

## Africa: Moving the Boundaries

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### **Afrikaner émigrés in Australia: Perception vs. Reality in Human Decision-Making**

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#### **Abstract**

Based on ongoing ethnographic research among post-1994 first generation Afrikaner immigrants in Australia, in this paper I argue that the majority of them bases its decision to emigrate from South Africa on their perception of reality rather than on reality itself. The primary reason why they are leaving their home country is affirmative action, which they view as racist policies that lead to 'reverse discrimination'. They believe that their children do not have a future in South Africa because of the fact that they have white skin. However, the preliminary results of this study show that in reality, only a very small number of participants has had an *actual* experience with affirmative action, and secondary sources demonstrate that white privilege still prevails in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, the underlying, subconscious reason why Afrikaners are emigrating is their fear of the threat that affirmative action poses to their children's future. As such, it can be analysed according to Maslow's human needs theory, which shows that they are fundamentally in search of survival.

#### **Introduction**

Amid the multitude of emigration flows that characterize our contemporary world, the Afrikaner<sup>1</sup> exodus out of South Africa forms a distinctive stream, in the sense that it represents a perpetrator Diaspora that feels victimized. By this I mean that, contrary to general opinion which views them as the apartheid culprits, in their own perception Afrikaners are victims of post-apartheid policies and circumstances which drive them out of their home country, and mostly into Australia.<sup>2</sup> During my fieldwork in South Africa in 2011,<sup>3</sup> I noticed that most Afrikaners I met had parted or were parting from family and friends who had immigrated or were immigrating to Australia. I also observed that as a people, especially the older generations, they seemed to express a profound sense of sadness, associated with loss and change. This is what prompted me to do a research project on post-1994 first generation Afrikaner immigrants in Australia, which I am currently conducting as a doctoral study at the University of Adelaide. My engagement with Afrikaners, then, comes from an interest in and compassion for their sadness, though primarily from a deep desire to understand it, and them, not to justify or

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<sup>1</sup> Defined here as 'white' South Africans of European descent whose vernacular is Afrikaans.

<sup>2</sup> According to official statistics, 10 to 15 per cent of the Afrikaner population has left South Africa between 1994 and 2011, which translates into 300,000 to 450,000 people (Giliomee, 2011, 709; Statistics South Africa [SSA], 2011). Based on statistics from recipient countries, the real figure is estimated to be two to three times as high (Van Rooyen, 2000, 27). Despite a lack of accurate statistical data, using various sources combined (Bornman, 2005; Giliomee, 2011; Oberholzer, 2011; and Lucas, Amoateng, & Kalule-Sabiti, 2006, amongst others), I would argue that most Afrikaners immigrate to Australia. It should be noted that other South Africans are leaving too, and that many would like to but cannot (due to a lack of skills or finances) (Crush et al., 2010; Schönfeldt-Aultman, 2009; Young, 1999, cited in Lucas et al., 2006, 46).

<sup>3</sup> For my MPhil degree in African Studies at Leiden University, I conducted five months of field research in Polokwane, Limpopo.

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apologize for the past, but to improve our understanding of it, of how it came to be and of how it continues to shape the present as well as the future, of, in the meantime, both South Africa and Australia.

The main argument set forth in this paper is thus based on empirical research. Carried out within the anthropological discipline, the research strategy is qualitative and the approach ethnographic, i.e. the study is conducted through long-term fieldwork in which participant observation, interviewing and informal conversations are the main methods, complemented by the analysis of texts (mainly Facebook group discussions). Fieldwork has been conducted since September 2015 and continues until the end of 2016.<sup>4</sup> Thus far, approximately 150 people have participated in the study, 72 of whom through interviews, which were conducted in Afrikaans. The research sample is drawn from those Afrikaners that emigrated between 1994 and 2016 as adults, and is selected through purposive- and snowball sampling.<sup>5</sup> The majority has emigrated as a nuclear family unit, and the average age of participants is between thirty and fifty years. The main fieldwork location is Adelaide/South Australia, though in total, interviews have been conducted in five different towns and cities covering three different states.

This essay deals with a small portion of the data results so far, namely with the primary reason most research participants mentioned for their decision to immigrate to Australia: they see no future for Afrikaners in South Africa. For nearly all interviewees, as well as for most other Afrikaners that I spoke to in an informal setting (at events), this reason was principally related to future generations: whether it was for their (unborn) children or grandchildren, they asserted that ‘white’ children have no future in South Africa, primarily as a consequence of affirmative action. Before discussing this in more detail, I will first clarify what I mean by the most relevant terms and concepts used in this paper. Importantly, I also note here that the views expressed by participants in this particular case study are not necessarily representative of all Afrikaners in Australia.

### **Clarification of concepts and terms**

Following research participants’ self-definition, with the term ‘Afrikaner’ I refer to a South African of European descent, i.e. with white skin, whose mother tongue is Afrikaans.<sup>6</sup> ‘Migration’ is the permanent or semi-permanent change of residence by individuals or groups (Lee 1966, 49; McLean & McMillan, 347), whereas ‘emigration’ (from) and ‘immigration’ (to) refer to the act of leaving one’s country with the intention of permanently settling into a foreign nation.<sup>7</sup> The ‘Diaspora’ concept, although currently attributed to many migrant groups (Daswani, 2013; Pries, 2013; Tölölyan, 1991) and often conflated with the term ‘transnational community’ (Ong, 2003, 86; Stanley-Niaah, 2009, 756) in its classical meaning refers only to those migrant groups that disperse due

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<sup>4</sup> It is therefore important to note that, since both the processes of data collection and analysis are ongoing, the research’ final conclusions may differ slightly from those drawn in this paper.

<sup>5</sup> And ultimately, of course, through self-selection: all interviews were held with written consent.

<sup>6</sup> It is crucial to distinguish between Afrikaans-speaking ‘white’ South Africans and English-speaking ‘white’ South Africans (those of British descent), because the research participants do this: if *anything*, they are not British. Unfortunately, not many researchers working on South African emigration acknowledge the importance of this distinction.

<sup>7</sup> Oxford Dictionary Online, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/emigration> and <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/immigration>, accessed November 20, 2016.

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to a perceived or actual threat to its survival (Du Toit, 2003, 16; Tölölyan, 1996, 12).<sup>8</sup> As I show in this paper, Afrikaners do this indeed.

The term ‘affirmative action’ in the South African context refers to an amalgam of policies in different sectors of society aimed at redressing the inequalities resulting from apartheid by ‘affirming’ those population groups that the system oppressed, collectively labelled as ‘black’ (Employment Equity Act of 1998). Classifying population groups by the colour of their skin is problematic and arguably racist, however, in any work on South Africa it is still largely unavoidable. In its data collection, the South African government continues to use the old apartheid race distinctions of ‘African’, ‘coloured’ (persons of so-called mixed-race descent), ‘Indian’, currently combined with Asians in general (‘Indian/Asian’), and ‘white’. Moreover, it uses these classifications for the very purpose of redress (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013, 15; Erasmus, 2015, 104). Thus, it appears that until a better alternative is found, we are stuck with these labels. This is not to say that I agree with their use, and since ‘race’ is a socially constructed concept I use quotations marks whenever I use skin colour as an adjective in this paper. Doing so is incorrect anyhow, since skin colour is a physical attribute, not a state of being (i.e. skin colour is something you *have*, not something you *are*). However, precisely because the idea of ‘race’ is socially constructed, it can be argued that people have become their skin indeed. In this regard, having ‘white’ skin, not only in South Africa but globally, has historically become associated with wealth, status, ‘Western civilization’ and, perhaps most importantly, with privilege (Hage, 2000; Garner, 2007; Wadham, 2004). ‘White privilege’ is famously defined as ‘an invisible package of unearned assets that [white people] can count on cashing in each day’ (McIntosh, 1989, cited in Garner, 2007, 35-36) and can mostly be seen as a consequence of European imperialism and colonial conquest. Crucially, certainly for Afrikaners, who could be viewed as its epitome, white privilege has become so normal to those who enjoy it that they are oblivious to it (Garner, 2007, 34-39; Wadham, 2004, 22). Moreover, it arguably leaves people with white skin ‘racially unmarked’ (Schönfeldt-Aultman, 2009, 121), since they represent ‘the norm’ against which all others are defined.

Finally, then, we come to a definition of perception and reality, two terms so crucial in this paper. ‘Reality’ relates to things as they actually exist in the world (often but not exclusively physical objects or actions) and ‘perception’ refers to the way in which those things are understood.<sup>9</sup> Since human beings have an individual mind and a unique frame of reference that is constructed on personal life experiences, they usually have different interpretations of the same thing (reality). In other words, they attach different meanings to the same facts. However, groups of people can also and often do have a *collective* perception of reality, of which this paper provides an example. In the following section I set forth what the collective perception of Afrikaners about affirmative action in South Africa is.

### **Perception: No future for ‘white’ children in South Africa**

Most Afrikaners that participated in this research feel that their decision to emigrate from South Africa to Australia was not a personal choice, but one that was forced upon them

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<sup>8</sup> For more characteristics of Diasporas, see Clifford, 1994, Kearny, 1995, and/or Tölölyan, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Oxford dictionaries online, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/reality>  
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by circumstances in their home country. The principal reason for this is that they feel that their children's livelihoods are being threatened, and to a lesser extent their own subsistence as well, first and foremost by affirmative action policies implemented by the successive ANC governments.<sup>10</sup> They view these policies as 'reverse discrimination' and they fear that their children, especially their sons, will not have equal access to quality education and/or jobs in comparison with other South African children, namely those often referred to as 'previously disadvantaged individuals' (Hoffman, 2011; Mbeki, 2009) and generically termed 'black' (as discussed before), who form the main objective of South Africa's affirmative action policies. Sons (boys, males) are perceived to be most disadvantaged, as they were most privileged during apartheid and are thus now targeted most strongly. Since all research participants believe that South African universities are applying racial quotas to ensure demographically representative student intakes, they feel that their children are being discriminated against because of the fact that they have white skin. They want their children to be assessed on merit, not on race, when applying for university. This is illustrated by the following quote from Marieke, who emigrated in 2007 with her husband and sons:

'The big reason for us was, I have two sons. They are white sons. With the affirmative actions in South Africa it's going to be absolutely difficult for a white young man to study and to get a profession. [With the] Affirmative action, I think now, at universities, it's seventy per cent is being given to black students, and the other thirty per cent is being divided between your other previously disadvantaged, so your Indians, your Coloureds, your Chinese, your Asians are being advantaged even before a white South African, then your white woman, and then the white boy. So this is, he will be the very last. And even if his points [performance] are the best, first all the other students will get a place at university. And our eldest son had at that stage already shown very good potential, he can go and study something because he has the capacity. And that's when we realised: "We are OK. We have jobs. We are qualified, our professions are set, we are OK. But for *that* generation, for our children, we want something different. And this is why we started the whole process and came over [to Australia].'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> From the forty-three research participants of whom the interviews were analysed in full detail at the time of writing, thirty-six stated that they left South Africa because they saw no future for their children, and, to a lesser extent, neither for themselves, due to affirmative action policies. This translates into 83.7 per cent of the research sample. One person came to Australia to join her adult children, who had also emigrated because they did not see a future for their children in South Africa. Four people (9.3 per cent) mentioned crime as their primary motive, though in relation to their children as well: they felt that they were unable to protect their children from violent crime. Lastly, there were two participants, a couple, who came to Australia because of a job offer. N.B. ANC stands for African National Congress and refers to South Africa's post-1994 ruling party.

<sup>11</sup> Marieke, interview with author, 2015. All citations from interviews in this paper are my own translations from Afrikaans to English. To protect the identity of research participants, pseudonyms are used. Since there are relatively few Afrikaans names, I have chosen Dutch names as pseudonyms, to prevent Afrikaans people in Australia from being identified by mistake. Dutch and Afrikaans names are generally quite similar. To further protect interviewees' identities, the exact date, time, and location of the interview is never stated.

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For the next phase in their children's lives, that is, when entering the job market, the interviewees neither feel that their offspring will have a fair chance due to affirmative action policies. Furthermore, most research participants feel that their children (and, again, especially their sons) will suffer life-long insecurity because of their disadvantage of having white skin, in the sense that they are perceived to be prone to losing their jobs. Most male interviewees see job loss as a very real personal threat as well, and for one of them it has become a reality, which was the reason for his move to Australia. Arjan told me that he was retrenched in South Africa at age fifty-four, and that there was just no way that he would get a job again in the country. 'All the [white] men above fifty years of age who lose their jobs do not get another one', he stated. 'You can just forget it. They throw your CV in the paper bin immediately. They don't even look at it any further.'<sup>12</sup> When discussing the subject of 'reverse discrimination', another participant, Richard, stated –

'I always had the risk, if you are above fifty, fifty-five years of age, and you are a white man, and you lose your job, then your chances to get a job are zero, you know. My brother in law has been without a job for a year now, and he's around our age. But your chance of getting another job there is zero.'<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, the overall perception among interviewees is that when a white man loses his job after the age of fifty (and some mentioned forty), he will not acquire a new position. This will make him and his family extremely vulnerable, because at that stage in his life he will have children in high school and/or at university, and he will not be able to support them anymore, which means that the entire family will get into financial difficulties and, in the worst-case scenario, end up in a 'white' squatter camp.

Thus, in sum, the great majority feels that they, as 'white' South Africans, and especially as Afrikaners,<sup>14</sup> are being discriminated against in post-apartheid South Africa. The threat that affirmative action poses is felt much more strongly for their children since this generation has not yet received or completed its education and has yet to settle itself into the workforce. Participants feel that affirmative action gives jobs to South Africans with black skin at the expense of South Africans with white skin and that the latter group is negatively affected by affirmative action policies in general. In this, they see 'white', and Afrikaner, males as the prime victims. Next to this, they believe these policies to be wrong as they are based on race: they feel that people should be judged on their competencies and achievements and not on the colour of their skin. In their perception, South Africa has, with affirmative action, continued the use of institutionalised racism - the very policy that should have ended in 1994 - but then 'in reverse'.<sup>15</sup> The next part of

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<sup>12</sup> Arjan, interview with author, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Richard, interview with author, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> They feel that as a group, they are being punished more severely for apartheid than English-speaking 'white' South Africans, since it was the Afrikaner Nationalist Party that dominated the apartheid governments.

<sup>15</sup> N.B. Most participants stated that it was OK to have affirmative action policies in place for some time after the end of apartheid, but that they should have ended by now. Importantly, there was also one participant who formed an exception by specifically stating that she does *not* believe that 'white' people do not have possibilities or that they are being discriminated in South Africa (Carolien, interview with author, 2016).

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this essay investigates to what extent these claims are congruent with reality.

### **Fact I: Affirmative Action is *not* ‘reverse discrimination’**

Before I can discuss the perception that affirmative action constitutes racism, I first need to define what the concept actually entails, in more detail than I have done in the introduction. In general, affirmative action policies are programs designed to tackle a series of inequalities that mainly but not exclusively focus on minority groups (Dhami, Squires & Mohood, 2006, cited in Archibong & Adejumo, 2013, 23). The term does not so much refer to one single policy, but rather to an amalgam of components of other legislation, policies and behaviour, including employment, education and government contracting, that are undergoing continuous change (Holzer & Neumark, 2000, 484-485). In South Africa, the main legal frameworks for the implementation of affirmative action are the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (EEA) and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 (BB-BEE, shortly BEE) with their subsequent amendments (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013, 15; Mbeki, 2009, 68-69). Both frameworks provide laws aimed at achieving demographic representivity in the workplace, with BEE specifically designed for the private sector. As such, it ensures that employers take *proactive* steps towards employing or training specifically those who need ‘affirming’ since they have been disadvantaged in the past (Holzer & Neumark, 2000, 484, my emphasis), and who would otherwise not or less quickly be employed or trained. Taking proactive steps principally distinguishes affirmative action from other antidiscrimination measures that only prevent employers or institutions from discriminating against certain groups in society (ibid). The goal of affirmative action in South Africa is thus to correct the pre-1994 imbalances and to ensure that the previously disadvantaged groups (‘black’ South Africans) enjoy the same benefits and opportunities as the privileged group (‘white’ South Africans), now guaranteed to them in the Constitution (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013, 15, 23).

The Afrikaners that have participated in this research are not the only ones to be critical of affirmative action in South Africa. Several political parties including the Democratic Alliance, the Inkatha Freedom Party and the Freedom Front Plus, and also civil society organisations such as Solidarity and Afriforum argue that these policies marginalise South Africans with white skin (Modisha, 2007). The term ‘reverse discrimination’ to denote affirmative action policies is widely used, not only in South Africa but also in other countries that have similar measures in place.<sup>16</sup> Does affirmative action indeed constitute (legalised) racial discrimination? Most scholars seem to agree that, yes, it does, but since it is used for the purpose of redressing past injustices, it is ‘fair discrimination’ (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013, 19), a clear *contradictio in terminis* (the very concept of discrimination means ‘unfair’), or ‘acceptable discrimination’ (Chow, 2009, 355).

For any law to be racially discriminatory in the world today would seem illegitimate, however, in our recent past it was business as usual, of which South Africa is perhaps the prime example. Since ‘white’ South Africans have racially discriminated against ‘black’ South Africans for at least forty-six years (apartheid) and actually for more than three centuries (colonialism), it can logically be argued that there should be justice and there should be consequences. In a legal form, this could take the shape of affirmative action.

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Pincus’ work (2000, 2003) on the USA.

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The crucial point here is that the two are directly related to each other and that the relationship is causal: the elevation of one population group came about *because of* the oppression of another, and intentionally so. The disadvantage of 'black' South Africans was not some unwanted by-product or unfortunate side effect of something that was otherwise beneficial: it was purposively created to privilege 'white' South Africans. The very concept of 'privilege' signifies dichotomy: without the opposite, it is meaningless. Thus, because of this causal relationship, it is not possible to make contemporary South African society more equal by only focusing on bettering the formerly oppressed and leaving the (previously and continuing) privileged untouched. The latter group has a responsibility to answer to the consequences of their actions by giving up their privileges in order to let those whom they deliberately disadvantaged in order to gain those privileges join the playing field.

Therefore, I would define affirmative action as neither 'reverse'-, 'fair-' nor 'acceptable' discrimination but as *legalised responsibility*. If apartheid constituted institutionalised/legalised racism, then affirmative action constitutes institutionalised/legalised responsibility. It means acknowledging a past mistake, accepting the consequences of that mistake, and working towards correcting it.<sup>17</sup> Thus defined, it seems that those Afrikaners and other 'white', privileged South Africans who oppose affirmative action and see themselves as its victims, are unwilling to take this responsibility. Furthermore, it could be argued that those who are leaving South Africa because of these policies are fleeing their responsibility. The underlying problem appears to be that this group does not genuinely acknowledge the past mistake in the first place. Nearly all research participants stated that they felt that apartheid was wrong, but that they themselves were never racists. In other words, they acknowledge the faulty system, but deny any personal responsibility for having created and/or for being part of that system.<sup>18</sup>

### **Fact II: 'White' South Africans are still privileged**

The second, and related, general perception, that affirmative action in South Africa is negatively affecting South Africans with white skin and Afrikaners in particular, does not appear to be congruent with reality either, when looking at the empirical evidence of both primary (my research) and secondary (existing studies) sources.

Concerning the first, of the sixty-eight interviewees belonging to the workforce, only three individuals had an actual, real life experience with affirmative action. This translates into 2 per cent of the current research sample. The three participants in question were all males and in different stages of their careers: Jaap did not get a training place after graduation; Mark was told by his manager that he could not get a promotion; and Arjan (quoted in section one) was past mid-career when he was retrenched. There

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that affirmative action in its current form is ideal; there are many valid criticisms on the policies, proved by their continuous adjustment (Chow, 2009; Holzer & Neuman, 2000; Roberts, Weir-Smith, & Reddy, 2010). Also, a lot of the discontent about affirmative action may not come from the policies as such but from their misuse (see, for example, Archibong & Adejumo, 2013), most notably around BEE, which is prone to corruption and mainly serves the interests of a small 'black' elite (Bond, 2005; Calland, 2006; Hoffman, 2011; Mbeki, 2009; Naidoo, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that a number of research participants was 18 years of age or younger in 1994, and could thus not have had much opportunity to try and change the system.

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was also one participant who owned his own company and decided to leave because he felt unable to find qualified people from the previously disadvantaged groups, which would ensure that his company complied with BEE policies. Next to this, there was (only) one interviewee who knew somebody close to him (his brother-in-law) that had lost his job due to affirmative action. If we include these two individuals' accounts, then the total number and percentage of research participants who have had a personal or secondary experience with affirmative action policies comes down to five and 3.4 respectively.

Secondly, in sharp contrast to most research participants' perception, studies on South Africa's economy and on the effects of affirmative action policies show that overall, white privilege has continued after 1994. In fact, the most important critique on affirmative action policies in the country is their relative effectiveness (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013, 23) and the slow pace of change (Roberts, Weir-Smith, & Reddy, 2010, 6).<sup>19</sup> Data from the South African government shows that since 1994, the unemployment figure for South Africans classified as 'white' continues to be the lowest compared to the three groups classified as 'black' (Statistics South Africa [SSA], 2016). When comparing the numbers for the most recent years, the statistics show an increase of 'white' unemployment in both the highest classes (those with graduate degrees and beyond) and the lowest classes (those without a high school diploma), whereas this number decreased or remained relatively unchanged for the other population groups. However, in the middle- and upper middle classes (those with high school diplomas and tertiary degrees other than university) unemployment within the 'white' group actually *decreased*.

These numbers suggest that affirmative action is successful in both the highest- and lowest echelons of the population, but unsuccessful in the broad middle class.<sup>20</sup> They also help to explain the fact that the great majority of research participants is highly skilled: this is the group that has most reason to feel threatened by affirmative action, as do the most unskilled. Given Australia's skills based immigration policy (Hugo, 2014; Louis, Duck, Terry, & Lalonde, 2010; Visser, 2004), it is unsurprising that very few interviewees belong to the latter category.<sup>21</sup> In any case, for these two classes, research participants' perceptions are supported by the statistics. However, for the middle- and upper middle classes, perceptions are contrary to the facts. Also, overall, unemployment for 'white' South Africans has decreased in the last year, and, as said, they are still the best employed population group: in 2016, the share of unemployment was 9.1 % for 'white' South Africans; 40.9 for 'black' South Africans; 27.7 for 'coloured' South Africans; and 16.9 for Indian/Asian South Africans (SSA, 2016). As we can see, these numbers are far from equal. Since the South African government does not distinguish between 'white' South Africans from British heritage and Afrikaners, it is unfortunately impossible to say whether, in reality, the latter are more affected by affirmative action

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<sup>19</sup> Affirmative action in general (globally) is critiqued for doing little for the poor (Sowell, 2004, 166).

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, by the year 2000, there were about as many African ('black') households in the top income quintile as there were 'white' households (Seekings & Natrass, 2005, 306), a success largely achieved through BEE.

<sup>21</sup> Those who do, three out of sixty-eight, all stated that they entered Australia through exceptional circumstances and that it had only been possible because of God's will. What probably contributed to the fact was that they were willing to move to the most rural places (the outback) and, for two of them, to work for less than the Australian minimum wage.



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than the former.

Other studies confirm that the ‘white’ middle class is actually still growing and increasing its wealth - although not in the same pace as the black middle class (Erasmus, 2015, 103) and that, although young ‘white’ men are finding it harder to gain access to jobs, especially the Afrikaans-speaking men from the lower classes, it is still easier for them than for young ‘black’ men (Morrell, 2002, 311). Thus, all that seems to have happened due to affirmative action policies is that the growth of the white middle class has slowed down. Next to this, the racial wage hierarchy in post-apartheid South Africa remains highly distorted in favour of ‘white’ South Africans (Allanson & Atkins, 2005, 1046) and ‘white’ South Africans are still demographically overrepresented in government (Erasmus, 2015, 107). Furthermore, the country’s corporate sector is still dominated by ‘white’ men,<sup>22</sup> who have the lowest unemployment figure of all population groups, namely 1.1 per cent (Van Wyk, 2014). Finally, and completely adverse to research participants’ perceptions, ‘white’ women have actually been included *as beneficiaries* of affirmative action policies since 2008.<sup>23</sup>

Similar to beliefs about employment, the claim that university admission is based on racial quotas appears to be an unfounded perception too. Although universities in their admission of students have little to do with the Employment Equity Act (since students are not employees), which prohibits the implementation of quotas (De Vos, 2013), they do not use quota. However, many universities are choosing for stricter admission policies to redress their unequal racial make-up and to mirror South African society better (Jones, 2011). In this sense, a university may, for example, reserve 67 per cent of its places for previously disadvantaged individuals and keep 33 per cent of the places available for any applicant, regardless of race (“Questions over racial quotas at SA universities”, 2016). However, all applicants have to meet minimum criteria for admission (ibid). Next to those that do, there are also universities that do *not* use race as a proxy for disadvantage and thus as a criterion for admission (Jones, 2011).<sup>24</sup> But doing so would only be illegal if a university would make use of a rigid application of a quota system, which, to the best of my knowledge, they do not.

From the above it can be concluded that South Africans with white skin continue to be privileged in South Africa, even though it is difficult to determine to which extent the Afrikaners are more, less or equally privileged in comparison to Anglo-South Africans. They are certainly less privileged than before 1994, but, as a group, they are still privileged.<sup>25</sup> This means that the perceptions of the majority of the research participants are contrary to reality. The belief that ‘white’ children, especially boys, and ‘white’ men are specifically victimised by affirmative action proves to be unfounded: in reality, affirmative action policies do not have a large, negative impact on white males.<sup>26</sup> If this

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<sup>22</sup> With their percentage in top management at 73 per cent (Erasmus, 2015, 100).

<sup>23</sup> Since the policies are also aimed at redressing existing gender imbalances (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013, 21; “Affirmative action recognises white women”, n.d.).

<sup>24</sup> This implies that research participants *could* chose a university for their children *in* South Africa where they would have an equal opportunity to be accepted. Therefore, it seems that they either do not believe this to be true (i.e. they believe that their perception of things is right), or that they only want their children to go to certain universities (that do use race as a proxy for disadvantage and for admission).

<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that on an individual level some Afrikaners, and especially Afrikaner men, have been hurt by affirmative action policies and are experiencing real troubles.

<sup>26</sup> A conclusion also reached by Pincus in his studies of affirmative action in the USA (Pincus, 2003, 120).

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is not the case, what then, makes Afrikaners *really* leave South Africa? In concluding this article, I will explain this.

### **Conclusion: Emigration decision is based on emotion (fear) & human needs**

There are two main conclusions that can be drawn from this paper. The first is that most Afrikaners that participated in the study decided to leave South Africa based on their perception of reality rather than on reality itself. Secondly, they decided to leave not because of affirmative action but because of *fear of* affirmative action, and to be more precise, because of *the fear of the threat* that these policies pose to their children's livelihoods. That people in general base their decisions on what they *believe* to be real and not on reality as such is known.<sup>27</sup> This includes the decision of whether or not to emigrate: as Lee has suggested, for most migrants 'it is not so much the actual factors at origin and destination as the perception of these factors that result in migration' (1966, 51). Thus, similar to most, if not all, human decisions, the decision to emigrate is never completely rational and may not even have anything to do with reason at all. In fact, the discovery by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio that people who cannot feel emotions cannot make decisions seems to have ultimately proven that perceptions, since they are based on emotions, are crucial in decision-making.<sup>28</sup>

Fear is an emotion that can powerfully motivate people's behaviour. Rather than being shaped by the object itself, emotions are shaped *by contact with* the object (Ahmed, 2014, 6). That is, people have an idea of the object as something to be feared, and this idea is shaped by cultural histories and memories (Ibid, 7, 69). In this case, Afrikaners have an idea of affirmative action as being something fearful, which is based on narratives about what affirmative action constitutes and what it *means* to them (and to 'white' South Africans in general). Ultimately, the fear is a response to the threat that affirmative action poses to their children's future livelihood (i.e. survival), and to a lesser extent to that of their own. This threat is shaped by the discourses that have created the perception that affirmative action policies lead to fewer (or no) possibilities for education and jobs for 'white' South African children, particularly boys.

As such, the Afrikaners' decision to emigrate can be, like most if not all human behaviour, analysed in relation to human beings' basic needs, as set forth by Maslow, and specifically to the most fundamental ones, namely physiological- and safety needs.<sup>29</sup> This means that, underneath the seemingly straightforward and rational reason to emigrate lies the deeper psychological and unconscious need for survival: the research

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Damasio, 1994, 2001, 2003; Lee, 1966, and Rule, 1994.

<sup>28</sup> Damasio's work shows that emotions often operate as a basic mechanism for making decisions without the work of reason, and in doing so he fundamentally redefined Descartes' famous statement concerning understanding the human condition, 'I think, therefore I am', as 'I feel, therefore I think' (Damasio, 1994, 2001, 2003). This resonates Freud's conclusion based on psychoanalysis, 'Where id was, there ego shall be' (1933, 80, cited in Roelke, Goldschmidt, & Silverman 2013, 193) and resembles Maslow's argument that we should not sharply distinguish between cognitive and conative needs because the former are based on the latter (i.e. thoughts derive from emotions) (1943, 385).

<sup>29</sup> Maslow in 1943 set forth his theory that beneath all the superficial differences that are culturally determined, human beings are very much alike, and that all of them have the same five basic needs, which are, in order of importance: the need for food & water (physiological); the need to be safe (physically, mentally and emotionally); the need to be loved; the need to be esteemed; and the need for self-actualisation.

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participants, and especially their children, *need* to have at least food and water and be safe (from an, in their understanding, unfair world).<sup>30</sup> In this sense, Afrikaners could have become what Maslow calls ‘safety-seeking mechanisms’ (1943, 376), since their behaviour is completely dominated by their need for safety. Thus, where for Maslow’s hungry man Utopia is a place with plenty of food (Ibid, 374), for the Afrikaner, Utopia is a place without affirmative action. Thus, they decide to leave South Africa and immigrate to Australia. In essence, then, it is fear - ultimately, and unconsciously, of death - that motivates them to make this decision.

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<sup>30</sup> Maslow states that injustice and unfairness, what the Afrikaners perceive affirmative action to be, seem to make human beings feel anxious and unsafe (1943, 377). He further argues that this does not have to be because of the injustice *per se* but rather because this treatment threatens to make the world look unreliable, or unsafe, or unpredictable (ibid). I believe that this is exactly what is happening to Afrikaners in post-apartheid South Africa, real or perceived.

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