



Identity, Culture & Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue. Volume 10, Number 1, July 2009. pp. 30 - 50. © CODESRIA, ICES. 2006. ISSN 0851-2914

## An Anthropological Perspective on Afrikaner Narrative and Myths

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### Abstract

*Selon Webb-Mitchell (1995 : 219), homme est né avec la « capacité et le désir d'exprimer et recevoir des histoires ». Une des actions humaines les plus fondamentales dans l'existence de l'homme est de dire, interpréter, et raconter de nouveau l'interprétation dans les mots, volontairement, sous forme d'histoires. C'est un éternel, se développer en spirales et un processus socialement construit. Le « récit est crucial dans la vie humaine d'arrangement pour tous que nous soyons, et tous ce que nous faisons, et tout ce que nous pensons et la sensation est basé sur des histoires ; toutes les deux nos histoires personnelles et histoires de notre communauté significative » (1995:215 de Webb-Mitchell). Slabbert (1999 : 49-51) déclarer qu'une identité officielle d'Afrikaner a existé jusqu'à 1990, qui était principalement dû à un récit principal a construit autour de l'adhésion d'église, de l'engagement à la puissance politique et de l'adhésion au parti, comme l'attachement aux organismes culturels tels que le lien de Broeder. En résumé on peut affirmer que l'Afrikaner a perdu son récit principal en vue de l'identité d'Afrikaner, et qu'un certain nombre d'approches à l'identité d'Afrikaner sont suivies chez l'Afrikaner se range. Comme indiqué, la désintégration du récit de maître d'Afrikaner a pour mener à la promotion de la question si les récits alternatifs et plus petits d'Afrikaner se sont développés, comme exposé par Lyotard (1984 : 3-16). De la littérature elle semble que la réponse est « oui ».*

Slabbert (1999:49-51) states that an official Afrikaner identity<sup>1</sup> existed up to 1990, which was mainly due to a master narrative constructed around church membership, commitment to political power and party membership, as well as dedication to cultural organizations such as the

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Broeder Bond. According to Vosloo (“Die Burger” 28 January 2005:12) and Roodt (<http://www.praag.org/menings17072005.html> - 2005/07/14:4 of 13) after 1994, the loss of this official identity marginalised and toppled the Afrikaner into an existence crisis. In regard to this, it must be pointed out that the Afrikaners’ emotional and intellectual bonds with the Afrikaans culture, churches, politics and Afrikaner language is changing, even narrowing, and that they are striving increasingly toward a new, cosmopolitan identity and way of life.

Other commentators, such as Du Preez, do not hold the same point of view (Du Preez 2005b:15). Du Preez is of the opinion that *“Afrikaans is experiencing a blossoming period in regard to rock music and publishing, and more Afrikaans books, newspapers and magazines have been released in the past two decades than in any other native language in Africa”*.

Even though commentators differ over what the influence the post-apartheid system had on the Afrikaner, and still has, it is a fact that the extensive political and social transformation in South Africa since 1994 has caught most Afrikaners off balance. Afrikaners clearly were not prepared for the changes, with the result that after 12 years they urgently need to reflect on their values, common purpose, identity, role and place in the new South Africa. On the one hand, Afrikaner core groups are now more likely to initiate overt activities (as observed on certain university campuses not long ago), and are also more prone to openly defending their language and Afrikaner identity. There is an inclination among the core Afrikaner youth to move towards international norms, practices, preferences and attitudes for career opportunities and wider exposure. The argument is more or less as follows: Due to the fact that there are less public organizations with an explicit Afrikaans character, identity and calling left, and because Afrikaners are being offered more positioning choices in regard to identity, language and culture, Afrikaner culture and identity is starting to lose its traditional meaning.

In summary it can be stated that the Afrikaner<sup>2</sup> has lost his master narrative in regard to Afrikaner identity, and that a number of approaches to Afrikaner identity are being followed within Afrikaner ranks. As indicated, the disintegration of the Afrikaner master narrative has led to promotion of the question whether alternative, smaller Afrikaner narratives have developed, as exposed by Lyotard (1984:3-16). From the literature it seems the answer is “Yes”. Two specific goals of this article includes exploring Afrikaner narratives further, as well as the opinions and categorization that have been fashioned in regard to about the Afrikaner.

## VALUES AS NARRATIVE

According to Webb-Mitchell (1995:219), man is born with the “*ability and desire to express and receive stories*”. One of the most basic human actions in the existence of man is to tell, interpret, and retell the interpretation in words, willingly, in the form of stories. This is an unending, spiralling and socially constructed process. “*Narrative is crucial in understanding human life for all that we are, and all that we do, and all that we think and feel is based upon stories; both of our personal stories and the stories of our significant community*” (Webb-Mitchell 1995:215). Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995:6) are convinced that humans of all times and culture used narrative as a basic method to organise their experiences and give meaning to their lives. They use the metaphor of “*the person as a motivated storyteller*” in this regard. Hearne (1984:33) explains “*story*” as “*just something we tell ... the way things happen and the way we grasp them in some kind of pattern.*” Sarbin (1986:9) describes this as “*a way of organizing episodes, action and accounts of action in time and space*”.

From the literature concerning narrative it is clear, in the first place, that it always is about the retelling. There is no once-off telling - Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995:111) refer to “*essentially unfinished stories*”. In this regard, Müller (1996:30) maintains that the telling of a story can only be renewing and constructive, if the future account and the preceding account are in congruence. According to Müller (1998:9) the theme: “*telling a past, dreaming a future*” is the whole description of human existence, in other words the link between past, present and future. The larger the gap between the “*telling*” and the “*dreaming*” becomes, the higher the strain and the bigger the possibility of pathological behaviour (Müller 1998:9). On the other hand, where there is harmony between yesterday, today and tomorrow, integrity, well-being and maturity is found (Mead 1978:17-18). Thus, an intense seeking of values lies at the core of narrative - that which is seen as meaningful. When applied to the present article, it means there will be a focus on Afrikaner narrative in order to expose Afrikaner values and ideals. There is no interest in entertainment or information values in such narrative.

A second aspect of narrative that must be emphasised, is that the evoking tale - which becomes a personal account that is told, told again and retold, nuanced differently, internalised, experienced, has transformational powers (Bruner 1986:25 and Combs 1996:88). In different places, times and under different circumstances, certain people, affairs, or things made such an impression on an individual, that he/she thought it important enough to make it part of his/her personal chronicle. This core legend of a person is of utmost

importance – especially where the self is seen as an organizing process of values.

Thirdly, myths or the mythical plays an essential role in narrative. Campbell (1972:8) argues that myths illustrate man's search for truth, meaning and sense through the centuries. Malan (1978:39) agrees that myths are man's way of explaining the significance, relationship, aims, ancestry and the conclusion of the cosmos through simple tales. An important aspect of myths is that there is an "evasive core" to each myth that cannot be explained rationally (Conradie 1964:10). This "beyond-reason" aspect of myths is one of the critical factors that must be taken into account when values and identity are explored by way of narrative. A myth may be purely fictional in nature, but the power behind is an irrefutable reality that, for example, may change the course of history. The point is that a myth needn't necessarily be about what the truth is, or what we know, but is about what we believe or accept as the truth. The fundamental aspect of a myth is thus not the truth thereof. Even if it is not possible to prove the contents empirically, people accept myths because they do not dare question them, because it affects the significance of their existence.

Central to the discourse on myths is man's belief in the very authenticity of those myths he/she grew up with. Though myths can alter with time, be adjusted, or under certain circumstances become obsolete and disappear, the de-mything or even re-mything of myths does not take place in one generation. Campbell (1972:8) states that myth formation through socializing and shared historical veracity takes place over a relative long period of time in the collective subconscious of a group, before being acknowledged as the truth and internalised by the group. Thus myths are not created overnight, which is why an artificially created legend never attains the "truth-quality" of a true myth.

## 2. MYTHS AS PART OF THE AFRIKANER NARRATIVE

In my opinion it is impossible to speak about Afrikaner narrative without drawing on the issue of creating myths. When concentrating on myths, it does not matter whether the specific myth is true or not – or which myths are true and which are false – but rather what the impact of that myth is on the culture, identity and narrative of the Afrikaner. Further more, this article does not examine the relatively superficial present-day myth building that makes life interesting and pleasing for some people (e.g. the Cheetah rugby jersey, McDonald's-advert-boards, and the more than life-sized advertisements for favourite types of beer). The significance of the myths, which this article pays attention to, lies deeper than those of bobotie, beer and boerewors. This point of departure, as elucidated by a quote from Adam Small (*Nuwe Verse*

1994:12), is that the “*essentials*’ of the things” and the “*memories*” linger and in long last are reduced to a “story” – and within this discourse then to a myth. Myths that will be examined include:

- The creation myths of the Afrikaner, as well as myths in regard his/her heroes. In other words, myths aimed at instigating self-respect and a feeling of self-worth. These myths are or will be passed on as bedtime stories or lullabies by grandparents in children’s rooms or around campfires (every Afrikaner’s grandfather was a hero during the Anglo-Boer war!)
- Radical myths, especially those in regard to political myth building, which are aimed at de-mything the other group’s myths, or even demonising them. (To most Afrikaners, the Zulu king Dingaan was an arch villain and criminal).
- The myth concerning the “liberation” of Afrikaans, from the albatross around its neck, which was proclaimed post 1994.
- The myth of the rainbow nation – with English as the language of national unity – which directly contradicts one of the myths concerning Afrikaans, which is addressed in this article and for which people in some cases literally, and in other cases metaphorically, were willing to die.

In the discussion of the myths around Afrikaans, factual events will be examined anecdotally and through example. Facts are often the “fabric” from which myths are fed and grow. The myth regarding the Afrikaner nation, for example, developed and grew over a long period of time, but gained momentum and grew to mythical dimensions as result of the traumatic events of the Anglo-Boer war. The myth of Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor had a long expansion in the colonial history of South Africa, but in actuality gained real impetus after events such as Sharpeville (1960) and Soweto (1976), and especially due to the death of Hector Peterson on 16 June 1976.

The aim of working by example is to show that myth building around Afrikaans as language took place from different angles; and secondly, to expand on the impact of the specific myth as part of the “story of Afrikaners”.

The point of focus of this discourse will however, not be the events themselves, but the commencement and impact of the exact myth. The aim of this is to illustrate the degree to which myths regarding Afrikaans and the Afrikaner culture explain and illuminate their origins to individuals and groups. Because

of the legion of other myths which developed simultaneously to the main myth, it is not possible to investigate, or even list, all the myths and mythical figures which constitute part of the "story of Afrikaners" (due to the extent thereof).

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFRIKANER

Writers are often quick to consider the development and progression of the Afrikaner as a single, drastic quantum leap. For example, Giliomee (1999:14) suggests that the 1707 statement of Hendrik Biebouw, "*Ik ben een Africaander*", must be seen as an expression of an identity- or existential choice. Degenaar (1987:233) disagrees that the development of Afrikaner nationalism can be projected onto the history of seventeenth century Afrikaner. Van Jaarsveld (1980:222) and Steyn (1980:135) agree that national consciousness only evolved since 1877. Van Jaarsveld (1980:222) calls the annexation of the Transvaal and the First World War "electric shocks" that "coursed through the heart of all Afrikaners", and allowed a "mindset" to develop in which the "Afrikaner nation was placed centrally, as a spiritual unit".

Van der Merwe (1975:67) takes the Afrikaner history back to 6 April 1652, when the first whites from Europe landed in South Africa. He maintains that the first free burghers who settled in the Cape in 1654 were the introduction of the Afrikaner nation. The move of resigning from the "*Vereenighde Oost-Indische Compagnie*" (VOC) and settling on South African soil was the first (perhaps unconscious) step in the direction of accepting South Africa as fatherland. Before the end of the seventeenth century some of the free burghers were already indicating that they were not planning on leaving the country again (Van der Merwe 1975:67).

Very soon the free burghers realised that their concerns differed from that of the administration (the *Kompanjie*). They clashed with the authority sporadically. Initially, the clashes were mainly about economics, but gradually the burghers realised that political action was required to protect their concerns. The activities of the Cape Patriots (1779) demonstrated a high level of political sophistication and had a measurably wider impact (Van Jaarsveld 1980:218). By this time the VOC was already an aged and ineffectual company, with a crumbling Cape administration. The uprisings in Graaff-Reinet and Swellendam (1795) were symptoms of a growing feeling among the burghers that their welfare was no longer to be found in the Cape administration, which was administered from far away. They would rather see to their own concerns. The isolated and independent life of the border farmers contributed to this feeling of self-resourcefulness.

Under British rule a new element of discontent with the administration entered, especially after the advent of the British Settlers in 1820. The policy of Anglicisation now threatened not only economic welfare, but also the general culture, especially in regard to language and religion.

*Giliomee (1999:13-20) argues that during this period there were signs of a growing consciousness of communal interest, which differed from that of the administration, and therefore an own identity. Furthermore, there was an impression that this personal identity was being threatened on a multitude of levels; a need to preserve this identity; and a sense that identity could only be preserved by shaping their own destiny. A sense of self-realization and a striving for self-preservation thus developed, and resolved into a need for self-dispensation.*

Van der Merwe (1975:69) maintains that the level of self-dispensation reached from 1838 to 1910 was incomplete and of short duration. Britain maintained a powerful presence in the Cape, and from early on placed legal and *de facto* restrictions on the independence of the Boer republics in the interior. The republics had to refer to Britain as regards to internal matters, which was incompatible with self-determination. By the end of the nineteenth century the dream of self-determination was irrevocably and finally shattered (Van der Merwe 1975:69). With this, a new threat against the Afrikaner emerged: a renewed policy of Anglicisation by the government and (for the Afrikaner) a too-liberal strategy in regard to racial affairs.

Before and during the Second War of Independence the term “Afrikaner” had no nuanced significance, probably because it was used in alternative to the word “Boer”, by which was meant a “*Hollandsch sprekende kolonist van Zuid-Afrika, inzonderheid die van de Transvaal and de Oranje-Vrystaat*” (Van Dale 1915, *Handwoordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*).

The use of the word “Boer” during the Second War of Independence, especially in newsprint, is familiar by far. Furthermore, the word “Afrikaner” does not appear in the 1895 edition of the comprehensive standard dictionary of the Dutch Language (WNT). From 1915 it features in Van Dale, where an Afrikaner was defined as: “*in Zuid-Afrika geboren blanke van Europeeschen oorsprong*”. For Naudé and others (1969:98), the word “Afrikaner” “*in opposition to the broader designation ‘South African’*”, means “*indicative of the white population of South Africa who are descendants from the first colonists. This means Dutch from Calvinistic families, as well as Huguenots, Germans, and later especially the Scots, who intermarried with the Dutch – people whose language mainly developed from Dutch and who accepted the spiritual inheritance of Calvin as their own*”. In this study the

Afrikaner is shortly defined as a white group with an own culture and identity.

Even though it is not possible to associate the birth of the Afrikaner with a single moment or event in history, authors do distinguish various significant factors in this regard. The main factor is probably the significant impact that religious principles had on the builders of the Afrikaner nation. In 1652, the Dutch settlers to the southern tip of Africa brought their own religious dogma with them, namely the Heidelberg Catechism, the Confessio Belgica and the Canon of Dordt – known as the Three Formularies of Accord, to guide their thinking and behaviour in their new-found fatherland.

*During the synod in Dordrecht in 1618/1619, the National Synod of the Reformed Churches of the United Netherlands laid down these explicit rules for the religious life and faith of all the Protestant-Reformed devout in the Netherlands. The synod in Dordrecht was primarily about choice. Those who believed as prescribed by the church in the Formularies were sure of their eternal selection by God – a selection that was irrevocable, as described in the Formularies. God's choice could never be recalled or declared invalid. Whoever did not believe as prescribed, was doomed to eternal judgement by the God of the Reformers – which was also binding. Thus, whoever was not selected was doomed to hell. They did not stand any chance of a blessed eternal life (Albertyn and others 1947:38-40 and Akenson 1992:104-110).*

With this belief and certainty of their Godly predestination, the *first Dutch immigrants* settled themselves on African soil (Elphrick & Giliomee 1988:27-31). As the chosen of God, they were certain that God had accompanied them, and that they were in this far-off land because God wanted it so (Albertyn e.a. 1947:57-59). This was the binding foundation of the first Europeans who settled themselves as Reformed Protestants in the Cape, and this remained the foundation on which their descendants, the Afrikaners, would build their destiny in the far-off southerly land. According to this perception, the Colonists (and later the Afrikaners) were placed in South Africa to maintain justice and bring the light of the Gospel and civilisation to Africa.

Professor F.J.M. Potgieter, previously Dean of the Faculty of Theology in the Seminary of Stellenbosch, summed up the impact of the Synod of Dordrecht on the settlement of the Afrikaner as follows: *"It must be considered that the settlement at the Cape took place only decades after the famous Synod of Dordrecht. At that Synod it had been decided that a new translation of the Bible must be undertaken. This was published in 1637, and on the 6 April 1652 the flagships, the 'Drommedaris', 'Reyger' and 'De Goede Hoop' sailed into Table*

*Bay with this edition board. The Dutch Authorised Edition ('Statebybel') is without a doubt the most precious possession of the Afrikaner nation. From inception, it was the guide for the life and doctrine of our ancestors. It shaped them: the child had to read from it and be spiritually fed; adults accepted the authority without question. So inextricably is the nation's founding, its being and existence interwoven with the Word of God, that the soul of the nation and nature of Afrikanership can never be calculated without it" (Naudé and others 1969:98).*

Taking the abovementioned into account, Van Jaarsveld (1981:47-48) and Du Preez (2005a:2) argue that the conscious and subconscious knowledge that the Afrikaner was placed in Africa by God runs like a golden thread through the founding and developmental process of the Afrikaner. Reformational Protestantism can indeed be known to ground the cultural configuration of the Afrikaner.

The awareness of a historical vocation and the reconstruction of Afrikaner history is a second, central factor in regard to ethnogenesis which can be distinguished in the Afrikaner. Especially Marais (1980:12) is an outspoken exponent in this regard. The meaning of the history, in regard to ethnogenesis, can be illustrated in different ways. Cattell (2001:14-15), for example, focuses on the mythical role of national heroes, while Van der Merwe (1975:66-72) concentrates on central themes. To him, the struggle for self-determination is the golden thread, which weaves through the Afrikaner's history. He differentiates the following four time periods in the Afrikaner history:

- (i) 1652 to 1838, where the premise of self-preservation becomes evident in a struggle for self-determination;
- (ii) 1838 tot 1910, where the premise of self-preservation becomes obvious as an understanding of the necessity of national unity;
- (iii) 1910 tot 1961, where national unity as a requirement of self-preservation was mostly achieved; and
- (iv) a period starting around 1961, where it concerned the preservation of national unity.

According to Van der Merwe (1975:69) at the end of the second period (1838-1910) the Afrikaner found himself in a radically changing world. Self-preservation through self-determination was a bygone dream – the Afrikaner had to share the same constituency with other nations who were not participants to his unique national interests. Through circumstances, a new weapon for self-preservation was placed in his hands, however. After unification, the Afrikaner was in the majority according to the

“democratically” organised political unity (because it was confined to the white population of the country). This majority placed the grasp of political power and self-preservation within the reach of the Afrikaner. A new potential struggle was thus born: national unity. Because only through accord could the Afrikaner achieve power.

Van der Merwe (1975:70-71) maintains that the start of the third period was characterised by everything but unity. There was no consensus among leaders as to the need or benefit of sequestering political power by the Afrikaner as an exclusive group. Prime Minister Louis Botha saw the advantage for the Afrikaner in conciliation with the English speaking population and the overpowering authority of Britain, and the construction of a new South African nation. General Jan Smuts saw progressive benefit in the amalgamation of the Afrikaner nation into the greater unity of the British Empire – thus relinquishing own identity. General J.B.M. Hertzog, supported by former president M.T. Steyn, saw a threat to the Afrikaner identity and concerns in Botha’s reconciliation policy (Van der Merwe 1975:71). Especially the English-speaking fraction of the white population was in a strong economic and cultural position. Hertzog believed that conciliation would mean capitulation by the Afrikaner. For him the opinions of Smuts and Botha had the same end result – disappearance of the Afrikaner.

The apparent initial unity in the Afrikaner ranks started to crumble by December 1912, during the break between Botha and Hertzog. Of political determination for the sake of self-preservation there was little chance before and immediately after 1912.

The events after 1912 (the Rebellion of 1914, die South West Campaign, the strikes of 1912 to 1922) alienated more Afrikaners from Smuts, and encouraged them to Hertzog’s point of view. During the elections of 1924, Hertzog took over the government in coalition with the Labour Party (LP) of Creswell. From 1924 tot 1929 the Afrikaners played a dominant political role, but they had to make important concessions to their Labour partners. From 1929 to 1933 Hertzog held an all-out majority, but decided to carry on in the spirit of the coalition.

Van der Merwe (1975:72) maintains that from 1934 to 1939 (and up to 1948) the government cannot be seen as an Afrikaner administration, because a significant portion of Afrikaners distanced themselves from it, and the government included a major portion of the English speaking population. There was no indication of Afrikaner unity in politics.

As did the First World War, the Second World War increased the separation within the Afrikaner ranks. Some Afrikaners enlisted in the armed

forces, others joined the 'Ossewa-Brandwag', while others distanced themselves from both. General Hertzog left the United Party (UP) to join Malan in the United National Party (UNP). Between Hertzog and Malan there were deep-cutting divergences however, and soon Hertzog resigned from politics.

According to Van der Merwe (1975:71), by 1947 an important group of Afrikaners saw the Smuts government as a threat to their self-preservation, partly because many Afrikaners associated Smuts with the English speaking population and the vision of the British Empire, as well as Smuts' "let-it-be" policy in regard to "non-whites". The Afrikaners' language was marginalized in the cities and in government, and it was felt that the Smuts' government paid no consideration to language equality. Afrikaans was losing track against a far more culture-compelling English. This was largely attributed to government actions. The Afrikaners felt threatened on all sides.

The realisation slowly dawned that Afrikaners' primary national concerns would not be maintained if they did not have the political power to ensure this themselves (Van der Merwe 1975:72). They also picked the bitter fruits of earlier division during and after the war years. The writing was on the wall, especially in regard to language rights and the relationship with "non-whites". This gave rise to an agreement in 1947 between Malan and Havenga, which led to an election victory in 1948 for the parties in which Afrikaners were predominant. The 1948 victory was unexpected and from all sides the belief was expressed that Malan's government would not last long – probably no longer than one term. Even though the Afrikaner's majority in the House of Assembly was very small (it was based on a minority of votes at the poll), the Malan cabinet of 1948 was the first that was totally represented by Afrikaners (Van der Merwe 1975:72).

In 1951 the UP and the LP merged to form the former National Party (NP). The NP gradually began to gain ground, and up to 1966 won each subsequent election under different prime ministers, managed to gain more votes at the ballot-box and enlarge their majority in the House of Assembly. Only in 1961, after 13 years of rule, the NP could announce an outright majority (even if small) at the poll for the first time. Due to the overwhelming support the NP collected out of Afrikaner ranks in 1961, Van der Merwe (1975:72) argues that the ideal of gaining political power to ensure self-preservation was achieved.

After achievement of the republican ideal in 1961, the Afrikaner politics entered a new time frame. Constitutional ideals were attained. The Afrikaner was in a strong political position. Afrikaans as language achieved higher levels of acceptance than ever before, and was firmly entrenched in public

service. From 1961 the Afrikaner felt strong enough to afford stretching out a hand of cooperation to non-Afrikaners (Van der Merwe 1975:72). This time, contrary to 1910, 1924 or 1933, the NP did not place its basic character as an Afrikaans party on the line. Up to 1980 it had gained little active support from members of other groups due to the primary Afrikaans character.

In summary, Van der Merwe (1975:73) states that it can be argued that through their developmental history, the Afrikaners realised that their survival could only be assured as long as they retained political control of the country. Van der Merwe claims that Afrikaner political control was dependent upon national unity until 1994.

Racial concern was the third factor that played a role in the foundation and development of the Afrikaner. Although Degenaar (1987:233) states that it would be incorrect to project the development of the Afrikaner purely on the history of the seventeenth century Afrikaner, it would also not be acceptable to disregard the facts, events and declarations of that time. In this regard Dalcanton (1973:305-306), Rhoodie (1969:6-26) and Tatz (1962:1-3) emphasize that the initial foundation of the (Cape) Afrikaner was not about settlement of an independent political system (read culture), but rather racial questions. This was a complex issue in the eighteenth century Cape. Even so, Degenaar (1984:52) is of the opinion that one of the margin characteristics of the Afrikaners is their descendancy. He expresses it as follows: *"These cultural, ethnic and religious differences which coincided with social, political and economic distinctions came to be seen in dominantly racial terms in the popular mind; the racial factor being the most visible and easily conceptualised index of group differentiation."*

Various statements confirm that the Afrikaner was/is racially aware. For example, Swart (1981:77) states unequivocally: *"Afrikanership meant white."* Jooste (1997a:61 and 1997b:102) and Marais (1980:166) confirm that the Afrikaner was concerned with biological heritage and appearance, as well as mutual relationship. Thus inbreeding and assimilation (culturally or biological) was rejected (Coertze 1983:52 and Marais 1980:124-130). The unsavoury debate about whether the so-called Coloureds are part of the Afrikaner or not, is evidence of the severity with which the Afrikaner saw the racial question (according to Coertze 1982:138, Botha 1938:1 and Sparks 1990:424).

From the preceding information it can firstly be deduced that representatives from different European nations were marshalled, and that the Afrikaners, with their own culture and identity developed from this combination. The role and environment (the southern tip of Africa), as well as a definite historical context were of particular importance, and played a significant role in the

ethnogenesis of the Afrikaner. Secondly it must be noted that it cannot be assumed without question that higher cultural considerations, including language, was the only or most significant factor in regard to the ethnogenesis of the Afrikaner. The inclination to distinguish “us” from “them” on the ground of negative racial considerations is a factor that was present from the beginning, and has left a mark on the values, culture and identity of the Afrikaner.

### **AFRIKANER NARRATIVE AND MYTHS IN THE PRE-1994 ERA**

In connection to Van der Merwe’s (1975) typing of the Afrikaner history as a striving for self-preservation, it is understandable that themes such as national unity and political control over a region would feature prominently in Afrikaner narratives. For example, Van Wyk (1994:305) emphasises that Afrikaner narrative contains characteristic epic material, especially in regard to the scattering and large-scale migration to the South African interior, battles with indigenous peoples, the commandos, strong leadership figures, as well as the perception of the protection and intervention of God. The continual narrative interpretation and reiteration of this past – in the form of political rhetoric and literature – did not only sharpen the Afrikaner’s historical awareness, but also the strengthened the bond of the nation to the national place of origin (Cattell 2001:13). In connection to the narrative integration of the present with the past, the adoption of history in the present in the form of national symbols, e.g. the erection of monuments and rituals, of which the most important according to Moodie (1975:20-21), was the celebration of the Day of the Covenant, lead to a general dedication of the Afrikaner past. Pienaar (1964:235) maintains that the sentiments that were conjured up by the continuity of the mythical origin of the nation come to the forefront in statements such as that of D.F. Malan in 1937. Malan described the Afrikaner history as the “greatest artwork of the century” and “a miracle”.

### **AFRIKANER NARRATIVE AND MYTHS IN THE POST –1994 ERA**

According to André P. Brink (in Van Zyl 2000:117), during the last decade there was a near obsessive fixation with the past in the Afrikaans literature. He says that the story of the Afrikaner is repeatedly re-examined and re-told. Where there used to be a large measure of analogy around the shared tale (e.g. the path that “we” travelled up to now, with a Jan van Riebeeck, Free Burghers, the Great Trek, Boer Republics, Boer War and the Rebellion), this has come under pressure and are there progressively more Afrikaners who do not feel that this saga is “our story” any longer.

Professor Nico Smith's (<http://www.litnet.co.za> - 2005/11/25:1 of 23) interpretation of the Afrikaner's origin legend is an example of a new type of Afrikaner narratology. For the obvious reasons, not all Afrikaners agree with his version. The point, however, is that for various reasons, progressively more Afrikaners may start to accept it – and thus award it the status of truth.

Smith (<http://www.litnet.co.za> - 2005/11/25:2 van 23) is of the opinion that the Afrikaners' ancestors made themselves at home on the African soil without an invitation, no negotiations with whoever had birth-right on the region, and thus without permission. To him, they were squatters in the true sense of the word, and they would have remained such if they had kept to the original goal of why they came here. Their lords, of who there were seventeen in the Netherlands, and with that their LORD, of who there was Three, sent them to settle a refreshment post (a Hamburger Hut, as Casper de Vries called it) here at the southern tip of Africa, and at the same time, to expand the kingdom of their LORD. Under the leadership of their "chief-induna", Jan van Riebeeck, they came squatting here to accumulate profit for their lords and their LORD, in order to enrich the motherland, Nederland, and to subjugate the "wild" and "brutal" people in Africa to their LORD.

Smith explains that the first whites (the ancestors of the Afrikaners) initially lived in informal settlements and then immediately started to build a fort – an indication that their stay would be permanent. He continues: *"... that the first permanent structure which was built was a fort, was an indication that they felt threatened because they knew that they had committed an illegality and they had to defend themselves against those against which they had misbehaved – the legal inhabitants of the land. They therefore knew well that their squatting was not acceptable to the original owners of the land and had to defend their uninvited presence. And when the legal owners had been driven off the farm or tamed, the fort became a castle in which the kings (or in African terms: indunas) of the squatters could reside. And kings (indunas) want to create subjects and rule. That is why a simple refreshment station was soon no longer sufficient. The refreshment post had to be extended. So Van Riebeeck gave permission for some of the squatters to start occupying farms. From squatting status the squatters progressed to a new status – that of farm occupancy"* (<http://www.litnet.co.za> - 2005/11/25:3 of 23).

Smith refers to the settling of the whites at the Cape in 1652 as die start of the squatting. He says: *"The humble start in 1652, as Giliomee calls the commencement of the squatting, progressed after only five years of squatting in the refreshment post, to brutal farm occupancy. The nine squatters to who Van Riebeeck gave the right to go and occupy farms in 1657, were rightly called free burghers, 'free' farmers – free to work out an own living on their gratis acquired property. Ten years later there were 35 free farmers and another 20*

years later, 260. At the start of the eighteenth century there were 2 000 free farm occupiers and at the end of the eighteenth century 25 000. When the farm occupancy eventually came to an end, 87% of the land belonged to the free farmers and only 13% to the original owners of South Africa. Indeed a freedom in squatting that knew no bounds. There were also no bounds to their crusade to invade and occupy, because 'God's goodness' towards them, as they saw it and sang in one of their church hymns, knew no bounds. When bounds were justly placed on the free farmers, they simply packed up and moved – northwards. *Dat vrije volk zijn wij!* They wanted to be free and accepted no Property Limited. They wanted to be a free company, which could privately and limitlessly work out a living of their own choice and contemplation..."

*"But in the end history caught up with the Afrikaners and their appointment to reign was withdrawn. What an irony. God placed the Afrikaners in Africa to reign, appointed them to maintain right and order, and Christianise the wild and rude people, and when they had done all this, and built up the land with offerings of blood and goods, God took the reign away from them and gave the land back to the wild and rude people from whom they had taken it."* According to Smith, history is indeed a cruel judge who rightly decides the destiny of nations and people in the end. Or rather, history only fulfils the judgement, which people construct for themselves.

Previously it was indicated that identification contains an element of self-ascribing, as well as ascribing by "others". Applied to this study, it means that the narrative of other culture groups regarding their experiences, opinions and perceptions of the Afrikaners are important if the Afrikaner wants to understand their own identity. It is only when the Afrikaners take note of the narrative that they can make a sensible re-evaluation of their own value-evaluation and identity. The story of Tiro is a narrative that tells how the "others" experienced the Afrikaner in the apartheid era:

**"5 Februarie 1974 ...**

daar was 'n swart man sy naam was Tiro  
 (en Tiro lê in sy eie bloed)  
 wou mos geleerdheid gaan haal by 'n 'universiteit'  
 (en Tiro lê in sy eie bloed)  
 waar hy hardegat getrek het om sy opvoeding tóe te pás  
 (en Tiro lê in sy eie bloed)  
 toe voor hy nog verban kon word tot die staat van leefdoories  
 het hy sy geboortegrond se stof afgeskud  
 vir 'n dorp met die naam Gaborone in 'n land  
 met die naam van Botswana in die woestyn  
 met oral vlammetjies van 'n stryd-om-vryheid  
 wat sy woorde laat ontbrand het ...

*en die baas moes toon dat 'n windgat kaffer  
 sy plek moet ken, of so nié ...  
 en die baas het vir Tiro 'n slim boek gepos  
 en Tiro lê in sy eie bloed  
 en Tiro lê in sy eie bloed  
 en Tiro is die binnevlam binne die rooi  
 ('boeke is bomme, vir my dooie broer, Abraham')*  
 (Breytenbach 1981:19)

[Free translation for the sake of this study:

**“5 February 1974 ...**

*there was a black man his name was Tiro  
 (and Tiro lies in his own blood)  
 wanted to get a learning from a 'university'  
 (and Tiro lies in his own blood)  
 where he took a hard line to apply his learning  
 (and Tiro lies in his own blood)  
 then before he could even be banned to the status of living-death  
 he shook off the dust of his fatherland  
 for a town with the name Gaborone in a land  
 with the name Botswana in the desert  
 with flames of a struggle-for-freedom all around  
 that caught his words on fire ...  
 and the boss had to show that a windbag kaffir  
 must know his place, or else ....  
 and the boss posted a clever book to Tiro  
 and Tiro lies in his own blood  
 and Tiro lies in his own blood  
 and Tiro is the inner flame inside the scarlet  
 ('books are bombs, for my dead brother, Abraham')*  
 (Breytenbach 1981:19)]

In a sense, the narrative of Tiro can be seen as “lesser history”, because it never gained as much attention in the “official” (white) historical account as that of Steve Biko, for example, or because the full saga of his life and death was unknown or even suppressed. Figures such as Abraham Tiro count among the many black people who died under questionable conditions during the hegemony of the apartheid government, whose names were never made known or forgotten in time. Sometimes such lesser history and narrative is utilised in fictional format: Tiro, as (among others) Ephraim Tiro in Jeanette Ferreira’s (1985:64) *Citation of a revolution*. In Breytenbach’s poem, the fictionalising process is forestalled, not only by the date at the top and the footnote below the verse, but also by the compound method of storytelling.

From the preceding information it is clear that standard, traditional narrative can no longer be accepted as the only adequate narrative of the Afrikaner. Among Afrikaners, the need has arisen to re-shape their narrative, as well as to take note of the narrative of other countrymen about them.

## CONCLUSION

The Afrikaners are undergoing since 1994 extensive changes in culture, values, identity, and narrative. This is mainly due to the change in the environment in which the Afrikaners find themselves, namely the so-called “new” South Africa, which has greatly changed since the scheduled date, and is still doing so. In the anthropology (and more precisely cultural ecology) it is accepted that culture is the result of adaptation to a definite environment. If the contemporary Afrikaner wants to be anthropologically understood, attention will have to be given to the context in which the Afrikaner exists and functions, namely the “new” South Africa, and what influence this has (had) on the Afrikaner.

A second comment is that the process of adaptation, re-examination and redefining of the Afrikaner is in full swing. It has not yet been completed, thus no final answers can be given about the outcome. The fact that the Afrikaner is caught in a fluid situation leads to uncertainty, which is reflected in the multitude of dialogues that rage within Afrikaner ranks. Given these realities, it is understandable that the former Afrikaner narratives have become obsolete, and that an urgent need has arisen for new narratives for the Afrikaner in a post-apartheid South Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the problems in constructing definitions, especially in a post modernistic context, it was decided that the departure point of this article would be that the Afrikaner is a white group with an own culture. Afrikaners are probably one of the most recent examples of ethnogenesis. Representatives of different nations from Europe were unified in a defined context, in a definite locality, and developed an own identity. The role of the locality (the southern most tip of Africa), is of special importance and has contributed specifically to the Afrikaner identity.

<sup>2</sup> In this article the male form has been applied consistently, although the meaning is inclusive, and not genderistic (Mouton 2003:131).

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