

A History of Afrikaner Ideas of Self-Determination and the Rise of the Network Society, c. 1993–2011

by

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Introduction

Afrikaner pursuits of freedom and self-determination have long constituted a powerful historical trope, manifesting in both tangible political projects and imagined ideological frameworks. Across South African history, individuals identifying as Afrikaners have articulated these aspirations in a variety of forms. The end of apartheid, which marked the conclusion of Afrikaner political dominance, gave rise to renewed and reconfigured expressions of this pursuit. As Ramutsindela observes, “apartheid might have been declared ‘dead and buried’, but threads of Afrikaner nationalism, which underpinned the theory and practice of apartheid, were not eclipsed by the dawn of the Mandela era” (Ramutsindela, 2004:179).

This thesis seeks to locate and disentangle several of these enduring threads. It examines a period of roughly two decades, spanning the end of apartheid, the democratic transition, and the rise of the Network Society. Central to this study is an exploration of how Afrikaner ideas of self-determination evolved in response to changing political realities and new technological forms of social organisation.

The thesis engages with Manuel Castells’ concept of the Network Society, examining how digital communication has enabled new modes of interaction within a virtual realm. This transformation has created alternative spaces for political mobilisation and cultural expression, fundamentally reshaping how communities articulate identity and belonging (Castells, 2000).

The analytical framework is grounded in Afrikaner pursuits of self-determination between 1993 and 2011. The territorial ideal at the centre of this study is the concept of the Volkstaat, translated as “the People’s State”. The demarcation processes preceding the 1994 general election serve as the point of departure, followed by an examination of the establishment and eventual dissolution of the Volkstaat Council. The Council’s reports provide insight into formal state-sanctioned efforts to realise a territorial Volkstaat, efforts that ultimately failed to secure consensus or implementation.

Subsequent initiatives, including the Volksraad Verkiesings Kommissie, are examined as later manifestations of territorial ambition. The roles of the Freedom Front Plus and the Afrikaner Resistance Movement are analysed to illustrate divergent ideological approaches to Afrikaner self-determination. The settlements of Orania and Kleinfontein are discussed as material attempts to establish Afrikaner-controlled spaces.

This context frames the core argument of the dissertation: that Afrikaner self-determination has increasingly shifted from material territorial ambitions to virtual, networked forms of identity and mobilisation. Drawing on Castells’ theorisation of the Network Society, this thesis argues that for many Afrikaners, the pursuit of a physical state has been partially displaced by the emergence of a cyber-based cultural and political sphere.

Chapter 1

Methodological Approach, Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

1. Methodological Approach

This dissertation draws on both primary and secondary sources to investigate the Afrikaner Volkstaat debate between 1993 and 2011. Primary sources include official reports compiled and published by the Volkstaat Council during the final decade of the twentieth century, as well as pamphlets, brochures, and newsletters produced by political parties and Afrikaner organisations. These materials provide direct insight into the ideological positions, strategies, and internal debates surrounding Afrikaner self-determination in the immediate post-apartheid period.

Internet-based sources form a central component of the primary material used in this study. A wide range of websites was examined to capture contemporary expressions of Afrikaner political and cultural identity. Particular emphasis was placed on social networking sites and blogs, where individual opinions regarding the Volkstaat and Afrikaner self-determination are articulated outside formal political structures. The use of online material presents methodological challenges, as digital content is often temporary, subject to deletion, modification, or restricted access depending on site administrators. To mitigate these limitations, relevant material was regularly saved or archived.

Access to certain social networking platforms required membership approval. An anonymous Facebook profile was created solely for the purpose of observing discussions within relevant groups. This profile was not used to initiate debates or interact with members, but functioned exclusively as a non-disruptive observational tool. YouTube was also utilised as a primary source, including videos published by Afrikaner organisations, interviews broadcast by media outlets, and content uploaded by private individuals. Newspaper articles were consulted through both printed editions and digitised archives available on newspaper and magazine websites.

Secondary sources include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and chapters in edited volumes. These sources provided both theoretical grounding and historical context for the analysis of Afrikaner nationalism, self-determination, and digital community formation. Together, the primary and secondary sources allow for an integrated examination of territorial, political, and virtual forms of Afrikaner self-determination.

1.1 The Network Society

Manuel Castells defines the Network Society as “a specific form of social structure characteristic of the Information Age” (Castells, 2000:5). The social transformations that have taken place since the late twentieth century have manifested across cultural, institutional, and political spheres, fundamentally reshaping social interaction in many societies. Central to this transformation is the internet, which has become a universal platform for interactive communication. This marks a shift from computer-centred technologies to network-diffused systems, enabling new forms of connectivity and organisation (Castells, 2000:12).

Within the Network Society, communication is structured through integrated systems of electronic media. Castells argues that the inclusiveness and flexibility of these systems result in most cultural expressions

being enclosed within digital environments, producing what he terms a “culture of virtual reality” (Castells, 2000:13). These developments extend beyond cultural expression and have had a profound impact on political life. Wilson and Peterson note that new media collectives may be mobilised to advance specific political agendas or to connect geographically dispersed ethnic and familial groups (Wilson and Peterson, 2002:449).

Castells further links the emergence of the Network Society to a reconfiguration of time and space. He introduces the concepts of “timeless time” and the “space of flows”, referring to a system in which social practices are organised independently of traditional temporal rhythms and geographical proximity (Castells, 2000:14). In this context, physical territory becomes less central, replaced by technological infrastructures that enable simultaneous interaction across multiple locations.

Social networking sites play a key role within this social structure. These platforms lower barriers to interpersonal interaction and enable connections between individuals who might otherwise never engage with one another (Ellison, Lampe and Steinfield, 2007:6). By reducing the costs of social transactions, social networking sites allow users to identify shared interests quickly and to maintain large networks composed primarily of weak social ties (Ellison et al., 2007:7).

At a community level, social networking sites provide spaces where individuals can express viewpoints and participate in discussion. While such environments can reinforce existing opinions, they also expose users to alternative perspectives and potentially increase dialogue and tolerance (Ellison et al., 2007:8–9). As Georgiou argues, contemporary communities are increasingly unbounded by singular physical spaces. Advances in communication technologies enable sustained, immediate, and transnational interaction, reshaping social bonds and expanding the limits of collective imagination (Georgiou, 2010).

Hampton and Wellman emphasise that when community is defined socially rather than spatially, non-local ties have long been central to communal life. Community, in this sense, is defined by supportive and meaningful social relations rather than geographic proximity (Hampton and Wellman, 2003:478). This dissertation applies these theoretical insights to examine how Afrikaner communities have developed within virtual spaces and how these spaces have influenced contemporary debates surrounding territorial self-determination.

1.2 Literature Review

The fifth report of the Volkstaat Council, *Die Geskiedenis van die Selfbeskikkingsgedagte by die Afrikaner* (The History of the Idea of Self-Determination among the Afrikaner), compiled under the direction of Professor H.C.G. Robbertze, provides a foundational source for understanding historical Afrikaner conceptions of self-determination. The report situates Afrikaner self-determination as a contested and evolving idea, arguing that its historical development illuminates contemporary political challenges. The study, conducted by historians J.E.H. Grobler, Herman Giliomee, and Pieter Bruwer, traces themes of freedom, independence, self-reliance, and autonomy across Afrikaner history (Robbertze, 1996).

Terisa Pienaar's master's thesis, *Die Aanloop tot en die Stigting van Orania as 'n Groeipunt vir 'n Afrikaner-Volkstaat*, offers a detailed examination of Afrikaner identity formation from its earliest origins through to the post-apartheid period. Her study focuses specifically on right-wing Afrikaner engagement with the Volkstaat ideal and critically assesses the establishment of Orania in the Northern Cape as a potential growth point for an Afrikaner state. Pienaar's work maintains that Orania represents both a symbolic and practical expression of Afrikaner territorial ambition, while also questioning its broader viability (Pienaar, 2007).

Together, these works provide essential historical and ideological context for this dissertation. They illuminate the continuity and transformation of Afrikaner self-determination narratives, while also highlighting the tensions between collective identity, political feasibility, and changing social conditions. These studies form the historiographical foundation upon which this dissertation builds its analysis of Afrikaner self-determination in the era of the Network Society.

Chapter 2

Pursuing a Territorial Afrikaner Volkstaat, 1993–2011

2. Pursuing a Territorial Afrikaner Volkstaat

When President F.W. de Klerk opened Parliament on 2 February 1990, he committed the National Party government to “a totally new and just constitutional dispensation in which every inhabitant will enjoy equal rights, treatment and opportunity in every sphere of endeavour – constitutional, social and economic” (Ramutsindela, 2004:182). This constitutional reform programme and negotiated settlement enjoyed the support of 68.6 percent of the white electorate. Nevertheless, the political transformation that culminated in the establishment of the so-called Rainbow Nation was accompanied by deep ideological divisions within the Afrikaner population.

Within these divisions, Afrikaner nationalists aligned with the National Party sought to preserve Afrikaner identity within a broader South African nation, while right-wing Afrikaners pursued a strategy of separation aimed at isolating Afrikaners from other population groups (Ramutsindela, 2004:182). For the latter, self-determination and secession became central demands during the negotiation processes leading to the formulation of the interim Constitution of 1993 (Labuschagne, 1999:84). Between May and November 1993, the Commission on the Demarcation of Regions received numerous proposals advocating some form of Volkstaat. These submissions, however, revealed little consensus regarding the precise location or nature of such a territory.

Significant disagreements emerged between Afrikaner groupings such as the Afrikaner Volksunie (AVU) and the Afrikaner Volksfront (AVF), particularly regarding the extent of land claims envisaged for a Volkstaat. While some proposals favoured a fully autonomous region, others were satisfied with sub-regional

autonomy achieved through negotiated arrangements. The majority of proposals identified Pretoria and its surrounding areas as the preferred core territory for a Volkstaat (Muthien and Khosa, 1998:308).

The Afrikaner Volksfront recommended the creation of ethnically homogeneous regions, not exclusively for Afrikaners but also for Zulu, Tswana, Xhosa, and Sotho communities. This recommendation drew particular support from Afrikaners who identified strongly with the historical legacy of the Boer republics and the ideological foundations of the Volkstaat ideal (Muthien and Khosa, 1998:309). Ethnic criteria were central to the demarcation process, with proponents arguing that distinct cultural identities could not be dissolved into a homogenised South African identity. One submission argued that “you cannot change a Xhosa, Zulu, Afrikaner, Venda, Tswana or Swazi into a colourless homogeneous human frame called South Africa” (Muthien and Khosa, 1998:309).

Despite these submissions, Volkstaat proposals were rejected by the ANC alliance. Cyril Ramaphosa famously remarked that “there is no place in South Africa for a Volkstaat” and suggested, sarcastically, that Robben Island could serve such a purpose (Muthien and Khosa, 1998:309). The failure to secure territorial self-determination during this period further fragmented Afrikaner nationalist movements in the run-up to the 1994 election (Ramutsindela, 2004:183).

The 1994 general election was boycotted by most right-wing parties, with the notable exception of the Freedom Front. This participation followed an agreement in principle by Nelson Mandela acknowledging the possibility of a Volkstaat, an agreement reached after the demarcation process despite Mandela’s earlier assertion that “as long as I live there will never be a Volkstaat in this country” (Muthien and Khosa, 1998:309). The concessions made to the Freedom Front resulted in the establishment of the Volkstaat Council in April 1994.

2.1 The Volkstaat Council

The Volkstaat Council was established by the newly elected South African Parliament to investigate the feasibility of Afrikaner self-determination through the creation of a Volkstaat. According to Dr Johann Wingard, former chairperson of the Council, the body was constituted under Section 184A(2) of the interim Constitution with the mandate to advise the government, the Constitutional Assembly, and other relevant institutions on self-determination in general and the attainment of a Volkstaat for the Afrikaner in particular (Storobin, 2005).

The Council consisted of twenty members drawn from various professional and ideological backgrounds. Its first interim report, *Eerste Tussentydse Verslag van die Volkstaatraad* (1995), proposed two core regions surrounding Pretoria as potential Volkstaat territories. The first region extended from Pretoria West into the eastern North West Province and the northern Free State, while the second stretched eastward from Pretoria toward Middelburg, Bethal, and Secunda in Mpumalanga. These regions were selected due to their relatively high concentrations of Afrikaner residents. The combined population of the proposed areas amounted to approximately 1.175 million people, of whom 60 percent were Afrikaners (Volkstaatraad, 1995).

Recognising that these regions could not accommodate the entire Afrikaner population, the Council further proposed the creation of seven autonomous regions distributed across South Africa. These included areas in the southern Free State, the Bosveld, the northern and southern Drakensberg, and three regions in the south-western Cape (Volkstaatraad, 1995:37–46).

At the time of the report’s publication, the Council concluded that the Northern Cape could not yet be designated as a Volkstaat region, as its viability depended on future Afrikaner migration patterns (Volkstaatraad, 1995:47–48). Subsequent reports revealed increasing disagreement within the Council regarding both territorial boundaries and the practical implications of establishing a Volkstaat. The second report, published in 1996, compiled evidence from Afrikaners across sectors such as agriculture, finance, and politics, demonstrating the divergent needs and expectations within Afrikaner society (Volkstaat Council, 1996).

These internal divisions underscored the disruptive consequences that territorial self-determination would entail. In 1998, Minister of Constitutional Development Valli Moosa acknowledged that Afrikaner efforts to develop a cultural homeland within the constitutional framework constituted a legitimate pursuit. Wingard, however, argued that the ANC had deceived Afrikaners with “empty promises” of self-determination and that the Council’s recommendations were never meaningfully pursued by government (Storobin, 2005).

Wingard further contended that the Volkstaat Council lacked broad grassroots support, as many Afrikaners were either unaware of its existence or disengaged from its proceedings (Van Rensburg, 2005). The dissolution of the Council marked the end of the last formal, state-sanctioned attempt to realise a territorial Afrikaner Volkstaat.

2.2 Post-Council Initiatives and the Volksraad Verkiesings Kommissie

Nearly a decade after the dissolution of the Volkstaat Council, a new initiative emerged in the form of the Volksraad Verkiesings Kommissie (VVK), established in 2010. The Commission aimed to organise an independent election for a Boer People’s Assembly capable of representing Afrikaners in negotiations for self-determination.

The VVK grounded its legitimacy in international human rights discourse, referencing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms that all peoples have the right to self-determination and to pursue their economic, social, and cultural development freely (United Nations, 2007). The Commission also invoked Section 235 of the South African Constitution, which recognises the right of cultural and linguistic communities to pursue self-determination within a constitutional framework.

In promotional materials and online videos, the VVK presented a historical narrative centred on the “Boere Afrikaner” and framed Afrikaner history as a continuous struggle for freedom dating back to early colonial settlement. Paul Kruger, a leading figure within the Commission, argued that multi-ethnic states were

inherently ungovernable and that different “volke” possessed fundamentally different needs. He emphasised the necessity of Afrikaner unity, irrespective of internal political or cultural differences.

The VVK distinguished sharply between Afrikaners who supported the establishment of a Volkstaat and those who accepted continued governance under the ANC. The Commission rejected fixed territorial boundaries at the outset, arguing that identification and organisation of the Afrikaner people should precede territorial claims (Labuschagne, 2011). By mid-2011, estimates suggested that between 20,000 and 30,000 Afrikaners had registered in anticipation of the proposed election (Jacaranda FM, 2011).

Despite support from groups such as the Afrikaner Front and the Herstigte Nasionale Party, critics argued that the VVK represented a continuation of fragmented and marginalised nationalist initiatives. Christi van der Westhuizen contended that the long-term shift among Afrikaners toward individualised identities made large-scale territorial secession increasingly implausible, as most Afrikaners were unwilling to relinquish the social and economic benefits of post-apartheid South Africa (Van der Westhuizen, 2007).

Chapter 3

Political Actors and Afrikaner Self-Determination

3. Introduction

While the failure of the Volkstaat Council marked the end of a formal, state-sanctioned attempt to establish a territorial Afrikaner homeland, it did not signal the disappearance of Afrikaner nationalist politics. Instead, Afrikaner self-determination continued to be pursued through political parties and extra-parliamentary organisations that articulated divergent interpretations of identity, autonomy, and resistance. This chapter examines two prominent actors within this landscape: the Freedom Front Plus (FF Plus) and the Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB). Together, they illustrate the ideological spectrum within Afrikaner nationalism in the post-apartheid era.

3.1 The Freedom Front Plus

The Freedom Front was established in March 1994 as a political vehicle through which Afrikaners could pursue self-determination within South Africa’s emerging constitutional framework. Led by General Constand Viljoen, the party represented a strategic departure from militant resistance and electoral boycotts, opting instead for parliamentary participation as a means of securing Afrikaner interests (Giliomee, 2003).

The party’s formation followed intense negotiations between Viljoen and Nelson Mandela, resulting in assurances that the possibility of Afrikaner self-determination would be recognised within the new constitutional order. This recognition was later reflected in Section 235 of the South African Constitution, which affirms the right of cultural and linguistic communities to pursue self-determination within a territorial entity or in other appropriate ways (South African Constitution, 1996).

Ideologically, the Freedom Front Plus positioned itself as a pragmatic nationalist party. While committed to the preservation of Afrikaner culture, language, and historical identity, it rejected racial exclusivity and violence as viable political strategies. Instead, it advocated decentralisation, minority rights, and community-based autonomy within a unitary South African state (Labuschagne, 1999).

Electoral performance reflected the party's limited but consistent support base. Although never approaching majority status, the Freedom Front Plus secured parliamentary representation in every national election since 1994. This sustained presence enabled the party to function as an institutionalised representative of Afrikaner grievances, particularly regarding language rights, affirmative action, and cultural marginalisation.

Despite its constitutional orientation, the party's commitment to a territorial Volkstaat remained ambiguous. While early rhetoric strongly supported the ideal, later discourse increasingly framed self-determination in cultural and administrative rather than strictly territorial terms. This shift reflected both demographic realities and the declining feasibility of large-scale secession (Ramutsindela, 2004).

3.2 The Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB)

In contrast to the parliamentary strategy of the Freedom Front Plus, the Afrikaner Resistance Movement (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, AWB) represented a radically oppositional approach to post-apartheid South Africa. Founded in 1973 by Eugène Terre'Blanche, the AWB rejected negotiation, constitutional compromise, and integration outright, instead advocating revolutionary resistance and the restoration of Afrikaner sovereignty through force if necessary (Van der Westhuizen, 2007).

The AWB's ideology was rooted in racial exclusivity, militant nationalism, and a romanticised vision of Afrikaner history. Drawing heavily on the symbolism of the Boer republics, the movement framed apartheid's demise as a betrayal of divine and historical mandate. Its paramilitary structure, uniforms, and iconography reinforced a politics of confrontation rather than accommodation.

During the early 1990s, the AWB engaged in several high-profile acts of violence aimed at disrupting the negotiation process. These actions culminated in the organisation's intervention in Bophuthatswana in 1994, an event that significantly undermined the movement's credibility and public support. The incident exposed both the strategic incoherence and limited mass appeal of militant Afrikaner nationalism (Giliomee, 2003).

Following the transition to democracy, the AWB became increasingly marginalised. Internal divisions, leadership controversies, and sustained state surveillance weakened the organisation's operational capacity. Although the movement continued to articulate the Volkstaat ideal, its refusal to engage with constitutional mechanisms isolated it from broader Afrikaner society.

3.3 Divergent Nationalist Strategies

The contrasting approaches of the Freedom Front Plus and the AWB illustrate the fragmentation of Afrikaner nationalism in the post-apartheid period. While both organisations articulated claims to self-determination, they differed fundamentally in their interpretations of legitimacy, strategy, and political engagement.

The Freedom Front Plus sought to adapt Afrikaner nationalism to a pluralistic constitutional order, reframing self-determination as compatible with democratic participation and minority rights. The AWB, by contrast, rejected this order entirely, interpreting compromise as surrender and constitutionalism as illegitimate.

These divergent strategies reflected broader shifts within Afrikaner society. Increasing urbanisation, economic integration, and generational change reduced support for militant separatism, while pragmatic engagement offered limited but tangible avenues for cultural preservation. As a result, the Volkstaat ideal persisted more as a symbolic reference point than as a realistic political project.

3.4 From Political Mobilisation to Cultural Persistence

By the early 2000s, it had become increasingly clear that Afrikaner self-determination could no longer be pursued primarily through conventional political mobilisation. The decline of mass-based nationalist organisations and the waning appeal of territorial secession forced Afrikaner movements to reconsider the meaning of autonomy and identity.

This shift laid the groundwork for the emergence of alternative forms of self-determination, particularly within cultural and virtual spaces. While political actors continued to articulate nationalist rhetoric, the centre of gravity increasingly moved away from party politics toward community-based and networked forms of engagement. These developments form the focus of the next chapter.

4. Introduction

While political negotiations and party-based mobilisation failed to secure a territorially defined Afrikaner Volkstaat, attempts at self-determination did not disappear entirely. Instead, they were reconfigured on a smaller scale through the establishment of Afrikaner-controlled settlements. Orania and Kleinfontein represent the most prominent material manifestations of this shift. These communities embody an alternative strategy in which self-determination is pursued through localized autonomy rather than national or regional secession.

This chapter examines Orania and Kleinfontein as case studies of post-apartheid Afrikaner self-determination. It explores their ideological foundations, governance structures, economic models, and symbolic significance, while also considering their limitations and internal contradictions.

4.1 Orania

Orania is situated in the Northern Cape and was founded in 1991 following the purchase of a former irrigation town by the Orania Beweging. From its inception, Orania was conceived as a practical experiment in Afrikaner self-reliance rather than as a fully sovereign state. Its founders argued that political autonomy could only be achieved if Afrikaners first demonstrated economic independence, social cohesion, and cultural discipline (Pienaar, 2007).

Central to Orania's ideological framework is the principle of *self-arbeid* (self-labour). Residents are required to perform all forms of labour themselves, rejecting the use of non-Afrikaner labour as both an ethical and political stance. This principle is intended to reverse the historical dependence of Afrikaners on black labour and to cultivate a sense of dignity, responsibility, and communal equality (Pienaar, 2007).

Governance in Orania operates through a combination of private ownership and communal administration. Residency is regulated through a screening process designed to ensure ideological compatibility. While this system has allowed Orania to maintain a high degree of internal cohesion, it has also attracted criticism for exclusionary practices and a lack of transparency (Van der Westhuizen, 2007).

Economically, Orania functions through small-scale agriculture, local enterprises, and service provision. The introduction of the Ora, a local currency, was intended to stimulate internal economic circulation and reinforce economic independence. Although the Ora operates primarily as a symbolic tool, it underscores Orania's broader objective of reducing reliance on external systems (Pienaar, 2007).

Despite its ideological ambitions, Orania remains demographically limited. Its population growth has been modest, and its economic sustainability depends in part on external markets and state infrastructure. As such, Orania represents a partial realization of Afrikaner self-determination rather than a comprehensive alternative to integration within South Africa.

4.2 Kleinfontein

Kleinfontein is located near Pretoria and was established in the early 1990s as another attempt to create an Afrikaner-controlled living space. Unlike Orania, which emphasises economic self-sufficiency and labour reform, Kleinfontein places greater emphasis on cultural preservation and symbolic continuity with Afrikaner history.

The settlement's governance structure reflects this orientation. Kleinfontein operates under a homeowners' association model, with decision-making authority concentrated among property owners. Cultural rituals, historical commemorations, and Afrikaner symbols play a central role in communal life, reinforcing a shared identity rooted in memory and tradition (Van der Westhuizen, 2007).

Kleinfontein has often been described as a "living museum" of Afrikaner nationalism. Architectural styles, public monuments, and social practices are deliberately curated to evoke the imagery of the Boer republics. While this contributes to a strong sense of belonging among residents, it also limits the settlement's adaptability and appeal to younger generations.

Economically, Kleinfontein is less self-contained than Orania. Many residents commute to nearby urban centres for employment, rendering the settlement dependent on broader metropolitan infrastructure. This reliance complicates claims of autonomy and underscores the symbolic rather than structural nature of Kleinfontein's self-determination project.

4.3 Comparing Orania and Kleinfontein

Although Orania and Kleinfontein share a commitment to Afrikaner self-determination, they differ significantly in strategy and emphasis. Orania prioritises economic independence and labour reform as prerequisites for autonomy, while Kleinfontein foregrounds cultural continuity and symbolic separation.

Both settlements face similar structural limitations. Their small populations, economic dependence on external systems, and legal subordination to the South African state restrict their capacity to function as viable territorial alternatives. Furthermore, both communities struggle to reconcile ideological purity with demographic sustainability, particularly in attracting younger Afrikaners who are increasingly integrated into urban and global networks.

Nevertheless, these settlements hold significant symbolic value. They function as tangible expressions of Afrikaner dissatisfaction with post-apartheid transformation and as sites where alternative futures can be imagined, however constrained their realization may be.

4.4 From Territorial Ambition to Symbolic Autonomy

The emergence of Orania and Kleinfontein reflects a broader shift within Afrikaner self-determination from large-scale territorial ambition to localized, symbolic autonomy. These communities represent an adaptation to political realities rather than a rejection of the Volkstaat ideal. By scaling down the project of self-determination, their founders sought to preserve elements of autonomy within a hostile or indifferent national context.

At the same time, the limitations of these settlements underscore the diminishing viability of territorially bounded solutions. Their continued existence depends not only on internal cohesion but also on external tolerance and integration. As such, they foreshadow the transition explored in the next chapter: the movement of Afrikaner self-determination from physical space to virtual and networked environments.

Chapter 5

From Territory to Network: Afrikaner Self-Determination in Cyberspace

5. Introduction

By the late 2000s, it had become increasingly evident that the pursuit of a territorially defined Afrikaner Volkstaat had lost both political momentum and popular support. While material initiatives such as Orania and Kleinfontein continued to exist, they remained marginal in scale and limited in transformative capacity. At the same time, Afrikaner identity did not dissolve into the broader South African polity. Instead, it underwent a process of reconfiguration, increasingly articulated within virtual spaces enabled by digital communication technologies.

This chapter argues that Afrikaner self-determination has not disappeared but has shifted from territorial and institutional forms toward networked and symbolic expressions. Drawing on Manuel Castells' theory of the Network Society, the chapter examines how Afrikaners have used cyberspace to articulate identity, construct community, and pursue autonomy outside the constraints of physical territory.

5.1 Cyberspace as a New Arena for Identity Formation

The emergence of the internet created unprecedented opportunities for individuals and groups to interact beyond geographical boundaries. In the context of Afrikaner self-determination, cyberspace offered a space where identity could be negotiated, reaffirmed, and mobilised without reliance on territorial sovereignty. Castells argues that networks constitute the dominant social morphology of the Information Age, restructuring power relations and enabling new forms of collective action (Castells, 2000).

Within this framework, cyberspace functions as a site of both continuity and transformation. Afrikaner historical narratives, symbols, and grievances are reproduced online, yet they are also reinterpreted through the logic of digital communication. Websites, forums, blogs, and social networking platforms allow users to participate in debates about language, culture, and political marginalisation, often in ways that are more accessible and immediate than traditional political structures.

These virtual spaces reduce barriers to participation. Individuals who might be geographically isolated or politically disengaged can nonetheless contribute to collective discourse. As a result, Afrikaner identity becomes less dependent on shared physical space and more reliant on shared symbolic references and communicative practices.

5.2 Online Communities and the Reimagining of the Volkstaat

Online Afrikaner communities frequently revisit the concept of the Volkstaat, though often in altered form. Rather than advocating large-scale secession, many digital discussions frame the Volkstaat as a cultural ideal or historical aspiration rather than a concrete political project. In this sense, the Volkstaat becomes a metaphor for autonomy, dignity, and self-preservation rather than a strictly territorial demand.

Castells' concept of the "space of flows" is particularly useful in understanding this shift. Social relations within online Afrikaner communities are organised through networks of communication rather than through shared location (Castells, 2000). This allows for the emergence of a dispersed yet interconnected community that transcends national and regional boundaries.

Online forums and social networking groups dedicated to Afrikaner issues often emphasise language rights, cultural education, and historical memory. These discussions reflect a move away from secessionist politics toward identity maintenance and cultural resilience. The persistence of Volkstaat rhetoric within these spaces does not necessarily signal renewed territorial ambition, but rather serves as a symbolic anchor within a rapidly changing social environment.

5.3 Identity, Memory, and Belonging in the Network Society

The Network Society facilitates new forms of belonging that are not anchored in physical proximity. Georgiou argues that digital communication enables communities to maintain cohesion through ongoing interaction, even in the absence of shared territory (Georgiou, 2010). For Afrikaners, this has allowed the

preservation of collective memory and identity in the face of demographic dispersion and political marginalisation.

Online platforms function as repositories of memory, where historical narratives are curated, contested, and transmitted. Commemorations of events such as the Anglo-Boer War, the Great Trek, and the end of apartheid are frequently revisited in digital form. These narratives reinforce a sense of shared past while also allowing for reinterpretation and debate.

At the same time, the interactive nature of digital media introduces fragmentation. Unlike traditional nationalist movements, online Afrikaner communities are characterised by ideological diversity and internal disagreement. This plurality reflects broader trends within Afrikaner society, where identity is increasingly individualised and negotiated rather than imposed.

5.4 Limits and Contradictions of Virtual Self-Determination

While cyberspace offers new opportunities for Afrikaner self-determination, it also imposes significant limitations. Virtual communities lack the coercive power and institutional capacity of territorial states. Online mobilisation rarely translates into coordinated political action, and digital engagement can foster symbolic participation without substantive outcomes.

Moreover, online spaces are susceptible to fragmentation and echo chambers. Algorithms and self-selection often reinforce existing beliefs, limiting exposure to alternative perspectives. As a result, digital communities may intensify feelings of grievance without providing viable pathways for resolution.

Despite these limitations, virtual self-determination should not be dismissed as politically irrelevant. Rather, it represents an adaptive response to structural constraints. In the absence of territorial sovereignty, Afrikaners have increasingly invested in symbolic, cultural, and communicative forms of autonomy that are compatible with the realities of the Network Society.

5.5 From Volkstaat to Networked Identity

The transition from territorial ambition to networked identity marks a fundamental transformation in Afrikaner self-determination. Whereas earlier movements sought to secure autonomy through land, borders, and political institutions, contemporary expressions prioritise connectivity, narrative control, and cultural continuity.

This shift does not imply the abandonment of historical aspirations, but rather their reinterpretation within new social conditions. The Volkstaat, once imagined as a physical homeland, now persists primarily as a symbolic reference point within a broader networked discourse.

In this sense, Afrikaner self-determination has become less about separation and more about self-definition. The Network Society provides the infrastructure through which this redefinition occurs, enabling Afrikaners to negotiate identity in a globalised, digitally mediated world.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine Afrikaner self-determination in the period following the collapse of apartheid, with particular attention to how this pursuit evolved in response to political transition, failed territorial ambitions, and the emergence of the Network Society. By tracing developments from the Volkstaat negotiations of the early 1990s to the proliferation of online Afrikaner communities in the late 2000s, the study has demonstrated that Afrikaner self-determination did not disappear with the demise of apartheid, but was fundamentally transformed.

The early post-apartheid period was characterised by a strong emphasis on territorial solutions. Afrikaner political actors sought to secure autonomy through the creation of a Volkstaat, grounded in historical narratives of independence and collective identity. The failure of these initiatives, particularly the inability of the Volkstaat Council to generate political consensus or practical implementation, marked a decisive turning point. Subsequent political efforts, including those of the Freedom Front Plus and later initiatives such as the Volksraad Verkiesings Kommissie, reflected both continuity and fragmentation within Afrikaner nationalist thought. While self-determination remained a central theme, its territorial feasibility steadily diminished.

Material settlements such as Orania and Kleinfontein represented attempts to salvage the ideal of autonomy on a reduced scale. These communities provided tangible expressions of Afrikaner self-determination, yet their limited demographic reach, economic dependence, and legal subordination constrained their broader political significance. Rather than constituting viable alternatives to national integration, they functioned primarily as symbolic spaces where identity and memory could be preserved.

The most significant transformation identified in this dissertation is the shift from territorial to networked forms of self-determination. Drawing on Castells' theory of the Network Society, the study has shown how digital platforms enabled Afrikaners to articulate identity, construct community, and pursue autonomy beyond the constraints of physical space. Cyberspace emerged as a new arena in which historical narratives, cultural practices, and political grievances could be reproduced and renegotiated.

This transition reflects broader structural changes in contemporary society. As traditional forms of collective organisation weakened, identity increasingly became individualised and mediated through networks rather than institutions. Online Afrikaner communities illustrate this shift clearly. While they retain references to the Volkstaat and other nationalist symbols, these concepts are frequently reinterpreted as cultural or symbolic ideals rather than concrete political objectives. In this sense, self-determination has become less about sovereignty over territory and more about control over meaning, memory, and belonging.

At the same time, the limitations of virtual self-determination must be acknowledged. Networked communities lack the institutional capacity of territorial states and are prone to fragmentation and symbolic politics. Nevertheless, their significance lies not in their ability to replace traditional political structures, but in their role as adaptive responses to structural constraint. They demonstrate how identity-based movements can persist and evolve even when their original political objectives become unattainable.

Ultimately, this dissertation argues that Afrikaner self-determination has undergone a process of reconfiguration rather than decline. The Volkstaat, once envisioned as a physical homeland, now survives primarily as a symbolic reference within a dispersed, networked community. This transformation does not signal the end of Afrikaner identity, but rather its adaptation to the conditions of a globalised, digitally mediated world. In the Network Society, self-determination is no longer bound to borders. It is negotiated through communication, culture, and collective imagination.

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