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Abstract: This chapter explores the construction of Rhodesian identity through digitised films and images, arguing that those who, in different ways, define themselves as Rhodesians are a community in post-colonial limbo. The chapter argues that the Rhodesian identity being constructed in this way draws on a narrative of heroised and militarised masculinity, in which being Rhodesian is equated with being a white, male soldier fighting to protect English civilisation in Black Africa during the Rhodesian Bush War or Zimbabwe War of Liberation (1964–1979). Methodologically, the chapter represents a relatively new but growing area of research, i.e. research on social media, and in this case specifically YouTube videos. The videos are approached using Somers method for narrative analysis, and the study is grounded in a post-oriental reading of the videos. The chapter concludes that the images from these videos contribute to a larger narrative of protection (including men protecting women, whites protecting blacks, the military protecting civilians) as well as a metanarrative claim of common cause: whites and blacks acting together against the enemies of civilisation. The chapter makes
connections between these images of heroism, masculinity, and power in the private, public, and political spheres.
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5 Excursions into marginality

Digitalised memories of militarised masculinity in Rhodesian understandings of self

Ane M. Ø. Kirkegaard

Some say we are made of flesh and blood. I believe we are made of stories.

In the last couple of years, a few references to Rhodesian pasts have appeared in European and US media. A widely distributed photograph depicted Dylann Storm Roof, who killed nine African Americans during prayer service in Charleston’s Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in a one-man terrorist attack, wearing a jacket decorated with the Rhodesian and apartheid South African flags (Hanson 2015). In a different, yet discursively similar context of white supremacy, the 2014 UKIP EU elections poster-boy Andre Lampitt was suspended because of his racist references to Black Africans – references he argued were sanctioned by his experience of growing up in Rhodesia (Chapman and Chorley 2014). Tucked away from the gaze of the public eye, Rhodesian militaria, authentic and fake, is being sold and bought at good prices across the globe. Rhodesian Security Forces uniforms are especially popular because of the very distinct camouflage pattern, which is considered one of the most well-designed among collectors.

The relatively sudden appearance of Rhodesian references in European and US public media overlap with the rise in and general acceptance of right-wing, decidedly White nationalist activity in former colonial powers in independent settler states that they created and in states in their close proximity. Interestingly, to someone who over the last decade and a half has followed the development of Rhodesian presence on the Internet, it also overlaps with an explosion of videos, webpages, and web-forums concerning Rhodesian-ness in different forms.

By asking who the Rhodesians are, this chapter demonstrates how YouTube can be used as a space where identity may be formed around a particular
narrative of belonging and loss among imperial-colonial diasporas involved in fighting a war to preserve colonial superiority. Through a series of YouTube videos studied here, I show how ‘The Rhodesians’ represent themselves through explicitly gendered, militaristic, and imperial-colonial imageries.

Research design

To come to grips with who ‘The Rhodesians’ are, what they do, and what their concerns seem to be, one may turn to the Internet (webpages, web-archives, open and closed web-forums, YouTube, and social media) with its wealth of information. The research discussed here is based on a dataset generated from YouTube on two separate occasions in 2014 and 2015, and focuses on a small selection of YouTube videos published between 2006 and 2015. What comes through over several years of following the unfolding of Internet activity linked to ‘Rhodesia’ is the initially slow development of a virtual Rhodesian community, which gathers momentum as more and more people access the Internet and link up to one another. This community consists of elders, those who actually lived half a life or more in pre-independence Zimbabwe (i.e. Southern Rhodesia, and Rhodesia) and who are recognised as having legitimate truth claims to tell the story of ‘how it was’. It embraces those who lived their early childhood, or adolescence in the rebel state of Rhodesia, and those who were born after its demise. Several generations of Rhodesians are thus connected and actively staying in touch. Some have a public presence as a diaspora in their new-found communities, such as those marching in Australian city streets on Anzac Day under Rhodesian army banners and in full parade uniforms. Most however, seem concerned with community-building and memorialisation, and are not otherwise publicly visible as Rhodesians. In the following pages, the place these community builders define as their original home will be referred to in their emotional-ideological tongue, i.e. as Rhodesia, rather than as Zimbabwe. Community in Rhodesian colonial lingua was based on the socio-economic and political ordering of all ethno-racial groups in communities, hence the ‘white community’, being a concept in use during colonial times (Mandaza 1997), and still referred to, to describe the White/European settlers. Their existence is firmly rooted in the idea of Rhodesia as a social, political, economic, and cultural entity, which de facto existed until 1979 – the data on which this chapter is based refers directly to this particular entity and cannot be understood without explicit reference to it. ‘The Rhodesian’, I argue, must be understood to be in a post-colonial limbo in which those identifying themselves as such attempt to keep holding on to a precarious identity as ‘once community’, recreating it through digitalised memories of a (failed) heroised and militarised society.

The first hit I ever had in an Internet search for the word Rhodesian was in the very early 2000s – it was a webpage of The Rhodesian Government in Exile. It provided a full list of Ministers and Ministerial departments, outlined
their responsibilities, and implied that they were ready for implementation once back in power; the flag and other Rhodesian national symbols headed the page, as well as a link to the national anthem of the rebel state. My previous research in Zimbabwe (Kirkegaard 2004 and 2007) had included one dataset made up of white Zimbabwean interviewees, none of whom identified as ‘Rhodesian’ – quite to the contrary in fact. Finding this website of the Rhodesian Government in Exile made me wonder about who are those who did – and do – identify as ‘Rhodesian’ and what does it mean, to them, to be a Rhodesian?

Internet search engines are constructed to configure the hits users get based on their search history. This may pose an unexpected challenge to social science researchers, as a search engine, unless manipulated, will use previous searches on the Internet to match what is read as the user’s preferences. This will bring forth a particular selection of hits on any particular search, especially if a certain word was previously searched. To check for biases produced by my own searches, the Malmö University Peace and Conflict Studies bachelor programme students of 2015, 2016, and 2017 were asked to help verify my findings during their practical methods exercises. The results of their searches corroborate the findings presented and discussed in this chapter.

According to Gerbaudo and Treré (2015), social media is increasingly a space in which identity is being constructed and negotiated, hence it forms an important sphere of research. Doing research on data sampled from YouTube poses certain new challenges in terms of ethics and methodology. YouTube is a forum where remembrance may be shared relatively easily with newcomers as well as old friends and family, and to the imperial Rhodesian diaspora, the global dispersal after the demise of Rhodesia seems to have created a need for such remembering, sharing, and archiving. YouTube presents an opportunity for the virtual formation of this particular group, through the sharing of images, text, sound, and film.

YouTube is a public website requiring (free) registration only by those who wish to comment or post videos. When registering, the user is informed about the consequences of the public aspects of the site and accepts the terms of use. Those who post videos have thereby given their consent to the open and public nature of the site and the various ways their posts may be used. It is an informal public domain, open and accessible to anyone with a computer or other digital device with Internet access and the necessary software, without any other restrictions whatsoever. It should be considered as any other sort of document(ation) that is publicly accessible ‘online without special permissions, registration or log-ins’. Furthermore, ‘researchers collecting such data without interacting with any writer may make a case that the study is comparable to a document analysis study . . . Accordingly, proper attribution is accomplished by citing the source’ (Salimons 2010, 88).
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The study includes randomly sampled videos, and the videos only – not the commentaries, information on authors (channel owners and managers), or any other information on the sites. The objective of the study is not to critically assess the vested interests (of which there are currently and admittedly a growing number) of those who posted the videos, but instead focuses on the narratives (conscious or not) springing out of them. This choice is quite deliberate. We have very little knowledge of how people who might be defined as White Africans (as an imperial diaspora) understand their own, however short, history on a continent that they actively took part in colonising. How do they perceive of their role in recent African history? Do they recognise the brutality of the structural, cultural, and direct violence inflicted by them as a group and individually on those they colonised? Research attending to similar questions in the recent literary and biographical contributions by descendants of Rhodesians (and who generally do not identify as Rhodesian) has been published (Magosvongwe and Nyamande 2013; Tagwirei 2015), but none deal with the exponentially growing number of YouTube videos concerning Rhodesia and Rhodesians.

These videos vary in length, upload date, type of account holder, and number of views. In other words, the sample is eclectic rather than strategic. The dataset was horizontalised (Moustakas 1994; Yüksel and Yıldırım 2015), and divided into three main categories (all listed in the reference list). The videos contain regular documentaries, news items, and private content, the latter most often in the form of stills.

While the dataset was initially crudely coded for its military-vs-civilian content, as the project developed, the analysis became more sophisticated. This study adopts the narrative approach to social life developed by Somers (1994), Finn and Georgakopoulou (2008) and Alexander-Floyd (2013), and applies it to these videos. This approach builds on ‘the premise that narrativity and relationality are conditions of social being, social consciousness, social action, institutions, structures, and even society itself’ (Somers 1994, 621). The focus is on the intertwining of private (ontological), public, meta- and conceptual (academic) narrativity, aiming to show how the very local and militarised colonial heroism of a discursively marginalised imperial diaspora is in fact but one expression of the kind of liberal imperialism still present in global political and normative structures of dominance. Hence, the manner in which the semanticity of conceptual narrativity frames how ‘We’ (academics) speak of and thereby re-produce dominance, and must be an integral part of the analytical context in which Rhodesians on YouTube are lodged. This explains why they are treated as politically marginal, while their original project simultaneously is reflected in current global power relations.

Framing the militarised settler hero
Ranka Primorac discusses the ways in which Rhodesian ‘diaspora-related written narratives manufacture, codify and help to reproduce group identities related to race and nation’ (2010, 204). The YouTube videos discussed here share the same discursive space as this Rhodesian literary tradition, lodged in a particular colonial ‘master code’ (Mbembe 2001, 103), made possible through colonial violence, culminating in the Bush War. As the literary tradition, the YouTube videos draw on a ‘common repository of images and a shared narrative grammar’ (Primorac 2010, 205). Central to this grammar are the tendencies to mythologise the origins of the dominant diaspora group, i.e. the British or more specifically the English imperial diaspora, drawing on religious, political, and historical signifiers. The reverence of the Battle of the Boyne may be pointed to as a particularly effective symbolic intersection alluding to such signifiers as the colour orange, the concept of (West) Christian Civilisation and the violent defence of what are perceived to be core Rhodesian values such as conservatism, a tightly knit family, honesty, heroic struggles to tame nature, civilising the indigenous peoples, and fighting international decadence and communism (Ian Douglas Smith’s (1998) autobiography is rife with these references as is Rhodesian literary tradition). Leaning on a common European colonial imagination, the Rhodesian imperial diaspora aimed to – and for some time managed to – secure and create a new British society severed from, while still totally dependent on, the colonised population, in effect extending their quite restricted experiences and practices far beyond the original localities they came from, while claiming these to be universally applicable.

As a semi-independent settler state, Rhodesia was founded by means of military occupation, upheld through militarised policing, and died as a unilaterally declared independent state after a long decade of war that was discursively constructed as a struggle by ordinary men (and women), through their performance of extraordinary and heroic acts of social and military defence, with the aim of saving the perfect society. Bonello (2010) describes the development of a quite particular identity among the early Rhodesians, based on a combination of feelings of neglect, insecurity, and superiority. Rhodesian society may be described as strictly hierarchical in racial, gendered, and class terms (Bonello 2010; Kirkegaard 2004 and 2007), and evolved through a particular, and in colonial contexts peculiar, focus on family-based settler colonialism (Kirkegaard 2004), from which ‘a collective sense of “Rhodesian-ness” evolved that was characterized by insecurity and a sense of separateness from surrounding groups’ (Bonello 2010, 7). This insecurity may explain the relatively strong focus on militarism.

Rhodesian-ness was founded on a racial imagery in which the African was understood to be ‘a dangerous antagonist’ (Bonello 2010, 9). This view was developed over the first five decades of the 20th century, and in the late 1960s the colonised African population was still perceived as primitive, less intelligent, and easily manipulated, while the mother-land and the British on
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the Isles were accused of having ‘an “inbred hostility” to Europeans in Rhodesia’ (White 2011, 239). Rhodesians understood themselves to be ‘a courageous people . . . cast . . . in a heroic role’, as the guarantors of ‘justice, civilisation, and Christianity’ (Smith 1998, 106) in an increasingly hostile world, where communism and decadence threatened modern, West Christian values and civilisation (Smith 1998; Evans 2007). Such sentiments were not new however. Already by the early 1920s we may discern the development of a particular Rhodesian identity, argued to be distinctly different from the South African, and claimed to be more British than that of the Britons on the Isles of Great Britain (Lowry 1997; Smith 1998). This identity was firmly tied to conservative British Toryism, and from the very beginning explicitly pro-Ulster (Evans 2007; Kirkegaard 2004; Lowry 1997). It also clearly evolved from Cecil Rhodes’ idea that Southern and Eastern Africa should become a new New World, i.e. a White homeland to which the British surplus population could emigrate, and subsequently civilise and develop. Rhodesia was only the beginning.

Creating Rhodesia involved the creation, development, and maintenance of gendered and racialised political, economic, military, educational, and religious infrastructure (Kirkegaard 2004) propped up by a modern military machine (Kirkegaard 2012; Barroso 2013; Reid-Daly 2000; Nkruma n.d.). Rather quickly, a Rhodesian identity could be claimed, which articulated and negotiated the meaning of being more British than the British: ‘courage, kinship, flag, Crown and the characteristic of not betraying one’s friends’ was ‘sacrosanct’ according to Lord Angus Graham, 7th Duke of Montrose (cited in Evans 2007, 179), and member of the Rhodesian Front (RF).11 Echoing Tawse Jollie’s claim (Lowry 1997), Kenneth Young (1969) wrote that the ‘spirit and courage that made Britain great was not extinct’—it had moved to Rhodesia (cited in Smith 1998, 50). The political peculiarities of Rhodesia were to have significant consequences for how Rhodesians would later define and understand themselves: as left alone to defend Western civilisation, Christian values, and modernity against the decadence of the liberal West (the United States, North-Western Europe, and even to some extent South Africa), and communist destruction (Evans 2007, Kirkegaard 2017).

The heroism developed discursively in Rhodesia, to which Ian Smith (1998) alludes throughout his autobiography, is one of the Little Man rising to great deeds, and despite the odds managing to re-create the civilisational pinnacle (England) in an extremely short period of time, while at the same time being able to live up to the militarised demands of the Mother Country when she calls upon her children in times of war. This particular narrative is central in all the videos, focusing on the every-day heroism of normalcy in times of blazing war. It belies however, the fact that at the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence, Southern Rhodesia took the command of a highly efficient, colonial security network for internal police and military control, which could, however, also be turned against its neighbours (Kirkegaard 2017; Nkruma n.d.).
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As Weitze (1990, 27, cited in Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995, 7) writes on the crucial role of control under imperialist colonial settler rule: it had to ‘consolidate control over the indigenous population . . . [in order to] prevent or contain natives’ political mobilization, unrest, and threats to the system’s stability and also discourage metropolitan interference on their behalf’.

In the face of British rejection of Rhodesian wishes for independence as a settler state, similar to the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, but in contrast based on minority rule of a kind comparable to South Africa, the RF decided to ‘go alone with pride’.

The colony, which had held semi-independence (self-governance) since 1923, had by 1965 not only a fully developed civil service (for Rhodesians) and an educational system including a fully functional university, but also a ‘security machine [which] was formidable, ranking only second to South Africa’s on the sub-continent’ (Evans 2007, 179). The decision to claim independence in what was perceived as stiff international and metropolitan opposition added fervour to articulations of Rhodesian identity as absolute heroism – courageous, perseverant, and righteous – backed up by a potent war machine and a police force effectively trained for tight control of the population. The Liberation War, or insurgency as the RF Government defined it, exploded in the early 1970s and ended in 1979. The Rhodesian regime is said to have lost the war, despite winning nearly all the battles (Evans 2007). This seems to be the defining experience of what being a Rhodesian means: the heroic ideological and military struggle for the survival of Rhodesia in the face of the betrayal by non-Rhodesian whites of Rhodes project.

Body count: white men in uniforms

Looking for ‘the Rhodesian’ on the Internet produces several images of white men in military uniforms. Every image represents its own narrative(s) linked to the geo-political entity Rhodesia. These images are private and press photos, posters, and army documentation, all produced within particular and separate historical contexts and geographical locales. Hence, when searching for ‘the Rhodesian’, a peculiarly militarised collection of images is the result, indicating that what we are presented with is a distinct understanding of what it means to be Rhodesian – on the Internet at least. What is more, these images ooze a very definite portrayal of masculine and racially specific power, strength, and success, whether the pictures show scenes from the Bush War or earlier wars in which Rhodesians have participated.

Of course, this is just an indication. Rhodesian identity should be much more complex, even on the Internet, however narrow the Internet may be from the perspective of representation. As a colony and rebellious state, Rhodesia mimicked the modern British state model, with all its historically and locally rooted practises, traditions, and symbols, while also transforming (in effect de-democratising) it to fit the circumstances of colonial control of indigenous
populations. This model was of course not only populated by, but also dependent on, people who were not armed, uniformed, male, white, and young. In Rhodesia itself, those ‘other’ people – women, children, the elderly, those working, entertaining, and farming – were central to Rhodesia’s reproduction as state (rebellious or not) and society. Even though black people were (and are) not understood to be included in the population group defined as Rhodesian (they were and are African) such people ought to appear too, not only as captives. And sure, when venturing onto YouTube a much more complicated scenario meets the observer traversing the published – by private, political, or business actors – history of a self-perceived ‘people’ who define/d themselves as the very essence of British-ness. The people we meet are no longer homogenously male, white, and uniformed. Even though most of the people seen in the videos are male and white and in uniforms, many are not. However, the simple quantitative count of how many times different sorts of people appear in the videos shows that white men completely outnumber all other categories; in addition, approximately half of these white men are uniformed (different parts of the Rhodesian Security Forces and a few from different branches of the police). They are also generally quite young. And heavily armed. And only very few of the images depicts situations and events before UDI (1965) and after the Bush War (1979).

*Table 5.1* Total number of appearance of military and civilian fe/male bodies in the videos studied
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Videos categorised</th>
<th>White civilian men</th>
<th>Uniformed white men</th>
<th>Black civilian men</th>
<th>Uniformed black men</th>
<th>White civilian female</th>
<th>Uniformed black female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>C6</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>C9</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>238</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1345</td>
<td>1126</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>11</td>
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</table>

All bodies that are determinable (clearly definable) according to age (adults), gender (fe/male), and skin colour (black/white/other), as well as whether uniformed or not, have been categorised. In this count, even bodies of non-living are counted (i.e. one corpse and numerous painted images of bodies).

What becomes glaringly apparent is that not only are white bodies in focus; white male bodies by far outnumber all other kinds of bodies. We find uniformed white men in 15 of the 20 videos. In contrast, there are no uniformed black females in any of them, despite the fact that we know such women existed. The British South Africa Police had black women serving, and both the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army and Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army organised women freedom fighters (see Kaler 1998 and Lyons 2004, as well as the 1988 and 2006 novels by Tsitsi Dangarembga, and other scientific and literary contributions). While white-uniformed women are represented in three of the videos, women – white and black – are overwhelmingly civilian. This is to some degree even repeated
when children (toddler to adolescents) are counted; white outnum-
ber black, and we see by far more boys than girls. The body count may be understood to articu-
late what is not spoken of in the videos. A Rhodesian, as we may re-
construct them through the videos uploaded on YouTube, is generally a white
male, who is in many cases uniformed (police and military) and very often
heavily armed.

**The front and the rear: militarising social spaces**

The multifaceted and multi-layered conditions of living in a colonial
continuum, still fraught with epistemic, cultural, structural, and direct
violence, despite the post-1979 de-colonisation process, is conducive to the
Rhodesian process of communal memorialising. In virtual reality, the
Rhodesian in a very definite way has become nearly synonymous with being
a white, male soldier fighting against the **terrs** (i.e. terrorists as the Liberation
Armies’ soldiers were called), or a supportive woman of the rear, with strong
nationalist and military-romantic connotations.

Traversing virtual Rhodesia, the emerging male soldier-hero fights for a just
cause, paying if necessary with his life, while the heroines of these stories hold
families and society together despite the tremendous pressures of the war. The
men we meet in the videos, whether black or white, are young, healthy, happy,
and serious, fighting a heroic struggle to protect women-and-children and in
the end White – or more correctly English – civilisation in ‘Black’ Africa. The
women, however, are clearly discursively divided according to racial-
civilisational separation, between the primitive and the modern, beastliness
and beauty, the raw and the refined. As such, the male, white fighter figures
more dominantly in comparison with his obvious and ultimate opposite: the
black, rural, bonded woman.

Negotiating not only presence but violent political, social, religious, and
economic superiority in a colony at the very outskirts of the empire demands
the articulation of a very particular sort of identity – ultimately both self-
confident and precarious. The videos intertwine ontological, public, and meta-
narratives (i.e. the private, public, and political) in their re-construction of
what once was – of **home** – and in the discursive constructions of gendered
and militarised heroism. Central in these expressly heteronormative narratives
are images of male, militarised masculinity, quietly carried forward by
women, the indispensable rear, militarised in their particularly feminine
support functions as soldiers’ wives, beauties to be desired by the regular
white service man and officer alike, mothers caring for returnees from the
battlefield or their orphaned youngsters, office workers stepping in for duty
while the regular male clerks are at the front. They are however also armed,
whether as civilians protecting themselves and their homes and children, or as
uniformed servicewomen – such as police officers or from 1978 as regular
fighting soldiers. Rhodesian militarised heroism is hence centred on the
imperative of protecting the imperial civilisational project through direct and indirect violence both in the (maled) wilderness – the bush – and at home, not only around the hearth, but on the (temporarily and out of necessity femaild) farm, against the beasts of the wild – the terrs.

While black women’s individuality is effectively erased through the representation of them as always part of undefined groups or as primitive, anonymous, and protected, Rhodesian women are always presented as individuals, and as modern and capable in every inch of their existence. The space they occupy reflects that of the white male soldiers – armed, civilised, clean, dressed, and up to date. Their lives, however, are completely severed from ‘The Bush’ – the space occupied by soldiers and black civilians. They appear as heroines of servility: as pin-ups with soldiers; brides; mothers; beauties to be enjoyed; and in a few cases as those who will defend the Rhodesian way of life if (or when) the war arrives at their very doorstep. There is a definite dichotomy in the videos between the goose and the bird, i.e. the foolish, childish, unserious, and the determined, militarised, soldiering female.

White women’s militarised bodies are presented as the ultimate form of sacrificial heroism – White women keep society together as part of their womanly war effort. Through keeping calm and carrying on as usual, they participate in the war, becoming war heroines through continued home-making, and because of the war thrust onto them also transformed into home defenders. Through the double move of dressing up and training women for war, i.e. the obvious militarisation of the female as carer (of the state) through death, also home-making, i.e. care-giving through life, is militarised. Caring for home and hearth is storied as militarised female heroism.

Illustrating this as factual body-politics, women were called on to train as soldiers in 1975 and only as late as 1977, ‘approval was given for the introduction of rank structure [. . . and] RWS [Rhodesian Women’s Service] members were now regular soldiers, and opportunities for promotion and career building were on an equal footing with the male soldiers’ (RWS webpage 2015). This happened whilst many analysts understood the war as already lost (Evans 2007). Armed women are few and far between in the videos – as the sine qua non of soldiering is being a ‘man among men’ – but at the end of the war, even the relinquishing of an all-male army was found to be necessary.

The stern and resilient facial expression on the most common image of a bird in the videos resembles that of black soldiers, as does her position vis-à-vis white male soldiers: as a learner in light weaponry. With war and violence, the early 20th-century British understanding of settler women as civilising agents (Kirkegaard 2004), their civilising mission was now expanded and militarised.

White and black women never really seem to meet. They are separated both in terms of place and space – they are generally not presented in the same
slides, neither in the same milieus nor contexts. This may of course be ascribed to the gender politics of early state formation, where white women refused black women access to white homes as a consequence of the white peril (Kirkegaard 2004). However, it also speaks to the colonial gender-racial discourses placing black women at the very bottom of social, political, and civilisational hierarchies as the ultimate primitive. When we meet them in these videos, they are discursively linked with colonially constructed signs of antediluvian existence: babies strapped on their backs, poor clothing, barefooted, cooking in clay pots over open fires, living in what look like makeshift ‘huts’ (thatched round-houses), or pressing to be let into or out of obviously rural fenced spaces. Black women are portrayed as masses or as poor, vulnerable, rurally locked representations of essential Africanness – while black soldiers are often portrayed as individuals much in the same way as whites are presented. As the black soldier fighting for Rhodesia is modernised through the experience of technified violence, he also comes to own, grows into, his individuality: he looks back at you, straight in the eye. He has grown into himself as a modern and civilised individual by way of heroised militarism, through killing and maiming other black men. He is being readied through heroic violence to move from primitive existence – where African women and the terrs still remain – to civilised normalcy and, in time participation, with a responsibility of dragging his own people into the territorialised modern, post-colonial polity controlled through the universalised provincialism of European imperialism.

Racialised heroism

‘The body I am’ wrote Connell in 1987 (146), ‘is a social body that has taken meanings rather than conferred them’. While theorising gender, Connell’s point may also be applied to racialised contexts where the particularities of the socio-political reproduction of bodies is central to comprehend what they become in a social media setting: the narratives of Rhodesian-ness we are presented with are articulated and negotiated through the taken meanings related to an identity configured and forged at the intersection of the gendered and racialised politics of an imperial diaspora. The narrative, to which these bodies are taken to be meaningful, is a particular representation of imperial identity and loss of space and place across time. The formation of the peculiar militarised identity, to which the videos bear witness, is not only a result of the sort of militarised masculinity so typical of wartime; rather the pictures have a private aura about them; they seem to tell us that those fighting this war were just regular men and boys, like you and me, who simply stood up to struggle for a young civilisation in the wilderness. Smith (1998), Godwin and Hancock (1999), and Godwin (1994) allude to this very idea of innocent but serene defenders of civilisation and development, the idea of being ‘better than’.
Excursions into marginality

The narrative of imminent threat, which Smith describes in his autobiography (1998), convolutes those involved in the collective struggle against evil villains (i.e. perceived and rather vividly described as African Nationalist communist terrorists, see Kirkegaard 2017). They are made and re-made in a reflexive movement on a scale from the individual Rhodesian in their home, to the epicentres of the global body politic, (re)constructed and (re)negotiated in time and space, digitally brought back to life and shared in a particular socio-cultural space, where they are retrieved and made visible and real as the heroes of a cherished and celebrated past, cast in the role of custodians of British imperial heritage.

The racialised realities of the colonial, yet rebelliously independent territory being defended are silenced throughout the videos. The struggle is understood to be – and is represented as – a racially neutral war of (West Christian) freedom and independence (Kirkegaard 2017). However, the joyous adventurism visible in Rhodesian soldiers’ faces, the carefree manner in which they relax and pose, juxtaposed with black soldiers, reveal the racial-gendered hierarchies in which the two groups are caught.

Black soldiers convey an uncompromising and unrelenting seriousness generally lacking in the white soldiers, and in contrast to white soldiers they are very seldom short-sleeved, shorts clad, or half naked. White soldiers are generally younger, more flirtatious and romantic than are black soldiers, who are older and more mature in appearance. While white soldiers are associated with all sorts of weaponry and advanced military technology, black soldiers are strictly speaking nearly always associated with lighter and simpler weaponry and transport.

What we seem to be witnessing is a defining moment not only for the settler civilisational project, but also for the ‘primitive’ African to rise above his insignificant existence, becoming part of colonial modernity – moving from subjugation through the common war effort – to modern man. The African soldier is a learner, who must prove his ability to handle modernity through the war experience. Hence, the Bush War may be understood as a salvation, a kind of liberation of the black man who may thereafter enter modernity, his rite de passage, his ascension, through organised, high-tech, effective, modern violence – against his fellow subalterns.

This very definite, but subtle separation of black soldiers from white – of learner from the always already knowledgeable – is matched by the much more visualised primitiveness of black women, seemingly always at the losing end. Compared to the expressions of stern resilience in the black soldiers, and read from a Rhodesian perspective, their existence is understood to be encircled, submissive, uncivilised, and in dire need of male, white, soldiering protection. Black women were, in contrast to black men, believed to be unable to understand the intricacies of modern life (Kirkegaard 2004), hence being in constant need of guidance and protection, primarily by their black male
counterparts, and secondarily by white men (Kirkegaard 2004; Barnes 1999; Schmidt 1992), as the videos illustrate.

**The metanarrative context of colonial settlerism in Rhodesia**

In a simultaneous move of double systems of appropriation, white women are firmly locked—secured—in a gender, racial, religious, legal, social, economic, and political structure of white men’s appropriation of their capacities, as reproducers of the domineering population, its culture, the nation, and West Christian civilisation (Kirkegaard 2004). However, while white settler womanhood is disarmed, controlled, and owned in this manner, as wives and mothers, it is also simultaneously metamorphosed, as they themselves become appropriators of subaltern men and women. Colonial hierarchies prescribe white men’s armed violence—to conquer, control, and protect—while subordinating their own women, as well as the colonised to a position of defencelessness. As a consequence of the war and thereby the militarisation of both black men and white women, the concurrent sharing of appropriation of rights over colonised women between white men and women, and colonised men (Kirkegaard 2004), results in a congruous tripartite exclusion of colonised women from civilisational capacities as bearers of knowledge, culture, and rights, as well as from rights to engage in armed violence—the ultimate prerequisite for heroism in a thoroughly militarised society. They are understood and represented as an utterly primitive, dependent, and victimised collective, unable to protect themselves, while colonised men in the same move are catapulted into modern civilisation, through militarised heroic violence.

The videos speak to a particular community’s understanding of itself as the authentic bearer of universal civilisation. The settler project proclaimed and initiated by Cecil Rhodes resulted in the transplantation of a complete socio-economic structure, centred on the nuclear family (Kirkegaard 2004), effectively moving it from one provincial locality to another, while claiming its universality. Their presence in the African context is a direct consequence not only of imperial-colonial appropriation of already inhabited socio-political space, but importantly also of the construction of colonial discourses and identities of the British (English) as civilising, thoroughly founded on a type of heroism different, yet intertwined with the explicitly militarised heroism projected by the war: the frontier settler hero, turning an imagined vast ‘nothingness’ into riches of civilisational modernity within the span of 40 years. The shared narrative of frontier agrarian heroism, in which the quick transformation of Zimbabwe from what was presented and understood as African, un-occupied wilderness, to modern statehood, is silently affirmed in the videos, allowing a presentation of white presence as original, through the silencing of their history of subjugation of land and people. In other words, the background as an imperial diaspora is obscured and transformed, through
the highly selective anti-historical memorialisation of the past, focused on militarised, protective heroism and the perceived betrayal by the rest of the civilised world.

Through narrating Rhodesian-ness as a matter of civilisation, the videos erase the racialised power hierarchies and their intersectional character, in which gender, creed, and history are decisive of access to resources and acceptable identities. They also tell a story of the publishers’ genuine feelings of total loss of political, social, economic, and symbolic space, despite their sacrifices on the imperial frontier. In the face of this loss, the centrality of the narrative of the military hero defending, even creating civilisation through war becomes the defining feature of what it means to be Rhodesian – on YouTube.

White culture is perceived of as deeply rooted, and shared globally, yet fundamentally disrupted by the racial betrayal of the Rhodesian imperial diaspora, creating a double diasporic identity loop – imperial and Rhodesian – which simultaneously speaks to the rights to, and loss of universalised power over space, place, and destiny. The return of the empire, i.e. the return-migration of former imperial diasporas to the imperial metropole-that-was, represents a degradation in terms of material and social status – as members of imperial diasporas do not move easily ‘into the seats of its former empire’ (Naber 2014, 1113). While Naber is concerned with contemporary diasporas in the United States, her proposition alludes to the situation, which Rhodesians seem to understand themselves to be in, as lost in a particular space-time-place disjuncture.

The understanding that UKIP’s Andre Lampitt portrayed of himself as particularly equipped with experiences of ‘The African’ is echoed in the videos. The return of the imperial diaspora to European mother countries catches them in a discursive limbo as carriers of the multifaceted violence of their colonial heritage. Rhodesians grew up in a society where fascistic racial definitions continued to exist unabated by the developments in Europe after 1945; the native population was defined as inferior, and ‘commercial races’ were allowed to immigrate only in small, controlled numbers (Kirkegaard 2004). As imperial returnees, Rhodesians are sealed off as illegitimate on the fringes of the political spectrum by their former compatriots, because of their militarised attempt at colonial preservation – experienced by them as a refusal of their heroism. They are marginalised in their native ‘home’ country, deprived by circumstance of their status as a heroic people in their own right, carrying with them discourses and practices which are fundamentally racialised and militarised, and intertwined with imageries of victimisation, trauma, and loss of civilisation, based in their reading of the demise of a glorious empire.

Languages of knowledge: making militarised settler heroism possible
5 Excursions into marginality

Understanding the formation of a virtual Rhodesian community necessitates bringing to the fore a discussion of colonial discourse in relation to their experience of being a double diasporic community. It is difficult – perhaps impossible – to think, talk, or write the story of white settler colonialism in Africa and the Rhodesian community’s choice of protecting itself by way of war, outside of the discursive frames of English imperial heritages. In one sense, the space that Rhodesians occupy, as positioned by themselves – as well as by others – historically and contemporarily, cannot be understood without references to the decidedly militarised imperial and colonial regime, which made their coming into existence possible. In another sense, understanding their presence precipitates a need for de-powering and de-centring modern, critical language of social sciences and humanities knowledge. This is particularly the case with Rhodesian settler descendants, who define(d) themselves as different from, yet related to other imperial settlers on the African continent (Kirkegaard 2004, 2007, and 2017).

As a consequence of colonial discourse and practice – developed over three centuries of growing global domination through epistemic, structural, and direct violence – the Rhodesian settler community participated, and continues to participate, in making this provincial particularity universal. The Rhodesian settler frame of reference is based in an English (British, European, and thence also United States) colonial discursive construction of a chain of interrelated conceptualisations of domination and superiority, granting this community the right to define themselves as better-than both the colonised and the mother country. In other words, this particular community cannot be spoken of outside of the discourses and practices of which they were a product, and which continues to form the political, economic, and social conditions in the area they once controlled – Zimbabwe. Furthermore, they complicate our understanding of what it means to be a diaspora, whether imperial or not, particularly through their violent attempt at keeping it ‘pure’ and untainted by those defined through colonisation as uncivilised Other. As such there are similarities to our own contemporaneity in which colonised peoples – in some cases made diasporas in their original spaces of habitation – are being redefined as terrorists (or terrs), through an epistemic move in which discourses and practices of militarised heroism is directed against them.

Those defining themselves as Rhodesians were propelled by the repercussions of Zimbabwean independence and majority rule into a differently based diasporic experience – as the diaspora of an imagined rather than actually existing geo-political entity. The language with which we are forced to speak about both the colonised and the coloniser amounts to epistemic violence and must be discussed in relation to the Europeanising colonial project called Rhodesia. The local Rhodesians must be placed firmly in their own particularity, not only in relation to the 1960s de-colonisation discourse, and as an odd group of romantic misfits, but as representing European provincialism as in contrast to the Self-imagery of European
(White) universalism. The very idea inherent in the meta- as well as ontological and public narratives not only of the videos, but of the colonial project as such, as well as the development aid discourse and practices following in its wake, creatively constructs White presence in the ‘African’ context as an ultimately necessary modernising force, confirming violent and in many cases, militaristic colonial binaries (Kirkegaard 2017).

The effect of being caught in a particular parlance of the provincial gone violently global, believing itself heroically universal and triumphant, amounts to epistemic muffled-ness: the language with which we have to attempt to understand the settlers’ own perceptions of position vis-à-vis other population groups in the immediate as well as distant political, economic, and geographical context, hinges on the dichotomies making anti-cosmopolitan colonial domination possible. It is caught in binary dialectics, nearly impossible to negotiate: African-European; black-white; civilised-primitive; modern-traditional; male-female; death-life; knower-naïve; adult-child; universal-particular. As much as we might want to do away with these binaries, we generally can speak neither about the settlers and their violent attempts at colonial independence, nor about the active and subsequently heroised resistance of those attempts by those they colonised, without being forced into a language of dominance and violence, colouring not only Rhodesian memorialisation, but contemporary discourses on humanitarian intervention, development aid, human rights, justice, peace, and migration, all of which are areas of contestation, conceptually and in terms of actual lived experience. The interlacing of violence with intentional goodness renders concepts central to Rhodesian Self-identification – civilisation, modern, courageous, perseverant, righteous, developed – problematic not only in their particular context of marginality and limbo, but speaks to the general use of such concepts to describe and make universal a particular provinciality.

The dichotomist language, the discourses and discursive practices rooted in it, effectively hems in the imperial diasporas – and research focusing on them – causing their post-colonial redundancy in human terms, while securing the constant reproduction of the forces set in motion through this language of domination. The imagery of security through isolationist ‘communities’ derived from social Darwinian theory was transplanted to the colonial political economy and quotidian practices in the settler colonies and among the imperial diaspora holding these colonies together. In Dabashi’s words this discourse, and its concomitant practices, amount to an asylum house of a Foucauldian kind:

It was not only the European asylum houses that emerged to house the unreason, as Foucault argued and demonstrated . . ., but a much larger and exotic domain was needed to harbour that unreason for the European Enlightenment to be assured of its primacy of reason. “The
As a consequence, this particular diaspora’s community-building efforts on YouTube allow us to come closer to understanding academia’s reproduction – conceptual narrativity – of colonial discourse and Othering, as well as the intertwining of ontological, public, and meta-narratives of exclusionary universalisms, rejecting the particular Rhodesian militarised heroism, while upholding the general subordination of ‘the South’. Rhodesian society mimicked a phantasmatic mythology of universalism, transplanting a particular – English – vision of social order through epistemic, cultural, structural, and direct violence and militarisation of life in general. The multi-layered oppressions and appropriations created, controlled, sustained – and ultimately still reproduce – settler societies wherever these were and are found. Separate development continues to mark societies emerging out of settler colonialism, i.e. where an imperial diaspora has been a politically, economically, and culturally defining force, the continuation of exclusionary practices may function as a prohibition on transformation. Hierarchies of power and resistance intertwine, overlap, and transmute, disabling the conversation, which is conducive to relational change, and to the realisation of the polylocal and cosmopolitan possibilities inherent to societies harbouring cultural diversity at its centre. Those still understanding themselves to be Rhodesian construct a gendered and racialised bubble of militarised heroism, in which they, as civilising agents propagating universal development, do not have to converse with the (formerly) colonised. Such conversation is rendered impossible in a colonial frame of reference, as a ‘tenable cosmopolitanism tempers a respect for difference with a respect for actual human beings’ (Appiah 2007, 113). As such, they represent, while rejected, the continuation of colonial practices on a global scale.

Conclusions: continuing colonial militarised heroism

The videos refer back, either directly or indirectly, to white (European) understandings of self. This referral is monological and exclusionary (as in isolationist), locking this group of Whites in a particularly marginalised position, vis-à-vis the surrounding socio-political context of change, because they refuse to accept that ‘Cultures are made of continuities and changes’ (Appiah 2007, 107, emphasis in original). Simultaneously however, while this referral to marginality, oddity even, is generally considered ‘backward’ as it romanticises a period which the former colonial metropoles consider historically redundant, it also speaks directly to the contemporary universalisation of the particular, refusing conversation on a global scale – the point of departure, in colonial and post-colonial discourse and practice never
being conversation as ‘engagement with the experience and ideas of others’ (Appiah 2007, 85) – amounting to universalisation through dominance. In other words; the videos refer back to European Self-reflections of supremacy – in much the same way as Anders Behring Breivik’s white, Christianist terrorism did (Kirkegaard 2011) – rather than into a polylocal and cosmopolitan future, where inclusion rather than hegemonic exclusion is at the centre. These referrals are decisively violent, as the project they are springing from is fundamentally militarised, representing a particular heroisation of civilising war and conquest (initially through physical occupation for resource extraction, and in post-coloniality by way of global financial structures and norm systems). Understood thus, the deep-seated origins of Rhodesian struggles to preserve their dominance, is not peculiar to them, but part of the much larger project of liberal imperialism still very much in effect globally, now nestled in the complicated intertwining of development aid, humanitarian interventionism, and the ‘responsibility to protect’ – amounting to contemporary global militarisation of heroism (e.g. Duffield 2007; Mbembe 2003; Mehta 2012; Weiss 2013).

While the Rhodesians re-present, remember, re-tell their stories of loss in the videos, the conversation needed for changing the marginality they inhabit to one of inclusion and acceptance is muted by the manner in which the narrative is constructed. As they ‘speak’ through the videos, they are simultaneously also inhibiting meaningful communication with those they necessarily have to share their life world. The narrative is one of taciturnity; the coloniser is muted and the colonised ‘never speak’ (to paraphrase Dabashi 2013, 130) – in addition, the ‘wronged’ imperial diaspora has been silenced by historical denunciation of their explicitly militarised separatism, and as a matter of resistance they turn to YouTube to create a space of sharing. This resistance comes in a form of organising memory reminiscent of total war (von Clausewitz 2017) – it is soaked in militarised heroism. A quick return to Table 5.1 allows us to spell this militarisation of memory out in numbers, as references to militarised bodies appear in all the categories (civilian, military, and cultural) into which the videos have been categorised.

The universalisation of European particularities is strengthened through the exclusionary practices of disowned groups, such as the Rhodesians, pushing them into marginal positions; by turning them into outcasts, ‘We’ may cast de-colonisation as the moment at which ‘We’ transformed from beasts to beauties, while holding on to the political and economic system, which not only made colonisation, settler militarised heroism and beastliness at all possible, but continues unabated to create spaces of both private and state-based militarised heroism in other places. The kind of ordinariness we see in the videos – the focus on the war being fought by men turned heroes through their surrendered non-military mundane ‘real’ life – may be juxtaposed with the post-Cold War everyday carelessness of militarised occupation by states with imperial
histories and ambitions, underpinning the lives of the few through the sacrifice of the many.

Notes

References


Excursions into marginality


**Videos**

**Culturally oriented (concerts, performances, symbols, etc.)**
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C1 (JB12 082 Saturday Those Guys Rhodesians Never Die National Anthem): www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LDsIUh1Z5k (published 11 August 2012, Robb Ellis)

C2 (JB12 094 Sunday Ron and Sheena Rhodesians Never Die): www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0ITpUCHCmA (published 12 August 2012, Robb Ellis)


C4 (Rhodians Never Die (Bagpipes) by Warren Mandy): www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVBcChCEsOE (published 30 January 2012, MrAermandy)

C5 (RIP Rhodesia): www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jNnQlXSptQ (published 8 July 2012, scars and tears)

C6 (RTV & RBC Those Were the Days): www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekq3kU3Pg5s (published 29 December 2011, StupendisVid)

C7 (The Last Word in Rhodesian): www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFRG0KgoZ3I (published 24 January 2009, ggrzesik)

C8 (The Rhodesians – TYLA): www.youtube.com/watch?v=165uqvCJRcQ (published 14 October 2012, StokedTV South Africa)

C9 (What a Time It Was Rhodesia): www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbM_0hRTSiA (published 3 March 2010, 91amp)

C10 (Whenwe Song): www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUYOLn40To0 (published 3 November 2009, 91amps)

Military oriented (focus on military issues)

M1 (Counter-Strike From the Sky): www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qExzmaht5o (published 9 June 2010, Kerrin)


M4 (Rhodesian Security Forces): www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jk0fW0KomjM (published 13 July 2010, SitNomineDigna)

M5 (Rhodesian Troops Fight Afrikakorps in Egypt 1940): www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6EBIkcclI0 (published 9 October 2010, Perseiden2)


Civilian (mainly from private collections)

CIV1 (Born in Rhodesia Beta (2)): www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pVL1yyw6FA (published 10 November 2011, BornInRhodesia)


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CIV4 (The BSAP of Rhodesia): www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5b8sNLA6mk (published 20 September 2006, memoriesofrhodesia)

Samba Gadjigo in *Sembene!*, a documentary about the African filmmaker Ousmane Sambene.

When doing a web search on the word Rhodesian, quite a few of the hits will be sites where Rhodesian military memorabilia is displayed, discussed, and/or sold.

Particularly in England, France, Germany, and Denmark (France still *de facto* has colonies, England is still the all-powerful state in the United Kingdom, while Denmark has granted Greenland home rule).

Particularly in the US and Australia, where such sentiments have literally become part of governmental discourse.

Other European countries in general, with colonial histories, and which define themselves as belonging to ‘European’, i.e. ‘White’ (or ‘Caucasian’) and ‘Western’ traditions and history.

The videos were randomly sampled (every fifth video with relevant content, i.e. not the dog breed Rhodesian Ridgeback, on the first 20 pages). The sample was thereafter categorised according to the content: Cultural (C., from cultural events, private parties, concerts, etc.), Military (M., parades, battle scenes, military information videos, Bush War documentaries) and Civilian (Civ., focusing on civilian life situations, at home, at work, etc.). Only images appearing in the videos are analysed, i.e. no consideration was given to number of views, comments, or other information.

This webpage has since disappeared from the open Internet, having been replaced with an obvious fake and joking page also referring to the Rhodesian Government in Exile (www.rhodesia.nl/Exile/).

In other words, the videos’ content was given equal value, ignoring irrelevant, overlapping, or repetitive content.

I am here leaning on Peter Frankopan’s (2016) distinction between western and eastern Christian traditions. Accordingly, West Christian denominates what developed into the Roman Catholic Church and subsequent Protestant orientations, with a central focus on exclusionary practices and provincialised universalism, in difference to the more inclusive and cosmopolitan eastern traditions.

Ian D. Smith quoting his broadcast announcing the Unilateral Declaration of Independence on 11 November 1965.

Rhodesian Front was the Rhodesian nationalist party drafting and implementing the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), which effectively brought then Southern Rhodesia onto a path colliding with the international society and the post-1945 processes of de-colonisation.

As Clem Tholet formulated it in the lyrics to the song *Rhodseians never die*, which is considered the unofficial national song of Rhodesia (Godwin and Hancock 1999).

Rhodseians participated in all the wars Great Britain was involved in, in Europe and elsewhere. In particular the Malayan Emergency is referred to in Rhodesian military discourses as formative, both of the Rhodesian Special Air Services (SAS) and the Selous Scouts (Reid-Daly 2000; Vidal-Hill 2017).

Godwin and Hancock (1999) explain that white Europeans (colonisers) exclusively occupied the identity of Rhodesian, while African was an exclusive identity marker of black people of African descent. In between these hierarchical poles we find, above ‘Africans’, ‘Coloureds’ and ‘Indians’, and at the top end, the
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differentiation between whites (‘Jews’, ‘Greek’, ‘Italians’, and ‘English’, the latter understood as the absolute pinnacle of human development).


16 This is a direct quote from the recruitment poster, which appears most often in the videos.

17 White Zimbabweans, whether defining themselves as Rhodesian or not, experience the same kind of exclusion as black Zimbabweans do when attempting to enter the exclusive zones of the north: they are treated as ‘Africans’.