

## White Afrikaners' search for new identities

### Summary

Theoretical points of view that are useful in gaining an understanding of and explaining identity are identified, and the following themes are developed: The Afrikaner was responsible for apartheid. On the other hand, Afrikaner identity is largely defined, determined and influenced by this same creation. Given this ambivalence, it was decided, first, to typify the conceptual framework of apartheid, and, secondly, to list the characteristics of Afrikaner identity within the apartheid framework. Thirdly, attention is devoted to the current debate on Afrikaner identity and the identity markers that are highlighted.

### Wit Afrikaners se soeke na nuwe identiteite

Teoretiese standpunte wat belangrik is vir die verstaan en verduideliking van identiteit word geïdentifiseer, waarna die volgende aangeleenthede beredeneer word. Die Afrikaner was verantwoordelik vir apartheid. Aan die ander kant het hierdie maatskappij Afrikaneridentiteit tot 'n groot mate bepaal, beïnvloed en gedefinieer. Om dié ambivalensie te verduidelik, is besluit om eerstens die konseptuele raamwerk van apartheid te ontleed en, tweedens, die kenmerke van Afrikaneridentiteit binne die apartheidstraamwerk te lys. Derdens word identiteitsmerkers uitgewys wat in die huidige debat oor Afrikaneridentiteit uitgekristalliseer het.

Authors such as Bekker (1993: 5), Bravman (1998), Darnell (1994: 7) and Peoples & Bailey (2000: 306-7) emphasise the current renewed interest in identity. Kuper (1994: 537) attributes this interest to post-modernism and its supposition that there are no fixed frames of reference in respect of identity. Identity may at best be considered subjective, a fluid (not absolute) thought- and/or language-related construct revealed in narratives<sup>1</sup> but finding no manifestation beyond the human spirit in societal reality (cf Strauss 1999: 13; Martin 1995: 7). Supporting this point of view, Dominguez (1994: 333), Peoples & Bailey (2000: 307, 310), Wolf (1994: 7) and Martin (1995: 5) accept that identity has nothing to do with homogeneity, is certainly not the same at all times (in a world of continuously changing historical events, any constant cultural and structural principles are imponderables),<sup>2</sup> and is fundamentally a construction of human representational ability. It is an idea

- 1 According to Martin (1995: 7), who follows Ricoeur (1990), narrative represents one of the most comprehensive mediums of expression because it draws on both history and fiction. Though the person as character in the narrative cannot be separated from his life experience, the narrative provides for the re-organisation of the events which form the foundation for the person's experiences. For this reason, it is eventually the nature of the narrative that assigns identity to the character. Given this interpretation, identity narratives are simultaneously fictional and real, because this leaves scope for variation with regard to the past and the future; identity is open, assigning meaning to customs and behaviours; and it is intended for the "self" as well as the "other". What is conveyed by the narrative (although its contents assign prominence to individual experiences, identifications and social relations) does not merely derive from the messages that a language user expresses or writes. It is based on and derived from the re-interpretation of collective systems which represent a variety of cognitive and behavioural patterns and are related to models of culture. Insofar as an individual belongs to a group, an identity narrative embodies the story of groups and individuals, and for this reason, group as well as individual identity may be analysed on this basis.
- 2 Colonialism and capitalism constructed and assigned meaning to structures, identities and boundaries, with specific political, economic and social consequences. However, these established colonial differences and ways of thinking about ourselves have been challenged in a post-colonial, post-modern world and changed fundamentally. Thus we are not able to pin down images about ourselves and our identities, what they look like, or the terms on which they were created.

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characterised by a plurality of “voices”; it represents individuals' decision to construct themselves in ways that emphasise difference, derived from their cultural and historical knowledge; it is emphasised differentially in various situations and points of contact, and it provides varying feedback about the ways in which people understand who they are, while its meaning is contingent upon the number of people who share that idea.

In contrast to the above-mentioned point of view, there are conventional and more familiar primordial, instrumental and oppositional approaches to and explanations of identity.<sup>3</sup> To my mind, these three approaches may be grouped together because, to a greater or lesser extent, they acknowledge the existence of constancy in cultural and structural principles, without which identity is not possible and means nothing.

Two broad points of view on understanding and explaining identity may thus be identified. In this study, the former perspective is supported and taken into consideration in the presentation of the data. In the discussion that follows, the focus is on Afrikaner identity.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, the Afrikaner was responsible for one of the most notorious products of social engineering in Africa, namely apartheid. On the other hand, Afrikaner identity is largely defined, determined and influenced by this same creation. Given this ambivalence, it was decided, first, to typify the conceptual framework of apartheid and secondly, to list the characteristics of Afrikaner identity within the apartheid framework. Thirdly, attention is paid to the process of identification that has become a struggle for the Afrikaner.

3 Cf Barth 1969, De Beer 1998, Cohen 1974, Glazer 1975, Geertz 1963, Kottak 2000: 114, Lambert 1979: 186, Theodorson & Theodorson 1969, Sarkar 1995: 70, Sharp 1988: 79, Tumin 1964 and Webster 1991: 248.

4 Coertze (1983: 77) regards Sunday, 6 February 1707 (when Hendrik Bibouw reportedly exclaimed: “k ben een Afrikaner!” [I am an Afrikaner!]) as the day and date on which the construct “Afrikaner” was founded. Van Jaarsveld (1959: 177) refers to the period between 1868-1881 as the period during which Afrikaners began to view themselves as a nation. The view of authors such as Degenaar (1987), Du Toit & Giliomee (1983: xxv-xxx) and Giliomee & Adam (1981), namely, that a single, dramatic “quantum leap” in the development of the Afrikaner cannot be distinguished, seems to be a more acceptable view.

In dealing with the aforementioned aims, the “Afrikaner” is not defined (rather, definitions created by those who define themselves as Afrikaners are used), and issues such as the means of representation and analysis of identity are not considered (cf Erasmus 2000 for details), while no definitive statement is made about the importance (or otherwise) of identity to human groups.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. The conceptual framework of apartheid

The following underlying and distinctive dimensions of apartheid may be identified.

Firstly, it may be mentioned that in the frame of reference of apartheid culture, ethnicity and race were the unquestioned values. Culture was seen as the organic product of a group of people (*ethnos*/tribe/nation) and the unique representation of their identity. This late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German Romanticist point of view was supported by Afrikaner ideologues (cf Kuper 1994: 539, Wolf 1994: 5 and Thornton 1988: 20) and meant in practice that it was accepted that humanity is divided into various ethnic groupings; that each ethnic group (*ethnos*) possesses its own particular culture; that members of a culture share the same classification of reality; that culture shapes individuals' perceptions of reality in powerful ways; and that culture reflects the social relationships, obtaining among individuals (cf Coertze 1966: 4-11; 1971: 105-15; 1972: 126-42; Malan 1990: 1-2). The implications of this presupposed close convergence between man and culture, for the purposes of identity, are the following: what makes people act differently is culture; culture encompasses specific institutional modes of creating and transferring identity, and the values in terms of which identity develops, as well as the processes of identity-building and conformation, are established through culture.<sup>6</sup>

5 In assessing the meaning of identity, it is often pointed out that estimates show that between 3000 and 5000 ethnic nationalities across the world inhabit approximately 200 independent states (Peoples & Bailey 2000: 329) and that the desire for political autonomy in poly-ethnic states is a powerful and worldwide phenomenon (Haviland 2000: 803).

6 Applied to the Afrikaner, it implies that the existence of a clear, separate, unique Afrikaner culture was accepted (see the outlines by Degenaar 1987 and

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The fact that culture, ethnicity and race were core constructs of apartheid meant in practice that whites commanded centre-stage and anyone different, *i.e.* non-whites, was the marginalised “other”. Indeed, they were excluded, ignored, repressed and exiled to the physical margins of the Bantustans/reserves/homelands. For more than five decades, attempts were made to define Afrikaner identity in isolation. Since “difference” is required to assign meaning to the “self”,<sup>7</sup> the aforementioned act resulted in a situation where, to a great extent, the meaning of the “other” was lost in determining the Afrikaner’s identity in the apartheid situation. To have an identity, one must not only be seen as identical, but the “other” must be willing to accept one’s use of that identity. Given this view, the only way to demarcate identity is to contrast it with other identities. For each preconceived “difference”<sup>8</sup> there is a reinforced feeling of shared “self”, which implies that identity cannot be defined in isolation.

Secondly, there was the myth of development — “separate development” was indeed the alternative label for apartheid. According to Ferguson (1990: xiv), people do not hold the same beliefs about the nature of the concept “development” — different people mean different things by “development”. What the fathers of apartheid understood under the construct “development” was encapsulated by the following core premises:

- to eradicate, on the one hand, those cosmological ideas and social values that they believed kept Africans from progressing, so that they could be freed from superstition, irrational behaviour and unfounded beliefs, and could progress to a utopian state of freedom, bliss and progress in their own, independent homelands;

Gilomee & Adam 1981: 99ff. in this regard). For this reason, a multitude of cultural organisations (Afrikanerbond, Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings, Rapportryers, Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging, etc) were founded to develop and protect this culture. This, in turn, led to a situation where the structuring and functioning of the Afrikaner was, for decades, understood primarily in terms of a (generally forced) link between identity and culture.

7 Cf Martin 1995: 6-7, Wolf 1994: 6, Peoples & Bailey 2000: 307, Bates & Rasmussen 1983: 86 and Sharp 1988: 80.

8 As in the case of identity, difference is not a natural construction, but a construct founded on historical and ideological considerations. For this reason, “real” traits cannot be identified.

- to identify, on the other hand, traditional cultural institutions, customs and structures that they believed could be used as a basis for separate development. In this regard, anthropological knowledge was used on a large scale (Afrikaner anthropologists in particular were involved in the process).<sup>9</sup> In this way, an attempt was made to give separate development the appearance of scientific practice, implying that its application could therefore be justified.

There is an important relationship between knowledge and power — emphasised by Foucault in particular — which is also relevant here. Briefly, to Foucault, discourse represents a practice characterised by power relations (Leroke 1996: 231, 237, 239-40). In his empirical studies in prisons and in the field of sexuality, Foucault not only made a direct contribution to social knowledge, but at the same time emphasised that knowledge should be explored in terms of the various discourses/practices which not only establish and structure its parameters but also have a deep-seated and substantive effect on its nature (Agger 1991: 116-7; Ferguson 1990: 18ff).

The knowledge generated in apartheid discourses and practices was not only applied to produce “development” in the Bantustans, but was particularly effective in the promotion of oppressive systems and the establishment of mighty constellations of control — for example the security police and the military machine.<sup>10</sup> Sharpville, Soweto and Boipatong became part of South Africa’s history, while “corrective” institutions were established and maintained with the intention of imprinting in the minds of prisoners (like Steve Biko) the qualities of good apartheid citizenship.

In the third place, there is the issue of apartheid’s *simulacra*. To Baudrillard, *simulacra* are copies, images and simulations of real objects or events which are so close to the original that the original

9 Cf Hammond-Tooke, 1993: 41 & 1995, Sharp 1981, Pauw 1980 and Gluckman 1975.

10 Giliomee & Adam (1981: 20, 77) focus attention on the fact that when Afrikaners became the exclusive ruler of South Africa in 1948, they followed a policy that entrenched their position of power; indeed, they never hesitated to use coercive means when this position came under threat.

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is no longer important (Powell 1998: 41-71). With what Baudrillard calls the “death of the real” the hyperreal takes over, and with hyper-reality the difference between real and simulation disappears.<sup>11</sup>

What Baudrillard states about *simulacra* in general is also valid with regard to apartheid creations: the policy was to divide South Africa into “homelands” and to reinstate the “traditional” role of the chief and tribal authorities.<sup>12</sup> This was based on the assumption that every African belongs to a particular “ethnic group”, and that ethnic groups and identities are immutable, involuntary and culturally homogeneous; moreover, this premise holds that the only way to accommodate such diversity in a political framework is to assign each group a particular geographical territory (Segar 1989: 83).

This coercively constructed reality capitalised and guaranteed all meaning and defined what qualified to be said and done. However, it bears no resemblance to the reality of a “Southern Bantu Cultural Area” of which the essential unity must be emphasised (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 41).<sup>13</sup> In order to rule over the black majority, the apartheid government created its own ethnic mosaic: cultural and ethnic classifications and differentiation were imposed, and these became the “real” — even more real than real — and created their own hyperreality — a representational order that replaced any other kind of reality.

11 The government of the Philippines, for example, relocated a small tribe of Tasaday Indians to their original jungle home in 1971 where, according to government ethnologists, they could live uncorrupted by civilisation. Baudrillard argues that in removing the Tasaday from modern civilisation, ethnology simultaneously ignored the real Tasaday — who want to remain living among TV's and cars. And by doing so, government created a mere model, a *simulacrum* of what an “original” pre-civilised tribe should look like — before the advent of ethnology.

12 This single level of government in the reserves was totalitarian, as the chief and his council were not accountable to their people. Furthermore, the chief owned all land; individual property rights on land did not exist; the chief and his council were in charge of law and order; they handled all welfare issues; they were the only employer; they looked after schools, roads, agriculture, and so on.

13 This artificial, unnaturally constructed “ethnic-cultural reality” of millions of rands did not enjoy the support of the majority of (rural and urban) Black People and was rejected with the first general democratic election (in 1994).

At this juncture, it may be concluded that during its political rule the Afrikaner created, transformed and structured units whose identities were defined primarily in terms of the “self”; culture-specific capacities were strongly embraced and kept intact, while the individual’s freedom of choice in terms of identity was compromised. In large measure, the outcome of apartheid was to the Afrikaner what colonialism was to the colonialist. With reference to the latter, Brown (1997: 40) states that the fact that the “civilised” colonialist guarded against contamination by the “impure barbarian” led not only to the oppression of the “other” in the colony, but also to oppression of the colonialists’ thinking, emotions, bodies, land and labour — in this way, rendering them the victims of their own colonialism.<sup>14</sup> In the next section, we consider the influence of apartheid on the Afrikaner and his identity.

## 2. Characteristics of Afrikaner identity

An “Afrikaner” is generally defined as a white South African, whose mother tongue is Afrikaans. This definition poses various problems<sup>15</sup> and is not generally accepted — hence the genesis of terms such as “New Afrikaner”, “Afrikaans-speaking person” and “users of Afrikaans”, which are presented as alternatives (cf Slabbert 1999: 57-64). As has been indicated above, the act of assigning identity may occur when others assign such an identity or by means of internal, subjective identification by the self. We shall, therefore, be able to consider in this section how this “other” views and defines the Afrikaner. The outlines presented by authors such as O’Meara (1977), Grapanzano (1986), Sharp (1981) and Dalcanton (1973) may be used as examples of the “other’s” view of the Afrikaner. For the purposes of this study, however, it was decided to focus on the Afrikaner’s view and definition of himself. In this particular view, we share Degenaar’s

14 Cf the contributions of Bekker 1993, Bravman 1998, Deacon 1998, Lewis 1990 and Mafeje 1971 in this regard.

15 For a comprehensive outline of the problems involved in defining the Afrikaner, as well as the development of self-awareness in the Afrikaner, the reader is advised to consult authors such as Degenaar (1987), Du Toit & Giliomee (1983: xxv-xxx), and Giliomee & Adam (1981).

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perspective (1987: 231-2) that Afrikaner identity cannot be severed from specific historical events. The apartheid era represents the historical context in which remarks made by Afrikaners about themselves and their identity are presented:

- The ideology posits that Afrikaners and their identity are the direct outcome of God's creative act (Strydom 1982: 59). For this reason, Afrikaners regard themselves as having a divine calling and their existence as justified on the basis of Christian principles.<sup>16</sup> By extension, the importance of the Calvinist/Protestant faith is emphasised as part of Afrikaner identity.<sup>17</sup> The portrayal of the Afrikaner as a unique creation of God provided a justification for the presupposition that the Afrikaner had been endowed with a particular genetic base (Giliomee & Adam 1981: 96).
- Fixed, separate social and cultural structures and boundaries are recognised (Krüger 1984: 58), since identity is manifested in fixed social relations (Jooste 1977b: 102;) which ensure stability and equilibrium (Jooste 1977b: 105; Pont 1991: 45).
- The Afrikaner is aware of being white. Being white implies Afrikanerdom (Swart 1981: 77). Afrikaner identity is therefore tied to biological origins and appearance (Jooste 1977b: 102), "similar biological (racial) origins" (Jooste 1977a: 61) and mutual relations (Jooste 1987: 89).
- Racial mixing (on cultural and biological grounds) is rejected; Afrikaner identity resists assimilation<sup>18</sup> and believes that maintaining a typical national character is justifiable on the basis of Christian principles (Van der Wateren 1980: 5-6).
- The symbolic significance and meaning of "land" (an exclusive territory) is regarded as being of crucial importance to Afrikaner identity (Jooste 1977a: 63, 1987: 89; Pont 1991: 48; Raath 1991: 55-62). For this reason the white agricultural sector expan-

16 Cf Swart 1981: 77, Van den Berg 1983: 17-27, Van der Wateren 1980: 5-6, Van Wyk 1979: 101-5 and Vorster 1976: 33.

17 Jooste 1977a: 63, Krüger 1984: 56, Pont 1991: 46 and Strydom 1982: 58.

18 Coertze 1982: 52, Jooste 1977b: 103, Jooste & Olivier 1980a: 47-9 and 1980b: 75-92.

ded considerably during the apartheid era, bolstered by a complex set of institutional arrangements such as government-funded loans, marketing boards and co-operatives.

- An exclusive, distinguishable culture is a crucial issue (Pont 1991: 46; Strydom 1982: 57-62). Typical characteristics include strict patriarchal authority, large families, strong family ties, and unique language (Swart 1981: 78-9).
- The Afrikaner is conservative, rejects liberalism (Venter 1991: 8-170) and is honest, cautious, frugal and loyal (Swart 1981: 79).

Although Afrikaners do not always act in ways entirely consistent with the premises outlined above, one may say, in a summative sense, that the above-mentioned outline of Afrikaner identity displays strong chauvinistic traits, recognises the primordial factor, and relies heavily on constant cultural and structural principles, racial exclusivity and a commitment to religion.

### 3. New wine in old skins

The loss of political power precipitated a crisis that threatened the Afrikaner's sense of unity and identity. It must be borne in mind that group membership and group identity were determined via statutory means in the apartheid dispensation. Individuals were legally (and automatically) part of a group and their identity and rights were determined and defined in terms of group membership. As a result, individual rights were never defined or protected by a bill of rights. The apartheid parliament was the institution which served as a guarantee for determining and protecting the individual's identity and rights. Hence, under apartheid, the Afrikaner did not have to decide on identity, and did not find it necessary to maintain such an identity.

It seems that the post-apartheid democratic dispensation is not particularly "user-friendly" with regard to identity in general. Bekker (1993: 24-8) presents the following reasons for this situation: it is widely regarded and accepted that identity was mobilised in apartheid discourse; identity was used to legitimise apartheid ideology and this led to a situation where Africans despised the term, and any serious discussion of identity was regarded as politically incorrect,

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with the result that the topic has become almost taboo. Slabbert (1999: 61-2) adds the following reasons: the new government does not have the resources or the infrastructure, within the capacity of the state, to provide assistance in the field of cultural minority rights; the new government is exceptionally sensitive and committed to forging a commonly-held South African patriotism, and there are signs of mobilisation around concepts such as "black" and "African".

This state of affairs (that in the new dispensation, there no longer are apartheid laws creating compulsory group identity; that the principle of voluntary association applies, and that there is sensitivity with regard to the legacies of the past) has been responsible, in large measure, for a debate among Afrikaners (which has gained impetus in recent times) on issues such as an exclusive political territory, the role of cultural organisations, the meaning of language, markers of identity, etc.<sup>19</sup> In the outline below, the emphasis is not on the various points of view<sup>20</sup> — what follows represents an interpretation by an Afrikaans-speaking anthropologist.<sup>21</sup> In discussing the subject of Afrikaner identity, I am engaged in a cultural action rather than in a scientific study. As a participant, I am fully aware of my personal and normative concerns, as well as the existence of different points of view. My point of departure in identifying what is regarded as

19 It is not the first time that such a debate has been unleashed in Afrikaner ranks. Giliomee & Adam (1981: 77ff) point out, for example, that the boundaries of Afrikaner identity have never been irrevocably fixed in its historical development, but have varied continuously, depending on ideological considerations as well as political and social circumstances.

20 For this purpose, consult, among others, *De Kat* 2000-03, *Die Burger* 1999-09-16 & 2000-03-28, *Die Volksblad* 2001-04-11 & 2001-04-16, *Rapport* 2000-04-16 & 2001-04-15, Breytenbach 1999, Du Pisani 1999, Slabbert 1999 and Van Niekerk 1987.

21 It is noticeable that white Afrikaans anthropologists have largely neglected the study of the changes that Afrikaner culture has undergone, or is currently undergoing. This has resulted in a situation where Afrikaans-speaking anthropologists' contributions to the discourses on contemporary issues impacting on Afrikaners are relatively limited. This has left a void in their contributions to the discipline, and has meant that they have not gained a deeper understanding of themselves, with the concomitant result that they could not gain a more profound insight into the other.

important in Afrikaner identity is encapsulated by the question as to what kind of Afrikaner the Afrikaner wants to be in the “new South Africa”. Slabbert (1999: 56) contends in this regard that although the Afrikaner will have to associate with a new set of values, it is not yet clear what these values are or should be. Those who want to be Afrikaners will therefore have to forge and develop such values. In my view, it would seem that the following aspects related to the “new” Afrikaner identity are important and should be taken into consideration.

In the first place, one has to refer to the meaning assigned to culture in relation to identity, which deserves attention. The impression exists that in today’s post-modernist world, Afrikaners continue to assign content and meaning to their language, culture and identity in terms of (redundant) Romanticist orthodoxy. This is simply not possible in a contemporary context, and attempts of this kind are responsible for the confusion prevalent among Afrikaners about who and what they are and how they may distinguish themselves. In a post-modernist, culture-conflated world, an ever-declining number of people can simply be labelled as the “other” on the basis of culture. Thus Martin (1995: 13) states in this regard that “all of us have become cultural hybrids” — a view shared by Geertz (1975: 29). The point made by these authors is that culture does not belong exclusively to a specific group. Even if it were possible for individuals to share the same experiences and environment, this does not mean that these individuals will understand them in the same way, or will have the same memories of them, or the same capacity to report on them with the same (if any) degree of agreement or even accuracy (Thornton 1988: 24; 2000: 35).<sup>22</sup>

22 What is important about the view that culture primarily represents implicit construct systems of meaning and understanding (Martin 1995: 16-17) is that one has to realise that the construct of culture is itself embedded in culture (Thornton 1990: 120). Furthermore, this construct is fundamentally diverse and does not consist of a single image or view, but rather implies that the resultant construct, too, is fundamentally diverse, consisting of multiple images and views. Differences in age, gender, life experience and perspectives, as well as the uncertainties emanating from a state of being uninitiated, secrecy, violence, fraud, and revolution, including those aspects that may be self-defeating and mutually exclusive, structure and filter the cultural “reality” that is presented.

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Although one might refer to cultural boundaries, one has to bear in mind that the markers they presuppose can be changed with ease, and that identity is, therefore, rarely absolute. Depending on the socio-cultural and political-economic situation, for example, the individual may presuppose various identities.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Afrikaners must realise that they are not a permanent, homogeneous group — not as far as their origin and background are concerned, nor in social, political, cultural or genetic terms. There are also significant differences in educational levels, life experiences and perspectives, while various uncertainties and divisions in the group emanate from self-initiated insider worlds (such as the Orania-volkstaat), secrecy (the Afrikanerbond), violence (the AWB, Wit Wolwe), fraud, and so forth. Given this heterogeneity, Slabbert (1999: 56) emphasises the necessity of finding commonalities. However, what is important in such a process is that individuals themselves must decide who and what they are and what is real and important with regard to culture and identity, as well as the fact that decisions in these fields may vary from one particular period to the next.

Secondly, as opposed to the earlier emphasis on Western European heritage, Afrikaners are required to accept the African context. Furthermore, in opposition to the idea of purity, the power of a hybrid culture, which emanates from the Afrikaners' physical and cultural origins, must be acknowledged. To authors such as Breytenbach (1999: x), Slabbert (1999) and Van Niekerk (1987: 1), it is indisputable that Afrikaners (with their European and African legacies) are intimately interwoven with Africa; that Afrikaners have the responsibility and obligation to gain an understanding of their shared history and environment, and that Afrikaners have specific skills and abilities that can only be fully realised in the context of Africa.

The Afrikaners' recognition of Africa will also enable the "other" to gain meaning in Afrikaners' revelation and definition of themselves (which, up to now, has hardly occurred). But then, Afrikaners may not typify the "other" any longer as homogeneous,

23 A white Afrikaner (like the author), for example, may come from both Africa (therefore as an African) and South Africa (thus as a South African), as well as being a European Afrikaner (white), a Free State Afrikaner (a Free Stater), or a Bloemfontein Afrikaner (an inhabitant of Bloemfontein).

lumped together in a collective “they”, nor reduce “he” (John) or “she” (Mieta) to an iconic level. A textually produced abstract “they” is generally encapsulated by the “self” in words in a timeless present. This presupposes that the characteristics and attributes of the “other” are fixed and immutable, as is social cognition, including ethnic and racial views that derive therefrom (Brown 1997: 30-3). If the general perceptions and stereotyping of the “other” are negative, these negatives will therefore be perpetuated.

Thirdly, we may refer to the increasing questioning of the moral and primordial basis assigned to Afrikaner identity, and for this reason the justification for racial considerations which from the start formed the corner-stone on which the development of the Afrikaner and the group’s identity has been based.<sup>24</sup> Associated with this is the observable desire, on the one hand, to liberate the Afrikaans language from the political and ideological connotations and contamination caused by apartheid (Breytenbach 1999: v),<sup>25</sup> and, on the other, the revival of Afrikaans cultural and arts festivals in Oudshoorn, Potchefstroom, Bloemfontein, Upington, Kimberley, Windhoek and London. These events satisfy Afrikaans-speaking people’s desire for a more relaxed cultural environment in which they may live their culture, stripped of its hegemonic status as the popular, mass culture.

Finally, the meaning of nationalism for Afrikaner identity has not yet been clarified. It seems, however, that the ideological meaning of the past (cf Degenaar 1987) is no longer assigned to this identity. It also appears as if it is viewed by highly qualified (and usually more liberal) Afrikaners as having less meaning — these are often the people who decide to emigrate. On the other hand, there is evidence that rural and more conservative Afrikaners still regard nationalism as important — their attitude is “this is my country”.

24 Social and racial relations were complicated matters in the eighteenth-century Cape (Du Toit & Giliomee 1983: 6ff). However, it may be accepted that the meaning of race played an important role in the ethnogenesis of the Afrikaner (cf Dalcanton 1973: 305-6, Degenaar 1987: 245 and Tatz 1962: 1-3).

25 What the place of the Afrikaans language should be alongside other official languages, or what its role should be in tertiary education, the public sector, or the economy has not yet been clarified.

#### 4. Conclusion

We proceeded from the point of view that in a world of incessantly changing historical events and re-interpretations, there can be no constant cultural and structural principles — and for this reason, we cannot refer to fixed frames of reference for Afrikaner identity. Afrikaner identity has been presented as a subjective and permeable construction that finds no meaning outside Afrikaner reality. Thus, the fact that there are no fixed parameters, no clear and definitive answers, or unanimity, not only confirms the point of departure, but also that what has been presented cannot be elevated to the status of the final word. The fact that (many of) the criteria currently used by Afrikaners to identify themselves are often imprecise, mutually contrastive, and even implicit and unarticulated does not constitute a weakness — rather, it reflects the difficulties involved in the process of creating one's own identities. For this reason, in a changing socio-cultural/political context, Afrikaners should proceed with their reflections on and reinterpretation of the “self” and the “other”, and in particular the universal, shared elements of whatever constitutes “our” identity.

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