

**Honorary Whiteness as an Ideological tool Sustaining a Hierarchical Racial Order and Land Expropriation in South Africa**

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**Abstract**

As a country with a history of settler-colonialism, the land question in South Africa remains one of the critical issues of redress that is highly contested. Furthermore, opinions on the land question tend to be divided along racial lines. This paper uses white ignorance as a theoretical framework to explain these polarised views on the land question in South Africa post-1994. The paper also uses the concept of honorary whiteness/brownness to explain how differences among ‘people of colour’ serve to sustain a hierarchical racial order in which whites remain the ultimate beneficiaries. While research on white ignorance mainly focuses on the socio-psychological and material benefits of white ignorance for whites, this paper argues that those classified as honorary white or ‘brown’ also benefit, albeit minimally, from endorsing willful white ignorance of past and present racial atrocities.

**Keywords:** Land Expropriation, White Ignorance, Whiteness, Honorary Whiteness, Brownness, Racial Triangulation

**Introduction**

The issue of land dispossession due to colonialism and separatist apartheid laws has occupied a prominent space in the South African public discourse since the inception of democracy in 1994. The debates around land and economic reparations often unmask interracial tension in present-day South Africa. The current conflict around land is attributed to the legacies of land dispossession and white settler narratives that declared expropriated lands - empty or ‘unpeopled’ ‘virgin’ territories (MILLS 1997, 18). In South Africa, these growing tensions have been further propagated by the recent public hearings initiated by Parliament to establish the plausibility of amending Section 25 of the Constitution. This amendment would make it permissible to expropriate land without compensation. Consequently, the land issue has been catapulted to prominence in recent years as an area of policy and research interest.

This paper offers a critical reading of the responses of ‘whites’, ‘coloureds’, Khoi and San groups to the land expropriation policy proposal made by the African National Congress (ANC) in 2017. Public debates on the calls for land expropriation without compensation presented across various media platforms such as newspapers (and other traditional media platforms), Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were divided along racial lines. Majority of the white respondents were opposed to the idea of land expropriation, while a majority of the black respondents saw this as long overdue reparative justice to restore what was stolen during Dutch and British colonialism(s) (DEUMERT 2019, 467).

However, the Khoi and San groups called for their recognition as the 'First Nation' and the rightful heirs of the South African land. They also called for the recognition of coloureds as 'Khoisan' before any meaningful debate on land could take place. Accordingly, this paper provides a critical reading of media reports and social media responses to the land expropriation policy proposal the land expropriation policy proposal (it is still a proposal at this stage - not a formal policy as Section 25 of the Constitution has not yet changed) among white, coloured, Khoi and San groups.

This paper uses the concept of honorary whiteness/brownness to explain how hierarchically ordered differences among people of colour serve to sustain a hierarchical racial order in which whites remain the ultimate beneficiaries. The concept of honorary whiteness allows us to move beyond white-black or settler-native binaries into the analysis of the role played by honorary whiteness or brownness in white settler colonialism (PATEL 2016, N.P). Theoretically, the focus is on the manifestation and functioning of white ignorance, which is salient in the responses of white, Khoi and San groups to the land expropriation policy proposal. This emergence and functioning of white ignorance has implications for interracial relations in the era of rigorous debates about land expropriation and reparations in general.

This research contributes to the scholarship on race and white ignorance by drawing attention to the role of honorary whiteness and/or brownness in white settler contexts. While research on white ignorance mainly focuses on the socio-psychological and material benefits of white ignorance for whites (MILLS 1997, 20), this paper argues that those classified as 'honorary white' or 'brown' also have a stake in endorsing white ignorance of past and present racial atrocities. However, despite moments of alignment in white - honorary white/brown political perspectives, whites remain the main beneficiaries of the white ignorance undergirding the hierarchical racial status quo.

The paper is organised as follows: the first section provides a brief background on the land expropriation debate in South Africa by mapping out the trajectory of the land issue from 1652 to 2021. The second section explains the land expropriation debate through the theory of white ignorance that underpins this study. The succeeding section discusses the concept of honorary whiteness/brownness in the broader context of global white supremacy. The paper concludes with a discussion of honorary whiteness/brownness in South Africa and its functions within the South African context of the ongoing land expropriation debates.

### **The Land Expropriation Debate in South Africa**

Historically, land dispossession, enacted through colonial rule, was made possible through a range of segregating legislation, both during colonialism and apartheid rule. Examples of such legislation include the *Native Reserve Act of 1902*, the *Native Land Act of 1913*, and under apartheid, the *Group areas Act of 1950*. These legislation "legitimised systemic land dispossession" that had already taken place since the arrival of the first European Settlers (mainly the Dutch) in 1652 (SAHO 2016, N.P). This dispossession has had long-lasting effects, which were revealed by the Land Audit report of 2017. This report showed that as of 2017, out of the 37 078 289 hectares of farm and agricultural land in the country, Whites own 72%,

whereas only 1 314 873 hectares or 4% is owned by Blacks (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform 2017, 2). Hence it is apparent why land in South Africa remains an emotive and divisive issue.

Since the beginning of the land redistribution program in 1995, little has changed in terms of white versus black land ownership. The Commission on Land Distribution Report of 2016 revealed that since its inception, the program has only managed to redistribute only 5.46% of agricultural and commercial land - evidence of a protracted process that has not yielded any significant improvements (KEPE and HALL 2016, 4). Due to this slow land distribution process coupled with pressure from political opposition parties, the ANC, at its 54<sup>th</sup> elective conference in December 2017, declared that it has decided to amend the Constitution to explicitly allow for “land expropriation without compensation” (DAVIS 2017, N.P). Although the bill to amend the Constitution to allow for land expropriation without compensation has not been passed (as of September 2022), it was the subject of fierce debates from 2017 to 2018 as the government invited communities to comment. Opinions often differed largely along racial lines (DEURMET 2019, 467). This study is mainly interested in the responses of white, coloured, Khoi and San political movements as groups or individuals who mostly opposed the land expropriation policy.

### **Theorising the Views of Whites, Coloureds, Khoi and San on Land Expropriation: White Ignorance**

According to Mills (2015, 2007), white ignorance suggests an “ignorance among whites - an absence of belief, a false belief, a set of false beliefs, a pervasively deforming outlook... causally linked to their whiteness”. White ignorance is understood as a strategy, deliberately produced by whites to serve certain political ends. As noted by Mills (1997, 13):

*white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race* are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonisation, and enslavement [emphasis in the original].

White ignorance is generally marked by a production of misinformation pertaining to race and colonised lands. With regards to race, whites constructed a positive, innocent, virtuous or moral white/European identity, alongside a negative, inferior “savage” and threatening “nonwhite/nonEuropean” other (MILLS 1997, 20). However, some “non-whites” (e.g., Asians) were described in less negative terms as superior to blacks “physiologically and mentally” (KIM 1999, 106). Similarly, colonised lands were often described in negative terms as empty, wild bushes or unpeopled lands occupied by a few “Bushmen” or as lands that were not used productively (Mills 1997, 20). This myth is also firmly entrenched in South Africa, particularly among whites. As noted by Mellet (2020, 16-17), South Africans:

were raised on a colonial and apartheid narrative which said that there was a sudden wave of northern ‘Bantu’, alternatively ‘black’ or ‘Nguni’, alien invaders of South Africa in the period of the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries,

who allegedly stomped over people the writers called 'Bushmen' (San) and Hottentot (Khoi). The latter were said to have been a few nomadic 'noble savages' in a relatively unpopulated Cape, who, according to this same slanted narrative, were conveniently almost wiped out by a smallpox epidemic.

Such depictions served to justify settler colonialism and the unlawful expropriation of land by European colonisers. Furthermore, due to whites having control of major societal institutions, such misinformation regarding land and race was disseminated widely through institutions such as education and the media. Counter-perspectives produced by people of colour were usually suppressed, hence the dominance of the white perspective on land and race today (MILLS 2017, 70). Generally, white ignorance is white produced (non)knowledge that served to justify colonialism and today is used to discredit calls for structural change or reparations.

Although whites stand to benefit from endorsing white ignorance, this study argues that those positioned as honorary white/brown also benefit from endorsing white ignorance materially and psychologically (albeit minimally). This may explain why (some) 'brown' South Africans endorse the empty land myth along with racial myths that position them as almost white or better than blacks (CHAN 2019, 2217). Furthermore, these socially engineered inequalities and feuds among people of colour largely serve white interests. In other words, white ignorance, honorary whiteness, and brownness can be regarded as ideological tools that serve to sustain a hierarchical racial order.

### **Honorary Whiteness/Brownness: Its Creation, its Creators, its Political Functions**

Research on honorary whiteness draws attention to the complicity (and sometimes resistance) of "non-Black people of colour" (NBPOC) in white settler colonialism (PATEL 2016, N.P.). According to Patel (2016, N.P), the concept of honorary whiteness allows researchers "to move away from the binaries of settler/native and white/black that often informs analysis of the settler-colonial situation and to account for differential racialisations and heterogeneous workings of power relations". Honorary whiteness is generally understood as "access to the social recognition and economic benefits usually reserved for whites" (though not at the same level as 'full whites') (YOUNG 2009, 178). This access can be at the individual level via individual assimilation into whiteness or at a collective level, based on race or ethnicity (e.g., the privileging of some black ethnic groups over others) (ABDI 2020, 274). The focus of this paper is on race. Similar to honorary whiteness, brownness is understood as a proxy for honorary whiteness, as Abdi (2020, 277) points out: "to be 'brown' is to be closer to whiteness than perceived blackness and is certainly not to be black". In South Africa, East Asians, particularly Japanese (later Chinese), were regarded as honorary white while the 'brown' category included coloureds and Indians (SUGISHITA 2017, 94). Thus, racial definitions or positioning in a hierarchy is not fixed. It is subject to change depending on whites' economic and political interests and individuals' or group's political beliefs or behaviour (KIM 1999, 106).

Research on race-based honorary whiteness pays attention to the construction of inequalities and tension among people of colour (PATEL 2020, N.P). Secondly, these studies draw attention to the politico-economic functions of honorary whiteness (CHEN AND BUELL 2018, 607). In other words, these studies also pay attention to the creators (and also biggest beneficiaries) of honorary whiteness/brownness. Regarding the creation of the racial hierarchy, Kim (1999, 106) uses the notion of “field of racial positions” to show how hierarchically ordered differences among groups are constructed. Kim argues that “public discourse about racial groups, their relative status generates a field of racial positions in a given time and place” (1999, 106). White opinion-makers, journalists, elected officials, business elite, scholars and so on are the chief architects of this field, although it is always contested among and within groups (KIM 1999, 107). Furthermore, as a “normative blueprint for who should get what, this field of racial positions profoundly shapes the opportunities, constraints, and possibilities with which subordinate groups must contend, ultimately serving to reinforce white dominance and privilege” (KIM 1999, 107).

Kim (1999, 107) also argues that groups classified as honorary white/brown are positioned below whites and above blacks through a process of “racial triangulation”. Using the United States (US) racial context, Kim explains the process of racial triangulation as follows:

Racial triangulation occurs by means of two types of simultaneous, linked processes: (1) processes of 'relative valorisation,' whereby dominant group A (Whites) valorises subordinate group B (Asian Americans) relative to subordinate group C (Blacks) on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to dominate both groups, but especially the latter, and (2) processes of 'civic ostracism,' whereby dominant group A (Whites) construct subordinate group B (Asian Americans) as immutably foreign and unassimilable with whites on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to ostracise them from the body politic and civic membership.

This tripartite racial approach, however, ignores the fact that societies today (e.g., both US and South Africa) often have four racial groups. In a four-tier racial system, Asians (particularly East Asians) are placed above group C (e.g., coloureds/Latinos in the US) – who are placed above group D (blacks) (CHAN 2020, 2220). However, as noted earlier, these positions are not fixed and are subject to change (THUMBRAN 2018, 16).

The chief driver of this racial arrangement has been the politico-economic needs of whites. Kim (1999, 109) notes that racial triangulation was driven by a need for cheap and docile labour after the end of slavery and a need to discredit the calls of African Americans for structural change. Through the process of racial triangulation, Asians were described as a group who ‘made it against all odds’ because of good cultural values and work ethic – suggesting that blacks were poor due to bad behaviour or cultural values, not slavery and systemic racism (CHAN 2020, 2220). Similarly, anti-colonial/apartheid activists have long described the racial valorisation of Indians and coloureds in South Africa as a divide and rule tactic designed to quell the formation of a united front against racism (TABATA 1974, 3). The argument advanced by these scholars is that the “racial middlemen”

position given to honorary whites “make them an extremely vulnerable population for ‘being used’ by whiteness” (HARTLEP and HAYES 2013, 123). This is usually the case when they endorse anti-black stereotypes, while accepting positive stereotypes associated with their group(s).

While white supremacy indeed informs anti-black attitudes, these studies, however, risk presenting honorary whites/brown people as people who became racist against their will. On the contrary, Errazzouki (2021, 5) suggests that some honorary whites such as Arabs in North Africa, already held anti-black attitudes before their encounter with European/British racial ideologies. Errazzouki notes that as race was becoming the primary marker of otherness (instead of religion) to justify slave trade, the Moroccan elite did not need much convincing in accepting this shift. Some Maghrebi scholars had already “published widely read texts that, in some cases, characterised Muslim Black Africans as ‘other’ and even ‘inferior’” (2021, 5). A look into pre-colonial racial ideologies in Asian and other non-black countries could help shed light on some of the factors (besides white supremacy) that may explain anti-blackness in these communities. This could help explain why some honorary white/brown groups became such over-eager agents in the white game of divide and rule (TABATA 1974, 3). However, psychological and material benefits that come with being classified as honorary white could be some of the main factors that account for this willingness to be classified as “not black” and to participate in anti-black racism (BESTEN 2009, 136). As noted by Mills (2017), group interests, in this case, honorary white/brown group interests, can explain why honorary whites endorse white ignorance (e.g., the acceptance of anti-black stereotypes/empty land myth).

Finally, studies also highlight ideological differences among honorary white/brown groups as well as those based on class or skin colour (colourism) (ERASMUS 2001, 11). This variation in terms of ideology is captured by Dowling’s (2018, 1) concept of “racial ideology continuum”. Dowling describes the racial ideology continuum as “a spectrum of colour-blind ideology on one hand and anti-racism ideology on the other” (2018, 155). On one end of the racial ideology continuum are honorary white/brown individuals who endorse colour-blind ideology/whiteness, and on the other end are individuals who endorse an antiracist ideology and embrace otherness (FLORES-GONZÁLEZ 2015, 1551). Between these two extremes are those that can be characterised as racial or political chameleons – colour-blind/white among whites and black/antiracist among blacks and are usually more moderate (FLORES-GONZÁLEZ 2015, 1551). Those in the middle tend to change their racial identifications over time and are less likely to join protests against racism. The concept of racial ideology continuum allows us to explain why some individuals classified as honorary white/brown endorse/join antiracist activists and why others become part of the colour-blind and/or anti-reparations movement. Although the focus of this paper is on coloured, Khoi and San responses (as ‘brown’ groups) that were shared on public platforms (which tend to be tilted, in favour of one end of the spectrum), this study acknowledges that responses of these groups to the land expropriation policy proposal differ (RUITERS 2009, 104).

### **Honorary Whiteness, Brownness in Colonial-Apartheid South Africa**

As noted earlier, South Africa began with a tri-racial system that acknowledged three groups namely, white, 'coloured' and 'native'/ 'Bantu' (and later 'black') (MELLET 2020, 35). The coloured category was further subdivided into Cape Coloured, Cape Malay, Griqua, Indian, Chinese, 'other Asiatic' or 'Other Coloured' (THUMBRAN 2018, 15). Generally, various Khoi and San groups, Southeast Asians (Cape Malay) along with the descendants of mixed unions such as black-white, black-Asian, white-Asian and Khoi/San-white were classified as coloured (BROWN 2000, 204). Since Khoi and San groups were viewed as primitive and 'native', many found Christian and Coloured identities more attractive (BESTEN 2009, 135). This led many to suppress their *Khoiness* and *Sanness* and emphasise their Christian-ness, although some openly acknowledged their identities (BESTEN 2009, 136). Besten notes that Coloured and Christian identities "allowed Khoe-San descendants to assert a status that suggested closer proximity to Europeans and Western culture and helped distance them from their Khoe-San heritage" (2009,136). What these studies show is that contrary to the view (among some Khoi/San movements) that coloureds are Khoi and San people who were wrongly classified as coloureds, Khoi and San individuals actively chose a coloured identity (IFNASA, 2018). "Colouredness" was positioned socially and economically above blackness, hence, this (practical) choice.

According to Thumbran (2018, 15), the term 'coloured' emerged between 1875 and 1910 as an "acceptable self-description" among slave descendants and the Khoi and San groups in the Cape. Moreover, this category was used to distinguish between slave descendants of Cape Malay, mixed-race descent, Khoi and San groups from other Africans who moved to Cape Town, mainly Xhosa-speaking groups following the destruction of Xhosa kingdoms by the British (THUMBRAN 2018, 27). Thumbran notes that "due to competition with blacks for material resources, 'coloureds' asserted this separate identity in order to claim a position of relative privilege on the basis that they were civilised and partly descended from European colonists" (2018, 27). While other labels for coloured included 'Bastards', half-castes', 'off white'; 'Cape coloured' - 'coloured' became the official term (THUMBRAN 2018, 27). Also, an important note here is that, *colouredness* was not simply imposed from above, it was "an acceptable self-description" among slave descendants, Khoi and San groups as noted by Thumbran (ibid). This category allowed coloureds to distance themselves from blackness. In other words, some honorary white/brown groups were active in their classification as "not black/above black".

Under apartheid, however, coloureds were demoted into brownness, while they were viewed as "an appendage to white society" by English white liberals in the British Cape (THUMBRAN, 2018, 18). "Indian" also became a separate brown category placed above both coloureds and blacks. Furthermore, coloureds under apartheid came to be associated with negative stereotypes such as drunkenness, drug abuse, illegitimacy, and gangsterism (ERASMUS 2001, 4). However, in the British Cape, they were described in much more positive terms as people "who have by their industry, intelligence and self-respect, raised themselves to a high standard" (THUMBRAN 2018, 29). This means the racial characterisation of coloureds was also fluid – positive or negative depending on white (elite) interests. For instance, as the anti-apartheid resistance grew in the

1970s, PW Botha's government developed a "StratCom Counter-Insurgency Strategy" to quell the burgeoning resistance unity among the oppressed (MELLET 2020, 35). According to Mellet, Botha's policy "sought to inculcate a spirit of 'die bruin Afrikaner' (the brown Afrikaner) [among coloureds] and superiority over those classified as 'black'" (2020, 35). The "mischief", according to Mellet, also included stoking anti-coloured attitudes among blacks. Generally, it is apparent that the position of coloureds, similar to other honorary white/brown groups elsewhere, was subject to change depending on the political/economic interests of whites.

Similar to 'honorary whites' and 'brown' people in other colonial contexts, Adhikari (2006) notes that the political strategy of coloured political organisations such as African Political Organisation (APO) was assimilationist as they sought acceptance in the white society rather than dismantling white supremacy. This approach tended to involve "a reluctant separation from whiteness and, on the other hand, a firm distancing from Africanness" (ADHIKARI 2006, 18). Although mainstream coloured political organisations sought full equality with whites, they accepted the second-class status as a better settlement than "being black" (STEYN 2012, 35).

By the 1940s, however, when the hopes of being assimilated were dwarfed by apartheid's segregationist policies, radical organisations emerged (ADHIKARI 2006, 18). Radical coloured individuals and organisations were critical of both the coloured category and the assimilationist strategies used by mainstream coloured political groups. In the 1960s, a number of coloureds began to reject the coloured identity, viewing it as a divide and rule tactic. Adhikari notes that although a number of coloureds rejected the coloured category – "coloured rejectionism was not a mass phenomenon nor was it ever deeply rooted" (2006, 474). He notes that the retreat into colouredness after apartheid demonstrated that coloured rejectionism was not widely received. Nonetheless, coloured rejectionism did gain some attention and was used as a strategy to challenge colonial/apartheid divide and rule tactics.

After apartheid, studies show that coloureds (also Indians) faced the threat of losing their position of relative privilege, of being equal to (or worse, of being below) blackness under the African political leadership (PILLAY and COLLINGS 2004, 607). Adhikari (2006) notes that the fear that coloureds will be marginalised again under African majority rule may explain the retreat into colouredness. White-led political parties have also used this fear of marginalisation among coloureds to draw coloured votes (BROWN 2000, 200). Cape Town (majority coloured city) and the broader Western Cape have remained predominantly under the white –'liberal' Democratic Alliance (DA) since 2005. Besten (2009, 140) suggests that there may be a preference for white over black politicians in the Cape. This may be due to fears of being marginalised under a black majority rule and/or pro-whiteness. In this regard, Adhikari (2006) notes that although the end of apartheid has brought some changes in the coloured identity, there have also been consistent aspects such as a sense of marginalisation (being a minority numerically and high levels of poverty), anti-blackness and a sense of being 'in-between' black and white. He asserts that:



With the racial hierarchy intact in many areas of South African life and with racist attitudes and racial modes of thinking prevalent at a popular level, it is not surprising that the old coloured identity that prevailed in white supremacist South Africa is still very much alive, though somewhat chastened, often manifesting itself in the form of an anti-African bigotry and a reactionary appraisal amongst many, especially within the working classes, that ‘we were better off under the white man’.

Unlike whites, who also claim a victim and a minority status based on claims of experiencing “reverse apartheid/racism”, Adhikari (2006) points out there is a material basis to feelings of victimisation among coloureds as the majority of coloureds (similar to blacks) remain overrepresented among the poor. Furthermore, while assimilating into whiteness was seen as means of gaining access to resources under colonialism/apartheid, in recent years, asserting Khoi and San identities has emerged as another means of gaining access to resources (RUITERS 2009, 4).

### **Khoi and San Revivalism, the Revival of the Empty Land Myth and Land Expropriation Debates**

In recent years, a number of ‘coloureds’ and the ‘Khoisan’ individuals have reclaimed the ‘Khoisan’ identities since the end of apartheid. The word “Khoisan”, previously used to refer to Khoi and San groups, was coined by a German Zoologist (turned ethnographer), Leornhard Schultze during the era of San, Nama and Herero genocide in German South-West Africa (Namibia) (MELLETT 2020, 17). The term ‘Khoisan’ grouped different Khoi/Khoe and San groups into a single category of ‘Khoisan’. As noted earlier, the majority of Khoi and San groups were classified as and also some opted for classification as ‘coloured’ and were later “given an attribute of ‘brownness’” (MELLETT 2020, 17). Khoi and San revivalism, therefore, takes place in a context where Khoi and San groups are referred to as brown and indigenous or first nation - a narrative based on the colonial empty land myth. Writing about the rootedness of this understanding of Khoi and San as different from ‘other’ Africans, Mellet (2019, 18) points out that:

...some sectors of our society have unfortunately been beguiled by a neocolonial mindset that has adopted a division of the African identity. So, they see Khoe and San as a separate ‘race’ from those other people who celebrate a Pan-African identity alongside singular communities. This plays into the constructed colonial identities that have been set up to be antagonistic towards one another. Consequently, one finds a narrative saying some are ‘black’ and ‘alien’ and others are ‘brown’ and indigenous.

This view of Khoi and San as coloured or brown is clearly articulated by the Indigenous First Nation Advocacy group (IFNASA) - one of the movements representing the Khoi and San groups in the land debate. Its demands as published in a 2018 press release included:

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Constitutional Recognition - First Nation Status

Identity Reclamation [Coloureds to be recognised as belonging to Khoi and San groups]. Symbolic Hand Back of the Land to the First Nation People - Sanctioned by the State

The group also uses the term – “San and Khoe Coloured People” and claims that coloureds are descendants of Khoe and San groups who were forcefully or wrongly classified as coloured. This narrative ignores the divergent origins of coloureds. As noted earlier, the coloured category included not only Khoi and San groups but also individuals of Southeast Asian descent (Cape Malay) and mixed-race individuals (Thumbran, 2018). Secondly, this group ignores the fact that some Khoi and San individuals actively chose a coloured identity, as noted earlier. Furthermore, although other African ethnic groups have Khoi and San lineage through interaction with these groups, some of the “coloured-Khoe and San” groups dismiss this view and also scholars who highlight it (such as MELLET, 2020). The motive for such dismissal, especially in the context of land debates, is to dismiss blacks’ claim to indigeneity and thus claim to the land.

Furthermore, in reviving the empty land myth, some Khoi and San movements want recognition as First Nation. Although Khoe and San’s demands for First Nation status gained public attention after the ANC announced its plans to expropriate land without compensation, studies suggest that “KhoiSan revivalism” began immediately after the first democratic elections in the mid-90s (BESTEN 2006, 140). It is also interesting to note (although expected) that some whites have been involved in supporting the development of Khoe and San organisations such as the South African San Institute (SASI) since 1994 (BESTEN 2009, 140). Besten notes that some whites have offered financial support, while some who have been contracted as consultants also “became involved in San educational, cultural and economic development projects, especially the promotion of San land rights” (2009,142). Although some Khoe and San groups reject white support, it seems that there have been moments of (re)alignment in political perspectives among brown and white Afrikaners after apartheid. Both groups endorse the empty land myth, but whites stand to benefit more from this narrative. For instance, AfriForum, a conservative Afrikaner civil organisation was a very vocal supporter of calls for recognition of Khoi and San groups as ‘First Nation’ during the 2017-2018 land debate. In Twitter debates under the hashtag #FirstNationStatus, the deputy CEO of AfriForum wrote the following:

In the Kalahari, the first people to ever live in South Africa say they aren't black, brown or coloured - they're Bushmen. They also say they're against land expropriation without compensation. Don't believe lies. The #KhoiSan are the ONLY indigenous SA people #FirstNationStatus.

By claiming that the Khoi and San are the First Nation and also against land expropriation, Afrikaner supporters stand to gain more from this Khoi and San-Afrikaner alliance (the language used here can also be considered patronising-speaking for, not with, the Khoi and San). The revival of the empty land myth serves to quell land reform and also allows whites to continue to enjoy the “spoils of white domination” (expropriated land) guilt-free (MUELLER 2017, 220). The empty land myth which calls for recognition of Khoi and San groups as First

Nation, is also part of the divide and rule (the economy) technique -as it maintains the colonial-apartheid engineered divisions among the oppressed groups in South Africa.

Accordingly, many black activists have described Khoi and San as “hired guns” used to stop the land expropriation process. In the 2018 Khoi and San Land Summit attended by AfriForum and other political organisations, AfriForum was accused of “using the Khoisan’s land struggle to further its agenda of preventing any kind of land redistribution that involved expropriation” (HLATSHANENI 2018, N.P). In his defence, the deputy CEO of AfriForum claimed that “their call to stand with the Khoi and the San was genuine and based on *facts* that were unpopular with politicians” (HLATSHANENI 2018, N.P) [emphasis added]. The unpopular ‘facts’ that AfriForum referred to are mainly drawn from the empty land myth -particularly the idea that both blacks and whites are invaders and have no right to South African land.

Similarly, in recent debates on land triggered by the public trial of Malema versus AfriForum over “shoot the Boer” song (which began on 16 February 2022), some individuals noted that endorsement of the Khoi/San First Nation narrative serves white interests. One Twitter user, for example, stated that “the whole ‘only Khoi/San were here’ conveniently says the smallest black tribe(s) (hence one with less political power) was the only black group in the borders that didn’t exist then?”. In other words, the white support of the Khoi and San groups seems to reflect the process of racial triangulation identified by Kim (1999, 107). Here, whites (group A) “valorises subordinate group B [Khoi and San groups] relative to subordinate group C (Blacks) [on the ground of nationality/citizenship status] in order to dominate both groups, but especially the latter”. While Kim noted that whites in the US valorised Asian Americans as they were considered perpetual foreigners, thus politically powerless, in the land debate, whites are valorising a group considered to be the original owners of the country but at the same time politically powerless as they are a minority numerically. As noted by Kim (1999, 111), strategies used to valorise a group may change depending on the context. However, it seems that politically powerless groups are viewed as perfect candidates for racial valorisation.

Furthermore, in a four-tier racial system, context also determines which of the two groups in the middle will be considered whiter or more useful. For instance, in the tweet used earlier, the deputy CEO of AfriForum claims that “the first people to ever live in South Africa say they aren’t black, brown or coloured - they’re Bushmen [a colonial term referring to San].” This statement suggests that even coloureds might be demoted (from B to C) as they are a numerical majority compared to whites (thus politically powerful). Accordingly, in the context of the land debate, the competition is among four groups, namely: whites (A), Khoi and San (B), coloureds (C-since they claim a Khoi and San identity, although they might struggle to claim a “pure” Khoi/San identity) and Blacks (D).

Group positions might, however, change when it comes to other political contested issues. For example, in the #AfrikaansMustFall protests and language policy debates that took place at historically white Afrikaans universities (HWAUs) in 2016, the Afrikaner civil organisations claimed that the language policy should not be changed on the grounds that Afrikaans is spoken by a larger number of people in the country, majority of whom are coloureds (RUDWICK

2016, 220). Furthermore, this argument hides the fact that Afrikaaps, the Afrikaans variety spoken by coloureds, has been marginalised and differs from ‘standard’ Afrikaans used by whites and also at universities (RUDWICK 2016, 128). Coloureds, however, were less vocal (if not less supportive) of the calls for Afrikaans to be retained as a language of instruction at HWAUs. In other words, this study suggests that context (a specific contested issue, e.g., land or language) will determine which group gets to be whiter among groups (e.g., B and C) in the intermediary position. As noted earlier, most studies tend to use a tripartite racial approach that ignores the fact that some societies have four racial groups.

On the whole, the examples used here show that the construction of four racial groups in South Africa largely serve white interests. Groups in the intermediary position might be considered ‘almost white’ or brown depending on context (i.e., with the possibility of moving into the almost white or brown category as and when a (white) need arises). This racial arrangement, however, has little benefit for these groups. Coloureds, Khoi and San groups for instance remain poor and their precarious economic condition is barely a concern for white supporters of the Khoi and San movements (ADHIKARI 2006, 476).

### **Conclusion**

This study has attempted to show the role played by honorary whiteness or brownness in white settler colonial contexts. The paper used *colouredness* and Khoi and *Sanness* to show how ‘honorary white’ and ‘brown’ identities have been used throughout history to serve white interests. The paper also drew attention to the agency of these groups to show how they have also been willing agents and at times resisters. Generally, this study demonstrated that honorary whites may endorse white ignorance as they stand to benefit (albeit minimally). For instance, the coloured-Khoi and San groups might benefit (socially/psychologically) from being recognised as First Nation. However, whites seem less interested in sharing land, and thus coloureds-Khoi and San groups are less likely to benefit materially from endorsing the empty land myth. Generally, the valorisation of honorary whites/brown groups, as noted by Chen and Buell (2018, 618) can be regarded as a form of “racist love” as it serves white interests. The support of Khoi and San groups by whites reflect this racist love or racist support as it serves to hinder attempts at reparative justice and recognition of past atrocities such as land dispossession and the massacres in which the Khoi and the San were also severely affected (MELLETT 2020, 3). The study has also suggested that there is a need to emphasise the agency of groups classified as honorary white/brown in order to understand how, why and when they endorse white ignorance and when they reject it. Lastly, the study has shown that context also determines the strategies used in the process of racial triangulation.

This study therefore points to an urgent need for counter-narratives that dismantle white ignorance on both land and race. The government, for instance, did little to challenge the empty land myth during the 2017-2018 national debates on land expropriation. If this myth remains unchallenged, land expropriation will be viewed as land theft (as AfriForum describes it) and thus unjustifiable (DEURMET 2019, 467).

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