

Review

Nicky Falkof (2015) *Satanism and Family Murder in Late Apartheid South Africa: imaging the end of whiteness*. London/NY: Palgrave MacMillan

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Hysterical white adolescent girls claiming to be possessed by Satan; Afrikaans men who violently killed their entire families with guns and axes. These are some of the white South Africans who populate the pages of Nicky Falkof's *Satanism and Family Murder in Late Apartheid South Africa: imaging the end of whiteness*. In this book, Falkof writes about the fissures in whiteness during National Party rule in a culture that believed that questioning authority, challenging the status quo, and going against heteropatriarchal whiteness was heretical. Falkof wants the reader to see the cracks in white hegemony as the apartheid state crumbled and movements like the End Conscription Campaign, the fight for liberation, and international sanctions burst the bubble of whites claiming to be living idyllic lives. Falkof is clear, however, that she did not write the book to make the reader feel sorry for South African whites. Instead, it is about the ways that systems of domination are violent to the oppressor and the oppressed, albeit in radically different ways.

Falkof explains to the reader that she chose both these moral panics in order to show how late apartheid led whites to claim that their social world was in crisis and under siege from within. The body politic, she explains, was in shock and reeling. To explore how repression and moral panic operated in the 1980s and 1990s, Falkof dives into an archive of national popular culture. In particular, she uses white newspapers and magazines, with a focus on 'family magazines', all which had 'allegiances to the state' (33) and were 'moral entrepreneurs' who both reported on and contributed

to moral panics. Falkof convincingly explains how this primary source data is key to understanding the ways that white society's decades of repression, violence, and social control had psychic, cultural, and violent effects.

Falkof's text is divided in two. The first half of the book is on the Satanic scare (she is quick to remind the reader that there was no evidence of real Satanists in South Africa performing the acts they claimed, like murdering and eating babies) and the second half on family murders (*gesinsmoorde*), mostly carried out by Afrikaans men. Satanic scares were prevalent in both Afrikaans and English communities. A number of moral entrepreneurs, including the Dutch Reformed Church, Pentecostal ministers, so-called 'cult cops' (who worked in the South African Police force's Occult-related crime unit), government officials, and the white media claimed to be actively battling against Satan and his influence. Unlike places like America and Britain, where Satanic scares were propagated by social workers and psychologists, in South Africa, Satanic scares were fought by Christians and 'Christian government functionaries' (36). Satanic rumours and accusations were part of a 'generalized paranoia' (61) from inside white society. Coloured and black South Africans were on the margins of white Satanic accusations and scares because whites were more concerned with the ways that their social worlds had been infiltrated from within by what they saw as evil. Satan abounded in late apartheid social worlds and Satanic accusations were one way to police those who questioned social, moral, and political authorities.

The second half of Falkof's text delves into the mostly Afrikaans men who murdered their entire families in the same time period as the Satanic scares. These murders had a number of stated causes in white newspapers and magazines, including the ways that so-called 'traditional' family values were being left behind, how Afrikaans marriages emotionally isolated men from being able to express their feelings and concerns, the changing economy, the influx of non-censored foreign media, and even the ways that mainstream churches were being flooded by liberation rhetoric and social movements. These all, claimed the media, had a detrimental effect on the power and social prestige of the Afrikaans patriarch (133-4). However, Falkof notes, while the white media may have been quick to critique Afrikaans masculinity, it also showed a large degree of sympathy to men who murdered, claiming that their social roles were being eroded and that they had, according to these writers at least, little

ways to express their discomfort and lack of power at the end of apartheid. These murders led to what Falkof calls a 'paranoid panopticism', where white men were put under surveillance by a society that felt under attack from those who were supposed to be its protectors. Family murder, according to Falkof, was both what she calls 'a failure of whiteness' (183) and 'a destructive act against the communal self' (184).

Falkof's book is a must-read for scholars of whiteness, historians of southern Africa, and media scholars who are interested in the ways that the state and the press can collaborate on projects of domination. Her text is very readable, abounds with interesting cases that illustrate her larger theoretical points, and is an important contribution to understanding whiteness during apartheid.