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Whiter shade of pale

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A village in South Africa has banned non-white residents in an attempt to escape the escalating crime wave that is engulfing the country.

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The village of Orania, in the middle of the Karoo desert, is a self-proclaimed Afrikaner homeland and follows the practices of strict racial segregation that were familiar under apartheid. Many in South Africa see the village as an anachronism and some politicians have openly mocked the residents' claim that the Afrikaner population is a dying breed that can only be preserved by retreating to a reservation. In fact over 60% of South Africa's 6 million whites are of Afrikaner descent.

The locals, however, remain unabashed, and claim that the racial restrictions are simply measures to protect against crime. Pieter Grobelaar, the village's tourism manager, says that gun violence in the cities has driven local people to take these drastic measures. "I am sick of it and I don't want to be paying high insurance premiums for the rest of my life", he says. He points out that since the end of apartheid in 1992, 1,500 white farmers have been murdered, arguing "we cannot stem the tide but we are determined to preserve our language and culture."

The village is now the centre of a huge political row, a problem not helped by the media which regularly provokes conflict by bussing in black people from outlying towns and villages. Although black people are technically able to shop in the village, the locals are not particularly welcoming. Indeed, when the black mayor of a neighbouring village came to visit recently, a farmer driving a tractor chased him out of the village.

Even a visit from Nelson Mandela has failed to reduce tensions and there are now worries that white supremacist terrorists are finding shelter in the village. The situation looks to be getting worse and the pleas of the locals that they are merely fleeing the crime epidemic are starting to wear thin, especially in the shadow of a statue dedicated to Hendrik Verwoerd, the original architect of apartheid, which overlooks the town.

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