Twitter Thread by Robyn Porteous



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“In context of media reporting, farmer killings are the most reported type of murder in SA. Research by minority white-rights org. AfriForum found more than 70% of farm murders were reported in the press - compare this to femicide, where less than 20% of murders ever appeared.”

“Farm murders are an extremely controversial topic. Partly because, for an extended period, SAPS stopped providing official data on farm attacks & farmer killings - which opened floodgates for false information, speculation & rumours of a government conspiracy against farmers.”

“There is also ongoing debate as to what does or does not qualify as a ‘farm attack’, who qualifies as a ‘farmer’, and how many ‘farms’ should or shouldn’t be included in such data.”

“But, related to the above, it is also because the victims of such attacks are often white (this should not come as a surprise, given that, even as of late 2917, 72% of privately owned agricultural land in SA was held by white owners)...”

“As a result, farm attacks have increasingly become framed as race crimes, or ‘hate crimes’ against whites.” - pg 171 - 171, ‘Femicide in South Africa’

“...farm attacks & farm killings are a genuine & significant crime, & a problem that needs urgent intervention & solutions - but solutions & interventions based on fact, not prejudice (& include everyone on farms & small-holdings, not only white farmers & their families).”

“Farm killings should be treated with the same swift condemnation & decisive justice that all other murders in this book demand. But that’s also the problem because our police & justice system aren’t just failing farm attack victims, they’re failing all of us, almost uniformly.”

“... the idea that there are ‘exceptional’ killings is not true. Every year, without fail, there are not just a few but literally hundreds of cases of murder that are shocking in their violence and in their gratuitousness.”

“To somehow imagine or claim that it is worse for some people but not for others shows the most callous sort of indifference; and this is also why the narrative for farm murders has become such a fraught space...”

“... because it persistently attempts to humanise white farmers through dehumanising black victims - by simply ignoring them, by pretending they don’t exist, by saying that black victims are not a white problem because violence is just ‘their culture’...”

“... as if 400 years of white colonisation of Southern Africa wasn’t literally built on murder and violence.” - pg 173, ‘Femicide in South Africa

“Research from the past two decades has consistently shown that farm killings are, in the overwhelming majority, criminally motivated & not hate crimes (like, for eg, the killings of black lesbian & transgender women, which are hate crimes), nor are they politically motivated -“

“ - although political, social and economic instability may indeed drive violent crimes, including an increase in violence against vulnerable people such as the elderly.”

“The absolutely grim reality is that, in many instances, criminals appear to commit extreme acts of violence against victims simply because they can... Having said that... it is quite frankly impossible to ‘rationalise’ the ways violence is meted out against people.” - pg 174

“It’s easy to see how these kinds of murders would revoke outrage, and anger. And rightly so. But when this becomes loaded with emotion and rhetoric, we also sometimes miss the bigger picture. Sometimes, this has been obscured.”

“... this is particularly true with farm attacks, not just because they represent white victims but also because farms and farmers themselves represent something much bigger in the narrative and history of white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.”

“In Afrikaner history, farmers were the pioneers who settled the land (&, in another narrative, they were the ones who stole the land) - & not just any land, but, for the boers, God-given land. Land to which the farmers had, & still have, a deep-rooted connection.” - pg 175

“The current white-right narrative likes to position farm killings as something far more recent - either from the mid-1980s... to the early 1990s.”

“These more recent narratives centre around the supposedly self-evident political motives for black violence against white farmers,... (taken up by Hofmeyr and his friends) and that democracy was in itself bad for white people.”

“Except... press records clearly indicate that farm attacks and farm killings were already a problem by the late 1970s... Which, not coincidentally, was where we were starting to see other flare-ups of violence (such as witch killings), & at a similar period in time.” - pg 176

“In many stories, it was mentioned or alluded to that several of those attacks were suspected to be linked to terrorists... even when the local police spokesperson would comment that they believed a particular farm attack to be a case of regular armed robbery...”

“... the newspapers (and readers’ letters) would often imply that there was a more sinister force behind the violence. This was complicated by a number of actual politically motivated attacks on farms & farmers.” - pg 177

“... a consistent flaw with arguments & allegations of right-wing lobby groups, the inability to see black people at all (except as threats) has meant an almost crippling blindspot in their ability to contextualise or analyse farms attacks in any way except a race-based one.”

“This isn’t just betrayed by racist behaviour & language (& nostalgia for the old SA flag or a time when 80% of the country had no rights), it also displays a persistent rejection of data, which at some point can’t be seen as ignorance & must perhaps be regarded as malice.”

“A SAPS docket analysis from 2015/16 showed that 47% of farm murder victims that year were black and 42% were white. To claim farm killings as a whites-only tragedy is bizarre and quite plainly untrue.” - pg 178

“This brings me to a crucial point, which is we have to be able to say 47 deaths (SAP’s figure for farm killings in 2017/18) is too much; & also be able to acknowledge that killing of 47 people in one year is a tiny drop in the ocean of violence in which all of SA is swimming.”