



Nation building and the 'struggle for Afrikaans' under the new South African 'rainbow'¹

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How can ethnicity be produced? And how can it be produced in such a way that it does not appear as fiction, but as the most natural of origins? History shows us that there are two great competing routes to this: language and race. Most often the two operate together, for only their complementarity makes it possible for the 'people' to be represented as an absolutely autonomous unit. Both express the idea that the national character (which might also be called its soul or its spirit) is immanent in the people. But both offer a means of transcending actual individuals and political relations. They constitute two ways of rooting historical populations in a fact of 'nature' ...

(Balibar, 1991b:96-97).

Abstract

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Although the geographical, technological and economic aspects of the South African nation have a reasonably stable basis, the socio-cultural aspect is not only contested, but has since 1994 led to new movements

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and public debates regarding the recognition of the position of some categories/minorities and their rights in the newly-created democratic dispensation. It would not be correct to assume that all these 'new' movements and voices are of a centrifugal nature and therefore indicative of potentially separatist tendencies. Whereas most of the evolution and history of 'Afrikaans' stemmed from its proponents' opposition to the imposition of English and its imperialist backing, the current debate is about Afrikaans being displaced and relegated to a lowly position by an English-speaking black-majority government. Surveying the nature and context of this public debate on the 'position of Afrikaans' will broaden the understanding of contemporary 'nation building' in South Africa. Again, social scientists could endeavour to comprehend culture 'in the making' as created by some of the 'imaginative' Afrikaans-speaking participants and the implications of this discourse for nation building and competition.

Opsomming

Nasiebou en die 'stryd vir Afrikaans' onder die nuwe Suid-Afrikaanse 'reënboog'

Hoewel die geografiese, tegnologiese en ekonomiese aspekte van die Suid-Afrikaanse nasie 'n redelike stabiele basis het, word die sosio-kulturele aspek nie slegs gekenmerk deur wedywering nie, maar het nuwe bewegings sedert 1994 tot openbare debatte gelei in verband met die erkenning en posisie van sommige kategorieë/minderhede en hulle regte in die nuutgeskepte demokratiese bestel. Dit sou foutief wees om te aanvaar dat al hierdie 'nuwe' bewegings en stemme sentrifugaal van aard is en daarom aanduidings van potensiële separatistiese neigings verteenwoordig. Terwyl die meeste aspekte van die ontstaan en geskiedenis van 'Afrikaans' te danke was aan die voorstanders daarvan se teenstand teen Engelstalige oorheersing en laasgenoemde se imperialistiese rugsteun, handel die huidige debat oor Afrikaans veral oor die vervanging en relegering daarvan na 'n minderwaardige posisie deur 'n Engelsprekende swart meerderheidsregering. 'n Oorsig van die aard en konteks van die openbare debat oor die 'posisie van Afrikaans' sal begrip oor hedendaagse 'nasiebou' in Suid-Afrika verbreed. Sosiaal-wetenskaplikes kan weer eens probeer om kultuur 'in wording' te begryp soos wat dit deur sommige 'verbeeldingryke' Afrikaanssprekende deelnemers geskep word, en ook die implikasies van hierdie diskoers vir nasiebou en wedywering.

1. Introduction

Where does the South African nation find itself in the process of growth after the 1994 elections? What degree of cohesion has been achieved and how do member categories perceive their accommodation within the system-wide cultural patterns? The current public debate in the media on Afrikaans may make for an interesting case study to find some answers to these questions.

In his early theoretical essay of 1953 on nation building, Eric Wolf (see Wolf, 2001a:83) had the goal of “replacing the study of national character with a more historical and materially grounded approach to nation making” (see also Hofmeyr, 1987 & Sharp, 1988:82-84). Instead of treating the concept of nation as a homogeneous and ahistorical given, he thought we should focus on how nation building had brought together culturally heterogeneous populations and gradually fostered their integration into a larger structure through the proliferation of new “system-wide cultural patterns”. Whether due to conquest or internal growth, new patterned relationships must permit the different groups to accommodate one another. Even the most exploitative socio-cultural segment must ensure that the exploited react to some of its symbols and signals to make everyday life possible, a view echoed by Giliomee (2000 & 2003). However, it is also true that the nation is the product of drawn-out and often painful processes of cultural growth in time and space (Wolf, 2001a:85).

In his study of nation building of the capitalist nations of the European Atlantic seaboard, Wolf discerned three stages, that is, localised nuclear development, territorial consolidation and the nation (Wolf, 2001a:86). In a certain superficial way the present South Africa had already reached this final stage in 1910, when the two British colonies and the two erstwhile Boer republics became the Union of South Africa, by control over a territory with defined limits and the ability to inhibit the processes of fission and fusion (see Wolf’s later essay; Wolf, 2001b:187).

The incompleteness and superficial nature of this new state and its ‘nation’ will interest the student of nation building. Not only are nations ‘not eternal entities, without a beginning and without an end’, they may also exist for reasonably protracted times without ever becoming ‘complete’ or even coming close to ‘homogeneity’. To have some degree of cohesion, politics, law, the army and the education system are usually reshaped to form new systems of hegemonic national cultures and to turn peasants into Frenchman; to make Italians inhabit a new unified Italy; to turn the fifty-odd German principalities into a German Reich (Wolf, 2001b:186); or even, in this case, to turn Thabo Mbeki’s ‘two nations’ (the rich whites and the poor blacks, Mbeki, 1998) into one nation.

Apart from this division (over-?) emphasised by Mbeki (Jansen van Rensburg, 2003), the Constitution recognises eleven official language categories and the right of members of these categories to “use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice” (South Africa, 1996; the Constitution, Section 30). Of the movements currently emphasising diversity, the only ‘language’-based mobilisation is the

Afrikaans one. Understanding the arguments within the context of South African dynamics will facilitate a better understanding of the process of nation building.

2. Historical overview

In the 17th century competing European powers had ideals of forming power bases or states in Southern Africa without any consideration for possible nation building because they mainly operated according to the exploitative and limited ideals of colonialists. The early states formed in Southern Africa allowed the most elementary of civil rights to their 'citizens'. The necessity of forming common values and identifying with the state and a nation were not important everyday issues. Besides, the indigenous populations in Southern Africa were expected either to carry on with their own affairs in a 'peaceful' manner, or to fit into the construction of the social, economic, political, legal and ideological infrastructures of the new states (Wolf, 2001b:188). Where this integration was not deemed feasible the indigenous people were forcefully excluded or brought to the brink of extinction by the emerging satellite states of the European powers.

In the period leading up to 1910, with the ultimate unification of the two British colonies and the two formerly autonomous Boer republics, indigenous people increasingly became politically relevant. In the Cape Province their very limited 'citizenship' indicated the slight possibility of their being considered part of a growing nation, but in the colony of Natal lip service was paid to their franchise and citizenship. The South African Republic (ZAR) and the Republic of the Free State were building partial 'nations', explicitly not in favour of equality in church and state between whites and blacks (Thompson, 1960).

To the dismay of the black elite in South Africa they were not involved in the nation-building efforts after 1910 (Davenport, 1988:249-52). It was politically expedient to reconcile Afrikaans- and English-speakers, excluding blacks from this effort. For a significant part of the nation in embryo reconciliation was a priority because the blacks, as the 'others' and their "dangerous political presence" had to be contained by whites (Thompson, 1960). Blacks were very important for the economic and industrial development of the state, and had to be used for the infrastructural and economic development of the nation, but they were seen as an issue or problem that had to be handled, managed or contained, never really to be involved in nation building.

Unification in 1910 repositioned Afrikaners (white Afrikaans-speakers) and English-speaking whites in a new South African state, but it did not

remove some of the issues dividing them in the past. The experiences of many white Afrikaans-speakers and their leaders regarding the frustration of their less ambivalent racist views and practices, their wish for independence from the power of Britain and the imposition of British customs played a very important part in South African political life between 1910 and 1948. Any position in favour of reconciliation between white English-speakers and white Afrikaans-speakers was often perceived as the betrayal of 'Afrikaner ideals'.

Already in the 1870s white Afrikaans-speakers organised themselves into 'language' movements. Spoken Afrikaans (consisting of Dutch-Afrikaans dialects) was not a standardised and accepted language for so-called higher functions and Afrikaners were divided on whether Dutch or English should be preferred for public and official purposes. To make Afrikaans respectable, to reinvent it as a standard language, the very strong associations of poverty and particularly 'colouredness' which clung to the language had to be shaken off (Hofmeyr, 1987:104).

The efforts of reinventing Afrikaans as a standard language and giving it literary respectability became more focused after the Anglo-Boer War, the policy of Anglicisation of Lord Milner after 1910, the First World War and the armed rebellion of certain sections of Afrikaner society. Not only must the development of Afrikaans during this period (1902-1924) be seen as a purposeful reconstruction of poor and marginalised Afrikaners, but the aspiring middle-class leaders began elaborating nationalist notions through the medium of literature (Hofmeyr, 1987). The inter-relatedness of language and particular material and political interests is emphasised by Hofmeyr (1987:116):

Their toils of socialising the poor consequently began to assume a particularistic content. For in the very moment that these educated Afrikaners were beginning to explore the category of 'their nation' through which they hoped to wrest some of capitalism's benefits for themselves, they were discovering the support which could give their nationalist vision some substance and clout.²

In 1925 Afrikaans became the second official language of the Union of South Africa, replacing Dutch. For decades Afrikaners complained about and acted against the 'second-class' position of Afrikaans, compared to English, the other official language. Although English could not and was not removed as official language in 1948 when the (Afrikaner) National

2 O'Meara (1983:134-148) indicated how the struggle for Afrikaans was linked to Afrikaner nationalism and how the economic movement persuaded white Afrikaners to support mass economic upliftment.

Party came to power, it soon became a 'second-class' language in public affairs, mainly because the civil service became predominantly an Afrikaner domain and enabled Afrikaners to improve their economic and social positions. Also in the educational field, the position of Afrikaans was gradually strengthened. The view of the National Party government regarding the role of Afrikaans in education led to the founding of an Afrikaans-language university in Johannesburg and a double-medium university in Port Elizabeth to counter the influence of English-language universities. The strengthening of the position of Afrikaans also developed to the extent of arrogance (by the imposition of Afrikaans), which played a significant role in the eruption of unrest in black schools in Soweto and the rest of the country in 1976.

In 1996 the second version of the new South African constitution was accepted and Afrikaans was affirmed as one of eleven official languages. It is possible to view the good intentions and the symbolic gesture of this proclamation as a basis for nation building by the constituent categories of the new nation. The symbolic gesture still has to take effect, however, on ground level and in everyday life.

Although the 'Madiba Era' (from 1994 to 1999) was one of positive euphoria for many South Africans, and Nelson Mandela and other individuals such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu did much to convince South Africans that they were a 'rainbow nation', united in their diversity, no serious observer thought that the process of nation building would be simple and brief. Although South Africans have created symbolic forms of nation formation (such as a flag, emblems, holidays, monuments and others), the establishment of other important symbols such as the construction of a national aesthetic, the resurrection and reformulation of literature (oral and written) and the exaltation of a standard language have made little progress (cf. Mosse, 1975 as quoted by Wolf, 2001b: 186). In the first years after 1994, concerns were raised because of the increased admission of other races to white schools. It was never clear whether resistance to this process was motivated by elitism and racism or possibly by the defence of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction at these schools. Also, the change in political leadership had to have its effect on the civil service, where the 'language of record' became English, a sharp turn-around from the dominance of Afrikaans in the civil service over several decades.

In 2001 and 2002 the public debate on the position and status of Afrikaans intensified and focused on tertiary education and the position of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at universities. This was mainly due to the work of the Gerwel Commission on this issue, and also to the decision of Cabinet to change the face of tertiary education dramatically.

The Minister of Education, in his plans for mergers in tertiary education, promised that the question of language would be dealt with in future. After a heated debate in the media regarding Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in tertiary education, Kader Asmal had talks with Afrikaans organisations,³ and in a reconciliatory address said that people should not derive pleasure from comparing him with Lord Milner or Andries Treurnicht, but that Afrikaners should return to the [conciliatory] spirit of 1994. He also assured South Africans of the importance of mother-tongue education, and that he did not want to destroy something that was so precious to people (Anon., 2002b:4; Joubert, 2002a; Joubert, 2002b). Possibly because of the wide-ranging public debate, Cabinet accepted a language policy for higher education, thereby clearly accepting Afrikaans as academic and scientific language and as a national asset. This new policy formulation also accepted Afrikaans as primary (but not only) medium of instruction in certain educational institutions and was seen by some people as a basis for the safeguarding of multilingualism at the highest academic levels (Anon., 2002d:16).⁴

The issue of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in education was one of several related issues reported in the media. The argument was often found in various balanced views that, based on the Constitution, the dismissive approach of the government to Afrikaans and other indigenous languages, and the very easy acceptance of English as the *lingua franca* in South Africa, was not acceptable (Anon., 2001c:8; Anon., 2002a:12).⁵ In the following analysis, attention will be paid to Afrikaans-speaking participants in the debate, and also to the underlying tenets of their arguments. The position of the Minister of Education and government officials will not be analysed.

3 More than 26 organisations (inter alia the South African Academy for Science and Art, the Freedom Front, the Group of 63 and Praag) conveyed their views on Afrikaans to the Minister of Education (Rademeyer, 2001:7).

4 This approach is also supported by the government's decision that all government documents must be published in at least six languages, which is seen as another way of making an important contribution to language and cultural democracy (Naudé, 2002c:8; Nieuwoudt, 2002c:2).

5 "It is a shame that after the adoption of the new Constitution, recognising 11 official languages, SA's public-service television is still 70% English. Languages like Tsonga and Ndebele have no representation on public television, violating the constitutional rights of a large number of citizens ..." (Msomi, 2002:20).

3. The mainstream or the old guard?

A prominent discussant, Jaap Steyn, albeit with an emotional call on the history of Afrikaans and the struggle for the recognition of Afrikaans, keeps to the issue of language and is mostly careful with his use of terminology (see, however, his mention of 'dangerous language detractors': *gevaarlike taalversmaders*; Steyn, 2002a:14). He avoids nationalistic and political issues by using phrases like Afrikaans-speakers or those with Afrikaans as a language (*Afrikaanstaliges*). However, he often finds it necessary to refer to the struggle of 'Afrikaners' for Afrikaans to illustrate some of his arguments. Sometimes he also 'endangers' his own broader approach by referring to a recent 'spontaneous' gathering of 5 000 people at the Voortrekker Monument, which for him means that "somewhere we [i.e. the Afrikaners] are still attached to one another", and that it would not be to the benefit of any ruler to ignore this because "[d]ivided, subjected and dishonoured peoples – as indicated by history – have a way of unexpectedly finding their soul again" (Steyn, 2002c:10). Elsewhere (and later) Steyn (2003:12) directly advocates Afrikaner nationalism by way of indicating a wide array of problems that 'Afrikaners' are supposed to experience (including even Mbeki's stance on Zimbabwe) and how this can be overcome (as with the mutual assistance (*Helpmekaar*) organisation of Afrikaners after the 1914 Rebellion). This kind of nationalism can be built on economic self-realisation, self-confidence, group loyalty, the willingness to sacrifice and to co-operate, thus helping to vanquish poverty and cultural imperialism (compare this with Hofmeyr's analysis, quoted on page 195 of this article).

One of the leading participants in the debate, Hermann Giliomee (2000: 10), views with disdain the warnings of some commentators that activism for retaining the position of Afrikaans is dangerous, and thus creates the possibility of making Afrikaans-speakers, and especially 'Afrikaners', a punchbag for a future Mugabe-like regime. He actually sees "republican defensibility" (*weerbaarheid*) and probity as the correct and practicable option, using a liberal constitution with individual and language rights as a basis for action. According to him, republican probity would include taking responsibility for one's language, as he also expects of at least some South African universities to do, but then in a constitutional and democratic manner and not as an exercising of a political 'right' (Giliomee, 2002c:12). Republicans, he says, ought to look beyond their individual rights and self-interest to what is honourable (Giliomee, 2000:10; Giliomee, 2002c:12).

This 'honourable' approach would not include a situation where historically Afrikaans universities consider their particular (sic) interest as more important than the common interest, viz. to work for the survival of

Afrikaans. He argues that in no way the struggle for retaining Stellenbosch as an Afrikaans university could possibly be misunderstood as proposing the existence of an Afrikaner university or an exclusively Afrikaans-language university, but at the same time he envisages Stellenbosch as a university with its “own character”, without indicating what this character might be (Giliomee, 2002g:10).

Giliomee (2002a:12) also conveys his ideas about Afrikaans (and also about ‘Afrikaners’) by sketching a historical parallel between the peace talks in Vereeniging in 1902, ending the South African War/Anglo Boer War, and the more recent negotiations in South Africa, resulting in the 1994 democratic elections. He implies that the driving force in both cases for ‘Afrikaners’ was survival, with the loss of political autonomy.

He considers the 1902 talks as much deeper and fundamentally about the nation’s honour and continued existence, whereas in the talks before 1994, whites were mainly concerned with the protection of property rights, the pre-occupation of the middle-class. Extreme affirmative action was not taken seriously during the pre-1994 negotiations, the latter issue being more important to the less privileged (whites) who are not able to attain scarce skills.

In his analysis of the post-1902 era he also indicates the divergent views among Afrikaner leaders. There were those who believed that the language (Dutch or Afrikaans) was the “channel through which the people could become a people again” (Giliomee, 2002a:12). Those who struggled for the language later also founded the exclusive and secret Afrikaner-Broederbond.

The others, such as General Smuts and General Botha, did not share these views, but believed that there were other priorities: reconciliation with English South Africans, the economy and the expense of bilingualism in South Africa. (Giliomee’s personal footnote is that, in commemoration of May 1902, consideration should be given to the founding of an Afrikaans council where these issues of survival (materially and culturally) can be debated and where practical possibilities for the survival of Afrikaans as a public language as well as the challenge of affirmative action can be discussed.)

When arguing for the use of standardised Afrikaans as a public language, and as a medium of instruction at some South African universities, Giliomee (2002c:12) mentions that only four languages (Hindu, Malay-Indonesian, Hebrew and Afrikaans) were standardised and implemented as public languages in the twentieth century. These languages were then also introduced as new languages of instruction at

universities. He regards this development positively and also states that universities in the USA and Europe with 'particular' natures must be regarded as assets. Not one of these universities of repute have changed its medium of instruction at undergraduate level or its nature as a "particular institution". Giliomee mentions diversity and diversification with a positive nod, whereas he grossly generalises and then bemoans the situation at African universities north of South Africa and in the former South African 'homelands', which he depicts as major failures because, according to him, they initially had the ideal of university institutions with English as the medium of instruction.

Many of Giliomee's arguments (2002b:8) centre in his severe criticism of the language situation evolving at the University of Stellenbosch (US). Apart from policy and constitutional issues in which he engages with the Minister of Education and with management at the US, he again argues for the "rights of smaller languages", particularly Afrikaans. He indicates the destructive effects of a centrist government policy (Giliomee, 2002f:10) and US administration policy that are opposed to the ideal of "protecting and furthering the interest of Afrikaans in order to convey the language as a public language to the next generation".

He pleads the case against the universal facilitation of language assimilation, and although he acknowledges the arguments of his adversaries, he does not acknowledge the implications of these arguments and how their existence weakens the weight and the effect of his own argument. First, his view of Afrikaans students' positive attitude at Stellenbosch University to double-medium instruction⁶ is the following: "... of course, they accept it, they can improve their English at no cost – and most of them are not worried that Afrikaans will progressively pine away amidst parallel medium instruction, and that Afrikaans will not be available for the next generation students" (Giliomee, 2002b:8; see also Giliomee, 2002e:10). Secondly, he criticises the acceptance by all the principals of historically Afrikaans universities of the Education Minister's parallel-medium plan because this will not enable the present generation to transmit Afrikaans as a public language to the next generation. It seems that in his reification of and romantic views regarding language⁷

6 In an official survey at the University of Stellenbosch it was found that there was a significant difference in attitude between older and younger respondents. Students and younger members of the academic staff were 'unemotional' about the language issue. The Academic Interests Council (a student body) had the view that the language issue should be subservient to the interests of education and research (De Stadler, 2002:8; see also Ferreira, 2002a:3).

7 Afrikaans is presented as a phenomenon or force outside human history.

he does not appreciate the importance of personal choice and that he thereby also places himself in the position of the next generation and imagines the loss that might befall them.⁸

4. Dan Roodt's "fire which destroys" and a "Prague spring" of nationalism

Is it unreasonable to read a writer's view and his stand on the position of Afrikaans through the lens of his views on Africa? I believe this approach is not unreasonable, and that Dan Roodt's views on Africa will lead to a better understanding of the issues involved in this article. In his perspective on the burning of the Pretoria station in February 2001, Roodt (2001b) does not think that common-sense explanations such as poverty, unemployment and frustration are very effective in elucidating the incident. He would rather see South Africa as a multi-cultural country, where the clash of cultures and divergent perceptions of reality lead to violence and arson (see also Roodt, 2002c:18). According to him, the broader background necessary for understanding this phenomenon is the process of decolonisation in Africa which was always brought about through violence and destruction and therefore (seen through the eyes of Frantz Fanon) became the replacement of "one sort of human being" by "another sort of human being", and also a replacement which was "totally, completely, absolutely ... without transition ...".

In this way, and by other similar analyses he removes African decolonisation (and the burning of the Pretoria station) from general human history and evaluates it as "rebellion against the domination of Western time concepts", and "the African cleansing himself from Western influence, [and who] may find the architectural style of the [station] building equally offensive as the name" [Pretoria, which recently became part of the Tshwane local authority] (Roodt, 2001b).

Roodt's (2001b:30) own logic forces him to discuss the French Revolution and student unrest in the USA and Europe during the 1960s too, which immediately also leads to his cerebral acceptance of the social, economic and historic complexity of these types of actions by masses of people. However, his inability to appreciate fully the social context of the station incident seduces him into slipping 'them' back into the special

8 Giliomee clearly operates with a specific view of the Afrikaans 'language community', and expects even more than allowed for in reality, as expressed by Balibar (1991b:99): "The language community is a community *in the present*, which produces the feeling that it has always existed, but which lays down no destiny for the successive generations".

category he has created for Africans. He places them in the framework of N.P. van Wyk Louw's drama, *Raka*. The perpetrators of arson (with Roodt even referring to standard works regarding mass action) are deftly removed from the general human context⁹ and pictured with a camp fire or a kraal fire in the tribal set-up where ritual and oral history are created as the antithesis of the 'colonial report' of written history.

According to Roodt we should not be surprised when in the replacement of "one sort of human by another" (*a la* Fanon), and as "one culture is left behind and another is either created or rediscovered in the process of transformation", fire figures repeatedly. Roodt thinks in terms of cultures clashing (inevitably?); the tendency of Africans for changing the unacceptable by means of violence; and the exclusiveness of human categories.

Neo-racist discourses, rather than explicitly drawing on bio-determinism, imply an association between cultural autonomy and biological viability (Harrison, 1995:49). According to Balibar (1991a:23) this approach can even present itself (as in the case of Roodt it often does) as true humanism, and it connects easily with 'crowd psychology', as

... a general explanation of irrational movements, aggression and collective violence, and, particularly of xenophobia. We can see here the double game ... operating fully: the masses are presented by an explanation of their own 'spontaneity' and at the same time they are implicitly disparaged as a 'primitive' crowd. The neo-racist ideologues are not mystical heredity theorists, but 'realist' technicians of social psychology.

This approach of Roodt will also influence the way in which he views the phenomenon of language and of Afrikaans and its 'endangered' position in 'Africa'.

Since the founding of Praag¹⁰ (Pro-Afrikaanse Aksiegroep) early in 2000, the public debate regarding the 'status' of Afrikaans became more heated. Although their leader, Dan Roodt, said that their action was about Afrikaans as an important language for cultural and communication

9 An analysis of the burning of the Pretoria Station where the actions of the perpetrators of this incident is situated within the socio-economic and political parameters of South Africa and their own humanness, is given by Wilhelm Jordaan (2001:10).

10 Dan Roodt, the leader, saw the founding of Praag as "an uprising against the prevailing order", and also reminded the ruling party (the ANC) that they supported the Soviet take-over of Prague in 1969 and for this reason they were not in a position to lecture others when it came to [having] a dark history (Anon., 2000a:10).

purposes, he already foresaw not only debate and the writing of letters to prominent people, but also protests and “commando actions” which would state the position of Afrikaans in an enthusiastic and creative manner. Since then, both the leader and the organisation have often been in the news because of actions such as the following:

- a protest action regarding the printing of only 600 000 census forms in Afrikaans,¹¹ whereas according to Praag, South Africa had 5,5 million Afrikaans-speakers compared to the 3 million English-speakers;
- trying to mobilise a number of Afrikaans organisations and political parties (inter alia the Freedom Front; Afrikaner Unity Movement (*Afrikaner-Eenheidsbeweging* – in essence the old Conservative Party) and the Christian National Forum to run a referendum among Afrikaans parents regarding the education of their children;
- Roodt’s letters in newspapers on the removal of its Afrikaans name on the building of the South African Reserve Bank;
- his involvement in the public debate on the position of Afrikaans at the Universities of Potchefstroom and Stellenbosch; and
- his attacks on the Minister of Education (Floris, 2001; Jackson, 2002; Roodt, 2001a & 2001c; Anon., 2001c).

Roodt does not shy away from controversy and confrontation (“Mr. Kader Asmal deserves a rotten tomato”; see Anon., 2001a). When criticised for his actions and rhetoric he calls on his democratic right to take part in the debate, the protection of Afrikaans in the Constitution, and the fact that the government is the provocateur and the oppressor (Anon., 2001a). He is not fazed when accused of being pro-apartheid in his efforts as an activist ‘for Afrikaans’.

Accusations are levelled at him by his critics of his being ideologically dubious – as much as German idealism *a la* Fichte – and parallels are drawn between Afrikaner nationalism and Nazism. Roodt simply considers these accusations as outdated and passé and claims that the apartheid ideology had certain liberal elements which should be recognised (Roodt, 2001c). In one of his speeches (Smith, C. 2002:6) Roodt proudly claims that “Afrikaners” will not use violence to regain their freedom in the way the “so-called freedom movements of Africa” had

11 Praag also warned the ‘Afrikaans public’ that information gleaned from the 1939 census in the Netherlands was used by the Nazis during the period of German occupation to persecute the Jews. Similarly, information on the present census forms could in future be used by a radicalised Africanist regime, such as that of Robert Mugabe, to persecute Afrikaans-speakers (Floris, 2001:5).

done, but at the same time he foresees the probability of a “Third War of Liberation” (the second one being the Anglo-Boer War). Also, he sees “Afrikaners” as the “peace makers of Africa who will not start another war in Africa, although ‘he’ [the Afrikaner] probably has the full right to do this”, because *he* is not really free and is oppressed by *English culture*, which in effect means that war has already been declared against the Afrikaner.

It is not a simple matter to get to grips with some of the conceptual tools in Roodt’s arguments. It seems as if his earlier views may have been more focused on Afrikaans as a language and that later it became more nationalistic in content. It may also be that the general political set-up had shifted, thereby either enabling or pressuring leaders such as Roodt into a clearer nationalistic parlance. Although he argues that “[the] unity [of a nation] is not threatened by diversity of cultures, but by discrimination against some of them” (Roodt, 2000), it does not seem as if he attaches any positive value to the existence of a nation and the existence of other societal forms of interaction, but only argues in terms of his ‘Afrikaners’ *vis-a-vis* ‘the others’.

In his debate with Ebrahim Harvey (2000) Roodt becomes involved in the issue of whether Afrikaans, in its history of origin, can be regarded as a ‘white’ or a ‘black’ language, which does not help to clarify anything, but clearly indicates his position as a nationalist demagogue. With regard to Afrikaans, he mostly uses significant words and phrases such as “Afrikaners”, “the Afrikaner”, “growing Afrikaner unity” and less often the more precise and inclusive “Afrikaans-speakers”.¹² The removal of Afrikaans from the SA Reserve Bank building is for Roodt, “a favour to Afrikaners” because “... it relieves us from being a party to the shameful devaluation of the country’s currency ...” (Roodt, 2001a:8). In his opposition to government policy and practice on language issues he does not shirk from selectively referring to instances of violence from the struggle era and then subliminally interpreting incidents (which may also be regarded by others as activities of the ANC against the apartheid system) rather as black on white terror (Roodt, 2002a:10).

Roodt (2002c:30) refers to his solitary struggle to give back to ‘the Afrikaner’ ‘his’ self-respect, and a pride in ‘his’ language and history. His choice of relevant historical incidents and symbols is focused on the arrival of white settlers in 1652 (for Roodt this event represents the founding of the nation); the national anthem (for Roodt this means *Die*

12 According to Prof. Hein Willemse (University of Pretoria), 55% of all Afrikaans-speakers in 1996 were black people (Willemse, 2002a:13).

Stem); he wants the Prince's flag or the orange-white-and-blue (*Prinsevlag* or *oranje-blanje-blou*) to be embraced as a singularly Afrikaans flag. When highlighting Roodt's nationalist talk, one should not be blind to the partial truths in some of his statements, as when he argues that South Africa has become a "language dictatorship" (Roodt, 2002b:16) and also how these incidents and perceptions can influence people to follow him. Also, it should be noted that, although Giliomee and Steyn have a different style from Roodt, some of their arguments on language rights do converge.

5. Clearer political motives?

Cassie Aucamp (2002:12), leader of the Afrikaner Unity Movement (*Afrikaner Eenheidsbeweging*), a movement that holds one seat in the National Assembly, does not see how there could be a language struggle without politics being involved. Also Carel Boshoff IV (2002:13), of Orania, berates many of the Afrikaans language activists because of their lack of understanding of the political reality in South Africa and states that many of them (such as Roodt) have belated delusions of Afrikaner power (Boshoff, 2000b). Boshoff believes 'Afrikaners' should rather strive for more limited "cultural spaces and a more limited political power position, which will conform to their minority status". He sees the ideals of Orania and its high level of autonomy as the only solution for a small minority such as 'the Afrikaner' in delineating themselves and making a claim within a geographical set-up that will not doom them to permanent minority status.

Although Boshoff (2000a:8) viewed the 1999 election as the end of the 'Afrikaner' as a political community, he now sees the development of the recent debate as a sign of the Afrikaner's rising like a phoenix from the ashes. Even if the "new order" in South Africa wanted to do it (Boshoff, 1999:10), it does not have the resources to promote the Afrikaans language in education or in public life. And if this cannot be attained, he writes, what about "my values, history and ideals that have [already] been doomed to the private domain?" According to Boshoff, unity among Afrikaners must be sought in order to create a programme with certain steps so as to gain economic and/or political autonomy. (It would be a grave mistake to assume that all those who actively campaign for Afrikaans are simply isolationists or have plain separatist political programmes (see Goosen, 2002:13)).

6. Those on the fringes of the 'Afrikaanse struggle'

Although intellectuals such as Giliomee and Roodt may have significant support, they also have a range of influential critics within the cadre of

Afrikaans-speakers. A number of issues are often mentioned which make specific categories of Afrikaans-speakers negative or sceptical about the 'struggle'. Two black Afrikaans-speakers, Hein Willemsen and Ebrahim Harvey, have problems with Roodt's political position on apartheid and his insensitivity to the issue of race; others feel that more minority groups should be involved; the probability of Praag's becoming a home for rightwing supporters is a very common concern; others are sceptical because the actions of Praag are again those of a group of white 'Afrikaner-men' and some say that any formally organised action would inevitably lead to the forming of another power block; a plea is made by Jakes Gerwel for real inclusiveness of Afrikaans-speakers without the confining involvement with group identity and requiring the rejection of aggressive bitterness and lowly whining¹³ of those "struggling" for Afrikaans (Anon., 1999:2; see also Boshoff, 2000a:8; Anon., 2000b:2).

Prominent Afrikaans writers, Marlene van Niekerk (on this issue she is, as she says *fokken gatvol*), Koos Kombuis, Antjie Krog and journalist Max du Preez are severely criticised by the *taalstryders* because they, as the "old left white", do not have "any sense of democratic revolt", whereas Max du Preez (Goosen & Duvenage, 2002:13) sticks to his view that these activists for Afrikaans are white men who have lost their power and status – the belly-achers want to abuse Afrikaans as a battering-ram because of their discontent with the present majority politics and Afrikaner men's loss of power and status¹⁴ (Naudé, 2002a:18)).

It is rumoured that, since 2002, some of the most prominent members of the Group of 63 (G63) have distanced themselves from the group,¹⁵ whereas one of them, poet and dramatist Breyten Breytenbach, after criticism of "The Play" (*Die Toneelstuk*) and fears by some commentators that this play could alienate him from 'Afrikaners', responded by writing: "... I would like to reassure you and your readers. Under no circumstances am I a member of your people (*volk*) or would I desire to be" (Anon., 2001b:1). This was not surprising, taking into account that

13 ... aggressiewe bitterbekkigheid en kleinlike keffery ...

14 "Die klomp bitterbekke [wil] Afrikaans as 'n stormram misbruik vir hulle onverge-noegdheid met die huidige meerderheidspolitiek en Afrikaner-mans se verlies aan mag en status ..."

15 G63 landed themselves in a turmoil of political controversy by writing a letter to President Thabo Mbeki, linking the frustrations of Afrikaners and rightwing bomb planters (Anon., 2002e:8). They were severely castigated for being politically naive, for bad timing, not representing anyone but themselves, being insensitive and again using volatile and dangerous Afrikaner myths in their recent actions (Scholtz, 2002:8; Naudé, 2002b:16; Jeffreys, 2002:14; Malan, 2002:15).

already in 1999 (Breytenbach *et al.*, 1999:8), in the run-up to ‘the Afrikaner’ debate in Parliament, writers Breyten Breytenbach and André P. Brink, literary critic Ampie Coetzee and business man Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert said they did not know who these ‘Afrikaners’ were, who the ‘we’ included, and how many people they represented. Breytenbach went even further and decided not to publish in Afrikaans any more but to send his poems to only a selected few (Greyling, 2002:16; Kombuis, 2002:21).

7. The brown/black Afrikaans-speakers

The manner in which loose interest groupings like the Group of 63 (G63) operate, does not help to shed light on the issues under review. Although they do not use the nationalist rhetoric of Roodt and Praag, and more clearly have the interests of Afrikaans as language as their main goal, they also seem to want an Afrikaans Council that should give advice on issues concerning the ‘Afrikaner’ [exclusive] or Afrikaans [inclusive?]. G63 also has in mind the recognition of language and socio-economic interests of minorities (Barrell, 2000:8).¹⁶ They have not sufficiently engaged with the fact that a number of ‘brown’ intellectuals have already indicated that they cannot associate with the nature of the present language struggle (Joubert, 2002c:13). ‘Brown’ thinkers supporting the protection of Afrikaans and other official languages often have a broader and explicitly multiracial approach (Esack, 2000:6; Anon., 2000c:7). Jakes Gerwel (Anon., 1999:2) sees being Afrikaans-speaking as “dynamic, encompassing all political, social, economic, ethnic, cultural, religious and other forms of expression and experience”.

Hein Willemsse (2002b:10) warns against the “ethnic-ideological thinking by means of which the schism between the own group and the other” is often argued in the Afrikaans language debate. He feels that language then becomes property that has to be protected and refined (*veredel*). The ‘group’ is then defined by means of the language and this becomes the basis for mobilisation and the staking of political and historical claims. In the long run this then becomes the basis for intolerance that can have

16 The Deliberation Platform (*Oorlegplatform*), under the leadership of Hermann Giliomee, and with very prominent supporters, in August 2002 submitted proposals on a language policy to the University of Stellenbosch. Some of the supporters are: André P. Brink, Ampie Coetzee, Lawrence Schlemmer, Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, Richard van der Ross, Ton Vosloo and David Welsh. Giliomee feels that, while the US ought to be of service to and empower the whole Afrikaans language community, the government wants English as medium of instruction, and thereby also to impose its hegemony in a tangible way in the cultural field (Mischke, 2002a:1; Mischke, 2002b: 22; Ferreira, 2002b:3).

devastating end results. Likewise, Neville Alexander does not see the present debate as being about the interests of Afrikaans, but rather about "ethnic nationalism", something he considers very dangerous. However, this does not detract from Alexander's clear view on the constitutional right of a university like Stellenbosch to be mainly or predominantly Afrikaans (Van der Merwe, 2002:45).

Willemse (2002b:10) also objects to trenches being dug around Afrikaans by persons claiming to be acting on behalf of Afrikaners and sometimes even on behalf of Afrikaans-speakers. He reminds his readers that Afrikaans is also the language of the very poorest, and then mostly their only language. They do not have access to the language of the city dweller, the middle class or the bureaucracy. Therefore they need a language that will give them access to the authorities and to all forms of education. He protests against the "Afrikaner-centrism" and nationalistic stance of many of the protagonists and that they have not even started listening to 'alternative' views built on an "Afrikaans experience" which is definitely non-racial (Willemse, 2002c:10; Willemse, 2002d:8).

8. The indifferent generation, women and expatriates

Although the younger generation has a new interest in Afrikaans, such as in the rediscovery of Afrikaans folk music, they do not feel Afrikaans is threatened in any way. They also use Afrikaans without feelings of guilt or hang-ups. The desperate "struggle for Afrikaans" is absent among the Afrikaans-speaking youth and in many ways Afrikaans is showing many signs of new life (Jordaan, 2002:5; Naudé, 2002a:18). Karen Zoid with her hit: *Afrikaners is plesierig* (Afrikaners are a jolly lot), does not want to be possessed by Afrikaners and sees herself as a member of

... the first generation that is integrated. We do not have to fight for anything. What irritates us are the old men (*ou omies*) who expect us to sing in Afrikaans, write songs in Afrikaans, do your thing for the promotion of Afrikaans, who want to make you part of a struggle ... I am here to sing (Smith, I. 2002:16).

The reasons for the indifference of the youth may be some of those mentioned by John van Rooyen, who says:

Ostensibly they fight for survival of Afrikaans, but we believe they fight to keep the US [University of Stellenbosch] white. They just can't admit it. Therefore they say 'keep it Afrikaans' (Van der Merwe, 2002:45; see also Nieuwoudt, 2002a & Van Eeden, 2002).

The silence of 'Afrikaner' women on the matter of their mother tongue may be an indication of their subservient role and their reliance on men

to conduct the public debate. It might also be that the ferocity of attacks on women makes them shy away from the debate. Often the criticism against women like Antjie Krog, Sonja Loots, Marlene van Niekerk and Karen Zoid is directed against them as women *per se* (Van der Westhuizen, 2002:14).

Apart from participating in other public debates in the media, expatriates¹⁷ often express their views regarding their changed status and some even worry about Afrikaners in, for instance, Australia who become Anglicised so easily. Parents speak to their children in English and adult Afrikaans-speakers tend to converse in English. Metaphorically, like whales running ashore, Grobler (2002:11), from Australia, says: "They have lost their will to live [as Afrikaners]." In other cases, such as in Canada, the view is that there it is actually easier to 'be Afrikaners'. They keep many Afrikaans traditions and are recognised as a minority with certain rights (Alberts, 2002:9).

Expatriate white Afrikaans-speakers attended arts festivals in Britain, such as Ukkasie 2002 and Ukkasie 2003, in large numbers and will probably do the same when similar festivals are held in Canada and New Zealand in future. Some of those who attended Ukkasie 2002 were shocked by the crass and militant sentiments that could be found here. A T-shirt with: "Speak Afrikaans or shut up" (*Praat Afrikaans of hou jou bek*) was seen at the festival. They were also dissatisfied with the very visible presence of a white South African political party, the Freedom Front (Relaas, 2002:8) at Ukkasie. Several successful national (mainly Afrikaans) arts festivals have not only become important occasions for the promotion of 'Afrikaans culture', but also for introspection and lively debate on the true meaning of Afrikaans, being Afrikaans-speaking and also Afrikaner identity and South African identity (Nieuwoudt, 2002b:17; Anon., 2002c:8).

9. Conclusions

Actions somewhat similar to the 'struggle for Afrikaans' might also be seen in the founding of and support for the Inkatha Freedom Party), the Freedom Front and the Afrikaner Unity Movement ('AEB'), the Lemba Cultural Association, some Islamic tenets in PAGAD, and more recently,

17 "There is excitement because of the proposal to buy an island off the Australian coast for R12,5 million. This is not envisaged as a volkstaat, but rather as a culture colony for Afrikaners where full cultural autonomy and local government will be practised" (Wingard, 2002:10).

the founding of the Khoisan Association.¹⁸ White Afrikaans-speakers have a long and 'successful' history of struggling 'for Afrikaans', thereby actually organising themselves for political action,¹⁹ not realising that "the vernacular itself is not nearly as unitary or as widely shared as nationalist ideology implies" (Fishman, 1974:410; cf. Sharp, 1988 & Hofmeyr, 1987).²⁰

The perceptions of some white Afrikaners (according to Lawrence Schlemmer's *MarkData*) regarding the efficiency of state administration, safety and crime, affirmative action, as well as signs of enmity against 'their' language, tend to be rather negative (Naudé, 1999:12; see also Steyn, 2002b:10). It is therefore not surprising that Giliomee (2002d:10; see also Giliomee, 2003:8) develops his argument regarding the right and position of Afrikaans, also at universities, in the wider context of democracy.

He views criticism and the right to oppose as important facets of a real democracy. Even in well-established democracies, the tolerance of minorities using their freedom to emphasise their group identity and to have grievances removed is not well developed. Therefore (according to Giliomee) exactly this sort of action will strengthen our democratic dispensation.²¹ He says that, especially in Africa, one often finds there might be initial reconciliation, followed a decade or two later by acts against minorities, like intimidation, Africanisation of the civil service and land grabs. Giliomee feels that our democracy is strong enough for civil society to organise, to debate issues actively, and to mobilise certain issues that they consider important for themselves. He says the importance of these actions, in this case the struggle for the position of Afrikaans, will emphasise the right of minorities to be heard and to take

18 Broadly, these movements can be seen as organisational expressions of ethnic identity, where ethnicity, class and categorical belongingness make sense to people (Eriksen, 1993:60).

19 In his broad analysis of Afrikaans language movements of the past, Du Plessis (1986:14) concludes that "a language movement is a political and/or religiously inspired movement where language is used very pertinently as a means to a goal".

20 Trapido (1978) indicated how, in the 1880s in the rural South African Republic (ZAR), tensions ran high regarding class and the differential access to land.

21 See also Wolf's (2001a) view that "new patterned relationships must permit the different groups to accommodate each other".

part in a process where not only the majority can decide on the basis of their majority position. ²²

This sentiment underscores Wolf's (2001a) idea that "even the most exploitative sociocultural segment must ensure that the exploited react to some of its symbols and signals to make everyday life possible". Making everyday life possible within the complexity of the modern state is extremely difficult exactly because 'nation' and 'ethnic group' (also using 'language rights') are "ideas which people use to confirm or challenge the legitimacy of states" (Saul, 1979, as quoted by Sharp, 1988:81).

Although the emotional claims used in the debate regarding the position of 'Afrikaans' have the power of mobilising a following, they definitely have their intrinsic limitations in alienating 'brown' Afrikaans-speakers, the youth and those who still remember the destructive effects of Afrikaner nationalism in the apartheid days. The admonition by a social scientist of even the best debaters' reification of language and culture and the nationalist and racist consequences of this will have no value in clarifying the issues or containing emotional leaders or their frustrated followers. These dynamics can only be balanced in a 'national state' by means of political sensitivity and proficiency. The obvious question is whether the ideal of nation building, with its enormous and critical agenda, should necessarily marginalise some categories and thereby provide nationalist leaders like Roodt with a following.

To assume that language, and specifically the mother tongue, has nothing to do with nation building would be a grave error (Fishman, 1974). Although universities and schools should ideally always be accessible to 'outsiders', Omotoso (2002a:10) indicates how all older universities have been a reflection of the aspirations and ideals of 'communities'. Of course, this is only one side of the coin, since universities also have the function of being critical of the social order in which they are situated. Some sort of association, however, between society or sections of society and universities, is inevitable and even necessary, and more so since South Africans have only taken the first steps on the way to nationhood and towards facilitating the accommodation of categories and groups in the new dispensation. Therefore, sound pragmatic arguments for the position and role of Afrikaans and

22 Giliomee and the other 'language bulls' (*taalbulle*) are leaders in forms of boundary maintenance, which have become important because the boundaries are under pressure, and they all perceive a continuity with the past that "function[s] in a psychologically reassuring way for the individual in times of upheaval", providing an important source of self-respect and personal authenticity (Eriksen, 1993:68).

other languages in South African nation building can often be found (see also Omotoso, 2002b:8).

In the public sphere in South Africa there are very few signs of “new systemwide cultural patterns”. It is crucial for these new cultural patterns to allow for the accommodation of ‘diversity’, but it is also very true that “we think too much of constructing *identities* – a new national identity, rather than a national alliance built on the overlap of historical experiences, and respectful of their differences” (Sharp, 2001:71, referring to Haraway, 1989 & Gilroy, 1995). Clearly, the complexity of the views on the ‘struggle for Afrikaans’ bears this out.

At the stage where large numbers of Afrikaans-speakers in their diversity might find common ground for action in the interest of Afrikaans as an official language, the other overlapping identities will necessitate alliances between categories with different histories/experiences, religions, material interests and political views. This would be nation building that really might be in the interest of the nation in the making, and by advocating the continued use of Afrikaans, those with diverse material interests and historical backgrounds could promote the building of the nation – until the time is ripe for another major transformation.

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Key concepts:

Afrikaans
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Kernbegrippe:

Afrikaans
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