a post-heroic narrative mainly due to its atemporality; the screen as surface of flux; and, additionally, the notion of double occupancy.

*Verraaiers* is set against the event and the memory of the South African War. Critic Leon van Nierop praised *Verraaiers* for avoiding any claims to accurate historical portrayal (332). Based on Albert Blake's book *Boereverraaier* (Boer Traitor, 2010), *Verraaiers* depicts the topic of treason and the idea of betraying the Afrikaner nation. *Verraaiers* is set during the South African War between South Africa and Britain; by the time this conflict started on 11 October 1888, republican forces had already been mobilised by Boer military leaders such as Commandant-general Piet Joubert (Grundlingh, *The Dynamics of Treason. Boer collaboration in the South African War of 1899–1902* 19). These republican forces were often criticised for a lack of proper military discipline (*Dynamics of Treason* 23–4). In response to the announcement of the British army's scorched earth technique, Boer commandant Jacobus van Aswegen (Gys de Villiers) and his sons abandon the Afrikaner war effort to return to their homes and protect their families and property. Van Aswegen and his sons are tried for high treason and sentenced to death. As producer and screenwriter Sallas de Jager told Screen Africa, "[the] subject of Boer traitors is still a controversial

issue in the Afrikaner community [...] That time period had a massive impact on history and on the South Africa we're seeing now". In the analysis that follows, we demonstrate that *Verraaiers*'s protagonist Jacobus van Aswegen is a post-hero, and that the film itself is post-heroic in its emphasis on the parapraxis of the body. This post-heroism is further illustrated in the way *Verraaiers* uses *mise-en-abyme* to call attention to the use of the screen, and the film's deployment of multiple perspectives on key ideological and political matters.

Since *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* can be read to respond to previously dominant traditions of Afrikaner nationalism in their post-heroism, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of Afrikaner nationalism as well as the links between nationalism and historical Afrikaans-language cinema.

### The development of Afrikaner nationalism

Rising from historical challenges and traumas, Afrikaner nationalism, writes Hermann Giliomee, "is arguably the single most important political development of the first half of twentieth-century South Africa" (*Maverick Africans. The Shaping of the Afrikaners* 196). Such was the eventual impact of Afrikaner nationalism that Dan O'Meara ("Thinking theoretically: Afrikaner nationalism and the comparative theory of the politics of identity" 2) describes Afrikaner nationalism as the most severe of the "ethnic legacies which transfigure[d] [South Africa's] history".

Afrikaner nationalism "as a conscious movement" developed in the 1870s and 1880s (Giliomee, "Western Cape farmers and the beginnings of Afrikaner nationalism, 1870–1915" 38). Later, the subsequent development of an increasingly pronounced Afrikaner nationalism in the Western Cape (1870–1915) was influenced by a series of key events that posed numerous challenges to Afrikanerdom, including the South African War ("Western Cape" 62–3), which informs the narrative setting of *Verraaiers*. By 1938, "the great mass of ordinary Afrikaners" had been converted into "a consciously nationalist ideology" (Moodie, "The rise of Afrikanerdom as an immanent critique of Marx's theory of social class" 6). It is in the context of such strong, ideologically forged bonds and loyalties that even in-group "[political] differences seemed to dissolve in the heat of 'oxwagon sentiment'" in the kinds of centenary celebrations held in major cities such as Pretoria (Moodie, "Rise of Afrikanerdom" 7). This sentiment extended into various areas of political and economic activity. As T. Dunbar Moodie reflected at the time, "[the] Afrikaner state in South Africa has been absolutist over against blacks and protectionist over against foreign competition" (Moodie, "Rise of Afrikanerdom" 16).

For Degenaar, Afrikaner nationalism consists of four cornerstones: *selfbeskikking* (self-assertion), *volk*, race, and structural exclusion as constitutive of Afrikaner nationalist power and rhetoric (Degenaar 13–6). *Volk* translates as "the people", where the people in question are a culturally distinct and ethnically recognised group called the Afrikaner. As such, *volk* is a cultural concept based on a shared language, religion, and history, and is often associated with a sense of exclusivity. Structural exclusion refers to organisational instruments and support in ensuring the power of the Afrikaner and was originally enforced through two main organisations, the Afrikaner-Broederbond (Afrikaner Brotherhood, or AB, 1927–1948) and the National Party. Political power, in the context of historical Afrikaner nationalism, is dictated by ideological production of *selfbeskikking*, *volk*, and race, justifying the maintenance of Afrikaans power.

Against this exclusionary nationalist backdrop, Degenaar emerged as a "dissident professor of philosophy at Stellenbosch University" (Barron), who clashed with various Afrikaans authorities about religious dogma in his discussions of political philosophy. Degenaar explains that self-assertion is the mentality of the Afrikaner which ensures the freedom of the Afrikaans nation to view themselves as superior, as it is a seemingly self-created freedom, with institutions such as the Afrikaner-Broederbond, as ideological production of Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

Degenaar's criticism of Afrikaner self-assertion and ideological state apparatuses leads Moodie ("N. P. van Wyk Louw and the moral predicament of Afrikaner nationalism: preparing the ground for *verligte* reform" 200–1) to offer a positive evaluation of Degenaar's contribution to discussions around race in South African—and primarily Afrikaans—circles. With reference to race, Degenaar was critical of the apartheid policy of separate development in which race was formalised as category for geographic placement, often limiting black South Africans to so-called homelands. In opposition to this policy, Degenaar argued that ethnic identity "in a multi-cultural state must necessarily involve sharing political sovereignty" where ethnicity—or "voluntary ethnic attachment"—is fluid. Degenaar was one of the Afrikaans critics of Afrikanerdom who had anticipated the collapse of an unsustainable Afrikanerdom (Moodie, "N. P. van Wyk Louw" 209) and its nationalism.

This collapse of Afrikanerdom and its myths plays out implicitly as a political commentary across the melancholic landscapes and moral quandaries of the historical dramas *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and

*Verraaiers*. We identify a constructive resonance between the demise of the Afrikaner's structural political power in a democratic South Africa, and a narrative feature film structure which does not reassert a nationalist Afrikaner self-identity. Instead, these narrative feature films propose a post-heroism in which identity is “not a God-given but [...] the product of voluntary identification with a group and its values”, as Degenaar describes it, where individuals think “in moral terms about survival” (Giliomee, *The Rise and Demise of the Afrikaners* 79). After 2010, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* sustained the call from politically dissident Afrikaans filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s such as Jans Rautenbach and Manie van Rensburg (Botha, “Die Suid-Afrikaanse filmbedryf sedert 1994”) to critically reconsider what it means to be an Afrikaner in relation to the persistence of a ‘volk’ in the Afrikaner's social imaginary and in the social imaginary of contemporary white Afrikaans-speaking individuals who recognise themselves as Afrikaans and/or Afrikaners.

### **Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaans-language cinema**

In 1923 the first production company based in South Africa, African Film Productions (AFP), was established. This British-funded production company produced *De Voortrekkers: Winning a Continent* (1916), which reinstated a sense of pride in the recently defeated Afrikaners after the South African War (Tomaselli, *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas* 26–7). Such was the film's cultural impact that General Louis Botha, then South African prime minister, praised the film's intense investment in history and historical accuracy (Van Nierop 27–8). While one should not overdetermine the influence of this single film on Afrikaans-language filmmaking, *De Voortrekkers* “established a powerful precedent for the coding of race and nation” in South African cinema (Moyer-Duncan xvi). Also in 1916, *A Zulu's Devotion* was about an elderly Zulu man who is taken in and cared for by a white family (Van Nierop 25) while in 1938, Joseph Albrecht's *They Built a Nation* celebrated Afrikaner history as part of a larger civilising mission benefitting Africa (Van Nierop 37). If it holds that over time “the ‘strong and courageous Boer’ became the figurehead of the myth of white Afrikaner identity and later the cornerstone for the Afrikaner Nationalist ideology from the late 1930s until the end of Apartheid [sic]” (Jansen Van Vuuren, “Challenging the Mythical Boer Hero Archetype in Anglo-Boer War Short Films” 6), then both *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* are overtly conscious of humanising and also demythologising the Boer—family man, father, soldier, provider, and farmer—and positioning the emergent figure within the post-heroism of a more introspective and possibly politically progressive rethinking of Afrikaner nationalism.

As we will demonstrate later in this article, approaching these films through the lens of post-heroism enables a reading of these films as humanising—and demythologising—its main characters.

From the 1950s to the 1980s South African cinema often served the apartheid government by validating Afrikaner cultural values (Moyer-Duncan 33). Botha (“Suid-Afrikaanse filmbedryf”) describes the often politically unresponsive, escapist South African (often Afrikaans) films of primarily the 1960s and 1970s as *verstrooiingsvermaak*, a pleasurable light-hearted diversion or distraction from the political tumult of the day. Unlike the more politically conscious films of filmmakers such as Ross Devenish, these escapist movies avoided explicit socio-political commentary in favour of formulaic and predictable genre fare. *Verstrooiingsvermaak* persisted in the more than 30 Afrikaans feature film released between 2006 and 2013, which consisted of teen comedies, adaptations of young adult novels, musicals, and other genre fare (thrillers and romantic comedies) that borrowed heavily from American counterparts. In this environment, Katinka Heyns's *Die wonderwerker* (The Miracle Worker, 2012) was an award-winning prestige drama about the Afrikaans poet and naturalist Eugène Marais. Botha (“Suid-Afrikaanse filmbedryf”) identifies Heyns's film as well as Eilers's *Verraaiers* as two of the post-2010 feature films that confront the viewer with the traumas of South African history. In this sense, our position is that *Verraaiers* is the more politically and aesthetically productive of the two films. This status of productivity is linked to positioning *Verraaiers* as a post-heroic film featuring a post-heroic figure at its centre.

Rachel Browne points to an important contrast between the social realities depicted on screen in *Die wonderwerker* and *Verraaiers*. For Browne, *Die wonderwerker* “seemed to be suspended in non-reality, and as an historical drama it was [...] utterly at odds with the actual history providing the context for the times” while *Verraaiers* shows the Van Aswegen farm neighboured by black African occupants (Browne 452). About the exact status of these black African farmers, Browne adds: “it is not stated [what kind of farmers these characters are], but they were there and are woven into the fabric of the story. This is an important factor in the film, as it contributed towards its gravitas while unmistakably locating the tragic events, infusing them with veracity and integrity” (452). Indeed, some viewers anticipated that *Verraaiers* would be received as an attempt to humiliate the

Afrikaner by making them revisit the war they had lost and by showing why many Boers had chosen to abandon the republican forces and return home (Son). As Jansen van Vuuren puts it, *Verraaiers* was “the first commercial feature film made about the Anglo-Boer War since the end of Apartheid [sic]” (“Challenging the Mythical Boer” 7). For Jansen van Vuuren, the film “openly challenge[s] the myth of the pure and innocent Boer fighting for their land in a just manner” (“Challenging the Mythical Boer” 7); the De Jagers had fortuitously laid the groundwork for a post-heroic Afrikaans cinema.

While the constituent parts of post-heroism draw on the scholarship of Elsaesser, we borrow the spirit of this version of post-heroism from Degenaar and his critique of Afrikanerdom recounted earlier. For the purposes of this article, post-heroism refers to a shift away from narratives built around heroic figures in pursuit of a specific goal, where this goal is explicitly or implicitly linked to aspects of Afrikaner nationalism; a shift towards narratives that call for a new thinking of ‘community’ where, in a South African context, a critical engagement with historical and contemporary tenets of Afrikaner nationalism takes place; and is characterised by a sense of aesthetic innovation and cinematic self-awareness that is indicative of a break with what might be considered aesthetically conventional in much of mainstream Afrikaans cinema, including an emphasis on the mortality and even abjection of the human body.

### **Atemporality, double occupancy, and parapraxis in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux***

*Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* introduces numerous perspectives on its characters, events, and environments through its atemporality: deliberate shifts in time that lead the viewer to question or acquire insights into the characters and, for instance, event causality. The film’s first image is a medium long shot of a voluptuous woman, Anna, undressing and approaching a bed. There is a radio in the foreground of the shot. The next scene is set in the future where the older Engela (Laurika Rauch) enters a room at the old farmhouse and reads a letter addressed to her that is written by Frans. Through these opening images the film introduces various perspectives or points of view of the woman getting undressed, the radio commentator who celebrates Mannetjies Roux’s rugby skills, the older Engela, and Frans. These images and figures speak to each other in a way that becomes clearer as the film’s temporality gradually crystallises into a narrative of conflicting perspectives in which truth elides Engela (and the viewer), at least up to a point.

Director Eilers is conscious of the importance of perspective through the constant shifting of character perspectives and through characters’ dialogue. Toemaar, the nomadic coloured worker staying on the farm, explicitly advises young Engela against a single perspective by stating “*dis soms partykeer beter om dieselfde ding in ’n ander lig te sien*” (it’s sometimes better to look at the same thing from another angle). This foregrounding of perspective shifts reminds the audience that the film screen is a surface of flux, not a mirror. For Elsaesser the screen as a surface of flux is an essential element of a post-heroic narrative in that it undermines audience-hero identification and instead invites the audience to navigate through various perspectives on narrative events (Elsaesser, “European Cinema and the Post-heroic Narrative: Jean-Luc Nancy, Claire Denis, and Beau Travail” 711).

Linearity in heroic narratives depicts the screen as a window, or mirror, to reality which creates a sense of temporal exactness to the film as events are represented chronologically. This film’s atemporality presents the screen as a surface of flux, without suggesting any accurate, realistic representation. The film evokes trauma as personal (deceit, infidelity, and betrayal) and political (apartheid). The atemporal structure also implies the mortality of the human body; the film codes the mortality of the human body in regular flashbacks and flash forwards: time and the human body are exposed as time-bound and fragile. At the end of the film, the older Engela visits the graves of her parents, Anna and Frans. The long shot of the graves reveals that Anna and Frans were buried next to one another on the farm, indicating that Koba must have forgiven her sister. This single shot confirms the deaths of Anna and Frans, while evoking the dual figures of a younger and older Engela. In this evocation of aging and death, the scene establishes the film’s awareness of the mortal body. Engela’s navigation of memory and filmic time moves between youthful immaturity and innocence (teenage Engela) and self-reflection in the wisdom of age and experience (older Engela).

Double occupancy refers to the multiplicity of identity across spatial displacement and historical shifts, where the space is already occupied by power structures associated with history (Elsaesser, “Space, Place and Identity in European Cinema of the 1990s” 650). Double occupancy challenges grand narratives of history, geography, and place. Such a double occupancy is conveyed through close-ups in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux*.

The film includes shots of bodies making physical contact with the space—the farmland—such as a close-up of Katie leaning against a table kneading dough and a close-up of Toemaar’s feet walking on a dust road approaching the farm. In the latter shot, Toemaar is immediately cast as an outsider, the other, who is literally excluded from the farm community. The coloured characters in the film are displaced as they are working on a white-owned farm during apartheid. These characters are further displaced because they are away from their homes, and their presence on the farm signifies space that is doubly occupied.

The inclusion of the other in this doubly occupied space points to the paradox of an Afrikaner-shaped national identity of the 1970s (Elsaesser, “Real Location, Fantasy Space, Performative Place: Double Occupancy and Mutual Interference in European Cinema” 48). The characters Katie and Toemaar are imbued by the parameters of their social roles during apartheid and they operate within and beyond these confines in alignment with the film’s narrative realism as agents of moderate social change in shaping the thoughts and lives of Engela and her family. *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux’s* representation of the repetition of 1970s Afrikanerdom’s failure to fully represent its racial and political other constitutes a corrective to earlier, more stereotypical representations.

Elsaesser finds that one can mourn the trauma of the past through the necessary repetition and mimicry of failure, or parapraxis (Elsaesser, “Absence as Presence, Presence as Parapraxis: On Some Problems of Representing ‘Jews’ in the New German Cinema” 113). Trauma causes a gap in memory, and this gap is often filled with false perceptions and versions of events and people. A narrative of memory work positioned as a ‘true depiction’ of historic (or current) events, is incapable of mourning the past because trauma is non-representable. Parapraxis successfully repeats history’s failure. Parapraxis, as a repeated failure, takes on the first two of Freud’s stages of mourning, remembering, and repeating (Elsaesser, “Absence as Presence” 110).

Parapraxis is derived from Sigmund Freud’s concept of *Fehlleistung*, which evokes the performative aspect of absence and failure (Elsaesser, “Absence as Presence” 109). Parapraxis implies a performed failure, often an action which unintentionally fails to achieve its apparent aim yet opens up productive possibilities of social and political activity. Performance and failure are seemingly contradicting terms as it implies that the result of an intended action is a failure and that the failure then has the possibility to mock the intention (Elsaesser, *German Cinema—Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory since 1945* 9). Frans embodies this parapractic paradox. After sleeping with Anna, he repeatedly fails at working through this betrayal. Frans as the parapractic post-hero performs Elsaesser’s description of parapraxis as the “the right thing at the wrong place, or the wrong thing at the right time” (Elsaesser, *German Cinema* 9).

Frans’s past failure is always catching up with him, specifically when Anna arrives at the farm years after their adultery. Frans then fails to conform to the traditional heroic figure of the community saviour. Instead, he is haunted by his repeated failures both in other characters (such as Anna) and in memory. Traumatic events, such as his betrayal of his family, are omnipresent, suggesting that the past cannot be changed and that the present is as precarious as the future. Instead, the failures of the past can be remembered and repeated, serving as the first two stages of Freud’s memory work.

Despite his best efforts, Frans fails in his attempts at heroism, specifically the notion that it is through his apparent self-sacrifice that his family can resolve their conflict. Elsaesser explains that the post-hero is parapractic when the hero’s active efforts to accomplish something (even something praiseworthy or otherwise laudable) lead to unintended politically positive results, by doing “the right thing at the wrong place, or the wrong thing at the right time” (Elsaesser, *German Cinema* 102). In fact, Frans goes so far as to physically remove himself from family disputes by resigning to the nearby wind pump, which becomes a significant object in the film. The wind pump becomes an object of isolation and social impotence associated with the parapractic figure of Frans. It is appropriately symbolic of Frans’s passivity: it too is moved to action by external forces, not by an own volition. Frans’s ritual of sitting on the wind pump and enjoying the silence and isolation of the space to apparently gain insight into the family problems never leads to any action or tangible solution. Ironically, by finally falling off the wind pump Frans saves the family. Frans’s death is not self-sacrificial as it is Anna who accidentally pushes him off the wind pump.

As Giliomee (*Maverick Africans* 165) describes it, apartheid would persist in ideology and practice “as long as the church continued to endorse some basic idea that God had willed the existence of Afrikaners and, indeed, all nations”; that is, as long as there was a distinct religious exceptionalism to the Afrikaner. Although Christianity was a cornerstone of Afrikaner nationalism, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* is for the most part secular. One of the few references to God in the film is a conversation between Koba and the farmworker, Toemaar. When Koba

leaves the farm to stock up on supplies, Toemaar asks her for matches and coffee, to which she responds: “Jy’t ’n probleem, Toemaar. Jy moet daaroor bid” (You have a problem, Toemaar. You must pray about it.) He answers her with a significant reference to the absence of God: “Maar die Here is dan so ver en Mevrou is dan net hier langs my” (But the Lord is so far away and Ma’am is right here next to me.) Unfortunately, the film does not further explore the materiality of Toemaar’s recrimination of Koba: why appeal to an immaterial supernatural force when Koba is right there to attend to earthly challenges? The most divine figure in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* is the rugby *volk* hero, Mannetjies Roux. The rugby legend’s solo try against the British Lions in 1962 would become entrenched in the collective memory and imagination of the Afrikaner, and would on occasion serve as a nostalgic point of re-entry into South African history (Grundlingh, *Potent Pastimes: Sport and Leisure Practices in Modern Afrikaner History* 71). While rugby remained for decades a male-dominated space in which men performed a particular masculine identity in the public space of the sports stadium, Grundlingh notes that “there seems to have been a residual and subconscious hankering to personalise and domesticate what took place on the field and to bridge the divide between the public and the personal” (Grundlingh, *Potent Pastimes* 90). When Frans tells the tale of Mannetjies Roux, he mythologises the rugby player for doing the humanly impossible, explaining that the odds were stacked against him in the match. Frans’s story of Mannetjies Roux’s try is also deployed whenever he consciously distracts himself from his adultery, positioning Mannetjies Roux as a morally pure icon.

Frans’s constant reference to Mannetjies Roux’s try is not only significant as he uses it as an alibi for his own infidelity, but also because of rugby’s historical political connotation. Stephanus Muller emphasises that, at times throughout South African history, rugby represented group cohesion and a collective dominance of Afrikanerdom (20). Rugby, then, has particular significance in the collective Afrikaner imagination and has informed Afrikaner popular culture as well as Afrikaner nationalism (Grundlingh, *Potent Pastimes* 11). In fact, rugby became interwoven with Afrikaner nationalism specifically in the 1930s and 1940s—which Giliomee calls “a radical [...] Afrikaner ethnic movement [...] which would insist on political supremacy and which would define the group exclusively in terms of an elaborate ethnic ideology” (*Maverick Africans* 100)—attaining a symbolic value “closely associated with resurgent Afrikanerdom” in which rugby was “closely aligned to the overall nationalist Afrikaner enterprise in its various cultural and political manifestations” (Grundlingh, *Potent Pastimes* 55, 62, 64).

Historically, rugby players could be claimed as *volk* heroes of the Afrikaner, where a victory on the field signified a victory of the Afrikaner over an enemy force such as the British. Mannetjies Roux’s victory on the field came to be read as a symbolic victory for the Afrikaner nation. Mannetjies Roux as *volk* hero is not physically present in the film but is a presence evoked by another character. The mythology of Mannetjies Roux underscores Frans’s parapractic status as Roux’s accomplishments are mostly present only in Frans’s reminiscing, a combination of memory and imagination. *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* presents a post-heroism informed by parapraxis, double occupancy, and atemporality.

*Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* lays bare the political impotence of nostalgia in favour of a potent demythologisation of the traditional hero figure and a particular Afrikaner ideological orientation. This demythologisation occurs in the film in its use of post-heroic mechanisms in which the politics of othering in the period setting (its double occupancy), together with the post-heroic Frans and the film’s facilitation of multiple perspectives on its characters, themes, and events. With reference to Degenaar’s work from earlier, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* complicates the idea of self-assertion and of the exceptionalist *volk* through double occupancy. Post-heroism counters structural exclusion by demythologising traditional ideas of Afrikaner nationalism.

### **Multiple perspectives, parapraxis, and fragile bodies in *Verraaiers***

*Verraaiers* follows the experience of Boer soldiers in the South African War who are put on trial for high treason after signing a neutrality oath and withdrawing from combat. Indeed, in its post-heroism we argue that *Verraaiers* represents and repeats a humanistic re-envisioning of the South African War which contrasts with the heroic narratives of Afrikaans feature film war dramas including, but not limited to, *Kaptein Caprivi* (Captain Caprivi, 1972), *Aanslag op Kariba* (Assault on Kariba, 1973), *Ses soldate* (Six Soldiers, 1974), and the more contemporary *Modder en bloed* (Blood and Glory, 2016). *Verraaiers* also preceded the releases of the critically introspective Afrikaans-language war films *Recce* (2018), *Kanarie* (Canary, 2018), and *Moffie* (Faggot, 2019).

Betrayal, in *Verraaiers*, is then explicitly linked to those Boer soldiers who had given up arms and returned to their homes in the face of the British onslaught, especially following the scorched earth mandate. Grundlingh (*Dynamics of Treason* 11) defines the controversial figure of the surrendered Boer as “a conscripted male burgher

from either of the two Boer republics, who first fought on the Boer side, after which he voluntarily withdrew from the conflict and handed over his weapons to the British military authorities". Boer soldiers "realised that Britain could call upon an almost inexhaustible number of military reinforcements" which increasingly eroded the Boers' chances of winning the war and convinced many of them to abandon the war effort and return to their homesteads (11).

Similar to *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux*, *Verraaiers* introduces the audience to a multiple characters' perspectives from the start of the film. *Verraaiers* accomplishes these multiple perspectives by shifting from 1950s Pretoria to the early 1900s. The film opens in 1953 in the Magistrate's Court in Pretoria, then shifts time and perspective as the judge recalls the events from 1900. This interplay between flashbacks and the present set the temporal pattern for the rest of the film to shift between 1953, 1900, and 1901. In doing so, *Verraaiers* positions the screen as a surface of flux. There are also various characters who deliberate on matters of war and high treason, providing various perspectives and even opposing views on the same events. The film reminds the audience of the importance of perspective when Gerrie, the young lawyer and soldier acting as confidant to General De La Rey, explains that "verraad lyk heelwat anders elke keer as jy van 'n ander hoek na dit kyk" (treason looks different every time you view it from a different angle), echoing a similar line of dialogue in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux*. Through these various perspectives, the audience is not manipulated into an immediate, exclusive loyalty towards specific characters.

Although the film positions Jacobus van Aswegen and his sons as the protagonists, it also articulates the perspectives of those characters who view the van Aswegens as traitors. Consequently, the relationship between the van Aswegens and these other characters can be described as antagonistic. The protagonists are viewed as traitors by the antagonist, Gerrie. Gerrie is a differently abled "traitor" who worked for the British and warned them that the Boers are planning an attack. After the British retreat, his allegiance shifts once more to cooperation with the Boers. The protagonists who have fought for the Boers in the war are tried for high treason, yet the traitor to the Boers is praised for his hard work and loyalty. In the film, the Afrikaners' mutuality is due to a shared enemy, the British, yet the Afrikaners are antagonistic towards one another for being traitors.

The film's provocation to engage with conflicting political and moral actions and to shift one's empathy away from or towards certain characters is a cinematic iteration of pluralist thinking. Pluralism counteracts the one-man-one-voice model of Afrikaner nationalism (Degenaar 110). Pluralism offers such an alternative by allowing for freedom of social configuration. *Volksnasionisme* (Afrikaner nationalism) included and excluded individuals based on race, language, religion, and culture, viewing the nation as a static construct. In contrast, pluralism positions a nation as a dynamic identity, with fluctuating social associations. *Verraaiers* facilitates a multitude of fluctuating social configurations through the various characters' perspectives. These perspectives accommodate a sense of personal, social, and political animosity in instances where individuals want to form part of a community or society, but also on some level resist such a potentially assimilative process. If these individuals prioritise their individual interests over that of the collective—the community—they put the idea of community and society at risk.

*Verraaiers* further positions the screen as a surface of flux through the characters' reflections in mirrors. These reflections are visually prominent in numerous scenes throughout the film, such as General de la Rey and Gerrie's reflections in a mirror whilst passing by in the military court. It also occurs quite regularly with Jacobus's wife, Gerda, whose reflection is visible in mirrors or windows. These mirror reflections function as *mise-en-abyme*, which stimulates the viewers' awareness of the screen by creating an inside-outside relationship between the audience and screen (Elsaesser, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* 56). *Mise-en-abyme* negates the notion of the screen as mirror or window to reality. Instead of reflecting or revealing reality, the awareness of the screen created by this cinematic reflexivity challenges the viewer to become aware of the form and language of what they are watching.

In *Verraaiers*, protagonist Jacobus van Aswegen has no agency in the resolution of events, as he and his sons are finally executed for high treason despite Jacobus's plea with General de la Rey and the military court to save his sons and execute him instead. He volunteers to be the self-sacrificial heroic figure but his attempt at self-sacrifice for the sake of the community fails. Jacobus is incapable of redeeming himself through self-sacrifice. His repeated failure to undo past events and mistakes, including encouraging his sons to sign the neutrality oath with the British, positions him as *Verraaiers*' primary parapractic post-hero. This performed failure occurs when the unsuccessful result of an active effort mocks the very intention of the effort (Elsaesser, *Film Theory* 102).

*Verraaiers* also provocatively positions the traditional Afrikaner *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) as parapractic post-hero. The *volksmoeder* in traditional historical Afrikaans cinema serves as a moral beacon of hope to unify the Afrikaner nation (Tomaselli, *Encountering Modernity* 148). In *Verraaiers*, Jacobus's wife Gerda initially reminds the men in the film of Afrikanerdom's faith in God:

*Moet ons dit nie vir ons Hemelse Vader oorlaat om die besluit te neem wanneer hierdie stryd oor is nie? Ek glo vas die Here sal vir ons 'n oorwinning gee. Ons moet hom net vertrou.*

Must we not leave it to our heavenly Father to decide when this struggle is over? I believe that He will give us a victory. We must just have faith.

The youngest son, Karel-Jan, reminds her that Christianity and faith are not the exclusive domains of the rebels: *Ma, voor elke veldslag bid ons in Afrikaans en hulle in Engels vir dieselfde God en dieselfde verlosser en net daarna moor ons mekaar uit. As ons wen het God vir ons 'n oorwinning gegee, maar as ons verloor was hulle te veel of iemand het ons verraa, of die omsingeldes wat opgegee het is lafaards, of iets. Daar's altyd 'n verskoning. Maar die hemele behoed ons as God sy ander kinders se kant kies.*

Mother, before every battle we pray in Afrikaans and they pray in English and just thereafter we kill each other. If we win God gave us a victory, but if we lose, they were too many, or somebody betrayed us, or the surrounded men who gave up are cowards, or something. There is always an excuse. But heaven forbid if God chose his other children's side.

Despite the characters' strong faith in God as their saviour, all the men are executed. Jacobus's death results in profound trauma for Gerda towards the end of the film. Here, in an extreme long shot of her alone in the harsh veld close to the farm, Gerda removes her dress, sets it on fire, and walks naked into the veld, away from the camera. As she slowly fades into the background, her burning dress remains in the foreground of the shot.

This scene suggests how the news of her husband and sons' execution has driven Gerda to abandon her traditional duties of wife and mother, and to surrender to a self-imposed isolation, probably death. As a *volksmoeder* she fails in her duties to be a moral beacon of unification through this action, despite her prior active efforts to forge cohesion amongst the community. This failure can lead to politically positive results (Elsaesser, *German Cinema* 102). In her failure, Gerda stands as part of the larger failure of Afrikaner nationalism with its myth of a single unified Afrikanerdom and proposes a call to renegotiate what it means to be an Afrikaner. Martha, Jacobus van Aswegen's daughter-in-law, suffers a miscarriage upon hearing about the executions. Demythologising Afrikaner nationalism points to a cinematic post-heroism explicitly tied to a unique contemporary context in which the Afrikaner continues to renegotiate their political role and participation in the post-apartheid dispensation.

Over time, the Afrikaner prisoners' bodies have become abject; physically, the men had become strangers to their former selves as a result of the physical degradation of their flesh. Elsaesser explains that in becoming the other, one is forced to confront the other within the self and overcome the binary between self and other (Elsaesser, "European Cinema" 723). It is only through confronting the other within the self that these men, associated with an Afrikaner war effort, accept the other and thus overcome the self-other binary, embracing antagonism. A physically strong masculine body is historically associated with acts of valour and courage performed by more traditional fictional heroes in Afrikaans cinema. The decay of the characters' physical bodies in *Verraaiers* represents both the ideological and biological decaying of Afrikaner nationalism. The combination of these bodies and ideas in decay with multiple perspectives, the screen as surface of flux, and a parapractic post-hero, renders *Verraaiers* a post-heroic film.

If it holds that the main aim of "the politics of historical memory is the justification of the entitlement of the group (called 'nation') to territorially delineated political sovereignty—which in turn is the principal aspiration and objective of nationalism" (Bauman 62), then the post-heroism of *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* challenges the notion of a God-given territory associated with an exclusive Afrikaner nationalism in which failure and treachery are categories assigned to specific actions and activities. This latter aspect of nationalism is exactly the "chauvinistic ethnonationalism" Degenaar decried in favour of an "open plural society" (Giliomee, *The Rise and Demise* 78). Through the interrelation between double occupancy and parapraxis cinema can demonstrate ways in which individuals can be politically and socially responsible for each other by showing how identity is "wholly relational and unsecured", where "each being exists in the space of the other [towards] cooperation and interdependence" (Elsaesser, "Real location" 60), echoing Degenaar's notion of the fluidity of voluntary social association.

With reference to Degenaar's work mentioned earlier, *Verraaiers* exposes treason as a parapractic and post-heroic iteration of self-assertion. The *volk* as homogeneous unified entity is itself a myth that has served its initial purpose and, in this film's commentary, run out of ideological momentum. The post-hero in this film and in *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* is conceptual nexus—a character as question mark—and not the heroic figure of 1970s Afrikanerdom. *Verraaiers* specifically foregrounds the traitor figure as post-heroic in a film that additionally deploys the instability of the screen (the surface of flux) to facilitate multiple perspectives on the theme of betrayal and its continued haunting of an Afrikaner psyche.

## Conclusion

In this article we drew on Elsaesser's research and followed Degenaar's political thinking to argue that the two Bosbok Ses films *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* demonstrate a framework of post-heroism in contemporary Afrikaans cinema by demythologising an exclusive nationalistic Afrikaner *volk* identity. The link between Afrikaner nationalism and a certain kind of earlier Afrikaans filmmaking was addressed. While a number of Afrikaans-language feature films indulged nostalgia in a *verstrooiingsvermaak*-manner, these two films ask critical questions of Afrikaner and Afrikaans identity as these identities remain contentious in South African discourse around history, race, and place.

To revisit the explanation of post-heroism from earlier, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* demonstrate a shift away from narratives built around heroic figures in pursuit of, and accomplishing, a specific noble goal where this goal is linked to aspects of Afrikaner nationalism. In addition, the films call for a new thinking of 'community' due to its deployment of double occupancy and the evocation of multiple perspectives on ideological and political matters. Both films offer a cinematic self-awareness *vis-à-vis* the screen as surface of flux and its use of narrative atemporality, which indicates a break from aesthetic conventions in much of mainstream Afrikaans cinema. In light of the above, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* offer a critical engagement with historical and contemporary tenets of Afrikaner nationalism. This engagement results in the demythologisation of the *volk* and its traditional heroes: the highly masculine Frans and his rugby hero Mannetjies Roux and the abjected Boer fighters in *Verraaiers*.

In conclusion, this overall post-heroism of the Afrikaans-language historical dramas *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* and *Verraaiers* invites viewers to speculate about the implications of a pluralist society free from imposed social association. This society nonetheless bears the weight of history, which may aid the successful mourning of social traumas emanating from South Africa's complex past.

## Notes

1. The Afrikaner Broederbond was a secret society which was exclusively reserved for Afrikaans, Christian men and played a determining role in the establishment of Afrikaner political power by promoting the National Party's agenda (see O'Malley, "Afrikaner-Broederbond (AB)") in its capacity as a "policy-making and coordinating body" (O'Meara, "The Afrikaner Broederbond 1927–1948: Class vanguard of Afrikaner nationalism" 184).

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