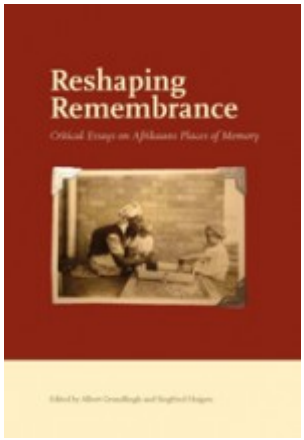
Reshaping Remembrance ~ Memories Of Heroines: Bitter Cups And Sourdough



Introduction

To write about concentration camps as places of remembrance is an exercise that any curious psychologist will find interesting. While the task of the psychologist is to listen to every memory with earnest compassion, she also has to regard what she is told with suspicion. The psychological undertaking starts with a focus on the conscious memory, but attention is then diverted to those things that are not yet remembered. The project about places of remembrance becomes the project of forgotten places – the holes, the cracks, the gaps, the pauses, the hidden, and, especially, the silences.**[i]**

When concentration camps are spoken about in this project of forgotten places, it is eventually less about the concentration camps themselves than about the way in which such places become places of remembrance – or not. The question is not so much about WHAT you remember – that is merely the beginning of the process. Other questions become more significant: Who is doing the remembering? When do they remember? Why do they remember? For whom do they remember? And, of course: what are they forgetting?

Waves of memory and forgetting

With these questions in mind, and with regard to memories of concentration camps in the South African War (1899-1902), the first question is when, and under what circumstances, are these camps remembered? Historians and social commentators**[ii]** give a clear indication of how memories – and forgetting – of the camps come and go in waves.

In the first wave of remembrance (1902-1905) it is immediately apparent how selfconscious the remembering was, and how purposeful the attempts not to forget. E.N. Neethling, in her 1902 account of the war significantly called *Should we forget?* gives the following reasons for writing the book:

*… to induce all good men and women to see and acknowledge the horror, the wickedness of war … so that we realise that we, Afrikanders of the republics and the colonies from the Cape to the Zambesi, are today, more than we ever were before, ONE PEOPLE.***[iii]**

Neethling's plea not to forget, even in the early stages, seems to be part of a nationalist project. In the far more emotional Dutch edition of her book, published in 1917 and aimed at Afrikaans readers, there is a bitter command on the title page: NB: This book is not for those who want to forget.**[iv]**

Most of the many books and pamphlets about the war were either written or compiled by white middle class South African women.**[v]** Van Heyningen observed that women's writings in the form of memoirs, diaries and reports play an unusually prominent part in camp historiography.**[vi]** In these books, the language of remembrance, even in the titles, is mostly intimate, emotional and dramatic: 'brunt of the war and where it fell', 'life and suffering', 'wanderings and trials', 'women's sorrow', 'the grief of mothers and the pain of children', 'war without glamour', 'aunt Alie's diary'.

It seems to be no coincidence that women were the ones documenting memories. In Totius's 1915 ballad about an old farmer and his life before and after the Boer War**[vii]** there is a description of the farmer's bride (or could it be an instruction for her?):

I am just a farmer's bride
All else I have set aside
No young man should have a doubt
I am what I am inside and out.
But I have two arms, plump and strong
Ready to labour all day long.

I am just a farmer's bride
Schoolwork I have set aside
When they start politicking
I just listen but say nothing.
But one day I will tell the tale
Of what took place in the Transvaal.

Totius's farmer's bride promises innocence, sincerity, naivety, and hard work,

and undertakes not to be too clever or politically outspoken. But at the same time she promises to be the keeper of memories.

That they as women will be remembered is a theme that runs through many women's depictions of themselves. Johanna Brandt, one of the chief custodians of memory, writes in her 1905 account of the Irene concentration camp:
*… and these things must be preserved with all the others, good as well as bad, that worked together to make the Afrikaner tribe a nation. Oh, women of South Africa, write up all your suffering at the hands of our mighty oppressors. May nothing be lost, may nothing be forgotten.***[viii]**

In *Die Boerevrou* (Boer Woman), the first Afrikaans magazine for women, fiery debates raged about who this 'Boer woman' was and what she looked like. For weeks, the chatty letters page (aptly named 'Around the coffee table') of this remarkable magazine was flooded with suggestions of who this 'Boer woman' was, and is.

The catalogue of qualities is endless. The Boer woman is queen, mother, bride, sister, girlfriend, teacher, housekeeper; she is pure, natural, humble, friendly, loving, humorous, shy; she makes soap, brews coffee, bakes rusks, darns stockings, stitches clothes, slaughters sheep, feeds chickens, manages domestic workers and kisses her husband and children. But she is also someone who remembers. A short story that appeared in *Die Boerevrou* in 1922 is telling. It is called 'The memory of a little old bonnet', and the bonnet herself is the narrator:
And the past, lying at my back? What a fertile pasture is it not for the thoughts of a little old bonnet, who has been through so much, and has shared the shifting fates of so many mistresses… It is almost 85 years ago that I saw the first light of day while on the trek out of the old colony. Sannie's mother made me on the long road to the North.

The bonnet tells the love story of Sannie and Piet who come to a tragic end when both are savagely murdered by Zulus in separate horrific incidents. The bonnet is theatrical in her bitter resignation:
Yes, Sannie and Piet are better off – their Trek is over – but for the little old Bonnet? So many shifting fates, and in the end, this little spot in the cold Museum, with memories, memories, nothing but memories!

The creation of memory becomes a focused, almost aggressive project.

Andriessen, one of the first writers to coin the phrase 'volksmoeder' (mother of the nation), tells the story of a commandant Fourie's daughter in his 1903 pamphlet, *The women of the Boers*. The girl watched stonily and without tears as British soldiers set her home alight.

When the house had burnt down an English officer asked her for a cup of coffee, which she served him herself. Surprised, he asked her why she would do that, as he had just burnt down her house. According to Andriessen she answered:
*Only because it will make our people bitterer and braver when they hear that I still gave you coffee after you stole from us everything we owned. Believe me, our people will take revenge for every cup of coffee you took from us.***[ix]**

It is obvious that the brave Boer girl makes sure, in Andriessen's view, that the memory will be bitter. Even as she is performing this task, she is thinking of what 'our people' will have to hear and what effect such stories will have on them. In 1920, the editor of *Die Boerevrou* (Boer Woman), Mabel Malherbe, called on readers to send in their memories:
You must write down what is still fresh in your memory and you must write it like you say it… Who is ready to write these stories? Powerful fare for Boer sons and daughters that will inspire them with lofty ideals and warm love for their country and their people.

We therefore know that women remembered the concentration camps, and that these were early and deliberate memories. It would also appear that they claimed this project of remembrance as part of their identity. So how are we to understand this role adopted by women, women who are normally and typically invisible in patriarchal legends of male conflicts and conquests? To answer this question it is necessary to take a closer look at what is being remembered – and try to pinpoint what is being forgotten.

The stories that women wrote and told about their part in the war are first and foremost about their suffering in the concentration camps. Postma wrote as early as 1918 of a 'register of horrors'**[x]** while Van Heyningen remarks that the early tales are 'accounts of devastation and suffering, tragedy piled upon tragedy.'**[xi]**

It is however interesting that this first wave of stories is in fact not merely a 'register of horrors', but can also be described as an inventory of 'indomitable resistance'.**[xii]** The first people to write about the role of women in the South

African War emphasise the pain and suffering of the women in the camps, while at the same time arguing that women were not just passive victims of a dreadful tragedy, but played an active and important part in the war. Women and girls are described as activists who played multiple roles far beyond their heroic and stoical acceptance of the suffering they had to endure in the camps.

They were farm managers, soldiers, spies, supporters and letter writers… and they even managed to terrorise the British. What is striking, though, is that underlying all the descriptions of what women did during the war, inside or outside the camps, is a specific idealised image of what women were like or, perhaps, should be like. Neethling describes the purpose of her book as follows:
*To write the story of Boer women as they showed themselves during the war, truly, fairly… their strength, their patient endurance, their heroic steadfastness.***[xiii]**

In 1905 Johanna Brandt writes the following about the concentration camps:
*It was a dreadful life in the camp…and everywhere you witnessed the grief… of mothers as they had to watch their children die, of women fearful and anxious for their men and sons in battle; yet you witnessed their courage, their faith and their fortitude, and their trust in God their father – and you developed a deep respect for them.***[xiv]**

Like Brandt, Neethling emphasises the patience and perseverance of the women in the camps:
*The patriotism, the patience, the endurance of the women, has been wonderful. To many a one there was no loss, no hardship, no disappointment she feared so much as that her husband would disgrace his men and surrender. We know of a woman in a camp who had lost her only two children and had suffered much; but when her husband came in, instead of welcoming him, she burst into tears, exclaiming, '0, this is the hardest blow of all'.***[xv]**

Andriessen, who wrote up many of the women's stories in *The women of the Boers*, stresses the agency, and even activism, of the women during this time. He tells the story of a Bloemfontein woman who was ordered to bake bread for British soldiers and refused to do so at first, but was forced to comply. The soldiers all fell very ill and it was established that the woman had added copper sulphate to the dough. Another woman, according to Andriessen, refused to help a British soldier, his 'teeth chattering with fever', and said to him: 'I will not help to

make you better just so you can go and shoot dead our people.'**[xvi]** As letter writers, the women, it is told, were relentless in their support of the South African soldiers and encouraged them never to give up. During the war Jan Smuts wrote a letter in which he states:

*And yet the women persevere in the most wonderful way; there is almost no letter that is smuggled out of the concentration camps to the commandos that doesn't encourage the men to persist to death and never to bring the shame of surrender on their families. No wonder that the burghers are so devout, it is as if their spirit is not of man but of God.***[xvii]**

Andriessen also describes women who did men's work on the farms in their absence:

*The harvest is gathered, the corn cut, bound into sheaths and brought to the loft in the arms of women and children. And that besides, the loyal spouse still cares for the patriarch's family… she provides the cattle with what they need so that they can be used for ploughing once more… It was painful to witness, the women everywhere… doing men's work. In the stable and in the fields, women and young girls, women driving the ox wagons, and with such calmness and serenity…***[xviii].**

Conclusion

The women in these stories are calm, patient, strong, brave, practical, devout – so much so that one may indeed be forgiven for thinking that they are 'not earthly beings, but of God'. The trauma of the war is carefully noted, but the emotional impact of the trauma (as described in these writings) appears to be quite unusual. Despite all the reports of pain and suffering there are no stories about depression, anxiety, hysteria, hopelessness or withdrawal. The normal symptoms of post-traumatic stress are strangely absent. It is perhaps no wonder that Neethling comments about her own book: '(it) may read too much like fiction', but '(t)here is no fiction about it'.**[xix]** Contemporary readers of these traumatic tales cannot help but wonder whether the flip side of the instruction to remember was indeed also an instruction to forget. It appears that in this early wave of books and stories about the war there was a determination to forget everything that went against the ideal that was created. It meant that even those things that could have been ambiguous were 'forgotten'. Consequently, we have in the remembrances of our heroines not only the institutionalisation of memory, but also the institutionalisation of forgetting.**[xx]**

NOTES

i. L-M. Kruger, 'A tribute to 150 years of Sigmund Freud. Not mastering the mind: Freud and the "forgotten material" of Psychology', in: Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in South Africa 14, 2006, 1- 12.

ii. A. Grundlingh, 'War, wordsmiths and the "volk": Afrikaans historical writing on the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 and the war in Afrikaans consciousness, 1902-1990', in: E. Lehmannn & E. Reckwitz (eds.). Mfecane to Boer War: Versions of South African history. Essen: Blane Eule 1992; L-M. Kruger, 'Gender, community and identity: Women and Afrikaner nationalism in the "Volksmoeder" discourse of Die Boerevrou (1919-1931)', MA thesis, University of Cape Town 1991; L. Stanley, Mourning becomes. Post/ memory, commemoration and the concentration camps of the South African War, 1899-1902. Bloemfontein: Kraal Publishers 2007; E. van Heyningen, The creation of a mythology, historiography and the concentration camps of the South African War, 1899-1902, 2007.

iii. E.N. Neethling, Should we forget? Cape Town: H.A.U.M. 1902, 127-128.

iv. E.N. Neethling, Vergeten? Cape Town: Nasionale Pers 1917.

v. Examples of titles are as follows: E.N. Neethling, Should we forget? Cape Town: H. A.U.M. 1902.; W. Riem Vis, Tien maanden in een vrouwenkamp. Het leven en lijden van een boerengezin in Transvaal tijdens den laatsten oorlog met Engeland, 1902; J.A. de la Rey, Mijne omzwervingen enbeproevingen gedurende den oorlog, 1903; J. Brandt, Het concentratie-kamp van Irene, 1905; J. Van Helsdingen, Vrouweleed. Persoonlijke ondervindingen in de boereoorlog, 1918; L. Boshoff- Liebenberg, Moedersmart en kinderleed of 18 maande in die konsentrasiekampe, 1921.

vi. E. van Heyningen, The creation of a mythology, historiography and the concentration camps of the South African War, 1899-1902, 2007.

vii. Totius, Trekkerswee. Potchefstroom: A.H. Koomans 1915.

viii. J. Brandt, Het concentratie-kamp van Irene, Cape Town: H.A.U.M. 1905, 123.

ix. W.F. Andriessen, De vrouwen der boeren. Place unknown: Publisher unknown 1903.

x. W. Postma, Die Boervrou. Moeder van haar volk. Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers 1918.

xi. E. van Heyningen, The creation of a mythology, historiography and the concentration camps of the South African War, 1899-1902, 2007.

xii. H. Giliomee, The Afrikaners. Biography of a people. Cape Town: Tafelberg 2003, 256.

xiii. E.N. Neethling, Should we forget? Cape Town: H.A.U.M. 1902.

xiv. J. Brandt, Het concentratie-kamp van Irene. Cape Town: H.A.U.M. 1905, 11.
xv. E.N. Neethling, Should we forget? Cape Town: H.A.U.M. 1902, 5-6.
xvi. W.F. Andriessen, De vrouwen der boeren. Place unknown: Publisher unknown 1903, 84-85.
xvii.W.F. Andriessen, De vrouwen der boeren. Place unknown: Publisher unknown 1903, 86.
xviii. W.F. Andriessen, De vrouwen der boeren. Place unknown: Publisher unknown 1903, 80-81.
xix. E.N. Neethling, Should we forget? Cape Town: H.A.U.M. 1902, i, iv.
xx. I. Hofmeyr, 'Popularizing history: The case of Gustav Preller', in Journal of African History, 1988, 29.
xxi. M. Foucault, Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison. London: Penguin 1977.
xxii. L-M. Kruger, 'Gender, community and identity: Women and Afrikaner nationalism in the 'Volksmoeder' discourse of Die Boerevrou (1919-1931)', MA thesis, University of Cape Town 1991.

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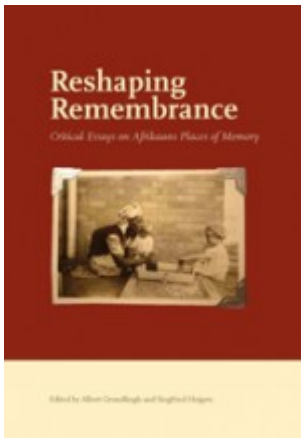
Reshaping Remembrance ~ The Voortrekker In Search Of New Horizons



*To forget and – I will venture to say – to get one's history wrong, are essential forces in the making of a nation.***[i]**

We are marshalled into two lines – boys to one side, girls to the other. I am wearing a long *volkspelerok*, a lilac folk dress the exact shade of jacaranda blooms, dutifully sewn by my gran Mémé. I feel the traditional white lace kerchief scratching my neck, my feet resisting the pinch of my brand-new black school shoes, neatly buckled over a pair of white socks. Earlier this morning I took down the frock from where it was hanging, covered in plastic and reeking of mothballs, next to my virginal white Holy Communion dress. Sister Boniface bends over the record player. Her Dominican nun's habit is daringly fashionable, the hem barely

covering her knees. As the first chords of *Afrikaners is plesierig* fill the air, we take up our positions. Sister Boniface puts her hands around sister Modesta's waist, and they twirl away.

In the singing class, we are taught ditties from the FAK songbook, a treasure trove of light Afrikaans song: *My noointjie-lief in die moerbeiboom; Wanneer kom ons troudag Gertjie; Sarie Marais…* Sister Boniface sings in perfect Afrikaans, tinged with a melodious Irish accent – tranforming the dust and plains of our language into moss and peat.

At the end of standard five I leave the Afrikaans convent school (the only Afrikaans convent in the world!) and move on to a big Afrikaans girls' school. The principal conducts the standard six girls to a bronze cast of Anton van Wouw's *Die Noitjie van die Onderveld* ('Simple country girl').

Figure 12.1 Anton van Wouw, 'Simple Country girl'. Bronze, 30 cm.

The Voortrekker girl stands about one foot (30cm) tall on a stone podium; feet together, hands crossed. Her head is slightly bowed; the small, bronze face barely visible and shaded by her *kappie* (bonnet). There is something despondent about her stance. 'This, girls,' the principal informs us, 'is an example of the demeanour of a respectable young Afrikaans lady – proper, humble, chaste.'

However, at this school, the Voortrekker girls wear neither long dresses, nor

bonnets. They are robust and rowdy, with muscular hockey calves and ruddy cheeks. After school they march and salute in their brown militaristic uniforms, singing cheery songs about camp fires and *magtige dreunings* (mighty rumblings)**[ii]**. I soon realise that the nuns, despite their brave efforts to turn me into a culturally authentic Voortrekker girl, have failed dismally. Here my knowledge of volkspele steps and FAK songs is meaningless.

I struggle to get a grip on the more subtle, underlying cultural codes. Due to my European Catholic background, I remain an outsider, and I am confronted with an impenetrable Afrikaans 'laager'; for the first time I hear about the R*oomse gevaar* (the so-called Roman Catholic 'menace'), the *Swart Gevaar* (Black 'danger'), the *Rooi Gevaar* (Red 'onslaught'). I realise that I am not an Afrikaner, even though my Flemish parents speak Afrikaans to us at home. I discover that I could never be one of them, no matter how hard I tried. I come to understand that my mother tongue is not the language of my mother, which makes all the difference.

Now, almost thirty years later, I shake my head in disbelief as I peruse a Sanlam advertisement in Insig.

Figure 12.2 'Meet the new Voortrekkers'. Sanlam advertisement, Insig Magazine

'Meet the New Voortrekkers', the advertisement proclaims, introducing readers to a group of young, confident, multiracial and androgynous artists. Long

forgotten is the chaste and humble country girl. Forgotten too the militaristic and exclusive youth movement standing for racial and cultural purity. The only requirement is that *Die Taal* ('The Language') be spoken with pride. Clearly the Voortrekker, as a locus of remembrance, is also a place of deliberate forgetting.

Though national identity has often been regarded as God-given, and therefore imagined as something natural and primordial, it is not generally acknowledged as a relatively modern notion – namely that of a fictitious community construed in a premeditated and deliberate fashion, usually in times of crisis when the survival of a particular society was at stake.**[iii]** As such, the Afrikaners presently occupy an interesting position, seeing that they used to be a rather undefined and divided ethnic group, once self-fashioned as a nation, and now demoted to only one of many African tribes whose tribal adherence presents a threat to the integrity of the unstable postcolony. From nation to tribe – moreover, a tribe with pariah status! A change of this order (in a community for whom self-determination has always served as a historical metanarrative) must of necessity inflict traumatic wounds to the collective self-concept. This liminality (between ethnicity and nationality, tradition and global modernity, dominance and disadvantage, colonialism and postcolonialism) is precisely what interests me with regard to the image of the Voortrekker. It is an image that has undergone significant changes: originating from historic events in the 19th century, becoming an icon of the Volk (Nation) in the 1930s, and finally evolving into a symbol of a more inclusive, cynical, militant and/or critical understanding of the Afrikaner's role in the New South Africa.

2.

The Great Trek, along with the figure of the Voortrekker, was generally accepted as the hallmark of Afrikaner origin and identity. The centrality of this historic event in the Afrikaner's national consciousness was, however, only established during the fervent and carefully orchestrated nation-building campaign of the 1930s and 1940s. At the time the Afrikaners' survival as an ethnic group was under threat due to (inter alia) the depression, the dividing character of Unionist politics, and a competitive black upward mobility. The ideologically-driven and renewed interest in the Great Trek during the 1930s secured the figure of the Voortrekker as an icon of the Afrikaner nation and a beacon of Afrikaner nationalism. Nations are often portrayed as a solitary figure. One only has to think of the allegorical 'Statue of Liberty' depicting the myth of a free and fair America.

The continuous representation of the Voortrekker image in Afrikaans newspapers and magazines (a striking example of the irreplaceable role of press capitalism in the process of creating a nation) has deeply etched the bearded patriarch on horseback and his modest but stalwart bonneted wife into the Afrikaner imagination.

Figure 12.3 Castle Lager advertisement, *Huisgenoot* 1938.

Clearly this national ideal struck all the right chords to mobilise and unite the depression-ridden Afrikaner. During the commemorative ox-wagon trek of 1938 the men grew beards, while the women wore bonnets and long dresses. Hundreds of couples in traditional Voortrekker attire were married alongside the ox-wagons, and many children of the commemorative trek were aptly named Ossewania and Eeufesia – derivatives of the Afrikaans word for ox-wagon ('ossewa') and centenary festival ('eeufees') respectively.

The obsessional continuation of a stereotype (such as that of the heroic Voortrekker in the Afrikaans magazine Die Huisgenoot of the 1930s) pays tribute to the unmistakable presence of self-awareness and the accompanying psychological unease and anxiety.**[iv]**

Over-articulation is a means to suppress the insight that the stereotype is an imaginary construct, thereby quelling any fears that the heroic Voortrekker might be a mere myth, while affording an image to be exploited for political purposes. In

the global imagination, however, it is not the narcissist, allegorical self-portraits of nations and ethnic groups that dominate, but the less attractive stereotypes: Bruce and his kangaroo-skin hat, sporting corks to ward off the flies; Hans with his lederhosen and big belly. Following the 1948 election victory, the ethnically exclusive image of the Voortrekker was turned into a national emblem**.[v]** The Great Trek was foregrounded as every South African's legacy. The Grand Narrative of the Voortrekker was told and retold in all South African history school books, and symbols associated with the Great Trek (the torch, the ox-wagon, the iconic figure of the Voortrekker) were forced down all South Africans' throats by every available medium and means – from postage stamps to the national anthem. This cultural violation caused irreparable damage to the image of the Afrikaner, giving rise to a less flattering stereotype – that of the Afrikaner as a thick-necked, khaki-clad, brutal racist.

More than any other structure, the Voortrekker monument embodies the narcissism, paranoia and chauvinism of the Afrikaner during the apartheid years. This monolithic monument, surrounded by its circular and uninterrupted laager of ox-wagons carved in stone, exemplifies a central aspect of identity formation, namely exclusivity. The establishment of an inclusive 'we' always goes hand in hand with a negative description of the rejected Other. In fact, the definition of the Self (embodied in the civilised, Godfearing and valorous Voortrekker) is positively dependent on a clearly defined(primitive, bloodthirsty and cowardly) Other. Especially in the Hall of Heroes, where a procession of large marble relief panels tells the story of the Trekkers' struggle to bring the light of civilisation to Darkest Africa, the subtext of self-righteousness and selfglorification is quite clear. To the scores of white Afrikaans children visiting the monument on school excursions, the image of the defenceless Voortrekker children and women overpowered by hordes of cruel savages must have made a lasting impression. Similarly the patriarchal nature of Afrikaner culture was reinforced by the brave heroes coming to their rescue.

The inauguration of the monument on 16 December 1949, shortly after the Nationalist Party had come into power in 1948, not only proclaimed the political triumph of Afrikaner nationalism, but also implied that this victory was divinely sanctioned. Just as the victory of the hugely outnumbered Voortrekkers against the Zulus at Blood River proved to Afrikaners that they were God's chosen people, the unlikely victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948 was similarly

interpreted as a divine intervention. The fact that nationalist monuments are often drenched in religious symbols is no coincidence.**[vi]** In the same way that the secular nation state had replaced the theocracy of the middle ages, the magical symbolism of religion was later applied to underpin the power of the state. In the process the identity of Afrikaner nationalism and the Protestant religion became inextricably linked.

But no nation's self-fashioning remains intact. As the crisis that faced the Afrikaners in the 1930s and early 1940s faded, and they increasingly profited from the 'affirmative' practices of the Nationalist government, the general profile of the Afrikaner changed drastically.**[vii]** The changing status of the average Afrikaner, together with the inevitable claims made by the country's displaced black population, would of necessity impact on the Afrikaner's self-image. Ideological and class differences that had always existed in Afrikaner ranks, though temporarily erased by a mutual desire for political and cultural recognition, emerged more strongly than ever, and right-wing Afrikaners increasingly tended to appropriate the cultural symbols of a united nation.**[viii]** A growing number of cosmopolitan Afrikaners would in due course become either apathetic towards, or embarrassed by their Nationalist heritage. A younger generation was soon to discover that the 'feats' of their forefathers had actually been deplorable, and that it was becoming rather 'common' to make a display of one's Afrikaner roots.

It is generally accepted that the establishment of powerful icons sets the scene for iconoclasm. Most of today's young Afrikaners, having escaped the programmatic cultural indoctrination of their parents, are no longer interpellated by the heroic Voortrekker narrative. For the new Afrikaner generation, an obvious way to deal with the chauvinistic outrages and the subsequent pariah status of their cultural heritage, is to reject and ridicule the historical cultural symbols.**[ix]** It therefore comes as no surprise that many young Afrikaners regard the identification with the collective symbols of a bygone era of Afrikaner glory as naive. T-shirts sold at the Klein Karoo Kunstefees ('Little Karoo Arts Festival') equated the ox-wagon (colonial motif of Western civilisation in the dark heart of Africa) with 'trailer trash'. At the opening of the Spier Contemporary art exhibition in 2007, a young Afrikaans arts collective parodied the Voortrekker and other outdated Afrikaner symbols, and no-one batted an eyelid. Caricatures of the naive, obtuse Boer have become commonplace in the media and entertainment

industry.

The opposite also applies, however. One has to keep in mind that the generation of young Afrikaners now sitting at their school desks, has to a large extent been spared the programmatic excesses of apartheid propaganda. To them the stories of brave Voortrekkers and the heroes of the Anglo-Boer war seem brand-new. These inspiring narratives pose a welcome alternative to the negative role assigned to Afrikaners by post-apartheid history. The unprecedented and unexpected success of Bok van Blerk's song about De la Rey, a once famous Boer general, points towards a fertile breedingground for rekindling the Afrikaner nationalist sentiment amongst young Afrikaners. This apparent need for a positive identification with one's Afrikaans heritage should in fact come as no surprise.

In terms of a Freudian interpretation, the Afrikaner's traumatic political disempowerment and the destruction of his self-concept have been transferred to a process of mourning and, eventually, healing. The glorious story of the Afrikaner, cast in the mould of the Great Trek and endlessly reified in the school history taught during the apartheid years, has become a lost object of mourning. The heroic figure of the armed and mounted Boer finds its final, convulsive revival in the figure of De la Rey. The spate of articles on Afrikaner identity, the bitter polemics on the Boer War and other key events in Afrikaner history, are symptomatic of catharsis. By way of discussion and analysis, the mythical object of mourning is gradually discarded. The teleological, symphonic Grand Narrative of the Great Trek finally makes way for an insurgence of the real. In this way a more balanced understanding of history (history as a web of numerous contingent, disrupted, many-sided, contradictory and polysemic narratives) is gradually emerging.

Figure 12.4 Fashion Photograph, Fair Lady magazine, 25 September 2002

But is a Freudian interpretation of this nature viable? I doubt it. Freud underestimates the perverse readiness of the collective (any collective!) to forget. The bitter indignation, discontent and obscene self-pity (about affirmative action; about the new dispensation's 'suppression' of Afrikaans) that often slur letters to the Editor in the Afrikaans press, are signs of a surprisingly short memory. But what does this need to forget signify? Paul Ricoeur points out that it is not coincidental that the words 'amnesia' and 'amnesty' have the same etymological origin. The desire for oblivion signifies a need for indemnification rather than forgiveness – the need to forget that forgiveness must be asked.**[x]**

Therefore it is hardly surprising that the Voortrekker monument, representing an imaginary sense of unity and adherence to the exclusivity of the Afrikaner, still serves as the primary symbol of an Afrikaner 'essence'. In a telling photograph from the transitional political phase of 1990 to1994, Tokyo Sexwale takes up a triumphant stance inside the laager. In a more recent fashion magazine, an elegant black model poses in front of one of the monument's marble relief tiles, right inside the sanctuary of the monument itself.

But here the familiar colonial dualism is markedly reversed: modernity, youth and prosperity are depicted as features pertaining to Africa, and represented by the model wearing a colourful top decorated with rock-art motives, while the Voortrekker woman (preserved for posterity in her pale bonnet and long dress), is

reminiscent of the obdurate past.

3.
One question now remains: are there any possibilities whatsoever of recapturing the Voortrekker image, apart from a nostalgic-atavistic right-wing revival (as the De la Rey phenomenon is often interpreted) or the flippant oblivion portrayed in the Sanlam advertisement? Is this advertisement's banal therapeutic multiculturalism (if the old white Voortrekker was the disease, the new multiracial Voortrekker is the cure) the only way for Afrikaners to claim their heritage without compromising their loyalty to the New South Africa? Not necessarily so. Self-reflection and humour offer alternative, more nuanced opportunities for fundamental reflection on Afrikaans places of remembrance.

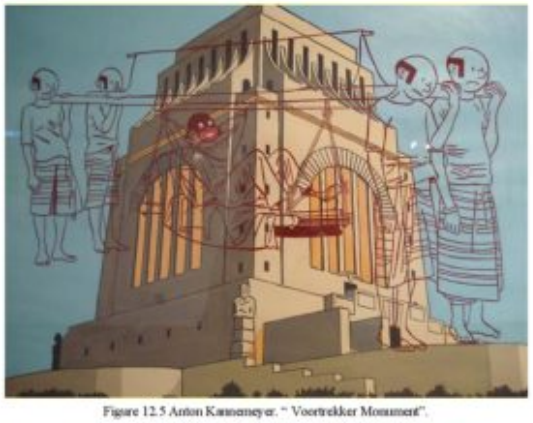


Figure 12.5 – Anton Kannemeyer's
'Voortrekker Monument'

Anton Kannemeyer's 'Voortrekker Monument' examines the fear of retaliation that possibly underlies the numerous debates about the future and nature of the Afrikaner in the New South Africa.

He overwrites the authoritarian aspect of the Voortrekker monument with a spectre of four identical middle-aged white men (caricatures of Kannemeyer himself?) who, in a parodic inversion of the colonial cliché, are carrying a black man in a hammock. The overtly stereotyped features of the man in the hammock signifies the deeply-rooted nature of white preconceptions about Africans – the very preconceptions manifesting in the Voortrekker monument. The power of the intimidating monument, founded on the radical exclusion and degradation of the Black Other, is undermined by exactly those fears, inferiority complexes and

feelings of guilt that were to be allayed by the erection of the monument. Here disillusion bears self-knowledge, a fruit that is not to be despised.

In Minette Vari's video installation, 'Chimera' (2001), the Voortrekker monument is also exploited as a forum for radical self-examination. Vari uses the marble reliefs in the Hall of Heroes as a background against which she projects the white man's profound unease with Africa. Using an insert of her own naked body, Vari disrupts the reliefs' self-glorifying version of history.

Figure 12.6 Minette Vari. Chimera. Video Installation. 2001.

Her body is constantly transformed from a shamanlike shepherd to a flying woman with the head of a beast. This perpetually moving and changing spectre destabilises the hierarchic stasis of the panels and disrupts the symphonic flow of the narrative with an ominous dissonance. Freud's concept of unheimlichkeit – the sudden, disconcerting strangeness of the familiar – is brought into play.**[xi]** The disturbing figure of the animal-like chimera alludes to a post-humanistic vision of identity that undermines the essentialist stereotypes in the Hall of Heroes. Here the white body literally becomes alienated,

whereby the artist not only articulates her own alienation as a disillusioned South African, but also the inherent strangeness and flux of identity as such. In this way the Afrikaner's story of self-justification is transformed into a narrative of displacement. As any account is always selective, thus serving to mask ideological

agendas, bodily experience is here applied to resist the narrative, or even to contradict it. Vari does not repeat or recount the story of the Voortrekkers in a different way, but the story itself is infiltrated and disrupted by the artist's personal experience of radical strangeness and the traumatic discomfort of being an Afrikaner and white person.

By playing visual games with the iconic status of the Voortrekker monument, both Kannemeyer and Vari demonstrate that instead of regarding places of remembrance as places of reappropriation (of a monolithic Self), they can be reinvented as loci of reflection for promoting self-knowledge. This may be one way of confronting the Afrikaner individual with his personal alienation, displacement and hybridity, thereby possibly enabling him to revel in a newly discovered, celebratory freedom.

NOTES

i. Ernest Renan in E. Heidt. 1987. Mass media, cultural tradition, and national identity. Fort Lauderdale: Verlag Breitenback, 131.

ii. In the rousing, patriotic Afrikaner nationalist song, Die lied van jong Suid-Afrika, the 'mighty rumblings' referred to here are the sound of a young nation rising.

iii. Andries Treurnicht articulates the idea of 'nations' as an integral part of a God-given command: 'If you believe … that God has a mission for those exceptional individuals called nations, if you believe that you are meant to survive as an identifiable nation to fulfil your specific calling, can it be right to neglect your nation's characteristic feature, its feeling of unity, its nationalism, its identity?'. A.J. Botha. Die evolusie van 'n volksteologie. D.Th. dissertation, University of the Western Cape 1986, 131. According to Benedict Anderson, however, the nation is an imaginary society, purposefully created for the political survival of a particular society or ethnic group. B. Anderson. Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London: Verso Books 1983.

iv. H. Bhabha. 'The other question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism', in: H. Bhabha. The location of culture. New York: Routledge 1994.

v. It is significant that the building costs of the monument (£360 000) were largely borne by the government. Another telling factor is that the monument was privatised in the 1990s, when it became apparent that the dispensation was to meet with major changes. Compare the text by A. Grundlingh: 'A cultural

conundrum? Old monuments and new regimes: The Voortrekker Monument as symbol of Afrikaner power in a postapartheid South Africa', in: Radical History Review 81 (2001).

vi. B. Anderson. Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London: Verso Books 1983.

vii. According to Grundlingh, the Nationalist Party's regime resulted in the urbanisation of 84% Afrikaners towards 1974. From 1948 to 1975 the number of Afrikaners occupying white-collar positions escalated from 28% to 65%, while Afrikaners in the agricultural sector and industry experienced a sudden heave. As a consequence the rise of the Afrikaans middle classes was established during the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s. A. Grundlingh. 'A cultural conundrum? Old monuments and new regimes: The Voortrekker Monument as symbol of Afrikaner power in a postapartheid South Africa', in: Radical History Review 81 (2001), 99.

viii. One only has to think of the 150th commemoration of the Great Trek in 1988, where efforts to revive the former political victory failed dismally when the centenary festival was hijacked by rightist movements such as the AWB (an Afrikaner resistance movement).

ix. The German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, identified this process, as demonstrated by German youths, as a reaction against the Nazi outrages of the Second World War. J. Habermas. 'A kind of settlement of damages: On apologetic tendencies in German history', in New German Critique, Spring/Summer 44 (1988), 34-44

x. 'It is not by chance that there is a kinship, a semantic kinship … between 'amnesty' and 'amnesia'. The institutions of amnesty are not the institutions of forgiveness. They constitute a forgiveness that is public, commanded, and that has therefore nothing to do with … a personal act of compassion. In my opinion, amnesty does wrong at once to truth, thereby repressed and as if forbidden, and to justice, at it is due to the victims.' S. Antohili, 'Talking history: Interview with Ricoeur', www.janushead.org/8-1/Ricoeur.pdf [Retrieved 23 September 2007].

xi. L. van der Watt. 'Witnessing trauma in post-apartheid South Africa: The question of generational responsibility', in: African Arts 38 (3) (2005).

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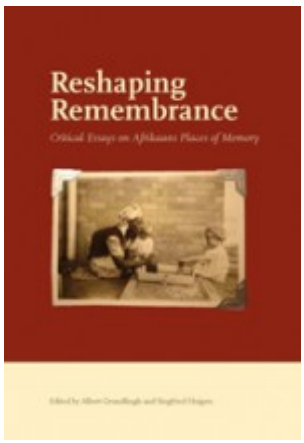
Reshaping Remembrance ~ English



1.

There is something rather uneasy about the thought of English as a space of memory or memorialisation for Afrikaans. One can't easily dispel a vague feeling of embarrassment at the idea that bilingualism features prominently in the specific language-memories of Afrikaans communities. English and Afrikaans are strange bedfellows: over time the relationship has been marked, either simultaneously or in turn, by admiration, amazement and reproach – and this continues right into the present. Of course, the complex relationship between the two languages and the two language communities dates back quite a long way. After 1806 the Cape was no longer Dutch, but the Dutch-speaking inhabitants stayed on. The British government that took constitutional control of the Cape after 150 or so years of Dutch East India Company rule, was

obliged to seek a way of peaceful coexistence between the earlier established Dutch community and the new colonists. From the very beginning of European settlement everything that is characteristic of language contact situations was there. Afrikaans is the product not only of gradual language shift or dialect change, but also of the sustained interaction with indigenous languages, with slave languages and with English.

As early as 1910, eight years after the end of the Anglo-Boer war, the decision on official languages in the newly established Union of South Africa reflected the reality of two strong, separate language communities (notably, the indigenous African languages were not considered at the time). In spite of a British victory in 1902 over the largely Dutch-speaking Boer republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State,**[i]** and their inclusion in a consolidated British colony, a compromise arrangement was accepted when it came to the language policy of the Union. Rather than following a winnertakes-all principle that would recognise English only, both Dutch and English were made official languages. In 1925 – fifty years after the establishment of the 'Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners' (GRA) in Paarl with the explicit aim of propagating Afrikaans as a language in its own right – Afrikaans replaced Dutch as an official language. Then already the relationship between Afrikaans and English and between the language communities that were identified by each of these languages showed tell-tale signs of an ambivalent history. The introduction of Afrikaans as an official language was preceded by almost 100 years of its sporadic usage in popular texts that illustrated local language variation, specifically the colloquial Cape Dutch.**[ii]** For those who had been educated in Dutch and could read and write the language well, Afrikaans instead of Dutch as an official language, was hardly acceptable. For them, Dutch was the standard language; Afrikaans did not have the required kind of social and educational prestige. Others preferred English as the language of literacy and social progress, and thus chose to migrate from Dutch to English. For many living in the rural districts Afrikaans had become their only language; it had, however, never been the only language in any part of the country. For this reason, Afrikaans can never be considered without contrasting it and taking into account its relation with the other South African languages; one can hardly think of Afrikaans in South Africa without some or other contrast to Dutch and finally also to English, the only other Germanic language in the country.

A large part of the 20th century's memory of the relationship between English

and Afrikaans is coloured by the memory of a war. After 1866, following the discovery of mineral wealth in the interior beyond the colonial borders, the British policy of non-expansion was revised. The young Republics of the Transvaal (ZAR) and the Free State that were established on an ideal of independence from British government, became interesting to British statesmen like Rhodes and Milner in a new way. It was not the unequal competition between British troops and Boer soldiers for control over gold and diamond fields that became prominent in the collective memory; the aspect of the conflict between Boer and Brit (1899-1902) that shaped attitudes towards and memories of English for more than fifty years afterwards, was the hardships that women and children endured at the hands of members of the British forces. Grundlingh**[iii]** points out that a shared language contributed significantly to the development of Afrikaner unity as did other factors such as the perception of a shared past, and shared religious convictions and practices. Even so, in the process of rebuilding infrastructure and communities before and after the unification of 1910, and in the political development of the early 20th century, white English and Afrikaans communities were dependent on each other. For Afrikaners, English was friend and foe, ally and oppressor, language of education and domination, sign and signal of what could be achieved and what was unattainable.

Against this brief, sketchy background, I shall examine English as a space of memory from three perspectives, namely personal memory of the acquisition of linguistic identity in an Afrikaans-English household, memories of English in the development of Afrikaans writers and poets, and memories of the 70 year long period in which, as official languages, Afrikaans and English divided and united communities in public domains.

2.

Developmental Psychology and mnemonic analysis often reflect on the question as to how early the first conscious childhood memories are established, and what it is that determines a specific experience as one that will become fixed in the individual consciousness so that it stands out as a memory. One of my earliest and very lucid memories that often surfaces, is one relating to language and emotion: we are sitting around the dining room table, mother, father and three little girls building a puzzle – one with a picture of a Union Castle passenger liner in blue and grey and white colours. As was the custom at the time, in adult conversations children were seen and not heard. The effect is that one becomes semi-

transparent, that one overhears adult conversation as if one is eavesdropping. You don't ask questions and you don't risk making a contribution. The topic of discussion is the child that has to go to school the following year, and the question is whether she will be enrolled in the English or Afrikaans class at the dual-medium school in our little town in Natal. According to dad it would be the Afrikaans class – no argument. But, is my mother's defence, she cannot speak Afrikaans. Then, dad finds, it is high time that she learns.

I can't remember having any specific language preference at school, with family or with friends, before or after that conversation. My father was Afrikaans, my mother English. To her we spoke English, to our father – also English, even though he spoke only Afrikaans. I have no recollection of stress or distress, of conflict or misunderstanding in managing the two languages. The neighbours' children, the Andersons, were English and spoke only English; the older cousins on the farm were Afrikaans and spoke only Afrikaans. I don't recall language being an 'issue' in those communicative spaces. Nor do I remember how beyond understanding, I eventually started speaking Afrikaans. What I do remember, is the shock and dismay I felt on that same day when my mother, following my father's instruction, started consciously and persistently to speak Afrikaans to me. There was a scene in the kitchen where I realized that she was deliberately addressing me in Afrikaans, and that she didn't want to answer me in the language that had been established as our 'first language'. The feeling of alienation and rejection was too much for my five-year-old equilibrium, so I started to cry; in English I shouted that she shouldn't speak to me like that, that I didn't like it.

Three months later I was sitting in Class 1 in the Afrikaans class. As far as I know there was nothing wrong with my English or my Afrikaans. The one remnant of our early English-as-home-language, was that us children used 'jy' and 'jou' (the tu-form of the pronoun) in addressing our parents – if one could use the English 'you' without being impolite, then the direct equivalent was probably in order. I always found my friends' 'ma, wat maak ma' or 'pa, sal pa my help'**[iv]** style rather comical. In any case, the memory of the little outburst in the kitchen where I stamped my feet and screamed in frustration, and the conversation that lead up to it, is an enduring one. My protest had been in vain. We never used English systematically in our home again. The younger brother born in my grade 1 year was introduced to Afrikaans as his first language. What kind of emotion is woven

into the use of a language (any language) so that a calculated change in linguistic behaviour is interpreted as betrayal, as a violation of agreement, a breach in one's sense of security? In a novel that topicalises the question of 'how we became as we now are', Christa Wolf**[v]** points out that it cannot be answered without consideration of such early, intense memories.

One can't escape asking about the nature of the relationship between language and identity. Language is widely recognized as one of the central markers of personal, but also of social and cultural identity. Referring to the experience of so-called 'Latinos' in the USA, Anzaldua writes 'ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language',**[vi]** and Ramsdell writes 'language is identity and identity is political'.**[vii]** I am not alone within the Afrikaans memorial community if I identify myself as 'Afrikaans', and simultaneously remember very dear English grandparents who found it difficult to follow the Afrikaans that their grandchildren were speaking to one another. The relationship between English and Afrikaans may have been tricky, at times even painful, but it was always intimate.

3.

Wolf concerns herself with questions about the historicity of identity. She draws attention to the fact that at some or other mostly unidentifiable moment, every person starts to perceive himself/herself historically, that is, as being intricately part of the period in which they are living.**[viii]** She suggests an answer to the question of how we come to our present identity. According to her, one kind of answer would be found in a list of book titles that stand out as having been formative. In the literature, the poetry and prose of a community, you are likely to find a memorial space. In the transition from personal memory to collective memory I will reflect on English as a language which Afrikaans writers inevitably had to take into account.

I grew up with A.A. Milne's *Christopher Robin* and *Winnie-the-Pooh*, with *Nursery rhymes* and *The wind in the willows.* The bedtime stories, nursery rhymes, fairy tales and fables remain seated somewhere in a safe, trusted space. Later, but with less emotional attachment, there were Afrikaans stories such as *Huppelkind and Die wonderlike motor van Barnabas Bombas.* We were introduced to the legacy of the icons of Afrikaans literature. Completely un-chronologically, we were guided into the work of (amongst others) Langenhoven, such as *Sonde met die bure* and *Herrie op die tremspoor* – novels that were consciously written

as part of a project intended to establish Afrikaans as a literary language. There were M.E.R's Karlien-en-Kandas rhymes and Eitemal's *Jaffie*. At some stage there was also Eugène Marais, Leipolt, N.P.van Wyk Louw, W.E.G. Louw, Eybers, Opperman – poets whose work confirmed that Afrikaans is a worthy language. The work presented to us in school was not focused as much on pride of the fact that Afrikaans could be independent of Dutch, as it was on pride of the fact that works like *Raka*, *Die Dieper Reg, Heilige Beeste and Belydenis in die Skemering* were proof that Afrikaans literature could keep up with and hold its own against English!

If one looks retrospectively at the space created by these first Afrikaans writers and poets, it becomes apparent that they owe much of their development as creative artists to contact with English. A community that claims the work of its artists to be shared cultural property has to accept, even embrace, the various sources from which the art originates. To illustrate how English functions as a memorial space I refer to the contact of a number of iconic Afrikaans literary figures with English during their formative years. My selection is to some extent random – as is the nature of most memories. The first writers who wrote in Afrikaans (rather than Dutch) often did so in a self-conscious and sometimes openly pedantic way, not as full time writers or poets, but as journalists, teachers, doctors, lawyers, politicians.

Quite a number of Herzog prize**[ix]** winners received much if not all of their formal schooling through the medium of English. This was sometimes due to the fact that English institutions provided the only well established educational opportunities in a given context. So, for example, N.P. van Wyk Louw, even in his first school years in a predominantly Afrikaans Karoo town, Sutherland (1911-1919), received his tuition in English because it was the only option. However, Eugene Marais had his schooling in Pretoria in English even though there was a choice between Dutch and English schools.

The Louw family moved to Cape Town in 1920 where Wyk and Gladstone completed their high school years at SACS, and afterwards went to study at the University of Cape Town (UCT). I.D. du Plessis, who was born in Philipstown, completed his school education at Wineberg Boys High in Cape Town, and also went to university at UCT. Education through medium of English, even when the field of study was not specifically languages or social sciences, inevitably brought exposure to a different perspective from the local one. Most of these writers, in

reflecting on their own development, refer to English writers, poets, and literary traditions. Also, their writing often bears traces of thematic and structural features of English works.

It is said of Leipoldt that he grew up in a polyglot household where Afrikaans, English, and German were actively used. As a young journalist, he was war correspondent from 1899 until 1901 for an English newspaper, *The South African News*, of which the owners were outspokenly pro-Boer. At the time there was a host of English leaders in Cape Town who sympathised with the Boer republics. So, for example, Leipoldt was supported by John X. Merriman as well as Fred Centlivres in his protest against the manner in which the British government and the local government in Cape Town waged the Anglo-Boer war. In contrast, there were people in the Cape such as S.J. du Toit, who vigorously supported the development of Afrikaans rather than Dutch, but who sympathised with the English cause during the war. The suggestion that political divisions were drawn along the same lines as language divisions, that English automatically represented imperialism, liberalism and anti-Afrikanerism, is a construction that is not borne out by the available evidence.

Leipoldt grew up in Clanwilliam, started working in Cape Town as a bilingual journalist who could write equally well in English and in Afrikaans, and eventually trained as a medical doctor and paediatrician in London. A.G. Visser, who started his career as a teacher and journalist in the north, also studied medicine in England. J.H.H. de Waal, a nephew of Onze Jan Hofmeyr, who opened the genre of historical romance in Afrikaans literature with his *Johannes van Wyk*, studied law in London and later practiced in Cape Town as a lawyer. So too did H.A. Fagan, who is seen as the founder of realistic drama in Afrikaans. He received the Herzog prize in 1936 for *Die ouderling en ander toneelstukke*, a compilation that included Ousus, which is considered to be his best play. A remarkable contribution in the form of Afrikaans animal stories came from the Hobson brothers, descendants of the 1820 Settlers in the Eastern Cape, who had grown up in an English speaking family in the district of Graaff-Reinet. The overwhelmingly Afrikaans speaking community in which they lived ensured that they were competently bilingual, and that their writing, which was based on experiences and observations from their environment, would be in Afrikaans. Already in 1930 they were awarded the Herzog prize for their literary contribution, specifically for *Kees van die Kalahari.*

Writers and poets of following periods in Afrikaans also produced creative work in contexts where English was used regularly and systematically. To name but a few: Jan Rabie, married to the artist Marjory Wallace, wrote to her in English while he was working on an Afrikaans novel, and explained in detail what he was planning, how he was progressing, and what he was battling with in his work.**[x]** André Brink taught at English institutions, Rhodes University (Afrikaans-Dutch, 1961-90) and the University of Cape Town (English, 1991-2000); later he also started writing in English and did the translations of his Afrikaans work into English, himself. Antjie Krog, who comes from a family of farmers in the Free State where memories of the Anglo-Boer war remained alive in all sorts of ways, was still at school when her first collection of Afrikaans poems was published. She finally published, in 1998 and in 2004, two non-fictional works articulating intensely personal observations and a new kind of identity, in English. She writes about her experiences as a radio journalist covering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings (*Country of my Skull*), and about her impressions of the transformation process in the country (*A Change of Tongue*). Afrikaans translations of these books appeared at a later stage. After about 10 collections of poetry from her Afrikaans pen between 1970 and 2000, she exhibited the same artistic flair in English with *Down to my last Skin* and later with *Body Bereft* (Verweerskrif). Neither did award-winning South African writers of English works escape the entwined relationship of English and Afrikaans and the effects of having shared spaces. For many their names already signal family histories in which an Afrikaans ancestry played a more or less recent role: J. M. Coetzee, Michiel Heyns, Rian Malan – to name but a few.

4.

If language is a space, a place in which people function, then it can also be, just like any other place, either safe, or threatened and threatening. My own memory is that simultaneous exposure to and use of Afrikaans and English in itself does not have to create conflict; the threat lies in the shattering of established, secure patterns. Spaces change over time – what was initially threatening can eventually become familiar, part of the trusted and appreciated. It took just over a hundred years to establish an Afrikaansliterary tradition; currently a lively publishing industry bears testimony to the success of the enterprise. In its own right, Afrikaans developed a literary space alongside and contrasting to English, and it is a space that has been enriched through continuous contact with English. Recognition that English has always been present in Afrikaans memories, and has

always been rapping at the windows, crying through the locks, does not change the variety of feelings that are associated with it. Despite having achieved the kind of security that comes from owning an established space, English remains for Afrikaans a controversial space.

Memories are not necessarily less complex than reality itself. Leipoldt's introduction to English in the Hantam illustrates something of the versatility that many Afrikaans families elected and simply lived; however, that was not the rule within the rural Afrikaans environment. In the North-West, English is often jokingly referred to as a foreign language. In Calvinia, a Biology teacher of the 1960s and 1970s is remembered for, amongst other things, the way he referred to his own English as 'just enough for personal use' – not enough to share, nothing fit for the market, nothing that will generate capital or any other kind of profit. English may have enriched the literature that his colleague taught in the Afrikaans class, but to him only distant contact was safe. Introduce a most friendly and accommodating English guest, and the space would become insecure; ask Mr. Lenhoff to welcome the visitor in English and make him feel at home, and the space would become uncomfortably narrow. For some, English is a reminder of boundaries, of being an outsider, also of unpleasant, even embarrassing histories that easily incense.

Maybe even more: in the early years of the 20th century, when English clearly dominated, there were people with Afrikaans as their first language who chose, for social reasons, rather to associate with English. They made a few shifts and adjustments If language is a space, a place in which people function, then it can also be, just like any other place, either safe, or threatened and threatening. My own memory is that simultaneous exposure to and use of Afrikaans and English in itself does not have to create conflict; the threat lies in the shattering of established, secure patterns. Spaces change over time – what was initially threatening can eventually become familiar, part of the trusted and appreciated. It took just over a hundred years to establish an Afrikaans literary tradition; currently a lively publishing industry bears testimony to the success of the enterprise. In its own right, Afrikaans developed a literary space alongside and contrasting to English, and it is a space that has been enriched through continuous contact with English. Recognition that English has always been present in Afrikaans memories, and has always been rapping at the windows, crying through the locks, does not change the variety of feelings that are

associated with it. Despite having achieved the kind of security that comes from owning an established space, English remains for Afrikaans a controversial space.

Memories are not necessarily less complex than reality itself. Leipoldt's introduction to English in the Hantam illustrates something of the versatility that many Afrikaans families elected and simply lived; however, that was not the rule within the rural Afrikaans environment. In the North-West, English is often jokingly referred to as a foreign language. In Calvinia, a Biology teacher of the 1960s and 1970s is remembered for, amongst other things, the way he referred to his own English as 'just enough for personal use' – not enough to share, nothing fit for the market, nothing that will generate capital or any other kind of profit. English may have enriched the literature that his colleague taught in the Afrikaans class, but to him only distant contact was safe. Introduce a most friendly and accommodating English guest, and the space would become insecure; ask Mr. Lenhoff to welcome the visitor in English and make him feel at home, and the space would become uncomfortably narrow. For some, English is a reminder of boundaries, of being an outsider, also of unpleasant, even embarrassing histories that easily incense.

Maybe even more: in the early years of the 20th century, when English clearly dominated, there were people with Afrikaans as their first language who chose, for social reasons, rather to associate with English. They made a few shifts and adjustments within the linguistic spaces, sending children to English schools, accepting English as a home language, keeping little contact with Afrikaans speaking family and friends. In the second half of the 20th century, when Afrikaans was identified as the language of an authoritative government, many felt that if they had to choose between the two official languages of the time, then English was the safest, perhaps in terms of conscience the only, choice. Jan Rabie, who is regarded as the first of a new generation of Afrikaans writers that emerged in the 1960s and was referred to as the 'Sestigers', was already a critical thinker as a student – or as some would say, he liked controversy. Even in his criticism of the Afrikaner establishment, he persistently worked and gave his critiques in Afrikaans. After a lifetime of protest against Afrikaner Nationalism, he came with the credo: 'My name is Jan Rabie. Without Afrikaans I am nothing'.**[xi]** The same form of protest in Afrikaans was not possible for everyone.

There is another group, namely the coloured and black speakers of Afrikaans whose political space was limited in that they either were never assigned the

right to vote, or were disenfranchised after 1948. More concretely, the denial of the right to vote materialised in (e.g.) limitation of movement, housing, employment, quality of life chances. Those affected could not easily dissociate language from political space. For many speakers of Afrikaans their first language no longer provided the sense of security that it once had done. English then became a place of refuge. Today it is clear that, in response to no longer feeling at home in their own language, a significant number of Afrikaans first language speakers consciously made a linguistic shift. Parents that grew up with Afrikaans have started to speak English to their children when the infants are still in the cradle.

David Crystal estimates that two thirds of all children in the world grow up in a bilingual milieu,**[xii]** and Grosjean is of the opinion that roughly half of the world's population know at least two languages.**[xiii]** According to Crystal's calculation, for 41% of the people that know more than one language, English is one of the two,**[xiv]** and according to Romaine, of all the people that have a relatively good command of English more than half have it not as a first, but as a second language.**[xv]** As second language speakers of English, Afrikaans speaking South Africans fit this mould well. At least in this respect we are not alone in the universe, nor unique in our relationship with English.

A constitution that officially recognizes 11 languages manifestly has the intention to maintain the variety of languages spoken in the country, at least to a reasonable extent and also in the public domain. Thus the South African constitution provides for a number of opportunities in which one can simultaneously find personal expression in Afrikaans, and gain access to a bigger space by means of a world language like English. In Africa, as in many other multilingual communities, besides the practical benefits offered by multilingualism, a certain amount of prestige is associated with the knowledge of more than one language. Proficiency in two or more languages is largely seen as 'a sign of intellectual or cultural superiority'.**[xvi]** Even so, a significant number of historically Afrikaans speakers, more specifically families in the coloured communities, have over the past 40 years increasingly chosen to raise their children as virtually monolingual speakers of English, rather than as bilingual speakers of Afrikaans and English. This has been confirmed in relatively lengthy interviews with members of three generations in family context in 2003**[xvii]** and in follow-up data collected since then. For people who were cast as the lesser

members of the Afrikaans language community for too long, English opens new horizons. The decision to replace Afrikaans as the family's first language and raise a second language to that position often represents more than mere protest against what is experienced as Afrikaner domination; it is also a reminder of the fact that a new language can create new spaces, and this offers people within confined spaces the opportunity to shift boundaries.

In 2003 a colleague and I interviewed a young mother whose father used to admonish her if her Cape-Afrikaans dialect was too prominent. She was reminded that she should speak the standard, notably the white standard. Her linguistic consciousness had clearly been shaped by such a family history – she recognises the shibboleths of the different varieties of Afrikaans spoken in the region, is adeptly bilingual and when it suits her, she speaks the most beautiful idiomatic Afrikaans. We specifically asked her about her and her husband's decision to speak English to their children and to send them to an English school. My question was whether she didn't feel a little sad about her children's loss of Afrikaans, and whether the development of strong Afrikaans-English bilingualism was not a consideration for them. She paused for a moment, tilted her head, and gave an answer that made it apparent that the recent 20th century experience counts more than the now distant memories of the 19th century Cape history when identity with Afrikaans was outspoken in the coloured community. Her remark was that they had never had such a 'thing' going for 'the Language' as the Boers had.

NOTES

i. Cf. D. Denoon, A Grand Delusion. London: Longman, 1973, 75-79, for a description of the futile attempts, specifically of Milner after the war, to Anglicise the Dutch/Afrikaans community.

ii. A. Deumert. 'Language variation and standardization at the Cape (1880-1922): A contribution to Afrikaans sociohistorical linguistics', in American Journal of Germanic Linguistics and Literatures, 13.4 (2001): 30152.

iii. A.M. Grundlingh, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and White Politics', in: B.J. Liebenberg en S.B. Spies (eds), South Africa in the 20th Century. Pretoria: J.L.van Schaik 1993, 268.

iv. Although the vous form in Afrikaans is technically 'u', it is general practice in Afrikaans to use the title rather than the pronoun in directly addressing an older person, thus 'ma, wat maak ma' ('Mother, what is mother doing') rather than 'ma,

wat maak u' ('Mother, what are you doing'), or 'pa, sal pa my help' ('Dad, will dad help me') rather than 'pa, sal u my help' ('Dad, will you help me').

v. C. Wolf. Kindheitsmuster. Darmstadt: Luchterhand 1976, 12-15 ff.

vi. G.E. Anzaldua. Borderlands/La Frontera:The Neroi Mestuza. San Francisco: Aunt Lute 1987, 59.

vii. L. Ramsdell. 'Language and Identity Politics: the Linguistic Autobiographies of Latinos in the United States'. In Journal of Modern Literature 28:1 (2004), 166.

viii. […] 'sich selbst historisch zu sehen; was heißt: eingebettet in, gebunden an seine Zeit' […] one (begins) to see oneself historically; i.e. embedded in, bound to one's own time. C. Wolf. Nachdenken über Christa T. Darmstad: Lucheterhand 1968, 95.

ix. The Herzog prize, arguably the most prestigious award for creative writing in Afrikaans, is decided annually by the Suid Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (South Afrikan Academy for Arts and Sciences). See http://www.akademie.co.za/new_page_2.htm#Hertzogprys

x. J.C. Kannemeyer, Jan Rabie. Kaapstad, Tafelberg, 2004, 287-8.

xi. 'My naam is Jan Rabie. Sonder Afrikaans is ek niks.' J.C. Kannemeyer. Jan Rabie. Kaapstad: Tafelberg 2004, 459.

xii. D. Crystal. English as a Global Language. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1997, 172.

xiii. F. Grosjean. Life with Two Languages: an Introduction to Bilingualism. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press 1982, 11.

xiv. D. Crystal. English as a Global Language. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1997, 173.

xv. S. Romaine. 'The Bilingual and Multilingual Community', in Bhatia en Ritchie, The Handbook of Bilingualism, Oxford, UK: Blackwell 2004, 395.

xvi. N.C. Dorian. 'Minority and Endangered Languages', in Bhatia en Ritchie, The Handbook of Bilingualism, Oxford, UK: Blackwell 2004, 446.

xvii. See C. Anthonissen & E. George, 'Family Languages: Bilingualism and Language Shift', in: Coetzee, A. (ed.) Proceedings of the 21st World Congress of the World Federation of Modern Language Associations – Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes (FIPLV) (in CD format) 2004, 1-17.

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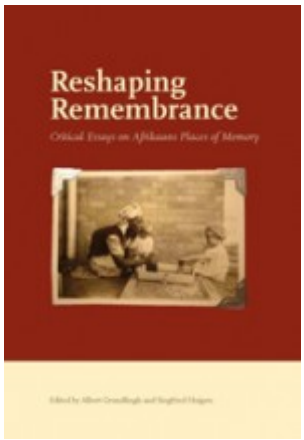
Reshaping Remembrance ~ Language Monuments



1.

The year 1975 was declared Language Year by the South African government, and 14 August was declared a public holiday in celebration of the centennial of the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners (Society of Real Afrikaners) so that 'people all over the country can celebrate the birthday of Afrikaans'.**[i]** On that day, the festivities commenced at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. In memory of the eight founding members of the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners, eight 'language torches' departed from the Voortrekker Monument to all corners of the Republic and to South West Africa (Namibia). In the following months, Afrikaans newspapers regularly covered the 'Miracle of Afrikaans', reporting on local festivities and publishing articles on the history of the Genootskap. One lasting outcome of this enthusiasm was a little-known language monument unveiled in East London on 9 September as part of a local language festival. It bears the words of a third-rate Afrikaans poet, C.F. Visser: 'O, Moedertaal / O, soetste taal, / Jou het ek lief / bo alles' (O mother tongue, O sweetest tongue, You I love above all). The unveiling of the huge language monument outside Paarl had been scheduled for 10 October, Kruger Day, for practical reasons: the weather was better in October than in August – the middle

of the rainy Cape winter.

The erection of the language monument in Paarl had been in preparation since the 1940s. In 1965 a Monument Committee approved a design for a language monument by the Pretoria architect Jan van Wijk. It was to be a modernist concrete structure in the style of Le Corbusier, and according to the brief given by the committee it was to be visible from the main road and blend in with the landscape. The latter requirement was to be achieved by mixing crushed Paarl granite with the concrete. The report of the commission of experts describes the visual experience of the monument in terms of a future promenade architecturale (Le Corbusier):
*The designer makes the visitor climb up stairs to reach the threshold of the entrance […] The visitor reaches a fountain and, having enjoyed the sound of the water, turns right and proceeds to the open space of the inner court. In our view, this is one of the most attractive concepts of the whole design. From this point there will be a splendid view of the main column and the buttress supporting it, an opportunity to pause for a while on one of the granite benches that will be provided and to enjoy the panoramas in the different points of the compass. […] Next to the main column, with a view on what the designer calls the 'magical influences of Africa', stands the smaller column that must symbolise our becoming a republic. […] A basin at the foot of both columns effectively connects them […]. We are also particularly struck by the three domes in the inner court which must remind us of the non-white elements. The inclined buttress of the inner court is reminiscent of another African motif, the ruins of Zimbabwe. We find the juxtaposition of these symbols of Africa particularly successful.***[ii]**

The iconography of the monument is based broadly on statements made by two important Afrikaans authors. The conspicuous main column is based on a statement made by C.J. Langenhoven in Bloemfontein in 1914, in a speech for the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (South African Academy for Science and Art). Langenhoven describes the development of Afrikaans as a line reaching for heaven, a parabola of linguistic achievement. Following in the footsteps of the poet N.P. van Wyk Louw, the horizontal dimension must express the connection of a 'lucid West' and a 'magical Africa'. The 'non-white' origins of Afrikaans are also referred to in the form of a small column, dedicated to Malay, on the stairway to the monument.

For some Afrikaners, like Loots, the founder of the Monument Committee,

these symbols were an impermissible overstepping of racial boundaries. In his view, this reference to the non-white contribution to Afrikaans was ‘unnecessary’. In protest, he even threatened to disrupt the festivities with violent acts of sabotage.**[iii]**

Figure 14.1 Afrikaans Language Monument near Paarl (Photo: Jana Enslin).

2.

Early in the morning of Friday 10 October, on Kruger Day, forty thousand Afrikaners started gathering around the monument on a mountain outside the small town of Paarl. According to reports in the Cape daily *Die Burger* a festive mood prevailed, stimulated by the brass band of the Department of Prisons and the military band of the Cape Coloured Corps. Special provisions had been made for coloured people.

Although the terraces that had been ‘reserved’ for them were not entirely full, they nevertheless played a part in the proceedings. The Primrose Malay Choir in particular was a huge success in the amphitheatre at the foot of the monument. The choir was accompanied by a bass, guitars and ukuleles. Nine Air Force jets blazed a blue, white and orange trail – the colours of the flag – while two Afrikaner scouts hoisted the flag. At ten o’clock that night the celebrations culminated in the arrival of the language torches:

There was a stir among the crowd when hundreds of Voortrekkers [Afrikaner

*boy scouts] with burning torches started moving up a Paarlberg shrouded in darkness towards the amphitheatre. Contingents of eight with flags smartly handed over the route torches to the Premier [John Vorster] […] For each torch, the Navy Band played a fanfare that had been specially commissioned […] After the torch procedure, Mr Vorster delivered his address, after which the descendants [of the members of the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners] helped to light the main torch and to declare the monument officially unveiled.***[iv]**

In conclusion, eight cannons fired a salvo. The eight language torches and eight cannons referred to the eight men who had founded the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners. Those present were probably well aware of this, in view of the constant stream of articles in the press and the attention devoted to it in Afrikaans-medium schools.

The Language Monument was the last of a series of Afrikaans monuments that marked the political position of Afrikaners in the country since the end of the nineteenth in South Africa was celebrated.

3.
The series of Afrikaans monuments started approximately in 1893 with the unveiling of the first Language Monument in Burgersdorp in the Eastern Cape. Erected there to celebrate the Dutch language, it was even a world première: the world's first stone memorial to a language. A more common tribute would be a series of classical works or a large dictionary.

The Burgersdorp Language Monument marks the early phase of the language struggle of Afrikaners to have 'high Dutch', the same language as that of the Netherlands, recognized as a junior partner alongside English. The actions promoting 'Patriots', a variant of the Cape Dutch vernacular that was propagated as the official language by the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners, still occupied the second place. Moreover, these actions stagnated during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).

The nature of the Burgersdorp festivities was rather different from that of the 1975 festival, which was run tightly by a South African police colonel. The occasionally chaotic Burgersdorp festival lasted five days. There were processions of farmers on horseback, picnics, official dinners and endless speeches. It was a sort of village fair. The centrepiece of all activities was 'Oom' Daantjie van den

Heever, a convivial fellow who took a salute in mufti, but wearing a helmet of the Free State Artillery. After the parade he took part in a race with ‘several ladies’, which he lost. A separate race was organized for ministers of the church.

There even was a publicity fiasco. Some days before the start of the actual festival, a ‘scandal and farce burlesque’ was staged in Venterstad. This advance festival was held to collect funds for the official festival in Burgersdorp. The children were lavishly entertained in the hall of the Dutch Reformed Church and rewarded with English prize books. In the evening, an ‘Amateur Entertainment, in support of the Taal Festival Fund’ took place, presided by Oom Daantjie. For three hours the audience was entertained with English items. Oom Daantje’s own children also participated. True, the last item on the programme was a reading of a poem by the Dutch poet Nicolaas Beets.

However, after singing the nationalist Afrikanerbond song, the proceedings were closed with the singing of ‘God save the King’. Die Patriot and De Zuid-Afrikaan, Cape newspapers that supported Afrikaner nationalism, cried shame on it.**[v]**

Figure 14.2 Dutch Language Monument in Burgersdorp. Left: copy of the original statue from 1908; middle: original statue from 1893, which was destroyed by British soldiers in 1900; right: a monument which commemorates the Anglo-Boer War (Photo: author).

The Burgersdorp Language Monument was unveiled a few days later in the presence of the leaders of Afrikaner nationalism, the Cape politician ‘Onze Jan’

Hofmeyr and the author-journalist S.J. du Toit. Following the classicist tradition of giving abstract concepts a female shape, this language monument was a comely young girl of whom rumour had it that Oom Daantjie's daughter had sat for it. Cradled in her left arm the statue bore a tablet with the inscription: 'Vrijheid voor de Hollandsche Taal' (Freedom for the Dutch language). Unfortunately this elegant statue did not grace its pedestal for long. In 1901, it was smashed by English troops and the pieces were transported to King William's Town, a few hundred kilometres from Burgersdorp. After the war, in 1908, the English colonial regime donated a copy of the statue, which was mounted on the empty pedestal. When the decapitated and armless statue was uncovered on a rubbish tip in the 1930s, it was erected diagonally behind the copy.

In 1893 the Afrikaner nationalists were still a politically subordinate and, in comparison with the English rulers, a vulnerable group of underdeveloped rural people taking their first hesitant steps to getting themselves organised. Initially there was no agreement about the language which should be used as the language of the people. It was only during the Second Language Movement, after 1905, that the enthusiasm to have Afrikaans recognised surpassed that favouring Dutch. The First and Second Language Movements had propagated Afrikaans as a characteristic of an Afrikaner identity and wanted it to occupy a central position in the fight for political power. 'Afrikaans was made in South Africa to suit our African circumstances and way of life; it grew up together with our national character; it is the only bond that holds us together as a distinct nation; the only characteristic of our people', said the author Langenhoven.**[vi]** Language was the starting point on the road to realising fully-fledged citizenship. Language activism also envisaged economic benefits. General Herzog foresaw that in the bureaucracy and the press more jobs would become available for white Afrikaansspeakers once a better position for Afrikaans had been gained.**[vii]**

In 1925 Afrikaans was recognised as an official language of the Union of South Africa. This Afrikaans was still a nascent language, based on the Paarl variety of the Cape Dutch vernacular. In order to make this language more acceptable to the bourgeoisie, it was embellished with borrowings from Dutch. Not everyone was satisfied with the result. The Transvaal language advocates Eugène Marais and Gustav Preller regarded this type of Afrikaans as too close to the Paarl (Western Cape) form whereas they had hoped it would be closer to the Dutch varieties of Cape Dutch. For instance, they bemoaned the fact that imperfect

tense forms had virtually disappeared from the new standard Afrikaans. A literature also had to be built up**[viii]**. In Van Wyk Louw's view, a high-quality literature was the justification of national independence. Good poetry was a matter of national policy.**[ix]** Even in the 1940s language users were still uncertain about the language norms of Afrikaans.**[x]** The next target in the language struggle of the Afrikaners was equality with English. This became a possibility only after the National Party came to power in 1948 and made language equality within the civil service compulsory, and also introduced Afrikaansmedium education for Afrikaans-speaking white and coloured people. Beyond these fields, Afrikaans was too far behind English.

Even after 1948, English remained the language of choice in the cities, in the business world and especially among black people. The preference of blacks for English was on the one hand due to the fact that since the nineteenth century they had been almost exclusively educated in English under the English colonial regime and (partly as a result of this education policy) because English was regarded by black people as the main gateway to Western knowledge and economic progress. In this regard Afrikaans was less significant; besides, it carried the stigma that it was used by white officials to implement the policy of apartheid. Consequently, Afrikaans was able to maintain its claims to equality with English only for as long as black people remained excluded from political power and Afrikaners constituted the majority within white politics.

4.
The language monument in Paarl was elected to commemorate the founding of an association that promoted the recognition of a variety of the Cape Dutch vernacular and the establishment of an Afrikaner national consciousness in which language was an important symbol of identity. This Afrikaner Nationalist sentiment existed in the planning of the Monument Committee right from the outset. According to the competition of 1965, the monument had to 'symbolise the miracle of our cultural and political growth. […] the first Afrikaans Language Movement that started here in Paarl was therefore much more than just a language movement; it was a movement for the cultural, political and religious liberation of the Afrikaans section of the population'.**[xi]**

The Republic Column of the Monument that shared the basin with the Language Column expressed these sentiments. In the iconography of the monument the roots of Afrikaans were ascribed to the rational powers of the

‘lucid West’. In the monument, ‘magical Africa’ is a continent that has to be guided by Afrikaans and by the Republic of South Africa. The report by the commission of experts of the competition mentions ‘the role of guidance and assistance that our country must play on the continent’.**[xii]**

The Language Column and Republic Column are positioned in the monument in a colonial opposition to the horizontal components, which are intended to represent Africa. According to this symbolism an originally rational Afrikaans language and a nation of European origin want to give guidance to an irrational and passive Africa.

Ten years later, when the unveiling took place, this pipe-dream of 1965 had long proved to be an illusion. In 1975 almost all of Africa had been decolonised. In 1974, Angola and Mozambique were the last to gain independence. A few months before the unveiling of the monument South African troops had started an ultimately abortive campaign against the Marxist MPLA, which was about to take over the government of Angola. Internationally, South Africa was becoming increasingly isolated because of its apartheid policy, while the black population was less and less willing to tolerate white minority rule.

In the meantime the government continued to pursue equality between Afrikaans and English in education. This had consequences for black schools only much later. Although it was decided in 1965 that from the last year of primary school Afrikaans would be used on an equal basis with English as the medium of instruction in black schools outside the homelands, this policy was never implemented in Soweto, for example. There it was only introduced in 1974. In 1975, however, black school boards in Transvaal instructed their schools to ignore this policy. One important reason for the resistance was that a greater role for Afrikaans as the medium of instruction was regarded as an excessive burden on pupils who were already finding it difficult to receive their education in English. Instead of acquiring subject knowledge, they would lose even more time learning an additional language of instruction. However, the deputy minister of Bantu education, Andries Treurnicht, stuck to his guns. ‘In the white area of South Africa, where the government supplies the buildings, gives the subsidies and pays the teachers, it is surely our right to determine the language dispensation’. Tensions surrounding the use of Afrikaans existed in Soweto long before 16 June 1976, when the black pupils in Soweto rebelled.**[xiii]**

The speech made by John Vorster when the Language Monument was unveiled contains traces of a sense of being under threat and isolated. At the start of his speech he turned on critics in Africa, Europe and America who alleged that the Afrikaners were merely temporary residents in South Africa, remnants of colonialism. The existence of Afrikaans proved, in his view, precisely that Afrikaners were entitled to be in South Africa because Afrikaans had originated in Africa. 'All responsible people in the world and in Africa irrevocably accept that we have the right to be in South Africa and form part of Africa. […] We can celebrate tonight knowing that we are recognized and that our title deed to be here is written in Afrikaans'.**[xiv]**

The second part of the articles in *Die Burger* in which the unveiling of the Language Monument and Vorster's speech were reported on, was printed next to a photograph on which eight (!) white men kneel before the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. Given the symbolic overload of the ceremony, the impression is created that this juxtaposition was not coincidental.**[xv]**

The racial policy of the National Party government carried much of the responsibility for the isolation of institutionalised Afrikaans. Afrikaans-language universities were not accessible to coloured speakers of the language. The Afrikaans media presented Afrikaans mainly as a 'white man's language' and defended the apartheid regime. The special editions of *Die Burger* and *Paarl Post* published on the occasion of the unveiling of the monument contained few or no references to coloured speakers of Afrikaans, whereas they accounted for almost half of the total number of native speakers and an article was devoted to the much smaller 'Jewish contribution to Afrikaans'.**[xvi]** The government did not exactly deal leniently with critical authors either.

In the Language Year, shortly before the unveiling of the monument, the Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach was arrested on suspicion of terrorism. On 13 October, two days after the big day in Paarl, a report on the Language Monument and a report on Breytenbach's wife, who had filed a request for a visa in Paris to visit her husband in prison, shared the front page of *Die Burger.*

5.

After 1994 the Language Monument initially became the target of loathing of the abuse of power by Afrikaners. Breytenbach's labelling of the monument as a concrete penis in *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* was repeated with

variations. Some critics even thought that they could detect the stink of urine at the base of the language column. The curves on the horizontal part of the monument which were supposed to symbolise Africa were described as 'little turds'.**[xvii]**

The new government put forward a proposal to declare the Language Monument a monument to all languages in South Africa. The attempts to profane the monument or to change the original meaning by decree were short lived. Year after year the subsidy for maintenance costs was simply paid out.

In 2009 the Language Monument has become a popular attraction for foreign tourists. Only one third of the visitors were South Africans; two thirds came from abroad.**[xviii]** The monument has developed into one of many enclosed (and therefore safe) tourist enclaves in South Africa**[xix].** There are helpful elucidations of the symbolism of the Monument in various foreign languages. Afterwards the visitor can have coffee and buy souvenirs, most of which are the usual collection of ethnic art and T-shirts.

Information on Afrikaans is hard to find. The Language Monument prefers to advertise the 'spectacular sunsets and sundowners' rather than the Afrikaans language **[xx]**. Like so many others in the new South Africa, the monument has been repackaged. It is now a Paarl version of Table Mountain or Cape Point, more a natural phenomenon for the avid tourist gaze than a place of historical significance.

NOTES

i. Die Burger, 14 August 1975.

ii. 2 Language Museum, Paarl, Dokumente oor Taalmonument, Assessoreverslag van prysvraag, 21 January 1966.

iii. Language Museum, Paarl, Dokumente oor Taalmonument, Die Afrikaanse Taalmonumentkomitee, Minutes of 18 July 1975.

iv. Die Burger, 11 October 1975.

v. D.H. Cilliers, Albert se aandeel in die Afrikaanse beweging tot 1900. Burgersdorp, Burgersdorpse Seëlkomitee 1982, 72-82.

vi. C.J. Langenhoven, Versamelde werke. Cape Town: Nasionale Pers 1938, Deel xii , 371.

vii. J.B.M. Hertzog, Die Hertzogtoesprake, Deel 3, April 1913-April 1918. Johannesburg: Perskor 1977, 264-265. Hertzog was a former Boer general and an

Afrikaner nationalist politician.

viii. S. Swart, 'An spect of the roles of Eugène Marais and Gustav Preller in the Second Language Movement c. 1905-1927', http://academic.sun.ac.za/history/downloads/swart/eugenemarais.pdf.

ix. N.P. van Wyk Louw, Versamelde prosa, Vol. I. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau 1986, 18-25, 44-48.

x. A. Deumert, Language Standardization and Language Change. The Dynamics of Cape Dutch. Amsterdam: John Benjamins 2004.

xi. Taalmuseum, Paarl, Dokumente oor Taalmonument, Die Afrikaanse Taalmonumentkomitee, Boukundige prysvraag, 12 April 1965.

xii. Taalmuseum, Paarl, Dokumente oor Taalmonument, Assessoreverslag van prysvraag, 21 January 1966.

xiii. J.C. Steyn, Tuiste in eie taal. Die behoud en bestaan van Afrikaans. Kaapstad: Tafelberg 1980, 255-305.

xiv. Die Burger, 11 October 1975.

xv. ibid.

xvi. Bylae tot Paarl Post, 15 August 1975; Afrikaans 1875-1975, special supplement to Die Burger for the unveiling of the Language Monument on 10 October 1975.

xvii. Case No: 1995/08 SABC – Agenda, Die Taalmonument; Afrikaner-Kultuur (AKB), D.J. Malan en Andere (Complainant) vs. SABC (Respondent). Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa:
http://www.bccsa.co.za (viewed 15 September 2007).

xviii. Language Monument, Paarl, Visitor statistics, April 2005 to March 2007 (with thanks to Gerda Odendaal, student of Afrikaans and Dutch, University of Stellenbosch, for obtaining the statistics).

xix. Cf. A. Grundlingh, 'A Cultural Conundrum? Old Monuments and New Regimes: The Voortrekker Monument as Symbol of Afrikaner Power in a Postapartheid South Africa', in: Radical History Review 81 (Fall 2001), 95-112.

xx. Language Monument Restaurant, http://www.tourismcapewinelands.co.za/za/guide/6de,en,SCH1/objectId,CTR4201za,curr,ZAR,season,at2,selectedEntry,home/home.html (viewed 15 September 2007).

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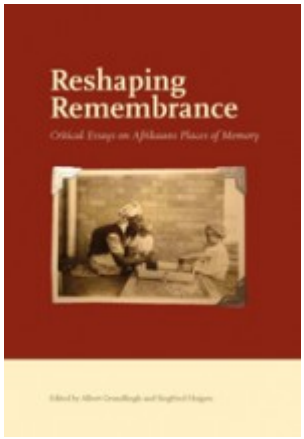
http://www.academic.sun.ac.za/history/downloads/swart/eugene-marais.pdf.

Reshaping Remembrance ~ The

Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal



1.

For the average language user, a dictionary is something that you do not argue with, that you rely on with varying levels of success to regain lost knowledge, for help with crossword puzzles and that you sometimes, very successfully, use to press flowers or as a doorstop. But despite the nature of the use of a dictionary – whether it is in fulfilling its genuine purpose or not – the typical user sees the dictionary as an authoritative container of grammatical and other information that provides the holy truth. That's why in spoken language people do not refer to 'a dictionary' but to 'the dictionary' – almost like *The Bible*. Not everybody is aware of the existence of a variety of dictionary types, each having to comply with its own typological criteria and help a specific target user group in a particular way to meet their specific needs in accordance with their research skills. One particular dictionary can't be everything for everybody – that is something that dictionary users often have to be reminded of. The fact that each specific dictionary has a distinct role in the recording and reproduction of language is also seldom emphasised. Moreover, the fact that between the wealth of dictionaries there is one which can be seen as the crown jewel of the dictionary family is also not always recognised. This jewel is the comprehensive explanatory dictionary, and in Afrikaans this typological place is occupied by the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (Dictionary of the Afrikaans Language), commonly known as the WAT.

The WAT as comprehensive dictionary is a source of information – as supplement, as affirmation and often also as reminder. But as Afrikaans source of reminding it is not only the content of the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* that is relevant, but the history of this dictionary as well that calls one's attention to numerous places of remembrance. As far as the content of the WAT is concerned, one must take note of the fact that a comprehensive dictionary typically consists of multiple volumes compiled over decades – for example, it took 148 years to complete the comprehensive *Het Woordenboek der Nederlandsche*

Taal (The Dictionary of the Dutch Language). The comprehensiveness of such a dictionary lies in its choice of items included for treatment, in the variety of data types that are treated in the dictionary as well as the nature and the extent of their treatment. The comprehensiveness with regard to the choice of words brings about the fact that such a dictionary includes a lot of words and phrases for treatment and in that way makes the user aware of various old and lesserknown language forms. The dictionary becomes a recollection of bygone and less ordinary language use; this is what the WAT is par excellence. In his reaction to a very negative discussion of his *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* of 1961 in *Life* magazine, a discussion which, like many others, condemned this dictionary for not being prescriptive enough, the American lexicographer Philip Gove said the following:
The responsibility of a dictionary is to record language, not set its style. For us to attempt to prescribe language would be like Life reporting the news as its editors would prefer it to happen.

The way in which a dictionary gives account of language and language use is determined by the dictionary types, the dictionary's functions and, especially, the target users and their needs. Smaller dictionaries, like school, learners' and even standard dictionaries aim to portray the standard variety of a language.**[i]** A comprehensive dictionary, however, has to give a comprehensive account of the given language. As a comprehensive dictionary, the WAT is seen as the most exhaustive Afrikaans lexicographic source. It is the dictionary which must portray the full extent of Afrikaans with all its varieties and dialects, the dictionary which has to give an exhaustive account of the Afrikaans lexicon, the dictionary which, through its choice of items, becomes a treasure chest of the language filled with lexical places of remembrance. While a smaller dictionary like a standard dictionary is aimed at the present and the future and therefore has a stronger normative role, the inclusion and treatment in a comprehensive dictionary is aimed at the past and the present and the dictionary therefore has a strong informative approach. The informative nature of the WAT forces the lexicographers to acknowledge the standard as well as non-standard varieties of Afrikaans. There may not exist a purist attitude that tries to isolate the Afrikaans language from the influence of other South African languages, that tries to ignore the reality and the influence of contact among languages, or that tries to allay the dynamic nature of language change. The real language of the real language users as practiced in actual usage situations should be treated in this dictionary. As a

language treasure the WAT must record, treat and protect the lexical riches of Afrikaans – and allay the sentence of evanescence. By focusing on the present as well as on the past, the WAT must become a place of remembrance for members of the Afrikaans community where words as well as other aspects of language can be recalled.

Paging through any of the thirteen volumes of the WAT that have already appeared calls up many memories for Afrikaans native speakers. The variety of dialects as well as idioms and set expressions confirms the richness of Afrikaans. The strong Dutch basis of older Afrikaans, in addition to the numerous non-Dutch words of both the present and recent past also show the influence of other languages, particularly English. This choice of words gives a clear indication of the changing nature of the Afrikaans vocabulary. A noticeable difference between recent volumes and older ones can be found in the inclusion and treatment of technical language. During the earlier phases of the WAT's development, there were not enough Afrikaans technical dictionaries and the WAT consequently included and treated numerous technical terms. Today the Afrikaans technical lexicography is well developed and the WAT only records a limited part of that section of the Afrikaans lexicon. It is specifically the technical terminology used in communication between expert and lay person that is considered for inclusion in the WAT.

Frequent reference has been made to the linguistic content of the WAT and will therefore not be discussed here. The emphasis of this contribution falls rather on certain aspects of the origin, development and positioning of the WAT. The focus therefore is not on an approach from the theoretical lexicography, but rather on the reality of the lexicographic practice.

2.

Many good and bad memories are linked to the history of the WAT. There are memories of how to do something right and how not to do it; memories of how not to start something and indications of how to complete something; memories of isolated struggles, but also memories of successful cooperation between theory and practice; memories of insensitive dealings with language and attempts to overcompensate for this insensitivity; memories of how to become the catalyst for the development of a new discipline, but also of how to be the stimulus for further growth in this discipline.

The early history of the WAT has been thoroughly documented by among others Snijman (1964) and especially Gericke (1991). The work on the WAT started in 1926 but was preceded by a lot of preparation work, although history would show that this preparation was not aimed sufficiently at the compilation of a comprehensive dictionary. The initial plan was to compile a much smaller dictionary meant to be completed in three years. According to a further agreement, that dictionary should have been completed by 1936 but that did not happen. In 1944 part of Smith's manuscript was handed over to Prof. J. du P. Scholtz for review. His findings were, among others, that there was a lack of direction from the editor in chief. When the first editor-in-chief, Dr J.J. Smith, took early retirement due to illness in 1945, nothing had as yet been published. Years later, a later editor-in-chief, Dr. F.J. Snijman, made the following comment with regard to Smith's retirement: 'For his own feeling both his life's work and his life ended in ruins'.**[ii]** From this memory, future editors-in-chief could learn the necessity of including thorough planning and direction as essential elements of the WAT.

Although according to the initial contract between the Minister of Education and Home Affairs, Nasionale Pers (National Press – currently Media 24) and the University of Stellenbosch the dictionary was supposed to be compiled with government support, a lack of government funds resulted in the University of Stellenbosch carrying the financial responsibility of the dictionary project on their own from April 1945 to March University would play through the years – and still plays today.

For many people, slow progress has become one of the lasting memories of the WAT. During a meeting of the Board of Control in March 1946 it was decided by the Board that 'a new editor-in-chief must agree to the completion of a manuscript of the whole dictionary ready for press in a period of five years after the starting of his term of office and … to the publication of a number of letters two years after his commencement of office'.**[iv]** The position was offered to Prof. J. du P. Scholtz who declined it because: 'I don't have the conviction that the Dictionary is placed on the foundation necessary for its satisfactory continuation and completion'.**[v]** According to him it was also impossible to complete the work within five years. The validity of Scholtz's finding would be confirmed in the years that followed.

In January 1947 Dr. P.C. Schoonees became the second editor-in-chief. This

was actually a new beginning and not just a continuation of the editorial work of the WAT. In the modern lexicographic theory the compilation of a dictionary plan according to which the editorial work is set out in detail is seen as one of the most important early phases of any lexicographic process. Dr. Schoonees not only arranged for the compilation work of the WAT to start afresh, but also worked out a set of general editorial principles. Good progress during Schoonees's term was however followed by a very slow approach during the term of his successor, Dr. F.J. Snijman. Volume IV (H-I) of the WAT was released in 1961 and was the last volume under the chief editorship of Dr. Schoonees. The first volume under the chief editorship of his successor, Volume V (J-KJ), was released in 1968. The letter 'K' became a serious swamp for the WAT because Volume VI which appeared in 1976 only covered the partial article stretch KLA-KOL and Volume VII (KOM-KOR), partly under the editorship of Snijman and partly under the editorship of his successor, Mr. D.C. Hauptfleisch, appeared in 1984.

With the release of Volume VIII (KOS-KYW) the letter 'K' was finally completed in 1991. Critics strongly spoke out against, among other things, the slow progress. They even were of the opinion that if that pace was kept up, it would take a further 120 years to complete the WAT. During Hauptfleisch's term, the editorial team seriously reflected on the slow progress and a new editorial system brought about real change which lead to an increased pace. This was also characteristic of the era of Dr. D.J. van Schalkwyk and applies as well to the term of the current editor-in-chief, Dr. W.F. Botha, although forced personnel cuts led to a slight deceleration. Since 1991 the increased pace led to the completion of Volume IX (L) in 1994, Volume X (M) in 1996, Volume XI (N-O) in 2000, Volume XII (P-Q) in 2005 and XIII (R) in 2009. The current projection is that the WAT will be completed by 2025. The memories of progress that was too slow led to a reality of increased production.

3.

The WAT as comprehensive lexicographic project's reflection of the full lexicon of Afrikaans not only provides memories of language forms, but the history of this dictionary also indicates a significant influence on the interaction with theoretical lexicography.

The fact that, when work on the WAT was started, the compilation of a comprehensive explanatory dictionary for Afrikaans was premature, can be seen when looking at the reaction to the publication of the first volumes. At that stage

in the broad field of Afrikaans linguistics there was very little talk indeed of attention to theoretical lexicography. Therefore no review or discussion followed that focused on the lexicographic quality of the WAT. There were however short discussions and announcements which showed a very positive reaction on the release of each volume and saw it as a 'national event'.

The first full discussion of a volume of the WAT was that of Combrink (1962), a probing critique of Volume IV.**[vi]** Although other contributions on the level of theoretical lexicography had been made earlier and were still being made in those years, Combrink's review took a new course, namely a linguistic-based critique of the WAT.**[vii]**

In the general development of the lexicography it was also still an early phase, characterised by a strict focus on the linguistic content of dictionaries.**[viii]** That was also one of the core elements of Combrink's review. Even more important than the value of Combrink's review as a commentary on the WAT was the fact that it was the start of valuable development of lexicographic theory in Afrikaans – and in this the WAT played no small role. For approximately two decades after the publication of Combrink's review the most important contributions to the theoretical lexicography of Afrikaans were probing discussions of the various volumes of the WAT.**[ix]** The WAT wasn't only a stopover for language users with a thirst for knowledge of the language, but also for linguists and theoretical lexicographers who wanted to quench their thirst for criticism. The important role of the WAT in the development of the theoretical lexicography of Afrikaans should never be underestimated. Initially it was a catalyst – something causing change without changing itself. The change regarded the interest of Afrikaans linguists in lexicography, but despite their fierce criticism, the feeling existed that it led to little change in the WAT. However, the WAT played a double role in this development: besides being the catalyst, it was also the stimulant and the target of the lexicographical discussion, but also a product which finally reacted to the criticism.

Change eventually came and theory and practice showed interaction. On the one hand the lexicographic practice of the WAT in due course made changes which led to the improvement of the lexicographic work, but on the other hand the Afrikaans theoretical lexicography also adapted due to the method of work and suggestions from the practice of the WAT. In this process the WAT must be seen as the most important stimulus in the development of theoretical lexicography in

Afrikaans.

Lexicographers must refrain from placing themselves between a word and its meaning. As repository of information, a dictionary should not reflect the subjective views of its compilers. Prejudice on the level of for example politics and religion or the insensitive handling of sexist or racist words is not acceptable – also not in a comprehensive dictionary. It does not however prevent the lexicographer from including such words. But the way in which they are presented and treated is important.

Earlier volumes of the WAT didn't always treat such words with the necessary sensitivity. Especially Volume V (1968), the volume in which the alphabetical partial article stretch K-KJ was treated, is an example of the insensitive treatment of lexical items with a racist value. But even in later volumes, among others Volume VII (KOMKOR) (1984), the necessary sensitivity in this regard is still not sufficient.

A fundamental breakthrough came in 1989 when a discussion on the lexicographic treatment of sensitive items was organised by Dirk van Schalkwyk. Besides the WAT's editorial staff, a number of local and overseas linguists as well as practical and theoretical lexicographers were invited to participate in the discussion. Invitees who were unable to attend were asked to provinde their comments in writing. During this discussion, the quality of the WAT as place of remembrance came under fire during the planning and the discussion.

The event took place at a time of extreme sensitivity with regard to different forms of racism – especially in connection to the more insensitive treatment in the volumes of the WAT that had already been published. In order to show the WAT's new sensitivity with regard to racist language use, the editorial staff suggested that all racist lexical items must be excluded from future volumes of the WAT. Some participants agreed, but others found this unacceptable. It was argued that the WAT would then neglect its duty to account for the full lexical stock of Afrikaans. One of the prominent international metalexicographers, Prof. Ladislav Zgusta, who could not attend the event but sent his comments to the editorial staff, summarised the matter well by saying that such as a plan of action would amount to 'lexicographic myopia'. It was then decided that sensitive terms would be included, clearly labelled and treated briefly and to the point.

The complete collection of recordings of the word's use would be stored in the WAT's electronic corpus where it would be accessible to researchers. A dictionary like the WAT may not only be a purist reminder of all that is well and good in the language, but should also remind us of words and the use of words that are to the detriment of the language.

4.
During the last decade the WAT has also focused increasingly on acting as a source of remembrance on another level. In the treatment of Afrikaans in general, insufficient attention has been paid to the description and treatment of etymology. Cooperation between the Buro van die WAT and the Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie in Leiden led to the publication of *Etimologiewoordeboek van Afrikaans* (2003) and its supplement in 2007. These two products of the WAT have also become valuable sources of remembrance for and of Afrikaans.

Despite a hesitant start and a rough middle phase, the WAT is currently well underway to treat comprehensively the lexicon of Afrikaans. The dictionary therefore provides a lot of food for thought about Afrikaans. Within the broader Afrikaans lexicographic terrain, one of the most important places of remembrance in the development of the WAT is its contribution to the establishment of the theoretical lexicographical discussion in South Africa.

NOTES
i. Compare the discussions on typology in numerous places, among others Zgusta, L. Manual of Lexicography. Den Haag: Mouton 1971; Gouws, R.H. & Prinsloo, D.J. Principles and Practice of South African Lexicography. Stellenbosch: SunMedia 2005 and Gouws, R.H. Leksikografie. Cape Town: Academica 1989.
ii. Unpublished. Snijman, F.J. Die Afrikaanse Woordenboek teen sy agtergrond. Manuscripts: WAT archives 1963, 163.
iii. F.J. Snijman, U woorde, u woordeboek. Stellenbosch: Raad van Beheer oor Die Afrikaanse Woordeboek 1964, 14.
iv. F.J. Snijman, U woorde, u woordeboek. Stellenbosch: Raad van Beheer oor Die Afrikaanse Woordeboek 1964, 14.
v. Ibid.
vi. J.G.H. Combrink, ''n Prinsipiële beskouing oor WAT IV', in: Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe 2 (4) (1962), 199-221.
vii. Compare S.P.E. Boshoff: ''n Standaardwoordeboek van Afrikaans', in:

Gedenkboek ter ere van die GRA. Potchefstroom, (1926), 307-328, F.F. Odendal, 'Leksikografiese probleme I', in Standpunte 14(6) (1961), 53-61, F.F. Odendal, 'Leksikografiese probleme II', in Standpunte 15(1) (1961a), 49-54 and F.F. Odendal, 'Leksikografiese probleme III', in Standpunte 16(5) (1962), 48-55.

viii. Compare R.H. Gouws, 'Meilensteine auf dem historischen Weg der Metalexikographie', in Lexicographica 21 (2005), 158-178.

ix. Compare J.G.H. Combrink, 'Die sesde deel van die WAT', in: Standpunte 140 (32-2) (1979), 49-64, Odendal, F.F. 'Plus positief en plus negatief', in Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe 19 (1) (1979), 24-41 and R.H. Gouws, 'Die sewende deel van die Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal' in: Standpunte 185 (1985), 13-25.

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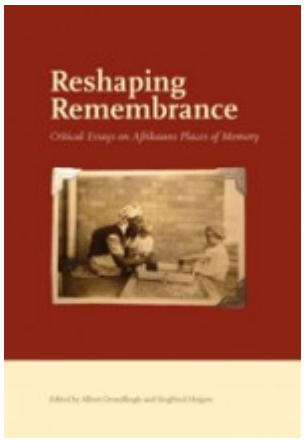
Reshaping Remembrance ~ And The Greatest Is … N.P. van Wyk Louw



1.
In the detective novel *Orion* (2000) by Deon Meyer there is a number of references to N.P. van Wyk Louw. His poem ‘Die hond van God’ (God’s dog) is mentioned in the same breath as the novel *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (Seven days at the Silbersteins) by Etienne Leroux: ‘the reading and discussion of “Die hond van God” by Van Wyk Louw continued all through the night until Sunday afternoon after lunch’.**[i]** The purpose of this reference is to demonstrate the cultural interest of the mother of Zatopek van Heerden, a police detective and the main character in the novel, and consequently of explaining Zatopek’s exposure to intellectual stimuli. Van Wyk Louw’s poem ‘Ballade van die nagtelike ure’ (Ballad of the night-time hours) also features prominently in Orion. Three stanzas from the poem are quoted. When listening to his older mistress reciting the poem, Zatopek realizes ‘for the first time what art really is about’.**[ii]** His obsessional quest for the love of his life is an antidote to the dark despair which gets hold of him after every brief, casual love affair. This quest leads Zatopek to Nonnie

Nagel. But precisely his passionate love for Nonnie becomes Zatopek's Achilles' heel; in 'Ballade van die nagtelike ure' he recognizes his own sad predicament: 'I did not know that "Ballade van die nagtelike ure" would become the crystal ball of my life. I did not know how irrevocably and dramatically the morning of my life would spill me as flotsam over its rim'.**[iii]** In the TV serial based on *Orion* Van Wyk Louw is not as prominently present as in the detective novel itself anymore but at the height of their love affair Zatopek gives a book by Van Wyk Louw as a present to Nonnie.

Not only a writer of detective novels but also Afrikaans singers find inspiration in the poetry by Van Wyk Louw. To mention just a few examples: echoes of Van Wyk Louw's poem *'Jy was 'n kind'* (You were a child) reverberate through the song 'Heiden Heiland' (Heathen Saviour) from the CD *Swanesang* (Swan song) by the band fokofpolisiekar. The playwright Deon Opperman reworks in his poem 'Die plukker' (The picker) one of Van Wyk Louw's most well-known poems: '*Die Beiteltjie'* (The little chisel). On her CD *Amanda Strydom: woman by the mirror*, the singer Amanda Strydom renders Deon Opperman's poem into song. Willie Strauss has made a CD and a theatrical production entitled *Jou ma se poësie en anner gedigte* (Your mother's poetry and other poems). Some of the songs are musical settings of poems by Van Wyk Louw. In his cycle *Vier liefdesgedigte* (Four love poems) and in *Die dobbelsteen* (The die) the classical composer Cromwell Everson has put to music respectively three and two poems by Van Wyk Louw.

Cabaret is another form of popular culture. On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of Van Wyk Louw's birth in 1906, the cabaret *N.P. van Wyk Louw en die meisies* (N.P. van Wyk Louw and the girls) was put on stage. This show was described as 'circus with narration'.**[iv]** It was obviously not the intention of the producers to create great art but to provide light and somewhat saucy entertainment: 'Thus we prepared for the audience the most scandalous episodes from his life in the most exciting ways'.**[v]** This approach – popular art should indeed not be too difficult – obviously relegates the more intellectually challenging poems by Van Wyk Louw to the dustbin of history. To the question 'How do you deal with certain aesthetic mannerisms in the poetry of Louw?' the director Albert Maritz provides the following answer: 'We deliberately use little of his poetry and even less of his prose, and when his poetry is quoted, it is his 'reality' poetry. Poetry which illustrates his values in life and which he prioritized: love, beauty, his religion and politics, his love for his country'.**[vi]**

Does this mean that the work of Van Wyk Louw is to such an extent subjected to the ravages of time that it has become necessary to deal with it very selectively? Or has the present-day cultural climate become so shallow in comparison to Van Wyk Louw's day and age that there is hardly any interest in or time for the more precious and intellectually challenging things in life? *Die Huisgenoot* (The Housemate), the popular weekly in which Van Wyk Louw published a column, cannot be compared by any stretch of the imagination with its present-day version. A lot less raunchy than *Van Wyk Louw en die meisies is Klippie-nat-spu, van die haas!* (Pebble-wet-spit, from the hare), a word and musical programme based on *Klipwerk* (Stonework) from the collection Nuwe verse (New poems) and the musical documentary made for television *Big, bigger than … N.P. van Wyk Louw*, which according to the Internet site of Kyknet, presents an overview of the ups and downs in the life of this giant in the history of South Africa.

Van Wyk Louw is omnipresent not only in more popular formats but also in highbrow literature, and his influence reaches far and wide. Winged words from his poems are often used as titles of anthologies such as *Die dye trek die dye aan* (The thighs attract the thighs) by Antjie Krog and Johann de Lange, Ons klein en silwerige planeet (Our small and silvery planet) by Johann Lodewyk Marais and Ad Zuiderent, and *O wye en droewe land* (O wide and sad country) by Adriaan van Dis and Robert Dorsman. Even though the poetical climate has undergone a seismic shift – poets no longer strive for the purest expression of the most exalted emotion or thought; contemporary poets are already contented when they can quietly sit and chew on a bone – the aftershocks of Van Wyk Louw's poetry can still be clearly registered. The poetry by a wide range of older poets from Johann Lodewyk Marais to Antjie Krog is clearly indebted to him. And in the poems by the younger generation of Afrikaans poets such as Ilse van Staden, Gert Vlok Nel and Danie Marais echoes of poems, stanzas or verses from Van Wyk Louw can be heard.

Not only poets but also prose writers quite often get drawn into an intertextual discussion with Van Wyk Louw. In *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* (2006) (The book of coincidence and consolation) by Ingrid Winterbach, the main character has an enormous admiration for shells because they are the result of a predictable, mathematical process. Shells are perfectly rhythmical and balanced: 'Like Piero in the poem by Van Wyk Louw, the nautilus shell lives beautifully in mathematics'.**[vii]** This reference evokes two poems by Van Wyk Louw: 'Piero

della Francesca'[viii] and 'Pure mathematics'.**[ix]** However, the novel makes the point that this state of complete harmony and utter perfection is unattainable to man. Man is the plaything of capricious forces. Loss and mortality are inherently part of his destiny.

Not only man's striving for perfection but also the ominous, uncontrollable, dark urges of man were confronted in Van Wyk Louw's poetry. In the epic poem Raka they form the biggest threat to progress, civilization and order. The novel *Raka – die roman* (2005) (Raka – the novel) by Koos Kombuis starts where Van Wyk Louw's poem ends: the battle between good and bad, light and darkness has been decided in favour of the forces of evil. They can now go on the rampage. In the Afrikaner community they already hold sway. The picture which is sketched of the family of minister Theunis Opperman, which is supposed to be exemplary, is extremely disenchanting. The fact that the novel is set in Stellenbosch, the bastion of the Afrikaner, just adds insult to injury.

Raka – die roman is a sombre book. Fortunately, the lavish use of humour makes the novel lightly digestible. The characters created by Koos Kombuis and the situations in which they get entangled often have a slapstick quality to them. The absurd exaggerations and the excessive larger-than-life characterizations make the novel into a hilarious read. Whether the reader keeps on laughing until the closing paragraphs is, however, not so certain. The portrayal of the total moral decay of the Opperman family – at the beginning of the final scene 'the children, completely stoned after taking Jozi's pills, sit and listen to Jan Blohm. 'Listen,' says Jozi. 'He sings Van Wyk Louw'**[x]** – suggests that nothing is left of the lofty ideals Van Wyk Louw tried to infuse into his people. Is change, fear and loss the fate of a people, which after 1994 has lost its political power, has to fight for its survival once again and as a result has to face a severe crisis of identity? It is bitterly ironic that this extrapolation takes place on the basis of an epic poem by a poet and thinker who had such high aspirations for his people and his country. And *Raka – die roman* is child's play in comparison with *Kontrei* (2003) (Region) by Kleinboer to whom Koos Kombuis dedicated his novel, or *Horrelpoot* (2006) (Trencherman) the dystopic novel written by Eben Venter.

Raka – die roman is not great art – this cannot be expected of a writer who has chosen the name Koos Kombuis (Koos Kitchen) as a pseudonym – but the futuristic vision which is sketched of the Afrikaner and by implication of the Afrikaner people, is horrifyingly pessimistic. Inevitably Van Wyk Louw's thoughts

on literature and culture, language and people are poignantly activated and radically deconstructed in Koos Kombuis's novel.

2.
Van Wyk Louw aspired to give legitimacy to the Afrikaner people through the creation of works of art of outstanding beauty. In order to achieve this objective, Afrikaans literature had to break free from the cosy local realism which had characterized it until then. Through the intrepid depiction of all aspects of human life, Afrikaans literature should strive to embody universal truths. The aristocratic artist should make this possible. Van Wyk Louw saw himself as the spokesperson for, and the representative of this ideal. Apart from the pompousness, emotionalism and self-aggrandizement to which this occasionally led, Van Wyk Louw has in his own poetry according to general consensus succeeded in reaching a superior level: 'With all he has written, Van Wyk Louw is the greatest poet in Afrikaans literature' is the assessment of John Kannemeyer in his *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur* (1978) (History of Afrikaans literature).**[xi]**

Van Wyk Louw's ambition to create an outstanding literature cannot be isolated from his thoughts on the position and the role of the writer in his community and on the importance of the literary work. While the literary work expresses on the one hand everything that makes a people unique, it can on the other hand transcend a people by opening up a wider perspective and thus by broadening a people's intellectual horizons. Van Wyk Louw writes the following about the importance of the writer C. Louis Leipoldt:
*In the days of our greatest need Leipoldt was the heart of the Afrikaans people … At that time Leipoldt talked, put into words our ache and he let this Afrikaans world of ours shine of a love which has grown during hundreds of years … He at one stage personified the intellect of our people. Maybe he was not a great thinker himself, but he had something in himself which reached beyond the thinking of our people. In many respects he bumped against the narrow confines of our small Afrikaans way of thinking … But he showed a whole generation that there are things lying outside of us.***[xii]**

Undoubtedly when he wrote this, Van Wyk Louw was also thinking of himself. It is not surprising that Van Wyk Louw was a staunch defender of the literary products of the younger generation of writers, though, as was the case with Jan Rabie, he also had a number of reservations.

Whereas the poetry of Van Wyk Louw is not directly politically involved, his plays most of the time deal with current social issues. Moreover, a number of them are occasional plays or radio plays which were commissioned, such as *Die dieper reg:'n spel van die oordeel van 'n volk* (1938) (Profound justice: a play about the judgement on a people) which was written on the occasion of the centenary of the Great Trek. It was performed during a popular festival organized by the Afrikaans Cultural Council of Pretoria celebrating the laying of the cornerstone of the Voortrekker Monument on 16 December 1938. The play attracted large audiences. *Die pluimsaad waai ver of bitter begin* (The seed is blown faraway or bitter beginning) is a play Van Wyk Louw was commissioned to write in 1966, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of South Africa becoming a republic. Berei in die woestyn (Prepared in the desert) was written and performed in 1968 at the 'Feast of the soil' which was organized just once. A number of the radio plays by Van Wyk Louw were commissioned and broadcast by the SAUK, the Afrikaans radio service.

H.F. Verwoerd, then prime minister, lashed out sharply at *Die pluimsaad waai ver of bitter* begin which he denounced as unpatriotic. Van Wyk Louw was very much taken aback by Verwoerd's stinging attack. His play was intended to support the Afrikaner cause: an act of remembrance of the Anglo-Boer war and a warning against internal division. His play was not meant to discredit Afrikaner nationalistic ideology but on the contrary to reaffirm and to reinforce it. The negative reactions to his play in Afrikaner nationalistic circles were founded on a misinterpretation of its message.

In his plays Van Wyk Louw did not try to break down the protective fences erected by Afrikaner nationalists: 'When somebody says that I am a rotten writer, I just shrug – who am I to judge? But when my Afrikanership is put into question, that can still sting, and very painfully indeed … When there is a call for young poets who sing really nationalistically, one can easily say: 'What has happened to Van Wyk Louw, who has tried to do exactly that for the last thirty years?''**[xiii]** Van Wyk Louw was a prominent writer but also an academic and a well-known personality. He reached a wide audience with his columns, which appeared amongst others in *Die huisgenoot.* He reflects on literature, literary criticism, Afrikaans, Afrikaans literature, his own creative work, the role of the Afrikaans writer, Afrikaner nationalism, the formation of a people, etc. Art and people always get inextricably intertwined. In the preface to *Berigte te velde*

(1939) (Messages from the battle field) Van Wyk Louw writes:
*But when re-reading these texts it seemed to me as if one conviction lay at the basis of all of them, an inclination to bring together two points of view which are normally sharply opposed to one another: 1. a belief in the primacy of the purely aesthetic in art, and 2. the conviction that such a 'purely aesthetic' art is a big, even a determining factor in the life of a people – and that this has not only to do with the quality of the life within that people, but even on a more fundamental level with the right of existence of that people itself.***[xiv]**

Van Wyk Louw had the ambition and the vision to pry Afrikaans culture loose from its suffocating mediocrity. He wanted to give so much momentum to a new language and a young people that it would allow them to claim their rightful position amongst other more established languages and nations. He saw himself in the role of a facilitator. Through his poetry and his essays he gave the Afrikaans people the self-confidence that it did not have before. On a cultural level, he achieved what Afrikaans political leaders brought about with the election victory of the National Party in 1948: a renewed belief in the future of the Afrikaner people and of the Afrikaans language. The merits of Van Wyk Louw are generally recognized in the Afrikaner community. Van Wyk Louw has been given a mythical, almost godlike status. His intellectual legacy is presented as everlasting.

Van Wyk Louw of course has to be situated within his historical context. The thirties and forties were a period of renewed combativeness and growing pride of the Afrikaner, the following decades an era of political and cultural consolidation of power. In spite of his criticism of certain aspects of the policies of the National Party Van Wyk Louw has never distanced himself from Afrikaner nationalism. His world view is determined by his steadfast Afrikanership. It prevented him from analysing South African reality from an inclusive perspective. It is ironic that whereas Van Wyk Louw sees resistance and revolt against the injustice experienced by a people as an inalienable right, he grants this right only to the Afrikaner people:
It is often said that Van Wyk Louw was ahead of his time with regard to South African politics. What is probably meant was that he was too liberal. This statement may be true as far as the coloured community is concerned. But when we look at his view on the position of the blacks in this country, our judgment has to be different. Once again, as a consequence of his coupling of people, culture

*and language, his position boils down to apartheid.***[xv]**

Is it as a result of the loyalty of Van Wyk Louw to the nationalistic ideal that his ideas were so highly appreciated by the Afrikaner elite and by Afrikaner intellectuals and that he himself could become an icon? That a quotation from Van Wyk Louw, together with one from C.J. Langenhoven, is inscribed on a plaque at the entrance of the Afrikaans Language Monument in Paarl, is not at all surprising. Did his views have such wide acceptance precisely because they did not shake the foundations of Afrikaner nationalism and did not undermine the policies of the different National Party governments? Did most Afrikaner intellectuals not find inspiration in the same nationalistic sources? Were most of them not members of the same brotherhood? In the final analysis a large majority of Afrikaners, also the intellectual elite, were unquestioning and docile supporters of the National Party. Have the ideas of Van Wyk Louw not all too often been used to provide intellectual cover for the apartheid policies of the white government?

It speaks for itself that the ideas of Van Wyk Louw had to be propagated. The organisation of an N.P. van Wyk Louw memorial lecture at the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit – now the Johannesburg University – expressly served that purpose. F.I.J. van Rensburg posits that one of the objectives was 'to explore the *"unprocessed possibilities"* in the oeuvre of Louw. In this way this is not only a homage or a memorial lecture, but also a determination of the relevance of the oeuvre of Louw "for future times"'.[xvi] And indeed most speakers did what was expected of them: they did their utmost to emphasize the continued relevance for later generations of Van Wyk Louw in different domains of human endeavour. Only in the more recent lectures has this trend been buckled; the hero worship of Van Wyk Louw has somewhat waned and a more polemical and critical line has been taken. It is striking how apologetically and cautiously even the mildest criticism of Van Wyk Louw is generally formulated. Old habits die hard. This subservient approach is also evident in J.C. Steyn's voluminous biography *Van Wyk Louw. 'n Lewensverhaal* (1998) (Van Wyk Louw. The story of a life). Consequently this biography comes across as a hagiography and not as an objective description and a sober assessment of a writer's life.

3.

After 1994 the situation of the Afrikaner has radically changed. With the advent of majority rule the National Party, and with it the Afrikaner, lost all political power. Both the language and the culture of the Afrikaner have since come under

severe pressure. Reasonably speaking one could have expected that with the bankruptcy of Afrikaner nationalism the ideas of Van Wyk Louw also would have lost some if not all of their appeal. This has not happened. From a deep-rooted feeling of injustice and indignation different outfits, cliques, movements and brotherhoods have desperately been looking for a new nationalistic dynamism for the Afrikaner people. Van Wyk Louw seems to be more popular than ever. There are of course parallels, but also big differences, between the thirties and forties on the one hand and post-apartheid South Africa on the other. But whether the ideas of Van Wyk Louw should still determine the direction in which the Afrikaner should march in the twenty-first century is certainly food for discussion in a serious open debate. Is Van Wyk Louw still the superafrikaner who will come to the rescue of the Afrikaner people in times of its most pressing need? Should Afrikaners like Breyten Breytenbach and other former apostates not replace him as role models and cult figures? The cases of Breytenbach, Beyers Naudé and others show that it is almost unthinkable that a dissident could ever be canonized as an icon of the Afrikaner people.

The frequent use by certain people and organizations of the name and views of Van Wyk Louw – very often simply as an authoritative argument – inevitably implies that his reputation should be vigorously protected and defended. For a large number of Afrikaners, Van Wyk Louw was and still remains untouchable as a writer and a thinker. He is like a Teflon pan: stain resistant and rustproof. Moreover, he can be appropriated without any problems by a wide spectrum of opinionated persons or groups, from selfproclaimed liberals to die-hard conservatives – ironically these days mainly by dyed-inthe-wool conservatives. Recognition can sometimes come from a very unexpected source indeed: in 2005 South African president Thabo Mbeki posthumously awarded the Order of Ikhamanga in Gold to Van Wyk Louw.

In the light of the momentous political and social shift which occurred in South Africa after 1994 it is surprising that there is so little appetite in academic circles to analyse Van Wyk Louw's ideas critically and to investigate whether they still have any relevance in the new South Africa. Critics who have done exactly that and pointed out certain weaknesses or shortcomings in Van Wyk Louw's oeuvre have often been mercilessly attacked. But the intellectual legacy of a writer is neither untouchable nor unassailable, no matter what desperate efforts are undertaken by his self-appointed heirs and acolytes to keep it alive and well.

Ultimately nothing lasts forever, not even the greatest of icons.

The spiritual legacy of Van Wyk Louw is undoubtedly safer in the hands of popular writers, singers, composers and authors. They at least make creative use of N.P. van Wyk Louw's ideas by confronting them with the constantly changing political and social South African landscape. Is this not the most suitable homage to a great Afrikaans poet?

NOTES

i. ''n voorlees en bespreking van Van Wyk Louw se "Die hond van God" het regdeur die nag aangehou tot Sondagmiddag ná ete'. D. Meyer, Orion. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau 2000, 85.

ii. 'Vir die eerste keer wat kuns werklik is'. D. Meyer, Orion. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau 2000, 100.

iii. 'Ek het nie geweet dat "Ballade van die nagtelike ure"'n kristalbal van my lewe sou word nie. Ek het nie geweet hoe finaal en dramaties die môre van my lewe my as opdrifsel oor die rand sou mors nie'. D. Meyer, Orion. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau 2000, 100.

iv. '[s]irkus-met-vertelling'. H. Morgan-Hollanders & A. Maritz, 'N.P. van Wyk Louw en die meisies: Haydee Hollander gesels met die produksiespan', available on: www.litnet.co.za.

v. 'Dus het ons die opspraakwekkendste dele van sy lewe vir die gehoor probeer berei op die opwindendste maniere moontlik'. H. Morgan-Hollanders & A. Maritz, 'N.P. van Wyk Louw en die meisies: Haydee Hollander gesels met die produksiespan', available on: www.litnet.co.za.

vi. 'Hoe kom jy verby seker estetiese geaffekteerdhede in Louw se poësie?' 'Ons gebruik doelbewus min van sy poësie en nog minder van sy prosa, en wanneer die poësie ter sprake kom, is 'realiteits'-verse ter sprake. Verse wat sy lewenswaarhede onderstreep en prioriteit geniet het in sy lewe: liefde, skoonheid, sy godsdiens en politiek, sy liefde vir sy land'. H. Morgan-Hollanders & A. Maritz, 'N.P. van Wyk Louw en die meisies: Haydee Hollander gesels met die produksiespan', available on: www.litnet.co.za.

vii. 'Soos Piero in Van Wyk Louw se gedig, leef die nautilusskulp skoon in die wiskunde'. I. Winterbach, Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau 2006, 307.

viii. N.P. van Wyk Louw, Versamelde gedigte. Kaapstad: Tafelberg 1981, 256.

ix. N.P. van Wyk Louw, Versamelde gedigte. Kaapstad: Tafelberg 1981, 182.

x. ‘sit die kinders, diep gerook van Jozi se pille, en luister na Jan Blohm. ‘Hoor daar,’ sê Jozi. ‘Hy sing van N.P. van Wyk Louw’. K. Kombuis, Raka – die roman. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau 2005, 221.

xi. ‘Met dit alles is Van Wyk Louw die grootste digtersfiguur van die Afrikaanse letterkunde’. J.C. Kannemeyer, Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur . Deel I. Kaapstad: Academica 1978, 437.

xii. ‘In die dae van ons grootste nood was Leipoldt die hart van die Afrikaanse volk … Toe het Leipoldt gepraat, woorde gegee aan ons smart en hierdie Afrikaanse wêreld van ons laat opglans van ‘n liefde wat in honderde jare gegroei het … Hy het op een tydstip die intellek van ons volk verpersoonlik. Hy was miskien self geen groot denker nie, maar hy het iets in hom gehad wat buite die denk van ons volk gereik het. Hy het hom in baie opsigte teen die eng grense van ons Afrikaanse gedagtewêreldjie gestamp … Maar hy het aan ‘n hele geslag getoon dat daar dinge buitekant ons lê’. J.C. Kannemeyer, Leipoldt. Kaapstad: Tafelberg 1999, 656.

xiii. ‘As iemand sê ek is ‘n vrot skrywer, haal ek my skouers op – wie is ek om te oordeel? Maar as my Afrikanerskap in twyfel getrek word, kan dit nog seer maak, bitter seer … As gevra word om jonger digters wat eg nasionaal sing, kan een maklik sê: ‘Wat het gebeur met Van Wyk Louw, wat dit al dertig jaar probeer doen?’’. J.C. Steyn, Van Wyk Louw. ’n Lewensverhaal. Deel II. Kaapstad: Tafelberg 1998, 1046.

xiv. ‘Maar by die herlees van die stukke het dit my voorgekom asof daar een oortuiging aan almal ten grondslag lê, ’n neiging om twee standpunte saam te vat wat anders skerp teenoor mekaar gestel word; 1. ‘n geloof aan die primaat van die suiwer estetiese in die kuns, en 2. die oortuiging dat so ’n “suiwer estetiese” kuns ’n groot, selfs ’n beslissende faktor in die lewe van ’n volk is – en dat dit nie alleen met die kwaliteit van die lewe binne daardie volk te doen het nie, maar nog dieper, met die bestaansreg van die volk self’. N.P. van Wyk Louw, Versamelde prosa. Deel I. Kaapstad: Tafelberg 1986, 3.

xv. ‘Dit word dikwels gesê dat Van Wyk Louw sy tyd vooruit was ten opsigte van die Suid-Afrikaanse politiek. Hierdeur word seker bedoel dat hy te liberaal was. Hierdie stelling mag waar wees waar dit gaan oor die Kleurlinge. Maar as ons kyk na sy siening van die swartes se posisie in die land, moet ons oordeel anders wees. Weer, as gevolg van sy koppeling van volk, kultuur en taal, kom sy siening neer op apartheid’. R.E. Van der Ross, ‘Onvoldoende liberalisme’ in W. Burger (red.), Die oop gesprek. N.P. van Wyk Louw-gedenklesings. Pretoria: Lapa 2006, 95.

xvi. ‘om die “onverwerkte moontlikhede” van Louw se oeuvre verder uit te werk. Sodoende is dit nie bloot ’n huldigingslesing of ’n herdenkingslesing nie, maar ook die bepaling van die tersaaklikheid van Louw se werk “vir latere tye”’. W. Burger, ‘Voorwoord: die (steeds) oopgelate kring’. In W. Burger (red.), Die oop gesprek. N.P. van Wyk Louw-gedenklesings. Pretoria: Lapa 2006, ii.

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