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Representation of racial and sexual 'others' in Afrikaans popular romantic fiction by Sophia Kapp

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This article provides a feminist critique of representation, analysing the way sexual and racial others are represented in the work of the Afrikaans popular romantic fiction writer Sophia Kapp. Comparing her first three novels to the latest one, the article points to a development in her writing and tracks the changes it has undergone over the course of the almost ten years of Kapp's writing career. Starting off with exclusively white and heterosexual characters in her first novels, her latest novel includes a number of black and homosexual secondary characters. However, while these characters appear to be equal to the white hero and heroine, an analysis of their representation shows that they are rendered in such a way that they support the white heterosexual marriage as the unquestionable standard, and it becomes clear that the inclusion of sexual and racial others appears for the most part to be in the function of "surrogate and enabler" for the white heterosexual marriage ideal. **Keywords:** popular romantic fiction, Afrikaans, Sophia Kapp, 'the other', feminist critique of representation

While popular romantic fiction generally reifies and endorses white heterosexual relationships and marriage, we can see a growing tendency in Kapp's writing to include secondary characters of other races and sexual orientations. This seems to be compliant with Cawelti's (5) argument that popular fiction not only strengthens society values but also can support social change. While some critics might claim that that Sophia Kapp's latest book—*Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* ("Survival guide for a difficult diva", 2016)—can be described as feminist writing, this paper argues that the work belongs to the category of texts with only a surface commitment to feminism (see e.g. Salzwedel). As early as 1985, Rosalind Coward points out the difference between texts with a surface commitment to feminism and texts with a deeper commitment. To make out which text belongs to which category, one has to examine how representation works in a text. According to Coward, "even novels which have a surface commitment to feminism should be interrogated as to by what representation of sexuality, of maleness and femaleness, they achieve their version of reality" (Coward 228). This feminist critique of representation is exactly what this article hopes to achieve (see Meijer 1996). In order to do this, I will undertake an analysis of the text, as Coward suggests, oriented specifically on the way racial and sexual 'others' are represented.

Sophia Kapp entered the Afrikaans literary scene in 2007 with the novel *Die Erflating* ("The Inheritance"). Her debut was awarded the ATKV-Woordveertjieprys literary prize for romantic fiction in 2008. The ATKV (Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging), the Afrikaans Language and Culture Association is an organisation that promotes Afrikaans language and culture. She was again awarded the prize in 2012 for *Huis van die wind* ("House of the Wind") and *Driehoek* ("Triangle") in 2014. The writer has published eight other books since her debut and has established herself as one of the most popular authors of popular romantic fiction in Afrikaans. Kapp's outstanding position within popular romantic fiction in Afrikaans is among others evidenced by the fact that her trilogy *Die Malansusters* ("The Malan Sisters") was reprinted in 2013, which indicates the enormous popularity of the trilogy, especially when we consider the vast number of popular romance fiction titles being published every month worldwide, in South Africa and also in Afrikaans. Since Kapp's novels have not been translated into English, all the quotations in the text are my own translations.

Even though she seems to have discovered a formula for a successful popular romantic novel, Kapp's writing style has not stagnated. Major development can be observed when we take a closer look at her writing, among others with respect to the depiction of 'other' characters in her novels. To illustrate the development her writing has undergone in the almost ten years of her writing career, I will briefly analyse her first three novels—the aforementioned *Die Malansusters* trilogy. Then I concentrate on Kapp's latest book, *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva*, which is in my opinion the most problematic, since it partially abandons the traditional formula of popular romantic fiction and shows clear signs of what Rosalind Coward calls "surface commitment to feminism".

Die Malansusters trilogy

The plot of the trilogy *Die Malansusters* revolves around the three sisters Adri, JC and Idalette, who are brought back together after their father's death, hence the title of the first book in the series, *Die Erflating* ("The Inheritance"). Each book in the trilogy concentrates on one sister—*Die Erflating* on the oldest, Adri, *'n Nuwe lente* ("A New Spring") on the middle sister, JC, and *Waar die hart is* ("Where the Heart is") on the youngest sister, Idalette.

The first book of the trilogy, *Die Erflating* (2007), has no significant characters of colour whatsoever, even though the three novels are situated in or near Cape Town, which is one of the most diverse parts of South Africa. The only character we could describe as 'other', in the sense that she differs from the general heteronormativity of the other characters, is the heroine's friend Adele. Adele is described by the heroine as follows: "Adele is and always has been an outspoken feminist, and her fierce passion for women's rights landed her in trouble many times already during her university studies" (*Erflating* 82). Adri describes Adele's activities as a bit too militant for her taste

(*Erflating* 82) and adds that even though she never had a problem with supporting Adele's life mission, she does not carry the same hate and anger for men in her as Adele does (*Erflating* 84). Adele's distrust in the male gender is further explained by her complicated childhood and negligent father. Adele, the feminist, thus hates men, and the author seems to imply that hatred of men is a general characteristic of feminists. This clearly disqualifies Adele from the heterosexual romantic plot, and no other options are mentioned. The feminist explains herself to Adri: "This is my vocation, Adri. This is what I need to do to make some sense out of my life. Nothing less would work for me. But you... you are different. [...] You need to love in order to have a truly fulfilling life." (*Erflating* 191)

Adele is depicted as an anomaly to the heteronormative paradigm, damaged by her childhood, and therefore unable to fit into the available discursive social roles. She hates men, and therefore cannot need, or crave, love. To fill the gap, she immerses herself in her business activities and the fight for women's rights—a cause understood but regarded as exaggerated by the heroine.

Adele is also the only character, including the supporting characters, who is not included in the "monogamous pair-bonding" at the end of the third book of the trilogy, *Waar die hart is* (see Roach 6). In the epilogue, all three sisters are together for Christmas in the house Idalette has inherited from their father. All three of them are married, Adri has a child, JC is highly pregnant, and after the guests leave, Idalette tells her husband Charl that she is expecting too. The secondary characters of the trilogy are also present at this grand finale, all of them happily coupled now, including the employees working at Idalette's guesthouse, who I will mention further on.

The second book of the trilogy, *'n Nuwe lente* (2008), is a bit closer to the South African social reality, since it includes a number of people of colour. That might, however, simply be the consequence of the main part of the novel taking place in a small fishing village on the coast of the Cape Peninsula with its mainly coloured population. If we look at the way the "local" characters are depicted we mostly see racial and classist stereotypes. The poor coloured community is rendered in a very stereotypical way, typical for formulaic literature, emphasizing promiscuity (Tashie's mother has multiple children with different men), alcohol abuse and violence (Tashie's father beats the children, and prefers his eldest son David, who is also violent towards his younger siblings) (*Lente* 113), and general lack of education.

Quite central to the plot is JC's interaction with a group of local (coloured) boys. She meets them for the first time in a shop where they're ogling a soccer ball that they cannot afford to buy. JC's heart sinks at the realization that in contrast with all the expensive developments and wealthy tourists vacationing at the seaside, a real soccer ball would probably be the highlight of the summer for the local boys (*Lente* 77). In the end JC buys the ball and makes an agreement with the boys that they will play together and whoever makes the first goal can keep the ball. During the

second match JC meets six-year-old Natasha, a stepsister of one of the boys. Natasha, or Tashie as she wants to be called (*Lente* 89), becomes friends with JC and plays the role of her local informant.

The archetypal bad guy is the aforementioned local teenager David who physically attacks JC when she tries to defend the younger children (*Lente* 116). He is responsible for a series of break-ins in the area, and as we find out towards the end of the novel, he has been sexually abusing his half-sister Tashie and finally kills her (*Lente* 211, 259). It is interesting that the only character that interacts with JC out of the white-coloured/rich-poor hierarchy has to get killed in the process.

In the third book of the trilogy, *Waar die hart is* (2008), we also find a number of secondary characters of colour or other ethnicities. Here, again, they are very stereotypically depicted. There is, for example, the Russian antique merchant Sergei Ivanoff—described by Charl as “one of the greatest crooks in the city” (*Hart* 142). He is said to have made a fortune out of exploiting his clients, showing up at widows or other inheritors, offering to sell furniture they don’t want for them, buying stuff over from them for nothing and selling valuable antique pieces for a lot of money. Sergei, as observed by Idalette, is “Short, bald-headed, with a broad white grin and shiny pitch-black eyes with greed dancing in them like dollar signs”, and his behaviour is described as “sleazy friendliness” (*Hart* 125).

There are two quite important supporting characters in this novel—the two employees of Idalette’s guesthouse—who can both without any doubt be described as ‘other’. Firstly, there is Chaukie, a deaf black woman who will start working as a housekeeper in Idalette’s guesthouse. When Chaukie comes to ask for a job, with her son doing the talking, Idalette sees that they are both hungry and remarks that Desmond’s shoulders feel hard and bony under her hands (*Hart* 191). Idalette also mentions Chaukie’s “ringless fingers”, even though she has a son (*Hart* 189). Later, we will find out that she became pregnant at the age of sixteen by a white attorney who seduced her and then left when she told him that she was pregnant (*Hart* 235). Desmond, her son, is bullied at school for his mother being a “white man’s whore” and him a bastard and half-caste (*Hart* 232).

Then there is Bostik Bezuidenhout, who will become a cook in Idalette’s guesthouse. Bostik is “a giant with arms as large as a Christmas ham and a chest as big as a water tank”, his head is shaven and he has a tattoo on his arm (*Hart* 207). He learned how to cook in prison, where he landed after he murdered his best friend for raping his seven-year-old-daughter (*Hart* 209). Idalette comments on Bostik and his employment at her guesthouse: “He was, just like Chaukie, a redundant person who didn’t fit in anywhere, but who got a special place in her house” (*Hart* 212). Here Idalette expresses a very patronising, and perhaps neo-colonial, attitude towards these two people. They are represented as clearly beneath her, and in need of being saved by her. It is Idalette, the privileged white madam, who makes it possible for

them to belong. Chaukie and Bostik end up as a couple in the end, being part of the monogamous pair-bonding grand finale mentioned previously (Hart 298). They, however, do not get married—as if marriage were an exclusive institution reserved for the privileged ones only.

The previous analysis provided a concise overview of where Sophia Kapp started off with representation of racial and sexual others in her first three novels. There is very little space for diversity, and when racial others do occur, they do not overstep the boundaries of the formulaic character depiction. It can be argued that stereotypes are a part of the popular literary formula, but such stereotypical shortcuts may have harmful consequences when it comes to the depiction of 'others'. It seems that all characters are by default heterosexual and heteronormative, with the feminist Adele who has a vocation filling the void in her life as the only exception to the rule. When there are racial others, they are of lower social class, and lower social status, and/or their behaviour, actions or past disqualify them somehow for the white heterosexual romance plot. Also, they are often victims of their social situation, e.g. Tashie who is sexually abused by her half-brother, or Chaukie who was seduced by an older white man and became pregnant at the age of sixteen.

Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva

In sharp contrast to her trilogy, in Kapp's latest novel, *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva*, the racial and sexual others are presented as equals to the heroine, and even become her friends during the narration. As should be clear from the analysis above, Kapp's previous writing fitted nicely into the discursive limitations of the genre of popular romantic fiction. In contrast, her most recent novel seems to be trying to break out of this category. Compared to the previously discussed works, this novel seems much more progressive and inclusive. However, a closer analysis reveals this inclusion to be more 'wishful thinking' than actual social engagement and/or criticism of an existing practice. The following analysis is an attempt to present this novel as a text with only a "surface commitment to feminism" and an example of a white woman writing white (Coward 228; West 28).

Firstly, I would like to contextualize the novel. *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* has many features of a popular romantic fiction novel, but at the same time it seems to be reaching out and transgressing the formula. Compliant to the formula of popular romantic fiction, the heroine Simoné meets the hero Barnard early in the narrative—on page 43—and they eventually end up together—on page 458 out of 476. This can of course only happen after they have overcome a number of obstacles. We could also label the novel as chick-lit, since it very much focuses on the development of the main female character. There are helping characters along the way who make possible her development and self-discovery, as well as the eventual relationship between the heroine and the hero, including the flamboyant gay friends, currently

a very popular token within the chick-lit genre. There are also other typical chick-lit plot elements like shopping trips (447–55), binge eating (347–8), and even yoga (e.g. 86, 133, 160). But *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* also differs from the formula of both popular romantic fiction and chick-lit. One of the examples is the way the story is narrated, combining three different narrative perspectives. While it is very much a standard narrative strategy to use a third-person narrative in popular romantic fiction, this particular novel combines a third-person narrative in present tense, diary entries from Simoné's past in first person, and passages from the "diva guide" that are added after each chapter.

There are aspects of the novel that might even appear as feminist, or at least empowering and supportive of the women's movement. One of these aspects is the motto of the novel—a quote from Clarissa Pinkola Estés' seminal work *Women who Run with the Wolves* (1992). The quote speaks about situations where women are cornered by the circumstances of their lives and therefore forced to act and take the situation into their own hands.

Simoné, the heroine, leaves her (already second) husband because he treats her and her son from her first marriage badly. She says: "No marriage is worth my self-respect" (71). She is also repeatedly critical of patriarchy and traditional gender role distribution throughout the narrative. Her character is put into contrast with her older sister Rina, who is described as "a conventional, compliant housewife" (53)—a gendered performance the character of Simoné seems to challenge throughout the novel.

However, if for example we look at the man she gets at the end, we see a typical popular romantic fiction alpha male hero—he is tall, has broad shoulders, lean hips, heavenly blue eyes, firm buttocks; one of the characters labels him as "The Most Eligible Bachelor in the District" (43, 232). And he is also very rich; he is the owner of a software company developing computer games, which, as Simoné herself mentions, comes with a pile of money and a certain social status (193). It is worth mentioning that the heroine only gives in to her interest in Barnard after she finds out about his line of work, in her words that he is everything but a male bimbo (193). Disregarding her criticism of the traditional gender role distribution and gendered performative acts, Simoné's behaviour and actions ultimately comply neatly with these.

Furthermore, the final union of Simoné and Barnard is an affirmation of the white heterosexual marriage, even though it would be the third wedding for our heroine. At the end of the novel Simoné daydreams about the day when they will fill the old stone church with flowers and ask pastor Albert to marry them (470). Even though she mentions other options too, e.g. signing the papers at the magistrate's court or just continuing living together without getting married, the church union is still presented as the ultimate goal and a culmination of the white heterosexual romantic enterprise.

What also makes this book stand out from other novels in the genre is the aforementioned inclusion of racial and sexual others in the narrative. This is something that has not been the case in her previous work, and also is not that much the case in the genre of popular romantic fiction in general, unless, of course, we are speaking of gay romance. The same can be said for so-called multicultural romance which is, like gay and lesbian romance, regarded as a (sub)genre of its own and therefore falls under different criteria (see e.g. Ramsdell).

In this novel, in contrast with Kapp's previous works, the racial and sexual others are included in the privileged monogamous pair-bonding. At the end of the novel, there is a New Year's party where

[t]he adults and children are together next to the dance floor: Rina and Carel, Ariëlla and Harry, Mrs. Cholmondley and Lionel, Janke and Jabu, Adeleen and Frederik, who finally made Rina's year by putting a ring on her daughter's finger, SW and Belle, Sugar and Spice, Jeanette and Itumeleng, Julie and some attractive hunk she picked up at the co-op in Bethlehem. (468)

Sexual others

There are two homosexual couples included in the plot of *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva*—a gay couple owning the local bakery, referred to as “honorary girls” (88) by other characters, and a local doctor, Jeanette, and her black partner Itumeleng, who is also a nurse at Jeanette's office. Furthermore, Simoné's son has a gay roommate who also becomes his best friend. There is a certain sensibility for the sexual others in the novel, as evidenced for example by this comment by Jeanette, reacting to Simoné's complaint that she feels alienated. Jeanette looks straight into Simoné's eyes, and says: “Alienated? You're telling ME that you feel alienated? Honey, I'm an English lesbian with a black partner on the Free State countryside. I could hardly be more alienated, even if I tried. It's a struggle, every day. Every day I see the shock on someone's face when they realize who and what I am [...]” (91).

But if we take a closer look at the way the sexually other characters, despite this seeming sensibility, are constructed and depicted, we encounter mainly a stereotypical imaginary reality than ‘actual people’. While one should not be surprised by the presence of stereotypes in formulaic literature, since it is one of the characterizations of the genre, these stereotypes become problematic when they turn into so-called othering strategies and denigrating depictions (see e.g. Cawelti 5–36). While the lesbians in *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* are described as masculine and lacking femininity, the gay characters are depicted as overly feminine and lacking any masculine traits. Jeanette is described as short and sturdy with very short hair, wearing cargo pants and workers' boots (83). The tortoise shell frames of her glasses further emphasize her lack of fashionability and femininity (83). Jeanette is also depicted as sexually aggressive, even towards the heroine. When Jeanette invites Simoné to

join her and her friends at the local brewery, Simoné is uncertain how to react and asks whether Jeanette is asking her out. Jeanette replies: "Relax, honey, it's a drink with friends, not a date. You're lovely but you're not my type. It's quite clear: straight to the very marrow of your bones. It's a pity, but well, I won't hold it against you" (87). Interestingly, the fact that Jeanette is in a relationship is not mentioned as an obstacle. Seemingly the only reason why Jeanette is not making sexual advances on Simoné is her straightness.

Similarly, Sugar and Spice, the gay couple whose real names are not even mentioned in the novel, is depicted in a very stereotypical way. The fact that they remain nameless can certainly be seen as a depersonification of these two characters, an often used "othering strategy" when representing 'others' (Meijer 12–3). Sugar and Spice earn their money by baking cakes, they are demasculinized by the term "honorary girls", and Spice has a high-pitched voice (88, 255). Furthermore, both of them are depicted as irresponsible and engaging in risky activities, for example in contrast to Simoné who orders a coffee before she drives home, they drink before they drive (230).

This irresponsible behaviour is evidenced for example by the scene when Simoné, who just heard of the finalization of her divorce, is drugged by Spice with his "home-made anti-anxiety blend" tea (254). Jeanette gets angry with him because Simoné is "high as a freaking kite." Spice defends himself by saying, "How was I supposed to know the girl is a novice? She comes from Gauteng, I thought they have all built up a tolerance over there." When he argues that he takes the same substance and does not have such a strong reaction, Jeanette cuts him short: "Because you became an addict ten years ago already." Other parts where Spice speaks are as caricatural and stereotypical. When Simoné first meets him and his partner, he reacts to the news of her taking anti-depressants as follows: "Oh fuckity. What happened? Was it a man? No, don't even bother, it's just a damned man who can put that look in such a beautiful woman's eyes" (88). In her essay on representation of black characters in white American writing, Toni Morrison coins the term "Africanist idiom" to describe a representative strategy when the racial others, if given a voice, express themselves in a way contrasting to the civilized white self, in order "to establish difference" (Morrison 52). Building further on this notion, we could call the parts of the narrative where Spice is speaking the 'gay idiom', since it seems to be serving a similar purpose.

It seems that homosexuals, the sexual others, can only be included in the plot when monogamously pair-bonded, and therefore not threatening of the normative heterosexuality of the romance narrative. They are represented in a way that puts them clearly out of the discursive limits of their gender, and places their gendered performances within the opposite gender. Furthermore, as is the case with especially Sugar and Spice, they are represented as perverted (e.g. Spice's drug use), caricatures and stereotypes, as illustrated previously. Lionel, the gay roommate of Simoné's son, is sexually abused by one of his teachers, and therefore also damaged (329).

The ultimate 'other' of the story is Itumeleng—Jeanette's partner. It seems that the author created her, and then did not really know what to do with the character. Itumeleng is almost invisible in the narrative; the only times she speaks are in the function of a nurse at Jeanette's practice. Itumeleng Ramapoko, ironically one of the only supporting characters who are introduced by their full name which creates a distance from the main character and implicitly also the reader, is immediately explicitly named black (81). Just after that, Simoné expresses her amazement at the fact that Itumeleng speaks Afrikaans without any accent (81). Such amazement, indeed, re-affirms the stereotypical thinking that a black person cannot speak good Afrikaans. Also the fact that Itumeleng works for Jeanette re-duplicates the "conservative" model of black people working for white people but also depicts Jeanette as "the man" in the relationship. Itumeleng is Jeanette's girlfriend, but oddly enough does not take part in the group's activities. She does not practice yoga with the others, does not go on the weekly outings to the local brewery, or at least her presence is never explicitly mentioned and she never speaks, which is in sharp contrast to especially Jeanette and Spice who do most of the talking (88, 230, 373, 423). No one in the group seems to find Itumeleng's absence strange or worth mentioning. That again strengthens the image of the relationship of Jeanette and Itumeleng as hierarchical, and of Itumeleng as Jeanette's helper but not equal. Itumeleng is also excluded from the "shopping trip" to Pretoria, that "after this trip will not be the place where two of [Simoné's] marriages were shipwrecked, but a place where she and her girlfriends go to spoil themselves and where they buy extravagant underwear with frills, where they laugh and drink wine" and so on (452–3). Itumeleng therefore is not a part of this "diverse group of women" (453) as Simoné describes them, she is not one of the (girl)friends. Taking into account that Itumeleng only ever speaks in her function of a nurse at Jeanette's practice, we can conclude that the author fails to give her a voice in the narrative. She is, exactly as Spivak has put it, a subaltern who cannot speak.

Even though there are homosexual characters included in the plot, they seem to be depicted in clear opposition to the white heterosexual hero and heroine. Jeanette's lack of femininity is presented in contrast to Simoné's femininity, sense of fashion and homeliness, and the feminine and manual profession of Sugar and Spice contrasts with Barnard's masculine job as the owner of an IT company. The homosexual relationships appear to be the means used to create the image of the white heterosexual self. Both the hierarchical "employer-employee" relationship of Jeanette and Itumeleng and the caricatured relationship of Sugar and Spice are in opposition to the seemingly equalitarian heteronormative relationship of Barnard and Simoné.

Racial others

There are a number of other supporting characters of colour in the novel. Apart from Itumeleng, who has been discussed already, there is also Jabu, SW's classmate

and friend. Jabu's parents are both "Very Important Politicians in the provincial parliament in Bloemfontein" and Simoné describes him as the product of a yuppie upbringing (179). His parents are presented as taking greater care of their careers than of their son, mainly providing their son with sufficient money (274, 292). Such remarks imply that Simoné is a better parent than they are.

Jabu is in the centre of a conflict that takes place during a beach vacation Simoné takes with her son and his friends. In a shop Jabu is approached by an Afrikaner couple, described by Simoné as "overweight, overcritical, privileged, biased, loud, arrogant, self-righteous" (293). The man addresses Jabu as "bushman" and when Jabu asks whether he is speaking to him, the man reacts that he should only be addressed as Sir, or Boss (294). He also comments on the fact that a black boy is mixing with white children and questions whether he is able to pay for everything he has in his trolley. Then Simoné intervenes, demanding an excuse for Jabu.

The character of Simoné represents an interesting mixture of prejudices and open-mindedness when it comes to interaction with people of colour. When two black men knock at her back door, her first reaction is fright (109). But soon she reasons that an attacker would probably not knock, and opens the door for them. When she realizes it is a man who used to work for her father, she greets him with a traditional handshake (109). The men are looking for a job, and later Simoné finds out that they have not eaten for a while, since they have no more food and Job's wife keeps the flour for the small children (111). Simoné mentions Job's radiant three-tooth-smile (109), playing with a racial stereotype, and states that the hierarchy in the new South Africa clearly does not mean a thing to him and that he will continue addressing white people as "Madam" and "Boss" (113). In both these interactions Simoné is personally against the old hierarchy and has an understanding for black South Africans. At the same time, she is the one who walks away from/comes out of these interactions as a hero.

Another scene illustrating this mixture of paternalism and understanding in the character of Simoné takes place in a supermarket where she sees a young black woman who is not able to pay for the expensive breakfast cereal her child hysterically demands. Simoné wants to walk up to her and give her a hug but she cannot, since, according to her "[t]here is a gap created by language and culture and social conventions that we cannot bridge, even though we essentially are sisters" (441).

As is the case of many other white texts, in Kapp's work the images of black people are "overdetermined and loaded with extra meanings" (Meijer 118). And while one can and should not object to the presence of stereotypes in formulaic literature in general, it becomes worrisome when this stereotypical imaginary reality, especially as it concerns racial others, reflects the complex relationship of the Occident to the Orient, "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 5). This is exactly the case in the discussed texts by Kapp.

Conclusion

Representations of sexual and racial others *as* sexual and racial others, as I have illustrated, support and strengthen the position of the white heterosexual middle-class subjects as the unquestionable standard. I argue that Sophia Kapp in her work reiterates the Hegelian economy in which the subject recognizes itself in 'the other', in order to create distance from the other and reaffirm their own identity and superiority. The inclusion of sexual and racial others appears for the most part to be in the function of "surrogate and enabler" (Morrison 51) for the white heterosexual marriage ideal. These characters and their relationships are the actual means through which the idealized version of the white heterosexual marriage is constructed (Meijer 141).

Robin Lynne, an author of popular romantic fiction herself and a contributor to the romantic fiction website *Dear Author*, argues that romance novels "are as feminist, or anti-feminist, as anything else in our society: namely, that it depends on the novel, but most of the novels we're talking about are produced within a society that is heteronormative and patriarchal (and most privilege whiteness as well)" (qtd in Luther).

And this is exactly the point of departure that the work of Sophia Kapp fails to leave behind. Rather than a pro-feminist statement, I would suggest that Kapp's *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* is a product of a culture of post-feminism. The heroine clearly profits from what the three waves of feminism have accomplished (so far)—Simoné has a job, she leaves her husband, has her own independent social life, and so forth. But at the same time, as the analysis above shows, the book is also a very clear expression of conservative values that are deeply and firmly anchored in patriarchy, such as the importance of the white heterosexual marriage, the exclusive representation of femininity, women's subjectivity and women's sexuality.

Mary West (3) writes in her study *White women Writing White* about "the largely invisible ways in which white writing by women is uncomfortably both consciously in support of, and unconsciously at odds with, multicultural celebrations of rainbow nationhood". This article has endeavoured to highlight the ways in which this takes place within selected texts by Sophia Kapp.

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