

A rhetoric of terror and of the terrified

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This paper draws on Philippe-Joseph Salazar's work in *Words are Weapons: Inside ISIS's Rhetoric of Terror* (2017) on ISIS's persuasive self-presentation on social and traditional media, to consider the rhetoric of the terrified Farmers evident in the framing discourse of selected South African television news reports on Farm attacks. Scholars who study ISIS's use of media have noted the efficacy with which this group has been able to harness the capabilities of media platforms to speak directly to audiences and construct its image. Likewise, the communicative strategies employed in the framing discourse of South African media around the victimhood of Farmers have been effective and have spread to audiences worldwide. Using Salazar's examination of ISIS's rhetoric, expressed through its use of words and images in the media, this paper discusses similarities between ISIS's self-presentation in audio-visual media and the news media discourse that articulates a sense of self-othering by Farmers through these platforms.

I INTRODUCTION

Farm attacks are defined as 'acts aimed at the person of residents, workers and visitors to farms and smallholdings, whether with the intent to murder, rape, rob or inflict bodily harm'.¹ In the South African public discourse, the significance of this term is not vested as much in the word 'attack' as it is in the idea of the 'Farm', which is a 'particular post-colonial space, almost mythical in its representation of the political struggle for freedom in South African security imaginaries'.² In Steyn's conceptualisation, Afrikaners in South Africa view Farms as independent microrepublics that are 'the last bastion of Afrikaner values'.³

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¹ South African Police Service *Report on Farm Attacks: Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Farm Attacks* (2013) 417.

² J Pretorius "'Dubula ibhunu" (shoot the boer): A psycho-political analysis of farm attacks in South Africa' (2014) 47 *Psychology in Society* 21 at 28.

³ AS Steyn 'Story of a South African farm attack' (2019) 66 *Africa Today* 55 at 69.

The words ‘Farm’ and ‘Farmer’ are capitalised in this paper in the same way that Salazar capitalises the notion of the Caliphate in his book.⁴ The Caliphate is defined as the Islamic state. Ordinarily, the word is not capitalised, but in Salazar’s work on ISIS’s rhetoric, the term is written as a proper noun throughout the book. This grammatical choice prompts the reader to interpret the word, not as a notion that generally refers to *any* Islamic state, but as a term that refers to a specific and designated Islamic state, which – while it does not technically exist geographically – is a recognisable entity as expressed in the language used by ISIS. Some scholars, such as Hayes,⁵ have critiqued this approach, arguing that Salazar does not go far enough to explain the choice, nor does he discuss the meaning of the term and its complexities. In this paper, I discuss why I have chosen to capitalise ‘Farmer’ and ‘Farm’, but this is not to suggest that my reasons are the same as Salazar’s with respect to his decision to capitalise Caliphate in his work.

As explained earlier, for Farmers, the notion of the Farm refers to more than just the place where farming happens. It is the genesis of the Afrikaner way of life and the site of the independent microrepublic that Steyn calls Afrikanerdom.⁶ The notion of attacks on Farmers refers to a specific kind of Farmer: the *Boer*. The Boer, as a concept, has specific historical and political meaning in South Africa. The term refers to South Africans of Dutch, German or Huguenot descent. The word also has meaning in geographical terms because white settlers left the Cape Colony in the nineteenth century to move to the Orange Free State and Transvaal, which became commonly known as Boer Republics. Steyn argues that the Boers became increasingly known as Afrikaners after their defeat in the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). Ampie Coetzee posits that ‘since the institutionalisation of apartheid by the Afrikaner government, *boer* became *Boer* and got definite ideological connotations with police, military and power’.⁷ For this reason, Farmer is given as a proper noun in this paper.

⁴ Ph-J Salazar *Words are Weapons: Inside ISIS’s Rhetoric of Terror* translated by D Khazeni (2017).

⁵ HA Hayes “‘This New World is not for the Faint Hearted’: Confronting the many dimensions of Philippe-Joseph Salazar’s *Words Are Weapons: Inside ISIS’s Rhetoric of Terror*’ (2019) 52 *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 301.

⁶ Steyn (n 3) 76.

⁷ A Coetzee, as translated and quoted in Pretorius (n 2) 23.

News reports on Farm attacks rarely cover attacks on black farm workers or even black farmers. The victims in these reports are predominantly white. Another notable feature is that it is mainly the incidents involving Afrikaner Farmers or Boers that receive coverage. Steyn notes that '[t]hough English farmers also suffer from farm attacks and some white English-speakers are also disturbed by these crimes, they have tended to be a much more muted presence in the struggle against farm attacks'.⁸ Meanwhile, attacks on black farmers and farm workers receive minimal coverage in the news media. Thus, even though these news reports do not capitalise Farmer, given how they conceptualise the term in relation to the notion of the Boer, it is fitting to employ this strategy of capitalising the word to make it a proper noun that refers to a specific and distinct entity, to make it clear that in the news reports considered, Farm attacks do not refer to attacks on all farmers and their families. They primarily refer to those involving white Afrikaners or Boers and those occurring on the microrepublics that can be conceived as Afrikanerdoms.

This paper draws on Salazar's work on ISIS's persuasive self-presentation on social and traditional media to consider how, and the extent to which, the rhetoric of the terrified Farmers, articulated in the framing discourse of selected South African television news reports on Farm attacks, mirrors ISIS's rhetoric of terror. Scholars who study ISIS's use of media have noted the efficacy with which this group has been able to harness the capabilities of these platforms to speak directly to audiences and construct its image.⁹ Wozniak, Woods and Lee argue that ISIS's media outputs are 'designed to ensure Western audiences and media sources will pick up on and thereby amplify their message'.¹⁰ They are 'styled to evoke fear in Westerners and ensure the widespread circulation of these images'.¹¹ Likewise, the communicative strategies employed

⁸ Steyn (n 3) 60.

⁹ CK Winkler, KE Damanhoury & A Dicker et al 'The medium is terrorism: Transformation of the about to die trope in *Dabiq*' (2016) 31 *Terrorism and Political Violence* 224.

¹⁰ JS Wozniak, J Woods & YS Lee 'The evolving self-presentation of the Islamic State, from *Dabiq* to *Rumiyah*' *The Social Science Journal* 27 February 2020, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03623319.2020.1727242?needAccess=true>.

¹¹ Ibid.

in the framing discourse by social and traditional media around the victimhood of Farmers have been effective and have spread to audiences around the world.¹²

Using Salazar's examination of ISIS's use of words and images in the media, this paper discusses similarities between ISIS's self-presentation in audio-visual media and the news media discourses that articulate a sense of self-othering by Farmers through these platforms.¹³ It may seem uncanny to draw on a framework conceptualised to critique the persuasive communicative strategies employed by an entity known for perpetrating violence, such as ISIS, to consider communication around a group of individuals that frame themselves as victims of ethnic and politically motivated genocide. However, as argued by Holmes, 'there is a political utility in violence not only for perpetrating populations, but also for self-identified victims and their sympathizers'.¹⁴ This is because violence can be a political motivator that prompts those affected by it, and those who sympathise with them, to mobilise. In the case of South African Farm attacks, even the threat of violence articulated in news media reports can be employed by organisations linked to the Farmer-community, such as AfriForum, through an emphasis on the brutality of these crimes with the aim of engaging potential constituencies. Thus, while ISIS's rhetoric of terror is combative, and the rhetoric of the terrified Farmers may, at face value, seem defensive, in the visuals and discourses used in televised news reports on Farm attacks, the focus is on the violence meted out against the Farmers 'to activate threat perceptions among sympathetic audiences'¹⁵ and can be deemed to be an attacking communicative move. Salazar applies the notion of words as weapons to unpack how ISIS persuasively communicates through media and theorises on this group's persuasive self-presentation through audio-visual and online media. In this paper, consideration is given to how South African news reports use words and visuals concerning Farmers to engage in persuasive self-othering, and the extent

¹² Steyn (n 3).

¹³ Y Vanderhaeghen *Afrikaner Identity: Dysfunction and Grief* (2018).

¹⁴ CE Holmes 'Victimhood for an audience: Portrayals of extra-lethal violence and their utility for self-identified victims' (forthcoming) *Politics, Groups and Identities*, available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6672f43c3a5320c2bec900/t/5c664409a4222f9bd0b7b044/1550205963382/Victimhood+for+an+Audience.pdf>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

to which their persuasive approach mirrors some of the aspects highlighted by Salazar, such that commonalities are observed between ISIS's rhetoric of terror and the rhetoric of the terrified Farmers that is posited here.

II THE RHETORIC OF THE TERRIFIED FARMER AND SELF-OTHERING

The rhetoric of the terrified Farmer articulated in the framing discourse of news media is based on a view advanced by right-wing Afrikaner nationalist groups, such as AfriForum, of 'Afrikanerdom as under threat and their Afrikaner identities as a source of shared victimhood'.¹⁶ In his work, which looks at Afrikaner films on Farm attacks, Steyn provides a valuable framework for understanding the terror expressed by Afrikaners on Farm attacks. Steyn remarks:

Farm attacks are ostensibly an attack on Afrikaner identity, on the Afrikaans language, on Christianity, on Afrikaner nationalist history, and on Afrikanerdom as such; it is an attack on the *boereplaas*, the genesis of an Afrikaner way of life and the romance it represents.¹⁷

The combined fear of losing political power, as the democratic dispensation was established in the 1990s, and threats of land expropriation that continue in the South African public discourse, have led to the news media's framing of Farm attacks as 'volksmoord [genocide; literally: murder of a nation]'¹⁸ driven by the presumption of a political and racial agenda against Farmers. Because of how central land is in Afrikanerdom, Steyn argues that Farm attacks and murders have become symbolically loaded as being more than mere criminal acts, which the current statistics find them to be, and are interpreted as a violent affront to the Afrikaner way of life, such that 'many Afrikaners have come to understand, imagine, and talk about their so-called marginalization, alienation, and victimization'.¹⁹ Holmes' work supports this perspective. She argues that for white South Africans, crime is central 'to the formation and bolstering of racist tropes regarding their own victimhood and purported genocidal campaigns against them'.²⁰

¹⁶ Steyn (n 3) 63.

¹⁷ Ibid at 76.

¹⁸ Ibid at 68.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Holmes (n 14) 8.

Another dimension implied in this rhetoric of the terrified Farmer, articulated through mass media, is that the perpetrator is racialised as black. This notion has its roots in the years before the South African democratic dispensation, which started in 1994, when the notion of *swart gevaar* (English translation: black danger) was prevalent in the public discourse, based on a perceived threat to whites posed by black South Africans. '[T]he state mechanisms of law enforcement and order were designed to victimize Blacks as threats to White society.'²¹ Vanderhaeghen notes that Afrikaners draw on this victim narrative to 'embrace an identity as the new "others", victimised and put upon by those they have "othered" – and continue to "other" – by largely ignoring them'.²² In doing this, they not only try to do away with the stigma of having formerly been the victimisers in their role as oppressors under apartheid, but they remove the focus from the lingering ways in which they continue to derive benefits and preferential treatment in the new dispensation, including in how the news media prioritises issues of crime that affect white South Africans, such as Farm attacks. As Steyn and Foster posit:

[B]y exaggerating white victimhood and stoking, even reactivating, constructions of the inimical nature of Africa and Africans to whiteness, resistant elements in white South Africa are able to underplay the dominance of their whiteness in the larger scheme of past and present global arrangements.²³

This rhetoric of the terrified frames Farm attacks not as instances of crime that are symptomatic of broader social issues, but as vengeful onslaughts against Farmers and their way of life. The news media are not merely channels that report on the attacks which occur on Farms. Hardt describes news media as the 'defining channels of the cultural, political, and economic discourse of society'.²⁴ He explains this by arguing that—

[d]eeply embedded in the cultural fabric of contemporary society, mass communication defines reality and marks the boundaries of social knowledge, authenticating its representations of the world through public compliance and consent, if not sheer popularity.²⁵

²¹ J Frueh *Political Identity and Social Change: The Remaking of the South African Social Order* (2003) 135.

²² Vanderhaeghen (n 13) 19.

²³ M Steyn & D Foster 'Repertoires for talking white: Resistant whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa' (2008) 31 *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25 at 46.

²⁴ H Hardt *Myths for the Masses: An Essay on Mass Communication* (2008) 6.

²⁵ *Ibid* at 6–7.

The work of Steyn and Foster, and that of Steyn and Vanderhaeghen, have been instrumental in highlighting the importance of media in advancing this idea of the terrified and victimised Farmer. Steyn notes that ‘white consumers of Afrikaans media being confronted with evidence of their fellow whites or their fellow Afrikaners falling victim to brutal crimes ... produces in them collective fear’.²⁶ Steyn quotes Comaroff and Comaroff,²⁷ who call this a “‘culture of vicarious victimhood,” where mass-mediated crimes are collectively experienced and create a sense that “we are all victims We have all lost our freedom to violence.””²⁸ Vanderhaeghen posits the notion of ‘self-othering’ to describe the victimhood narrative that characterises media coverage of violence against Farmers as—

a discursive reclamation of ‘grievability’ from what public discourse makes ungrievable, by enacting an innocence that disarticulates Afrikaner/guilt, and rearticulates an Afrikaner identity in discourses of victimhood. This establishes a clean slate not through an explicit denial of history or culpability, but through a rhetorical displacement in which Afrikaner ceases to be the ‘metonym of Apartheid’, but the synonym of victim. The innocent victim is the other of the monster.²⁹

III FRAMEWORK

In his 256-page monograph, Salazar considers ISIS’s rhetoric by considering the group’s communicative practices from various aspects. From his full volume dealing with how ISIS uses words as weapons, this paper focuses on a statement he makes in the Prologue on the oratory employed by the Caliphate, which he says is characterised by—

a strong image, hammered repetition, and lyrical soaring combine to stand in for logical proof — in what is a radical departure from the Greek rationality³⁰

²⁶ Steyn (n 3) 77.

²⁷ J Comaroff & JL Comaroff ‘Figuring crime: Quantifacts and the production of the un/real’ (2006) 18 *Public Culture* 209.

²⁸ Steyn (n 3) 77.

²⁹ YN Vanderhaeghen *Other than Ourselves: An Exploration of “Self-othering” in Afrikaner Identity Construction in Beeld Newspaper* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2014) 242.

³⁰ Salazar (n 4) 8.

Salazar's thesis seems to be that the West's failure to arrest the persuasive appeal of ISIS is because it has been drawing on rhetorical traditions that are not part of ISIS's communications orientation, and even dismissing communicative approaches used by the group that seem 'absurd' to Westerners.³¹ He also argues that the West's tendency to silence ISIS, for fear of giving the group a voice through media platforms, is one of the reasons why this group's rhetoric of terror is so little-understood.³² Due to scope, this paper only considers selected aspects of ISIS's rhetoric of terror and their applicability to the news media's framing discourse of South African Farmers' rhetoric of the terrified.

The first aspect is how Salazar deems the oratorical art, from which the Caliphate draws, as ornamentation and didactic. The paper examines how the utterances of the Farmers featured in these news reports employ 'a strong image, hammered repetition, and lyrical soaring combined to stand in for logical proof'.³³ In this respect, what is being argued is not that the Farmers' oratory is founded on the same tradition, but rather that there are many decorative elements used in the discourse. However, upon closer analysis, these are not supported by logical proof. Further, as Salazar argues, '[a]gainst this style we are disarmed' because Western discourse, which he describes as 'sterile, rhetorically banal, and poetically deficient',³⁴ does not know how to deal with analogy as a weapon of logic, as employed by ISIS. Analogy as a weapon of logic can be viewed as *ana-logos*, in as far as it is vested outside of Western notions of knowing. It aligns with the *analectic* method advanced by Argentinian-Mexican philosopher, Dussel, which considers approaches to knowledge creation employed by colonised nations.³⁵ Salazar names analogy as one such approach, arguing that because its persuasive appeal often lies beyond Western ideals of rationality, it can confound such audiences. In this paper, this notion is used to consider the visual and verbal analogies used concerning the Farmers in the news reports.

³¹ Ibid at 140.

³² Ibid at 141.

³³ Ibid at 8.

³⁴ Ibid at 9.

³⁵ E Dussel *Ethics of Liberation* (2013).

The second aspect is the notion of ‘judiciary punishment’ that Salazar uses to characterise ISIS’s televised beheadings. Salazar posits that these ‘decapitations are judiciary beheadings’³⁶ and should be viewed as such. He argues that while the Western response to the broadcasting of these killings has been to dismiss them as ‘barbaric’ or to remove them from view totally by erasing the footage when these killings occur, ‘the Caliphate’s militants are, in their view, performing an act of justice’.³⁷ By designating these acts as the exemplification of madness, the West has not developed a discourse that responds to these judiciary punishments. Consequently, ‘rhetorical transaction does not take place’³⁸ because no meaningful discussion is had. In this study, this idea of judicial punishment is used to interpret the physical and verbal violence communicated in the news reports in response to Farm attacks, particularly in the calls for the reinstatement of the death penalty.

The final aspect relates to the media’s role in the efficacy of ISIS to deploy words as weapons. This idea permeates Salazar’s argument, especially concerning online media and the notion of the ‘digital Caliphate’.³⁹ Salazar speaks about the central role played by the media in hindering a proper rhetorical transaction from taking place because of their choice to censor the violence meted out by ISIS. He also critiques journalists for not allowing the Caliphate to speak for themselves about the attacks, instead imposing commentary over these images to substitute themselves in and function as the truth police. Thus, the critique is twofold: first, the media is deciding what is seen and what is hidden, and secondly, the media is interpreting the little that they think we should see. The consequence of hindering the rhetorical transaction is that the discursive weapons of attack deployed by the Caliphate through their words are not countered.

IV METHOD

This study considered English news reports that were broadcast on two of South Africa’s most widely viewed free-to-air channels: SABC 3 and eTV. The news reports considered were those about

³⁶ Salazar (n 4) 148.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid at 153.

³⁹ Ibid at 56, especially Chapter 4 titled ‘Digital Caliphate’.

the murder of 21-year-old Farm manager, Brendin Horner, on 1 October 2020. The murder itself did not receive coverage, and the media reporting began only from 6 October 2020, when two men accused of the crime appeared in court. For this study, the news reports aired during October 2020 on SABC 3 and eTV's prime-time news bulletins were considered. Videos of the reports were recorded and then transcribed. The transcripts, on which this analysis is based, can be accessed online.⁴⁰

Between 6 October 2020, when the story broke, and 20 October 2020, when the last report was aired on related developments, 28 news items were aired on the case, and it was included in the headlines five times. This indicates the priority that the development received. A news item is the foundational building block of a television news bulletin and comprises an introduction, read by the news anchor in the studio. A live interview with a journalist may follow this introduction to elaborate on the developments. It can also be followed by an interview with a spokesperson and an expert. In the South African context, it is usually followed by a pre-recorded news package that includes interviews from the field, actuality footage and audio, and narration from a journalist reporting the developments.

The elements that make up the news package, including the visuals and audio, showcase the rhetorical strategies employed by a broadcaster when reporting on an issue, because they are the texts where the person producing the package has the most significant control over what is communicated. Because they are pre-recorded, there is an opportunity to carefully craft a script that employs communicative strategies to achieve the desired outcome, whether to convey information, to reinforce or challenge a perspective, or to evoke emotions.⁴¹ Through techniques such as editing of interviews, selecting particular footage and writing the narration, the person producing the news package is at liberty to take the elements collected in the course of putting the report together

⁴⁰ S Nkoala 'Transcriptions of television news reports on the murder of Brendin Horner broadcast on eTV and SABC in October 2020', available at https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Transcriptions_of_television_news_reports_on_the_murder_of_Brendin_Horner_broadcast_on_eTV_and_SABC_in_October_2020/19126109.

⁴¹ M Montgomery *The Discourse of Broadcast News: A Linguistic Approach* (2007).

and collate them to their desired ends. With interviews, while the anchor may direct where the conversation goes through the questions posed, they do not have as much prerogative to direct the answers given and thus have a more limited role in crafting the conversation towards their desired communicative outcome.

V ORATORY THAT RELIES ON ‘A STRONG IMAGE, HAMMERED REPETITION, AND LYRICAL SOARING’

It must be emphasised that there is no logical or fact-based reason to believe that South Africa Farmers are under attack. Crime statistics and independent researchers confirm that attacks on Farmers in South Africa are not out of the ordinary, both in terms of numbers and nature, in this context.⁴² Therefore, the news media’s framing discourse of Farmers as victims often relies on emotional appeals to persuade audiences that Farmers are being victimised. Some are factors outside of the text, such as socio-political realities of life in South Africa, but many can be discerned from reading the perspectives articulated in media.⁴³ This paper adds a perspective on the rhetorical device used to advance this discourse.

On the first day that the story was reported on, it was headline news on eTV and the headline given was ‘Fed up Free State farmers go on the rampage’, accompanied by a Super that read: ‘FIGHTING FARM MURDERS’.⁴⁴ News headlines are essential aspects of news content because they serve an agenda-setting purpose by indicating for audiences what developments are deemed important enough to be highlighted as those that audiences need to know about. They also frame these developments in a particular way.⁴⁵ Furthermore, it is significant that on the day that this development became a news story, it was also a headlined story and the phrasing

⁴² Steyn & Foster (n 23) 38.

⁴³ Vanderhaeghen (n 13).

⁴⁴ Nkoala (n 40) eTV 6 October 2020.

⁴⁵ S Liu, L Lei Guo & K Mays et al ‘Detecting frames in news headlines and its application to analyzing news framing trends surrounding US gun violence’ (2019) *Proceedings of the 23rd Conference on Computational Natural Language Learning* 504 at 505; RA Metila ‘A discourse analysis of news headlines: Diverse framings for a hostage-taking event’ (2013) 2 *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 71 at 72.

above was used. The portrayal of Farmers as people who have had enough and thus go on the rampage is suitable, bearing in mind the way the issue of Farm attacks has been framed. In this headline, their rampage is portrayed as their means of fighting Farm murders, so the motive is undoubtedly interpreted positively.

Violence on Farms is a complex matter with several socio-historic factors undergirding it. Through the use of aetiology, a figure of reasoning by which one attributes a cause for a statement or claim made,⁴⁶ the Farmers' violence is reported on as something that occurred as a result of the murder of the 21-year-old Farm manager. This means that those complex and longstanding issues are collapsed, and an impression is given in the reporting that the Farmers' rampage can be explained against that backdrop.

Both reports begin with a focus on the actions of the Farmers. In the eTV report, the focus is on the violence they engaged in outside court, while in the SABC report, the focus is on their call for the return of the death penalty. Their acts and calls for violence are then contextualised in the lines that follow that refer to the developments that had unfolded previously. In the eTV report, the context provided is 'two men appeared in connection with the murder of 22-year-old farm manager, Brendin Horner. Horner's tortured, lifeless body was discovered hanging from a pole.'⁴⁷ The SABC report states: 'This follows the murder of a 21-year-old farm manager, Brendin Horner, in Paul Roux last Friday. He was found with a rope around his neck and tied to a pole.'⁴⁸

The fact that the first news report on this development was aired when the Farmers torched a police vehicle ahead of the court appearance of the two accused, and the fact that the news stories used aetiology to contextualise the behaviour of the Farmers against the backdrop of the death of the Farm manager, supports a self-othering inclination by these reports to depict these Farmers as a group that is aggrieved and violated and is merely acting out in response to that. This bears a resemblance to the beheadings engaged in by ISIS, where aetiology is used to blame certain actions of the West for the executions. The use of aetiology by no means provides a rational and logical explanation for the actions

⁴⁶ RA Lanham *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* 2 ed (1991) 3.

⁴⁷ Nkoala (n 40) eTV 6 October 2020.

⁴⁸ Ibid SABC 6 October 2020.

of the Farmers and ISIS, because the reasons given as to why the violence is meted out do not necessarily align with each other. However, the repetitive manner in which this occurs from both the Caliphate militants and the Farmers is an expression of that hammered repetition Salazar refers to in his dissection of the oratorical art demonstrated.

From the onset, the Farmers are portrayed as a group engaged in just action against murderers of their kin, even though they are pictured destroying state property and burning a police vehicle. The SABC also headlined the developments that day, stating that ‘Farmers in the Free State are calling for return of the death penalty following murder of a 21-year-old farm manager’.⁴⁹ Again, here the motive of the Farmers’ calls is given: the murder of a Farmer warrants punishment of the severest kind, namely death. These calls, in support of a version of justice that condones violence and death against those accused of attacking Farmers, speak to the question raised by Salazar in his pondering over how ISIS uses live broadcasts of the beheadings of Western citizens in retaliation against attacks on their own. ‘What sort of justice is at work in jihadist executions?’⁵⁰ Salazar notes that through their televised executions, ‘the Caliphate’s militants are, in their view, performing an act of justice’.⁵¹

In South Africa, where the death penalty came to be associated with punishing black people for taking white lives, particularly during apartheid,⁵² the calls articulated in these news reports are for a type of justice that has specific historical significance in this context. The word ‘return’ also signals a desire to go back. They are not just calling for the death penalty, but they want it to be returned and evoke memories of what this type of justice meant for a specific demographic, which was not subjected to the cruelty to the same degree. In the same way that Salazar asks the question ‘what sort of justice is at work in jihadist executions?’,⁵³ one must ponder what sort of justice is at work through the news reports on the Farmers’ calls for the death penalty to be meted out against

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Salazar (n 4) 148.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² G Wallance ‘South Africa – Racism and the death penalty’ (1978) 19 *Race & Class* 404.

⁵³ Salazar (n 4) 148.

those who are accused of Farm attacks and murder. Is it the sort of justice that they hope will serve as a ‘lesson’ for other would-be Farm attackers, or is it a punitive form of justice that seeks revenge on behalf of their own? It cannot be the former because it is widely known that when the death penalty was used, it did not serve as a deterrent, and at some point during apartheid, South Africa had the highest number of legalised executions in the world.⁵⁴

In these calls for a particular ‘sort of justice’, the self-othering has two undertones. First, it implies that, given the violence being meted against Farmers now that the death penalty has been abolished, the apartheid regime’s use of this type of justice was warranted – because, now that it is no longer allowed, Farmers are being brutalised. Secondly, and closely linked to this, is the suggestion that the current legal measures taken by the government are insufficient to reign in the terror being meted out against Farmers. Something more drastic, like the death of the perpetrators, is needed – or so the Farmers argue.

Another important and relevant aspect of ISIS’s oratory that Salazar discusses is the rhetorical importance of professions of faith. He notes that the profession of faith by the Caliphate not only forms the basis of all action, it ‘is an essential constituent of the Islamic State’s call to action’.⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Oliver posits – on the centrality of faith for Afrikaners – that ‘[t]he Bible, together with the Calvinistic faith, was the single most important factor shaping the life of the Afrikaners’.⁵⁶ Therefore, a central aspect of the rhetoric of the terrified Farmer, employed in news media, is of a group of people of faith who, having lost faith in the government to save them, look to a Christian version of God for their salvation.

A prominent and striking visual featured in the reports is of the Farmers carrying white crosses during their demonstration and planting them in the ground to form a larger white cross. This visual is powerful because it is laden with meaning. On the one hand, the crosses symbolise the crucifixion of Jesus, someone who was innocent but had to die for the sins of others. Through

⁵⁴ Wallance (n 52) 405.

⁵⁵ Salazar (n 4) 3.

⁵⁶ E Oliver ‘Religious Afrikaners, irreligious in conflicts’ (2019) 75 *HTS: Theological Studies* 1 at 3.

it, the Farmers self-other by associating themselves with a religious figure who was killed wrongfully. In these reports about who killed this particular Farm manager, the ‘black suspects’ take on the role of sinners who killed Jesus. On the other hand, the crosses represent death, and when held up in large numbers and framed using a wide shot, as they are in these reports, they provide a visual depiction of the extent of the deaths, feeding into the notion that there is a genocide of Farmers, even though reputable statistics do not support this. Finally, the fact that the crosses used are painted white and deliberately named ‘white crosses’ in the report reflects simultaneous notions of innocence and white as a race.

Some of these crosses have names written on them, but many remain unmarked. When these crosses are featured in these news reports, those carrying them are usually in a posture of prayer, either kneeling with their hands raised or standing with their heads bowed. The visual is very powerful in how it references Afrikaner Christian nationalist ideals of themselves as a ‘people’ set apart by God and reliant on God.⁵⁷ While the background narrative, against which these visuals are depicted, is one of the violence being meted against Farmers, the visuals of them in postures of prayer serves as a form of profession that, as innocent faith-filled people, their salvation is in the hands of God since the democratic state appears to be failing to protect them.

This visualisation aligns with Salazar’s perspective on the role of faith and professions of faith by the Caliphate. Writing about ‘the compelling but habitual power of *Allahu Akbar*’, Salazar states:

It is concentrated and contained in the ‘god is greater’ chant that punctuates the actions of urban guerrillas as well as military engagements. It is amplified and grows in complexity in the harangues by the Caliphate’s militants during beheadings or executions. The brevity of the declaration of faith that is repeated in the chant of faith and the eloquence of the harangues that make a case for the declaration of faith, therefore, go hand in hand.⁵⁸

The Caliphate militants’ profession of faith is centred on the greatness of their God in a manner similar to the Farmers’ use of the crosses to suggest that the Christian God is on their side.

⁵⁷ DJ Bosch ‘Afrikaner civil religion and the current South African crisis’ (1986) 3 *Transformation* 23.

⁵⁸ Salazar (n 4) 3–4.

The posture of prayer adds to this profession because it shows them appealing to a source higher and more powerful. Everything else that the Farmers featured in the reports have to say is said against this background in the same way that the speeches of the militants occur against the backdrop of their belief that their 'god is greater'. ISIS's rhetoric of terror and the Farmers' rhetoric of the terrified include professions of faith because, to them, the actions they take as a result of this profession 'are the proof and illustration that the profession of faith is functioning',⁵⁹ whether it is executions on the part of ISIS or calls for the death penalty on the part of the Farmers.

One of the things Salazar laments as being behind the failure of the West to understand adequately, let alone respond decisively to, ISIS's rhetoric of terror is the media's role in trying to be the truth police that uses commentary to determine how the actions of ISIS, such as the executions, are to be interpreted in the public discourse. He states: 'The media impose a commentary over these images to substitute themselves in and function as a truth police.'⁶⁰ One of the consequences of this truth policing is the questionable characterisation of the ISIS militants, the Farmers and their actions. Salazar notes, for example, that the suicide bombers are sometimes incorrectly referred to as martyrs. With regard to the Farmers who engaged in violence at the court appearance of the two murder suspects, the television news reports at times referred to them as 'protesters'.⁶¹ Despite a female officer allegedly being strangled, a holding cell with the murder suspects allegedly being torched, and a police vehicle being set on fire, one report contextualised the actions of the Farmers as follows: 'The peaceful demonstration against farm murders turned violent after the accused's brief appearance.'⁶² In another piece, the journalist contextualises the actions of the Farmers as follows:

Brendin Horner was killed on his one-year anniversary as a manager on this farm. Sekwetsha Mahlamba and Sigula Matlaletsa, who were arrested for his murder, appeared in the Senekal Magistrates court on Tuesday. On the day of their appearance, farmers across the country descended on Senekal to protest against farm murders.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Nkoala (n 40) eTV 7 October 2020, eTV 8 October 2020, SABC 9 October 2020.

⁶² Ibid SABC 9 October 2020.

⁶³ Ibid SABC 11 October 2020.

In this report, the journalist describes the Farmers' actions:

Then violence broke out. A female warrant officer was allegedly strangled and pushed aside before a mob stomped into the court building, demanding that the two murder suspects be handed over to them. A holding cell was racked, and the two accused were injured in the attack. A police vehicle was overturned and set alight. The police have been criticised for inaction.⁶⁴

The use of the passive voice – when talking about the actions of the Farmers and the accusation at the end, not against the Farmers who engaged in the violent acts, but against the police who were inactive and are thus to blame for the violence – is an example of the media's commentary adopting the self-othering techniques used by the Farmers.

As with the ISIS militants, the Farmers are not featured speaking about their actions themselves. Instead, as shown above, these actions are interpreted for audiences by the journalists and meaning is ascribed to them, such as 'a protest that started off peacefully', an occasion where 'violence broke out', an incident where police were inactive. A rhetorical exchange cannot ensue because at this vital point, of the actions of terrorisers and terrified respectively, we are presented with 'the sounds and images of brutal acts, titillating our desire for the forbidden',⁶⁵ but not the actual words. Where Farmers are featured speaking in these reports, it is primarily on one of two aspects. First, they articulate their victimhood, suggesting that their plight affects South Africans broadly. Two examples are:

We understand the frustrations of people. We understand the anger because all of us and many of us, and many of us, have been dying victims of crime in this country. But we must respect the law. We can't take law into our own hands.⁶⁶

No farmers, no food. There's a bottom line, they know everybody will say this and will do this, and we stand up for this; it's about one thing, no farmers no food and if there's less farmers, your food and my food will become more expensive.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Salazar (n 4) 157.

⁶⁶ Nkoala (n 30) SABC 15 October 2020.

⁶⁷ Ibid eTV 10 October 2020.

Secondly, they are calling for the death penalty to be meted out against people who attack them, and for farmers to defend themselves:

I think the idea of the death penalty must be introduced.⁶⁸

The EFF want farm murders to continue. We tried to stop the EFF, and we succeeded. Our organization held the line and pushed back. We stopped them from getting to our people. That's why it's important to show them that we're a force to be reckoned with.⁶⁹

That is not right. When is it going to end? Do they want a war? If they want a war, they can get a war, but we must live together. We must live together in this land.⁷⁰

The majority of people interviewed in these reports are white and male. Where black people are featured, they are used to confirm the Farmers' terrified and self-othering posture. For example, in the report aired on 6 October 2020 by the SABC, the one black person featured in that report, who is a community member, states: 'This thing is a tragedy for the whole country not only black people or white people, but it's for the whole country.'⁷¹ Another black person was featured in the SABC report filed on 7 October. This person was featured in their capacity as a representative of a political party. They said: 'We feel like white people really undermine democracy of South Africa, we also feel that white people do not recognise the South African Government as their own government.'⁷²

Steyn notes that '[i]n popular parlance, especially in the rhetoric of activists, the categories "farm attack" and "farm murder" are often racialised and only applied to cases where the victims are white.'⁷³ In these reports, that rhetoric is not challenged and, in the imagery, is in fact confirmed. In the reports, the visual and verbal references to who is attacked point to white people. Most of the people interviewed in these reports are white. There is a reference to 'our farmers', which implies white Farmers in the context of Steyn's proposition. One person states: 'These brutal

⁶⁸ Ibid SABC 6 October 2020.

⁶⁹ Ibid eTV 16 October 2020.

⁷⁰ Ibid eTV 18 October 2020.

⁷¹ Ibid SABC 6 October 2020.

⁷² Ibid SABC 7 October 2020.

⁷³ Steyn (n 3) 59.

murders of our farmers, we need them, they feed the country and nobody stands up for them, nobody protects them.’⁷⁴

Who speaks, and in what capacity, is important in these reports. The white interviewees are almost exclusively Farmers or members of the farming community, and their calls are for more to be done to protect Farmers and for action to be taken against those who threaten their lives. The black interviewees are featured in one of two capacities. First, and most frequently, they are featured in their official roles as spokespersons, heads of ministries, or professionals in the criminal justice system. A handful are featured in their roles as community members. When featured in these roles, they usually speak about how the issue is broader than white Farmers. News interviews are not coincidental. Journalists find people to play a particular role and talk to a specific aspect of their reports, so it is telling that the capacity in which the different race groups are featured is as described above. The officials are the only category that is a given. The community members are a deliberate choice, as is the choice of which kind of soundbite to include from which person.

In terms of strong images, those have been discussed above in the section on faith. The repetition element inheres in the fact that none of the people interviewed in these reports challenges the statements made by Farmers on the extent to which these attacks are a sign of a genocide against them. The practice of including countering views is absent in these reports, such that if someone were to watch only these reports as a representation of how prevalent Farm murders are, they would most likely believe that a genocide is underway. Finally, the lyrical soaring is evident in how all of the interviewees so eloquently reference the victimisation of Farmers without ever using the term directly. Instead, there are subtle references to the failures of politicians and the state to ‘do their job’ of protecting Farmers: ‘Various speakers accused government of ignoring farm attacks’; ‘We need police that will do the job’; ‘Farm murders are out of control’.⁷⁵ Other references revolve around the value of Farmers and the need for them to be protected as a result: ‘this what we do today is our passion because

⁷⁴ Nkoala (n 40) SABC 10 October 2020.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

it's our food basket that is affected in South Africa'; 'No farmers, no food. That is the bottom line.'⁷⁶

In framing the Farmers' demonstrations on 6 and 8 October, the news value used is that of scale: 'Hundreds of people'. Furthermore, the use of the general term 'people' feeds into the notion that the issue does not just affect a particular constituency, even though it is widely known and even seen that it does. The suggestion here is that if this is an issue around which hundreds of people do mobilise, it should be a matter of concern to the viewers. The anchor's introduction to these developments in the SABC report states: 'A group called The group'⁷⁷ Here, the introduction is much more specific, identifying the particular group that has initiated the demonstration, unlike the eTV report which suggests it was undertaken by 'people' in general. The SABC piece also relies on scale as a news value to drive its report on the event, noting that the group 'brought the city to a standstill when they staged'⁷⁸ One interviewee is specifically featured speaking about the fact that the issue at hand for him is the murder of white Farmers: 'The white farmers in South Africa are getting killed by black people, and that is called genocide.'⁷⁹ The journalist does challenge him to refer to statistics that support what he calls a 'racist' statement, which the interviewee does not do. Instead, the interviewee states: 'We are not inciting racial tension; we are only speaking the truth.'⁸⁰

VI CONCLUSION

These news reports draw on victim narratives and visuals of Farmers who claim that, despite working hard to ensure that the nation is fed, as people of faith, they are under attack from black South Africans. The role played by mediatisation in allowing the Farmers to self-other has been discussed. Mediatisation is a notion that 'places the media at the centre of all kinds of important cultural, political and social developments'.⁸¹ With regard to Farm

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ DA Deacon 'Mediatization: Key concept or conceptual bandwagon?' (2014) 36 *Media, Culture & Society* 1032.

murders, the Farmers who want to use incidents to advance narratives of victimisation include certain props in their protests. In this study, two visual symbols were discussed. The first are the white wooden crosses usually used to memorialise people killed every year on Farms. The second is the number of people involved. In terms of the court case and the protest, the Farmers and their sympathisers were filmed in wide shots that depicted them as a large group. Just as the media was instrumental in ‘speaking’ to the notion of Afrikaners as a distinct people,⁸² this paper has used the selected television news reports on Farm attacks to show the role of news media in the perpetuation of prevailing notions of the terrified Farmer. These discussions have drawn on Salazar’s idea of ISIS’s rhetoric of terror that relies on ‘a strong image, hammered repetition, and lyrical soaring’⁸³ to argue that the news media’s rhetoric of the terrified Farmers employs comparable strategies and shows that ‘there is a political utility in violence not only for perpetrating populations, but also for self-identified victims and their sympathizers’⁸⁴ by discussing how the practice of self-othering in these reports creates a discursive environment where very little rhetorical exchange can occur through the media on how these Farm attacks are to be interpreted in the public discourse.

⁸² I Hofmeyr ‘Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity’ in S Marks & S Trapido (eds) *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (1987).

⁸³ Salazar (n 4) 8.

⁸⁴ Holmes (n 14).