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Whiteness Attacked, Whiteness Defended: White South African Rhetorics of Race in *JULUKA* Newsletter

Scott M. Schönfeldt-Aultman
Saint Mary's College of California

This essay explores the rhetorical strategies employed when whiteness is challenged, questioned, or attacked and when whiteness is defended. It uses as a basis letters to the editor of a North American-based South African newsletter, JULUKA. The analysis suggests that when whiteness is critiqued, several rhetorical manoeuvres emerge—retaliatory rhetorical attacks, defensive rhetorical posturing, and rhetorical reversing/shifting of the critique. In JULUKA, these rhetorical responses, ultimately, limit the newsletter's ability to be, consistently, what it desires—a publication marked by a genuinely diverse exchange of ideas. By extension, one might argue that predominantly white spaces desirous of diversity and dialogue, particularly published venues, require constructive interventions and strategies to achieve such an environment.

Keywords: whiteness, rhetorical strategies, South African, expatriate discourse, defensiveness

When *JULUKA*, the bi-monthly South African newsletter based in the United States of America, began in August/September 1991, it was intended to "inform ... investigate ... entertain ... encounter, charm ... and challenge" (Matheson & Kekana, 1991, p. 2). It was articulated as a publication that would reflect South Africa's "diverse cultural heritage" and would be a "forum for the exchange of ideas" (p. 2). After a decade, the newsletter's website described *JULUKA*, in part, as intending to help South Africans adjust to emigration/immigration within the United States and as providing a "forum for networking and the exchange of ideas and opinions" (*JULUKA*, 2001). The exchange of ideas occurs via articles, guest editorials, but most interactively via Mail Bag, the 'letter to the editor' feature. Unfortunately, these goals of diversity and exchange of ideas find difficulty coming to fruition in the newsletter, especially in Mail Bag, and particularly in the cases I discuss below, due to the rhetorical responses of letter writers when addressing whiteness. Using the newsletter's Mail Bag as a case

study, this paper explores the emergent rhetorical strategies that ensue when whiteness is challenged or attacked and when whiteness is defended, in order to understand how whiteness is discursively engaged in such situations, especially within a South African context. In these Mail Bag contexts, letter writers mention race explicitly, a significant divergence from much white South African rhetoric about race, which employs implicit, coded rhetoric.

This analysis concerns over 25 (out of nearly 140) letters to the editor in 23 *JULUKA* issues from April/May 1999 to August/September 2003. The letters I chose to examine were those in which whiteness was clearly a subject or point of contention. My method of analysis is rooted in an attention to emergent discourses and ideologies of race, whiteness, and nationality, and is informed by a cultural-rhetorical studies approach. I focus on three cases when whiteness is critiqued/defended and work through the varied responses of letter writers to demonstrate the complex and collective rhetorical responses related to whiteness' critique/defence. Ultimately, I contend that the responses can be roughly categorised as retaliatory rhetorical attacks, defensive rhetorical posturing, and rhetorical reversing/shifting of the critique. My analysis also helps to further demonstrate the relationship between language/rhetoric/discourse and power. It acknowledges rhetoric's ability to implicitly call forth history and to evoke hateful, injurious, and racist contexts (Butler, 1997). It understands that language exhibits ideology (Hall, 2003; McGee, 1980). It recognises, with Foucault (1980), that discourse has the power and ability to influence, to categorise, to normalise, and to manufacture power relations.

Moreover, these letters give some insight into how white South African expatriate rhetorics take shape when whiteness is critiqued and defended in this specific context of a post-apartheid, post-Mandela period. I chose this publication as a site of examination because of its longevity, reader-professed significance, and its uniqueness as a publication (in that few others like it existed during this period of time). The late 1990s, early 2000s were a key moment of transition for South Africa given that it was the beginning tenure of a new black President/leadership after Mandela's presidency. Many saw Mandela as a reconciliatory first black President and a respected, legendary figure in the South African anti-apartheid struggle. At the same time, white South Africans were continuing to leave the country to migrate elsewhere. With the respect to the newsletter, my analysis took place at the end of the long-standing liberal editor's tenure and just before this black and white newsletter was sold and developed into a full-colour glossy magazine (in early 2004).

In this essay, I first articulate the relationship of South African whiteness to that of the United States. Next, I offer a summary of research relevant to whiteness being attacked and defended. I then highlight the rhetorical responses in *JULUKA*'s Mail Bag when whiteness is critiqued and protected, before concluding the essay.

South African Whiteness in the United States

South African whiteness cannot be understood without acknowledging its historic relation to apartheid and racism. It is marked by various cultural experiences in part due to the differences and tensions among many English- and Afrikaans-

speaking whites. Steyn (1998) has discussed the “colonial imagination” and its binary approach to viewing Europeans (whiteness) and Africans (blackness), which also informs many white South Africans’ narratives of racial identities regardless of their ethnic identifications (see Steyn, 1999, 2001). She comments on white fears, white awareness of “black violence,” and the societal repositioning of whiteness in the new South Africa that has varying consequences for white identity (1999). Other scholars note that many South African whites feel they have lost certain privileges that they once had (Farred, 1997; Goodwin & Schiff, 1995; Vestergaard, 2001; Ndebele in West, 2010). Farred (1997, p. 73) asserts that white South Africans can no longer find “physical and mental sanctuary” in post-apartheid South Africa due largely to their “sense of place [being] endangered in real, ideological, and metaphorical terms.” This experience seems to manifest itself, at least in part, in what Steyn (2005) describes as “white talk,” which is intended to maintain privilege, preserve the inherited white status quo, to slow the transition towards democracy and multiculturalism, and to maintain centredness via exclusionary strategies and tactics and negative portrayals of the ‘other.’ There are distinctions to be made between Afrikaans- and English-speaking white identities, experiences, and rhetorics (Goodwin & Schiff, 1995; Steyn, 2004). Yet, within the United States, and particularly when the maintenance of South African national identity is the focus, these differences are not always articulated.

Steyn (2004) points out that South African whites, unlike most United States whites, have always experienced their whiteness and white privilege as visible given that South Africa’s specific political and historical factors have contributed to white South Africans knowing they were racialised, though their privilege was assumed as natural. She suggests that white South Africans held to such a narrative in part because of the perceived tenuous insecurity of whiteness in South Africa. In the new South Africa, white political power became significantly limited (though economic and cultural power were still strong) and white identity was in crisis. Steyn (2005, p. 122) argues, thus, that white folks require “new narratives to explain who they are, what they are doing in Africa, and what their relationship is to the indigenous people and to the continent.” When white South Africans move to the United States, where white political power is intact and where there is an ongoing history of Native American dispossession (Moreton-Robinson, 2008), it is important to acknowledge and analyse how white South Africans conceive of their racialisation and the security of their whiteness and how often they appeal to old and/or new narratives.

Scholars have argued that among white South Africans (both in South Africa and the United States) a shared sense of fear, be it the traditional fear of “swart gevaar” (black danger or black peril) or the fear of reverse discrimination shapes white identity (Schutte, 1995; Steyn, 2001). There are also very pronounced constructions of white victimisation (Crapanzano, 1985; Goodwin & Schiff, 1995; Schutte, 1995; Steyn, 2001; van Rooyen, 2000) that South African whites draw upon to rhetorically craft themselves as the victims of black violence (Schutte, 1995; Steyn, 1999; van Rooyen, 2000), often with the implication that violence is inherent to blackness (see Schönfeldt-Aultman, 2009, 2014a, 2014b). These ironic claims of white victimisation from white persons emerging from South African apartheid and choosing residence in a United States grounded in Indigenous dispossession amidst a hiding of that history (Moreton-Robinson, 2008), is not insignificant. In these white rhetorics of national identity, and in my

own argument, blackness functions as a “white epistemological possession” to “displace Indigenous sovereignties and render them invisible” (Moreton-Robinson, 2008, pp. 82-83) in a United States’ context.

Thus, the binary, racist discourses of white victimisation/innocence and black violence/crime find an easy fit in the United States due to the logics of white settler colonialism. Even though South Africa and the United States have different histories and different institutional structures of whiteness, the similarities of white privilege allow for similar (functioning of) rhetoric and rhetorical constructions. Moreover, being in a predominantly white space (as opposed to the predominant black space of South Africa) allows white South Africans to blend into whiteness, enabling them to be less consciousness of their being racialised as ‘white,’ and permitting their rhetorics (e.g., of identity) and rhetorical representations of whiteness and blackness to appear more justifiable, accurate, or true, in large part because of what Frankenberg (1993) refers to as the specific assumptions, value structures, and belief systems that mark ‘white’ social spaces, spaces such as *JULUKA*’s Mail Bag and many white South African spaces of residence in the United States.

When Whiteness is Attacked—When Whiteness is Defended

While much of the literature on whiteness discussed in this section is concerned with whiteness in the United States, it is still applicable to white South Africans living in the United States because of the overlapping logics of white settler colonialism that inform US and South African rhetorical strategies. When whiteness is directly discussed, questioned, critiqued, challenged or attacked, white folks have a litany of rhetorical strategies from which they draw. These rhetorical arguments and tactics work to protect white authority by invalidating challenges to it (Projansky & Ono, 1999) and by ignoring historical or systemic power relations (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995) and white power and dominance (Dyer, 1988; Frankenberg, 1993). The strategies I reference below are especially called upon when whiteness is attacked or defended.

One of the motivating factors when responding to whiteness being attacked or defended is to avoid being tagged a racist (see Jackson, 2006). The rhetorical strategies involved in such contexts of attack and defence include the denial of racism (van Dijk, 1992; Wise, 2008), the minimising of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2002), creating distance from responsibility (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), making appeals to unintentionality (Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2002), and employing rhetorics of dismissal (Kendall, 2006), of mitigation (van Dijk, 1992), or denial more generally (Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2002). Rhetorics of justification are common (Baldwin, 1965/1998; van Dijk, 1992), sometimes with specific appeal to anger and/or fear (Verkuyten, 1998). Other strategies include claims of white virtuousness (Feagin, 2010) or of the “good white” (Johnson, 2006), presentation of the white self positively and of the ‘other’ negatively (Jackson, 2006; van Dijk, 1992), and blaming the ‘other’ (Baldwin, 1965/1998; Foster, 2009; Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; van Dijk, 1992; Verkuyten, 1998).

Scholars have also argued that white folks often articulate rhetorics informed by colour-blindness when discussing numerous socio-cultural or identity issues

(Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Frankenberg, 2001). Unfortunately, colour-blind rhetorics often result in professions or demonstrations of ignorance of other realities (McEwen & Steyn, 2013; Verkuyten, 1998; Steyn, 2012), in disregarding of the effects of history (Baldwin, 1965/1998; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; McEwen & Steyn, 2013; Steyn, 2012), in the minimisation of other histories (McIntyre, 1997; McKinney, 2005), in claims that things are better (Johnson, 2006) or in arguments that certain racist activities have ceased (Kivel, 2002). When others seemingly insist on discussing race or continue to challenge whiteness, charges of oversensitivity, exaggeration, or intolerance (van Dijk, 1992) or "sick and tired" rhetorics may emerge (Johnson, 2006).

In defensive situations, white rhetors (e.g., speakers, writers) also make use of evidential story-telling (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; van Dijk, 1992; Verkuyten, 1998), claims for authenticity (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), disclaimers (van Dijk, 1992), and euphemisms (Moon, 1999; Riggs & Due, 2010). Other strategies include redirection of conversation (McIntyre, 1997), redefinition (Kivel, 2002; Verkuyten, 1998), and renaming (Johnson, 2006) of racial injustice. Silence (McIntyre, 1997) and nervous laughter (McIntyre, 1997) are sometimes employed when whites are challenged on their privilege. And, not surprisingly, counter-attacks directed toward the critic of whiteness are not uncommon (Kivel, 2002; van Dijk, 1992).

Finally, though also very prevalent in white defensive posturing, and as I have already indicated above in the specific context of white South Africans, are rhetorics of white victimisation (Frankenberg, 2001; Jackson, 2006; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Kivel, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; McKinney, 2005) or of the innocent victim (Ross, 1997), reverse racism (Frankenberg, 2001; Shohat & Stam, 1994; van Dijk, 1992; Wise, 2008) and anti-affirmative action discourses (Jackson, 2006). There is a long history of the rhetoric of reverse racism that "goes at least as far back as the days of slavery" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 25). Generally speaking, the rhetoric of white victimisation and disadvantage is prevalent both in the United States (Apple, 1998; Gallagher, 1995; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 1999) and in South Africa (Duster, 2001; Steyn, 2001).

My objective in this essay is to highlight what I believe to be some strategic rhetorical responses when whiteness is critiqued and various rhetorical strategies when whiteness is defended in the context of letters written by readers of a North-American based South African newsletter. These responses, which sometimes work in conjunction with one another, amount to retaliatory rhetorical attacks, defensive rhetorical posturing, and rhetorical reversing/shifting of the critique.

The first rhetorical manoeuvre analysed is defensive rhetorical posturing. This rhetoric is manifested via claims of authenticity, reference to affirmative action unfairness, denial of racism, reference to white victimisation or to the constant attack on whiteness, employment of universalising phrases, and rhetorical reclaiming of the thing critiqued. This rhetorical reclaiming is evidenced via, for instance, praise of and professed patriotism to the United States and congratulatory rhetoric for the individuals critiqued (e.g., praise of white courage, passion, and intelligence).

Retaliatory rhetorical attacks consist primarily of attacking the critic of whiteness more so than the critique of whiteness that is being levelled by a prior letter writer. Among these attacks are charges of smugness, cosiness, racism, ignorance/lack of intelligence, arrogance, hypocrisy, bias, non-productivity, ranting/gripping, nonsense-spewing, and assertions of failure to see the reality of the (white) South African experience (namely crime and worrisome life situations). There is also a rhetorical effort to invalidate the critic's personhood and perspective, sometimes by labelling it or relegating it to something not necessarily relevant to the issue at hand.

The third rhetorical manoeuvre analysed is the simple reversal of the critique and shifting the focus of the argument to the 'other' via binary and colonialist discourse, in an effort to demonstrate the writer's perception of the actual situation. These rhetorical reversals include attaching tropes of violence, crime, and inadequacy to black South Africans, as well as claims of blacks' inability to govern and their lack of goodness and commitment to freedom.

Case 1—Highlighting Defensive Rhetorical Posturing

Although infrequent, some letters to *JULUKA* reference their author's whiteness or someone else's blackness. Such attributions of racial identity are typically in response to a perceived or actual challenge to whiteness. Reflecting on white framings of Africa and blackness, as well as on the notion of white fear, a letter in Mail Bag of June/July 1999, from a white South African living in Washington, D.C., argues that "most white South Africans are full of sh*t (sic)—running scared due to their own insecurity and inner fears" (Greenland, 1999a, p. 10). He makes the claim based on a recent visit to South Africa marked by

racist outbursts from whites from various backgrounds: a self-proclaimed academic/intellectual from Wits; a Durban harbor pilot, and a piece of worthless scum from Madeira—all espousing vile hatred towards Africans. What was evident there was basically the same—insecure whites filled with their own inadequacies, and still claiming their undeniable right to ownership of all the spoils that they were used to under the past regime. (Greenland, 1999a, p. 10)

Apparent in this letter is a homogenising racial construction of "most" white South Africans as racist, insecure, angry, and fearful—across apparent class, education, and gender backgrounds. It challenges the common white South African rhetorics of deterioration and crime by offering an alternative racialised discourse that positions whites and white identity as being the problem, rather than black South Africans or black South African identity. Moreover, this letter positions the author as different from most South African whites, that is as non-racist, thereby constructing a different version of whiteness from the one the author critiques.

Subsequent respondents to this letter challenge the author's self-characterisation. For instance, one letter suggests that his perspective is skewed given his holiday-observations and that white South Africans have "plenty to worry about, believe me" (Sewell, 1999, p. 10). The letter notes that the author's "SA clients of any nationality or color do not have money" and that "there ain't no jobs" for people with "white skin." The letter closes with the retaliatory retort/attack (which also works to discredit Greenland on the basis of

his emigrant status), "Try living here, you cosy, smug little Washington resident, and you'll see what I mean" (Sewell, 1999, p. 10).

White anxiety manifests here through reference to the lack of jobs for white folks. It is justified and defended primarily on grounds of authentic experience or authenticity and an alignment between white working class and the working class of people of (any) colour without specificity of experience. The letter's retort however is arguably class-grounded, as implied in the use of the word "cosy," and the implicit reference to the stereotype of upper class smugness. The respondent also draws on a common, homogenising discourse/narrative that links being white in South Africa to limited employment opportunity (Steyn, 2001) and potential threat to middle/upper class status, which is often argued directly, or as in this case, implied, as a consequence of government-imposed affirmative action policies that benefit blacks. Gallagher (1995), Giroux (1997), and Kincheloe (1999) note similar expressions among whites in the United States regarding white employment and affirmative action, thus providing fertile ground and support for related expatriate white South African rhetorics. However, according to journalist Richard Morin (2004), 2002 South African government statistics suggested that even with "aggressive affirmative action programs, whites still outnumber blacks among top managers by nearly 10 to 1." He continues, "Even among middle managers, whites still outnumber blacks in a country where blacks make up 79 percent of the population, whites are 9.6 percent, mixed race are 8.9 percent and Indian 2.5 percent." Such statistics further suggest that white victimisation in the labour market is rhetorically rooted rather than economically widespread.

Interestingly, this anti-affirmative action discourse, with which some whites identify and which works ideologically to unify whites (Burke, 1950), is also alluded to by a South African letter writer, writing in the same issue as Greenland, and responding to Ridwan Nytagodien's critique of white power and dominance (in a prior issue). The letter writer asks why Africans like Nytagodien are returning to South Africa "in hordes to enjoy the real privileges offered to them by their own" (Smith, 1999, p. 10). Here, the defensive posturing comes through the language (i.e., "hordes") that shifts the focus of critique to the 'other' by implicitly referencing former diasporian South African blacks as an invading mass that profit unjustly and unfairly by the very fact of their "sameness" with government officials. It is not clear if this sameness is necessarily racial or if it may also refer to their shared philosophical or political perspectives, or even their historical experiences. What is clear is the ideological binary framing of all blacks as similar with one another and different from whites, a binary construction numerous scholars have noted about white rhetorics (Kincheloe, 1999; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Projansky & Ono, 1999; Steyn, 1998).

In this case, the binary works to essentialise identities, to discredit black re-investment in South Africa, to suggest favouritism among blacks, while avoiding the white racism/ideologies and racist structures that contributed to earlier black departure and to current white departures. In the larger rhetorical scheme of white South African rhetorics, blacks returning/remaining are characterised as barbaric and criminal "hordes," reinvigorating the fear of the "swart gevaar." Departing whites are conversely described through the religiously connoted term

"exodus," and whites remaining are depicted as victimised by the hordes of black South Africans returning/remaining (see van Rooyen, 2000). The black-white binary construction reinforces colonialist ideology and representation and reiterates white innocence and superiority. Relatedly, whites' racial and other difference from government officials results in a crisis of whiteness (of white class, careers, culture, and safety). This point is an important one when recalling Mercer's (2000) claim that people more intensely and consistently concentrate on identity when it is in crisis. In this case, and in others below, letters defend white identity vigorously because it is perceived as under attack and in need of defence.

Another letter (Bub, 1999, p. 10) responding to Greenland's letter (1999a) constructs Greenland, the aforementioned Washington South African, as an author of "a racist anti-white letter complaining of anti-black racism in SA." Such a construction is a retaliatory act of naming or labelling that functions to minimise and dismiss the legitimacy of Greenland's letter. This same letter of response references the author's (Bub's) own visit to South Africa and his defensive conclusion that "fear (which is felt by both whites and blacks) is a legitimate emotion when faced by rampant violence and an inadequate police force." Thus, the letter employs race and authentic experience as tools of attack to discredit an argument, to re-present white and black identities, and to justify the fear white and black South Africans feel. It also constructs the critic of white "racists" as a racist (an anti-white, white racist, that is). This letter leaves histories, privilege, and power unaddressed, as do other white rhetorics that scholars have studied (Dyer, 1988; Frankenberg, 1993; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). The letter also alludes to the tropes of black violence, black crime, and inadequacy (of black police), thus implying that such violence, crime, and inadequacy are reflective of blackness/black identity. The letter suggests these links when referencing the (newer, predominantly black) police force that many media reports have constructed as untrained, ignorant, inadequate, corrupt, and prisoner-sympathising (see Magardie, 2001; Mawson, 2002; Moore, 2002; Moya, 2003; Nedbank, 2001). Scholars have both acknowledged the role of media in circulating these rhetorics (Gastrow & Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Gastrow, 2001) and made efforts to study crime rates historically and public response to crime (Gastrow & Shaw, 2001), police corruption (Newham, 2000), and police transformation (Gastrow & Shaw, 2001).

In response to these two critiques (by Sewell and Bub on the matter of Greenland's critique of whiteness), the original letter writer pens another letter asking, "how can I, of Anglo Saxon descent, really be seen as a racist anti-white?" (Greenland, 1999b, p. 10). The letter notes the convenient way these aforementioned respondents "refer to everything back home as racist," noting that the

supposed 'legitimate fear' you speak of is nothing less than the insecurity of a people who never gave the new South Africa the slightest chance of survival, let alone see the reason or need to contribute towards it's (sic) reconstruction and development. (Greenland, 1999b, p. 10)

The letter also states that the author travelled in South Africa "with my eyes wide open to gain a true sense of life about me." One interesting aspect of this letter is the assumption that being white precludes being a "racist anti-white,"

who is racist toward whites. What is intriguing here is the claiming and constructing of white identity to dismiss the possibility of the author's racism against whites, as if prejudiced practice is only possible toward an(other) race and not one's own racial group. This letter may not be engaging in racist rhetoric, but it is certainly critical of whiteness or of white rhetorics. Ironically, it actually appeals to a racist Anglo Saxon heritage to claim lack of racism toward Anglo Saxons. That is, the reference to Anglo Saxon background appeals to, yet fails to fully articulate, the Anglo Saxonist historical, structural, social, and cultural racism (against 'others') to argue that one who is white and benefits from such a system cannot be racist against the other Anglo Saxons—that is, white racism is constructed as occurring only against other races to dismiss the possibility of white intra-racism. The letter also returns to the rhetoric of whites' insecurity and their fear of black governing, suggesting that whites' racism prevents them from contributing to the betterment of South Africa. The letter indirectly counters the earlier claims of authenticity (from Sewell and Bub) with its own defensive appeal to authentic experience, observation, and a more objective "true sense" of the South African situation.

These exchanges demonstrate the "rhetoric of authenticity" (Radhakrishnan, 1996) or the discursive engagement with a "politics of authenticity" in which one draws on authenticity, especially in the one case (Sewell's), "to trump or to close [these] particular ... cultural and political debates" (Keith, 2000, p. 521). Obviously, the explicit acknowledgement of whiteness is important in such arguments in order to strategically authenticate one's perspective. What is also evident in these interactions is the emergence and expression of white angst articulated as fear, blame, and/or lack of faith concerning black nature, violence, leadership, and mismanagement which Steyn (1998, p. 111) suggests also grounds the "type of thinking [that] largely motivates the emigration of Whites to countries that are more supportive of White identity" (see also Ballard, 2004; McEwen & Steyn, 2013). A subsequent letter from one of these three speakers in this exchange (Sewell), in fact, expresses the intent to emigrate. The defensive rhetoric and retaliatory attacks in these letters, in large part, work to recuperate and construct a home' for many white South Africans in the United States, a home that is articulated as better than the one from which they emigrated (e.g., due to lack of jobs and violence), yet one in which white identity can be similarly defended and represented ideologically as it was/is in South Africa.

Case 2—Focusing on Retaliatory Rhetorical Attacks

So far I have explained how defensive racial arguments serve a protective function for whiteness via invalidation, ahistoricity, and power-evasiveness. These rhetorical efforts demonstrate that whites resist, refuse, or hesitate to interrogate whiteness (Jackson, 1999). Sometimes, as below, the protection/dismissal of a challenge and the lack of attentiveness to power relations and white dominance occur via retaliatory attack on the writer making a critique. One case that evokes the retaliatory rhetorical manoeuvre is Brody's (2001, p. 10) letter. It responds to the previous issue's reporting of his "guilty as charged" declaration to a survey encouraging whites to recognise how they benefitted from apartheid, as well as comments on "bad South Africans" benefiting from apartheid and staying behind. The letter, which does not reference race, claims that "the ones who benefitted the most seem to have stayed because they couldn't make it anywhere else, or they had no incentive to

do so.” The letter also states that those who did leave, because of the “benefit of a Western education” (in South Africa) left, and “thanked their lucky stars not to be mired in the decline of the old country.” In effect, this statement is an indirect or implied challenge to whiteness. Brody also expresses some concern that the black South African government is isolating “hundreds of thousands of people [i.e. expatriates] willing to do something for them.” The next issue of the newsletter (June/July 2001) contains a response in a letter that identifies the author as a woman who is “a white South African living in the US” who accuses Brody of being “full of arrogance” (Morris, 2001, p. 10). The letter continues,

Let’s face it—many white South Africans would not have left if things remained the same. Leaving is not an option for many people and many have made the *courageous* choice to stay. Many have remained because they *feel passionate* about the country and want to be part of it. Their choice to stay has been a hard one. Brody has *little knowledge* of what is really going on in the country and speaks with such authority from his *cosy nest far away*. (Morris, 2001, p. 10, italics added)

This letter not only acknowledges the whiteness of the South Africans that Brody’s letter implied but also then defends these white South Africans while applauding their courage and passion for staying. This courage is dependent on and an allusion to the rhetoric of crime and violence that victimises whites. Similar to the earlier letter that commented on white South Africans (Greenland, 1999a), Brody is criticised for being in a “cosy” location far from South Africa. His intelligence is also questioned (“has little knowledge”) by this retaliatory rhetoric, not unlike the questioning/disparaging of blacks who lead or who challenge whiteness in other socio-cultural and mediated contexts.

A letter ascribed to a South African couple in the following August/September 2001 issue repeats the retaliatory critique of Brody’s intelligence and the defensive lauding of courage and passion of South Africans remaining in the country. This letter claims that Brody “knows so little of what is really going on in his country of birth,” that he has the “audacity to speak for all South Africans” and cannot “presume to know or understand the courage it took to consciously decide to remain and help rebuild the country that we love” (Stein, 2001, p. 10). The letter also reverses Brody’s critique of white benefits when noting “the comments and criticism of self-righteous and arrogant emigrants who presume to know it all.” It continues, “Many such people spent years riding the crest of the wave, stashing money in overseas banks in preparation for their comfortable emigration.” Obviously, these responses seek to invalidate what Brody’s letter implies about white privilege and whites both remaining in and leaving South Africa by questioning Brody’s intelligence, audacity, comprehension, arrogance, class, and commitment to South Africa by broadly invoking white folks’ courage and love for South Africa. The responses, however, do not treat in depth the issues to which Brody’s letter alludes, namely white power and dominance and the historical, systemic power relations of South Africa. There is, in other words, what Crenshaw (1997) calls a “rhetorical silence” about these things.

(A Special) Case 3—Recognising the Relationships Between and the Repercussions of Rhetorical Reversals, Shifts, Retaliation and Defensiveness

Some of the most aggressive and defensive letters in *JULUKA* were in response to Nytagodien's "Bridging the gap" column. These responses are important to discuss at length because Nytagodien's column was the most consistent, critical, and direct critique of whiteness in *JULUKA*, and one made by a man of colour. One article in particular ("Patriot This!", 2002) resulted in letters in two issues, perhaps due in part to the article's discussion of patriotism post 9/11. The article critiques the "white expats who declare their patriotism and new-found belonging in the United States" (Nytagodien, 2002, p. 9). In the same issue, Jo Gordon's "Culture shock" column (2002, p. 8) addressed Nytagodien's essay, which she titled "We are *not* amused," in response to Nytagodien's statements of being "amused" by such white expats. Some of the letters in the subsequent issue's Mail Bag sided with Gordon or expressed appreciation of her column's critique of Nytagodien, which employs all three of the primary rhetorical manoeuvres I highlight in this essay.

Before examining these examples, it is worth noting that Nytagodien's "Bridging the Gap" column ceased appearing after two articles in which he was especially critical of whiteness (titled, "Whiteness" and "Patriot This!"). In the issue in which his last column ("Patriot This!") appeared, Jo Gordon responded to that column (in her "Culture Shock" column). It is a rare practice to have a response to a feature in the same issue in which it appears, particularly in Nytagodien's case. In the next issue after this occurrence, an editorial appearing in Nytagodien's former space (p. 9) comments on this unusual practice of same issue response, and discusses Nytagodien's column within the context of *JULUKA*'s goals and readers. In fact, this practice resulted in Nytagodien's resignation (Matheson, 2003; Nytagodien, 2003). Also interesting is that Jo Gordon's "Culture Shock" column, which sometimes appeared on the same page (or on the opposing/preceding page) and often espoused the typical white ideologies and perspectives Nytagodien critiqued, subsequently sat where Nytagodien's column used to. According to editor Cliff Matheson (2003), this placement was related to layout format. Still, the use of column space and voice communicate here that whiteness recentres itself as dominant and normative when it is marked and critiqued too heavily.

Notably, Gordon's same-issue response to Nytagodien is mostly defensive, referencing whiteness and the "safe haven" the United States provides for expatriate white South Africans while drawing on white victimisation rhetorics and white authenticity claims. She also rhetorically reclaims privilege twice, arguing at one point that the "privilege I enjoy in the US is not 'white privilege' but human privilege" (2002, p. 8). She notes that the United States gives her a "vantage point from which to view both my history and my future with pride and hope." Such statements seem to not only reverse Nytagodien's argument regarding white privilege, patriotism, and ignorance of white South Africans in the United States, but to charge him with hypocrisy through the suggestion that while he "has so much to say about others who have flown the coop," he is not critical about or does not apply the same argument to his own status as a "coop escape" (p. 8). She suggests that his comment that white expatriate South Africans cannot lay claim to South Africa because of their departure is not extended to himself. Her rhetoric, of course, reflects the very denial and ignorance of racial difference and privilege, and ideology of colour-blindness, about which Nytagodien is critical.

The first response to Nytagodien's and Gordon's columns is an atypical one, which points out that Jo Gordon in "her defensive haste to put pen to paper as well as the content of the column ... exposes herself in a way that makes his point beautifully" (Gonsenhauser, 2002/2003, p. 10). This letter refuses to articulate a position supportive of Gordon's critique. Moreover, the placement of this letter before the other three pro-Gordon or anti-Nytagodien letters in this Mail Bag, arguably, frames the other letters. That is, this placement may be the liberal-leaning editor's way of encouraging readers to take the other letters with a grain of salt. Or, it may be a placement that sets up the first letter to be later discredited or forgotten. One might also argue that the newsletter itself frames the letters, and thus, works to marginalise the first letter, though this depends on one's interpretation of *JULUKA* as a whole.¹

The other letters responding to Nytagodien and Gordon use several rhetorical strategies that are representative of white rhetorics when defending whiteness or when whiteness has been challenged. Not unlike the responses to Brody noted above, retaliatory charges of arrogance, cosiness, and lack of intelligence surface in regard to Nytagodien. The letters refer to race, both black and white, at times. There are homogenised appeals to race, charges of hypocrisy and racism, disparagement of blacks or this particular black man, and expressions of praise and patriotism toward the United States.

One letter, which constructs the author as a self-professed "great fan of Jo Gordon's column," who the author sees as "usually so on target with [her] observations," asks, "Who is this Ridwan person anyway?" (Ravden, 2002/2003, p. 10) The letter asks if he is "speaking to the black point of view" but notes that the author cannot determine if Nytagodien is, since she "cannot be sure exactly what it is he is saying." The letter suggests that *JULUKA* "do itself a favor and find someone with something relevant and interesting to say." It then notes that "We are all sick to death of hearing 'everything white' berated from beginning to end—it is over-used and boring. I thought educated people had moved on from there a long time ago." This letter makes a retaliatory attack on Nytagodien by sarcastically asking who he is, suggesting that what he has to say is incomprehensible, irrelevant, and boring (in comparison to Gordon's typical perspectives), and implying that this "educated" person is not so advanced.

Simultaneously, the letter implicates the author's own whiteness and ignorance by not being able to (or refusing to) comprehend Nytagodien's critique or to see its relevance to her. In other words, the author's ignorance gets framed (reversed) as Nytagodien's ignorance or lack of articulation, such that white knowing trumps black knowing, and thus, as Maher and Thompson Tetreault (1997) argue, whiteness seeks to establish its intellectual domination or superiority. The letter also employs universalising phrases of "we are all" and "everything white" not only to obscure, indirectly reference, and/or code whiteness, but also to represent Nytagodien as inaccurately attacking "everything" white. By employing the words, "we are all," the letter assumes that all readers of *JULUKA*, regardless of race, are "tired" of Nytagodien's critiques and thus sets the entire readership against him. There is, thus, a problematic construction of a common "we" that does not mark differences of power and

¹ I am indebted to Ruth Frankenberg for making this observation, in an early draft of this essay, about the newsletter framing the letters.

simultaneously sets up a binary of a “we” against Nytagodien, the “single dominant Other” (Brah, 1996, p. 184).

The praise of Gordon continues in another letter that calls for “three cheers” for her article and “castigation of Nytagodien’s apparent hypocrisy” (Riddell, 2002/2003, p. 10). The letter suggests that Nytagodien’s “sole reason for ... being in the USA is to lecture Americans about the nonsense that the USA represents freedom, equality and opportunity.” The letter, in a retaliatory attack, then argues that Nytagodien “seems to have failed dismally” in this supposed effort, since “during the ‘90s more than 34-million immigrants made this country their new home.” The letter then shifts focus and attempts to disparage black-governed countries and black people when inferring that “countries north of the Limpopo River” are far from “paragons of virtue and freedom” and are not desirable immigration spots. That is, blacks are represented as not being able to govern properly or to be virtuous and do not endorse or value freedom in countries where they have majority-power. The letter states, defensively, that even though the United States has faults, it offers this author the “best opportunity to live my life to the full.” The letter concludes with a slap at Nytagodien who, it argues, apparently “accepts US dollars for his ‘self-serving parasitism’ (to quote him) and not 30 pieces of silver which he appears to be accusing white South Africans of accepting.”

Riddell’s (2002/2003, p. 10) letter congratulates Gordon and affirms the white rhetorical strategies she employs in her “castigation” of Nytagodien. The letter tags Nytagodien as a hypocrite who preaches “nonsense,” a parasite, a failure, and even a traitor to something holy or precious. The allusion to Judas’s betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver sets up a metaphorical exchange where Nytagodien is suggested as betraying South Africa for US dollars. The betrayal analogy—which directly acknowledges whiteness by referencing “white South Africans” but only indirectly implies Nytagodien’s blackness—breaks down, since Nytagodien is not white and cannot thus betray the group of which he is not a part, nor can he really betray the United States since he is South African, nor can he betray South Africa since he defends it. The analogy works, however, if one reads it via the white lens that sees Nytagodien as betraying the readership of *JULUKA* (of which he is a part), or at least the white sensibilities and comfort zones of many readers. As if to re-patriotise the author and justify his leaving South Africa with his family “more than 50 years ago,” this letter praises the United States for its freedom, equality, and opportunity (and in effect, bestowing of white privilege) that gives him the “best opportunity to live my life to the full.” By not naming that “opportunity” as white privilege, however, the letter enacts what Frankenberg (1993, p. 189) has called a “color- and power- evasive repertoire.”

A third letter notes Nytagodien’s “vitriol” (a representation not uncommon when white people describe the “black savage” or black male) and sarcastically claims that Nytagodien attacks all South African whites with the exception of those “handful” of whites “who joined the armed struggle or ended up in jail for opposing the illegitimate regime” (Lubbe, 2002/2003, p. 10). The letter then defensively states that “we [whites] learn that we are delusional in believing that the United States is a great country which represents freedom, equality and ... opportunity!” In an apparent retaliatory jab at Nytagodien’s intelligence and credentials, the letter questions what “the professor” might think about “the rule

of law, individual and religious freedom, an unfettered press, a high standard of living, and an abundant opportunity for education" and "where a better situation would now be found." Such attacks on black intelligence or efforts to demonstrate white intellectual superiority are not uncharacteristic of white rhetorics addressing blackness, as scholars have noted (Maher & Thompson Tetreault, 1997; Kincheloe, 1999; Shome, 1996). The letter then subtly identifies the author as a US citizen (of South African birth) when noting that "Most Americans are fully aware that *our* system can be improved at many levels" (italics added) and then reduces Nytagodien's critique to "reckless ranting" that is a "waste of time and energy" (Lubbe, 2002/2003, p. 10).

As should be obvious, the patterns in the above letters consist of attacks on Nytagodien's character, framing him as ignorant, praise and expression of patriotism and loyalty to the United States, direct acknowledgement of whiteness, and describing the challenge to whiteness as nonsensical and an unworthy endeavour. The refusal to engage Nytagodien's critique as anything other than "reckless ranting" is an indication of a lack of intent to engage seriously in reflecting upon the meaning of whiteness and of patriotism in relation to white privilege in the United States. This retaliatory rhetorical manoeuvre is the manifestation of yet another fear, of racial self-interrogation, that inflects expressions of white South African national identity. Incidentally, one of these same letter writers addresses another of Nytagodien's essays in the April/May 2001 Mail Bag. Initially, the letter appears to be in agreement with Nytagodien's position but this is conveyed through sarcasm. For example, the letter notes that Nytagodien "rails against whites and is contemptuous of those that want to let them off the hook too easily" (Lubbe, 2001, p. 10). The letter further suggests that South Africa would be better off by not following Nytagodien's "advice." Such advice would lead to something like a "socialist system," which the letter characterises as "not very auspicious."

A letter in the February/March 2003 Mail Bag continues employing these white rhetorical strategies of dismissal, retaliation, reversal, and defensiveness. The letter claims that "people like myself find ourselves too busy with real stuff to be bothered with debating and getting involved with nonsense the likes of ... [Nytagodien's 2002] 'Patriot This!' article" (Wilson, 2003, p. 10). While the letter does not explicitly say "people like myself" means white people (that is, it does not mark it as such), it implies white people, particularly since Nytagodien positions himself as clearly critical of whiteness and white South African rhetorics of patriotism and privilege. The letter, like Riddell's (2002/2003) earlier letter, labels Nytagodien's critique of whiteness and patriotism as "nonsense" and implies it is not "real" (or rather not "real"ly important). In what can be read as a retaliatory move to discredit Nytagodien, his university, and "blacks," the letter asks if "academic environments or institutions" which hire folks like Nytagodien have a "department of 'White Studies,' or is a field such as this only reserved for blacks to promote more hate and self-serving theories" (Wilson, 2003, p. 10). Curiously, the letter, in a reversal of the critique of white egoistic patriotism and parasitism, constructs blacks as responsible for hate and self-serving theories rather than whites. The letter reduces Nytagodien's critique of whiteness to hate mongering and as beneficial only to himself but characterises white studies as a field that would help white people maintain privilege with the creation of self-serving theories. The letter puts forth all of these arguments with little or no apparent self-consciousness about the way such rhetoric continues to uphold

white privilege, even as it renounces the justifiability of a call for redress for blacks. The arguments also manifest an amnesia of an apartheid that fostered hate, white advantage, and white self-serving theories and policies in South Africa.

The letter (Wilson, 2003, p. 10) continues by subtly praising the United States, while belittling the black South African government by saying that the "government and mindset that [Nytagodien] defends cannot provide him with a lifestyle equal to the one he now enjoys!" Such a statement assumes knowledge of Nytagodien's lifestyle while also suggesting that a mindset and government found in the United States (and implicitly coded as white) is beneficial to this black man. The writer implies that Nytagodien ought to be thankful and appreciative of the United States that has offered him work and a good "lifestyle." The letter continues,

Nytagodien, Africa is all you wanted it to be, so go back and enjoy what you sought so hard to overthrow. Get down from your ebony tower, stop teaching racism, and go back home. I, like Martin Luther (sic) too have a dream: Go back to Africa, stop griping ... get on with something that resembles productivity, and put your money where your mouth is—in Africa! (Wilson, 2003, p. 10)

Omniscience and assumption of superior knowledge (both often marking white rhetorics) are employed in this final retaliatory paragraph to apparently put Nytagodien in the place where he belongs (i.e. Africa). Once Nytagodien's appropriate geographical position has been established, his critique of whiteness is reduced to "racism" and "griping," in part by appealing to Martin Luther King and the rhetoric of non-productivity that numerous scholars (Frankenberg & Mani, 1996; McClintock, 2000; Steyn, 2001; Young, 2000) note often accompanies white and colonialist framings of black activities.

Incidentally, the title the newsletter gives to this letter is, "Leave the ebony tower, then walk the talk!" Given that the phrase "walk the talk" appears nowhere in the printed letter, arguably, the newsletter contributes to white rhetorical defensiveness and retaliatory attack, especially given the meanings of the phrase "walk the talk!" in quotidian use. Although this titling may be indicative of an editor attempting to summarise the 'spirit' of the letter, it is also possible that some readers could conclude that the word choice of title reflects the views and endorsement of the editor for this particular Mail Bag. Moreover, the retention in the title of/and the letter's use of "ebony tower" inaccurately suggests not only the black takeover of the "ivory"/white academy but the judgment that black critique of whiteness equates to unjustified racism and complaint. Rhetorically, whiteness is reinstalled with power. In addition, the reference to Martin Luther King casually and erroneously as "Martin Luther"—a 16th century white, German monk, theologian, and key figure of the Protestant Reformation—symbolically reflects the expelling and whitening of significant black historical achievement and of the black King. The absence of 'King' also works rhetorically and metaphorically to link to and obscure the historical significance of black South African patriarchs/royalty.

The final letter critiquing Nytagodien's "Patriot This!" article (Geffen, 2003) persists in some of the white rhetorical strategies I have already noted. It demonstrates an apparent ignorance of the experience of many people of colour

in the United States, yet does so under the guise of all-knowingness. It continually praises the United States and defends patriotism, because whiteness enables privilege in the country. Via a retaliatory move and a reversal of the critique, the letter frames the “professor’s” intelligence as patronising and cynical and compares him to a prejudiced (though not termed ‘racist’) National Party of apartheid. The letter does not frame the United States as racist. Instead, it frames Nytagodien as racist for his critique of white patriotism and whiteness. For example, the letter sees Nytagodien’s column as doing a “great disservice to the New SA” and “greatly insults” the United States. The letter praises the United States as a place giving “émigrés a home and opportunity for a new life,” as a “society ... with relatively little prejudice against being foreign born,” and as more “welcoming” than most countries to “new residents/citizens” (Geffen, 2003, p. 10). The claim that the United States is not prejudiced toward immigrants is not historically accurate or universally applicable and fails to consider the role race and “white”ness plays in immigrants’ experiences. While the United States has “warts,” the letter writer sees it as a “country that has led the way in civil rights and opened society to freedom and democracy.” The positioning of freedom and civil rights as auto-produced by the country ignores the sovereign dispossession of Native Americans and the struggle for civil rights as largely driven by people of colour, which forced US government administrations to make relatively modest social and political adjustments.

The letter also claims that without the “US groundbreaking, open societies elsewhere would not have developed as well—if at all.” Clearly, the letter defensively reframes US colonialist, oppressive, and self-serving activities throughout the world, because it is represented as a caring, concerned, fair, mostly unprejudiced country for which the world should be grateful. This praise for, and rhetorical reframing of, the United States is not uncommon in the newsletter (see, e.g. Richardson, 2001) and fails to acknowledge the historical and extant counter-narratives that highlight the country’s white supremacy (see Bush, 2010). The letter rhetorically invalidates and renders unjust the critique and critic of whiteness/white patriotism, describing them as marked not only by “racism” but also by “intolerance, and poor generalizations [that] distort the facts to mislead” (Geffen, 2003, p. 10). Of course, what happens here is that the letter accuses the critique/critic of whiteness of practicing what is commonly a white rhetorical strategy (intolerance, generalisation, distortion, misleading, and racism). So, again, a turning around of the critique exists, which seeks to free up whiteness and simply dismiss the challenge to it, so as to not have to interrogate whiteness. In enacting a rhetorical strategy of reverse racism (see Shohat & Stam, 1994), the letter, along with its other rhetorics, evidences defensive rhetorical posturing, retaliatory rhetorical attacks, and reversal/shifting of Nytagodian’s critique.

Conclusion

This analysis has argued that when whiteness is critiqued, several rhetorical manoeuvres emerge—retaliatory rhetorical attacks, defensive rhetorical posturing, and rhetorical reversing/shifting of the critique. These rhetorical strategies are rhetorics of justification. They work together to bolster claims for the crisis of whiteness for white people. They work to maintain white innocence, superiority, and authority. They attempt to rescue, justify, and bulk up

whiteness. They assume self-omniscience as a way of refusing to engage in an actual critique of race privilege and inequality. They deny, ignore, and eschew history, white privilege, and power relations. They also suggest that one cannot critique a system from which one benefits, or can do so only under certain circumstances. Ultimately, these are the marks of the enacted rhetorical strategies when whiteness is attacked and when whiteness is defended within white South African expatriate discourse. In these moments, the rhetorical responses demonstrate more broadly the difficulty of talking about whiteness in ways other than those that are celebratory, congratulatory, or implicitly coded. They also show a limited functional framework for productively and constructively engaging with whiteness as a structural system of power. As is clear above, white people have a wealth of defensive and retaliatory strategies through white rhetorics to resist self-interrogation. Consequently, many white folks fail to interrogate their whiteness and complicity in racial power. In turn, this failure reinforces the idea that white folks are unreflective. Finally, and with respect to the newsletter, amidst the reassertion and protection of white privilege and perspectives, a climate of inclusivity and diversity of perspectives is difficult to maintain, despite the reality that South Africa is itself so diverse racially and culturally. Thus, the exchange of ideas that *JULUKA* seeks and purports to foster is more accurately described as the routine rejection of 'other' perspectives and the re-enforcement of rhetoric that centralises and defends whiteness.

Author Note

Scott M. Schönfeldt-Aultman (Ph.D. Cultural Studies, University of California, Davis) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Saint Mary's College of California. His primary areas of research are whiteness and South African expatriate discourse. Email: dssaultman@aol.com

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