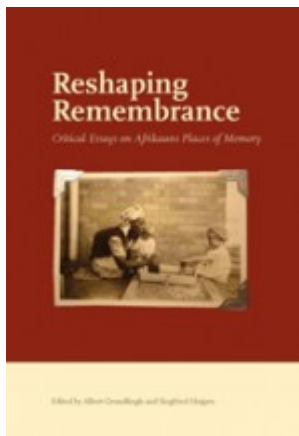


Reshaping Remembrance ~ Language Monuments



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)

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).

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 Afrikaans-medium 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.tourismcapewineland.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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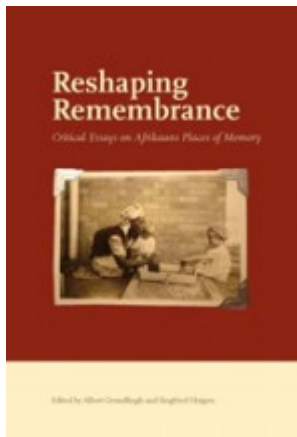
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Reshaping Remembrance ~ And The Greatest Is ... N.P. van Wyk Louw



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 Beiteljtjie' (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-in-the-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 nautiluskulp 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 gerek 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.

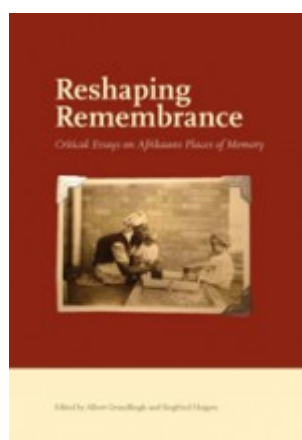
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Reshaping Remembrance ~ Why Have A Ghost As A Leader? The 'De la Rey' Phenomenon And The Re-Invention of Memories, 2006-2007



1.

In an altogether unusual way, a dimension of the South African War of more than hundred years ago came to knock on the door of Afrikanerdom in 2006 and 2007, in the form of a popular song entitled 'De la Rey', and sung by Louis Pepler under the stage name Bok van Blerk. The song is about the exploits of the Boers during the war under the charismatic leadership of General Jacobus Hendrik (Koos) de la Rey. At the time of the centenary of the South African War in 1999-2002 there was little sign of mobilisation around bygone military events; in fact, the Afrikaners' commemoration of the war was characterised by contemplative reflection rather than by an emotional reliving of the past.**[i]** However, four years later 'De la Rey' struck gold. Within less than a year Bok van Blerk sold the unequalled number of 200 000 CDs - an exceptional achievement in a relatively limited market. Moreover, his concerts were packed with enthusiastic fans, from the rural areas in South Africa to as far afield as America, Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand.**[ii]**

For many fans the concerts were an emotional issue. Some teenagers were

totally carried away: with closed eyes and hand to the heart they almost went into a trance on hearing the first chords of De la Rey. Among the enthusiastic crowds were those who regard the song as nothing less than a new national anthem.**[iii]** Moreover, this song did not appeal to the youth only. In Potchefstroom, where Bok van Blerk performed at the Aardklop Arts Festival, 'little old ladies with gilt-framed reading glasses' whispered the words in unison while 'elderly men wearing Piet Retief beards' jumped to their feet and heartily joined the students in song.**[iv]**

2.
What was Van Blerk's intention in bringing De la Rey back to life? The media regularly questioned him about this and his answer was the same every time: it was merely about a historical figure and not politically motivated.**[v]** What complicates the matter, however, is that there are of course many levels of political expression. If one focuses on overt and explicit intentions linked to a programme, there is no evidence that Van Blerk and his group had any connections with organised politics before the CD was launched. But other dimensions of political involvement could indeed exist. In his description of the connection between politics and music, Goehr points out that
*... by denying involvement with the political, musicians might be playing out in music their most effective political role - ... in abstraction, in transcendence ... In general, abstraction or transcendence has been seen to be achieved in the employment of creativity, imagination, and contemplation in what nearly two centuries ago was referred to as 'the free play of faculties'.**[vi]***

It can be argued that it is at this broad level of transcendence that the political nature of De la Rey comes to the forefront - it touches on the cultural and historical dimensions, and within this framework creates space for free association. Van Blerk's viewpoint is that it deals with the restoration of a part of history that is in danger of being forgotten. He demarcates the terrain within which he operates: 'Patriotism is not always political.

Just ask the Scots who still cry - even today - when they hear "Flower of Scotland" being played. It touches one's inner being, one's identity and culture'.**[vii]** From this broad, transcendental perspective the audience can then interpret the song in their own way.

De la Rey must also be read against the background of the other songs on the CD

that are mostly about liquor consumption, cars, girls in bikinis and rugby (the 'coloured' wing Bryan Habana). These contributions are more in line with mainstream Afrikaans light music and have a different flavour. Consequently one can deduce that it was not initially the intention of Van Blerk and his group to send out a strong political message.

In slight contrast to the political assumptions concerning De la Rey, it was also alleged that the song was merely produced for financial gain. Van Blerk denied this: 'On the contrary, it was a bit of a risk to include this song in a commercial album. If someone had tried to tell me a year ago that a song about a Boer general would become a number one hit on the radio, ahead of the top names in the music business, I would have laughed at him.' At the same time, he made the point that it was only logical that an artist would never turn out a product in the hope that it will not succeed. However, De la Rey exceeded their wildest expectations and 'we are obviously not going to be ashamed of, or apologise for the fact that we are making money with it'.**[viii]**

De la Rey as a historical figure was not simply chosen by chance. Besides the fact that De la Rey rhymes with the Afrikaans word 'lei' (to lead), which was surely an important consideration, Van Blerk also found him a 'fascinating character'.**[ix]** The renowned poet and writer Antjie Krog agrees with this view. She contends that De la Rey was 'a fantastic choice for the song, considering that on the very day of his death various myths came into being about the man'.**[x]**

There were various elements and apparent paradoxes that afforded him status as an enigma. He had his doubts about Paul Kruger's declaration of war in 1899, yet he avowed that he was altogether willing to commit himself to the battle. During the war, he became known as the 'Lion of the Western Transvaal' as a result of his military genius. But he was also a gallant general who showed concern for the wounded general P.S. Methuen. At the time of the turmoil caused by the 1914 Rebellion he was strongly influenced by the shadowy Boer prophet Siener van Rensburg, and this contributed to the fact that he acquired a certain mystic quality. In addition, the circumstances surrounding his death, which Siener supposedly predicted, fanned his supporters' suspicions. On the eve of the Rebellion, just outside Johannesburg, De la Rey was accidentally hit by a ricocheting bullet fired by the police, who mistakenly identified the car in which he and General C.F. Beyers were travelling as that of a criminal gang. Some of his supporters, who had their doubts about the way in which he died, spread the false

rumour that he had been shot deliberately on government orders. **[xi]**

His mythical status flourished even further. Aspects of his career and his death clearly contributed to the creation of his image as a charismatic hero. It is this De la Rey aura that Van Blerk and company exploited in the song and the video. Antjie Krog rightly points out that 'De la Rey is pictured in romantic terms in the song: rushing at a gallop, flying across the landscape, known by his praise name: the Lion of the West Transvaal. A lion and a horse, majestic, beautiful, fearless and fast'. **[xii]** But why, one may well ask, have mainly the youth of the 'volk' now decided to choose a ghost as a leader?

3.

Historically speaking, protest music was not an outstanding genre in Afrikaans music, with the important exception of the Voëlvry Movement who in the 1980s used their music in a unique way against the ruling apartheid government. **[xiii]** During the first half of the 1990s, at the time of the transition in South Africa, Afrikaans music showed mainstream qualities and was mainly devoid of political elements. Yet, music with implicit social commentary gradually started to surface. Bands such as those of Karen Zoid - the first Afrikaans rock chick - and others with names like 'Klopjag' (*'Raid'*), 'Snotkop' (*'Snothead'*), 'Brixton Moord en Roof Orkes' (*'Brixton Murder and Robbery Band'*) and 'Fokofpolisiekar' (*'Fuck Off Police Car'*) all addressed elements of the changing contemporary dispensation and established their own artistic critical accents.

Some of the music, like Zoid's, contained nihilistic ambivalences, while the lyrics of others were more outspoken in denouncing state policy and showed increasing rancour at still having to do penance, as Afrikaners, for the sins of apartheid. Although they were at times explicit in their discontent, they did not express this dissatisfaction in the form of a potentially ethnic project. **[xiv]** Nevertheless, it can be argued that the frustration that these groups pinpointed did, to some degree, prepare the way for De la Rey.

A striking feature of De la Rey is the nostalgic undertone of the song, which refers longingly to a hero of bygone times. Although the phenomenon of nostalgia has the past as its subject, its essence is to be found in the present. It is constructed in the present and accordingly bears the tracks of the spirit of the age in which it is created. At the same time, the nostalgically constructed mental image of the past is set up in opposition to the present, which subsequently implicitly forces a

comparison. In both cases, a particular reciprocal action takes place. The past is inclined to become purified and idealised while the present is experienced as being disagreeable and threatening. Emotional strength can therefore be drawn from the past. **[xv]**

However, this does not necessarily mean that nostalgia is an antiquated and sentimental kind of reflection that has a crippling effect on the challenges of the present. As Kloppers **[xvi]** indicates, '(i)t is rather a form of affirmation of life, recalling certain matters from the past and reclaiming them (often in new ways)'. In this sense nostalgia cannot in the first place be seen as atavistic in so far as it rather attempts to overcome a modern kind of fragmentation by energising images of the past. **[xvii]** In conjunction with this aspect, nostalgia can be a journey of discovery that gives meaning to the present.

According to the well-known Afrikaans writer Dana Snyman, who relies heavily on nostalgia in his work, 'after 1994 many Afrikaners were slightly ashamed of our past [...] now we are unashamedly involved in rediscovering ourselves. To rediscover yourself you must know who you were. That is why we become nostalgic about the past'. **[xviii]** Within the context of rituals of dance and music that have the past as subject, Eyerman and Jamison emphasise that this practice does not demonstrate some kind of 'primitiveness', but rather constitutes a present that can be remembered in a creative way. Similarly nostalgia cannot merely be linked to particular political schools of thought. In this regard Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase point out that '[t]he view of nostalgia as a self-serving, chauvinist, right-wing version of the past foisted by the privileged and propertied likewise neglects half the facts. The left no less than the right espouses nostalgia.' **[xix]** Without wanting to imply that the African National Congress still strives after a leftist ideological agenda today, it can be said that it does indeed often appeal to a leftist struggle past.

It is easy to see the ghost of the old and obdurate Afrikaner nationalism in these De la Rey flights of memory. Perhaps too easy. It is true that a few people waved the old South African flag at concerts, but on the whole the discourse exuded a different spirit. Van Blerk himself claims that it has to do with respect for cultural goods and that they are '100% in favour of moving on', of leaving the apartheid past behind and of being part of the 'rainbow nation ... but then we ask to be treated in the same way as other groups'. **[xx]** The desire is therefore expressed to be accepted fully as a minority and without reserve in the new South Africa.

Although his word naturally does not have to be accepted, Van Blerk's followers also make it clear that

*[we do not] long for the old dispensation of the Broederbond and the mendacious National Party ministers. We are merely seeking a new identity, an identity that is removed from the lip-service and lies of the National Party. And the attempts at indoctrination by the Broederbond. In other words, the Afrikaners' own identity and not the politicians' rendering ... And that new identity has become clear to me in the case of artists like ... Bok van Blerk.***[xxi]**

4.

The emotion-laden quest for identity of Van Blerk's followers can also be situated within the broader context of South Africa's material realities. As far as the economy is concerned, there are analysts who claim that despite difficulties, the Afrikaners are financially in a better position at present than in the time of apartheid.**[xxii]** Ton Vosloo, chairman of Naspers, has pointed out that notwithstanding 'pockets of poor whites ... in material terms things have never been so good ... Notice who possess beach houses and drive 4X4s, besides a Merc and another smaller car as well as a bakkie in the garage or yard. We complain far too easily while we are sitting pretty.'**[xxiii]**

It is in this connection that Herman Wasserman wrote a satirical response in which he exhorts De la Rey to come and lead the Boers:

*You will have to come and fetch them. But remember not to look for them in the wrong places. Although Bokkie's little song laments the fact that his wife and child are languishing in a camp ('my vrou en kind lê in 'n kamp en vergaan'), the people who sing his song at the top of their voices do not live in squatters' camps. Their children are not perishing while their parents earn a starvation wage by toiling in other people's kitchens and gardens. No, you will have to fetch your followers from Tyger Valley, Somerset Mall and Menlyn Park. You will see huge, shiny 4X4s, packed with supplies from Woollies, following your horse out of the parking areas.***[xxiv]**

De la Rey is also advised to change his attire, because 'that bandolier and waistcoat are going to make you look very out of place among the Billabongs and Levi's that the young fellows wear when they go out for a drink at the Mystic Boer in the evenings'.**[xxv]**

This point of departure does not necessarily cancel the idealistic yearnings of Van

Blerk's adherents, but by involving other realities it does indeed place the youth's position in perspective. An analysis of the nature of the De la Rey concerts clearly shows that excessive drinking is part of the profile. A report of a specific concert stated that the drinking went on to a point of great exuberance. **[xxvi]** Although excessive drinking is, of course, quite common among the youth and does not necessarily have any greater overt meaning, it is in sharp contrast to the sober historical figure that is called to mind. One commentator formulated it in the following way:

The Boers of whom Bok van Blerk sings were God-fearing people with self-respect, pride, ethical values, moral values, standards and loyalty. The 'Boers' who sing De la Rey in bars these days lead debauched lives. They have no self-respect. They sleep around and have no moral or ethical values, because all they do is look for the next opportunity to become motherless. What is more, there is much we can say with regard to loyalty. **[xxvii]**

In the same way there is also a discrepancy between the language usage of certain individuals and the general passion for Afrikaans Van Blerk lays claim to. One fan had the following to say about Van Blerk: 'I dig his music. He's a cool dude. I like Bok because he says it like it is. I'm telling you, he's hot! Hot like a potato!' **[xxviii]** It is clear that some young people will derive from rock concerts whatever makes sense (or non-sense) to them, notwithstanding the more elevated connotations that others might want to attach to such shows. These expressions of behaviour indicate simultaneously the multiple contexts within which De la Rey has been received and interpreted.

Furthermore, it is obvious that the De la Rey phenomenon shows strong signs of a masculine character. As Cornell puts it, 'Masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.' **[xxix]**

In the case of De la Rey it is not only the masculine icon of the man on his horse that occupies the particular space, but without trying to pretend that De la Rey does not have its quota of female fans, it seems as if men are over-represented at concerts and women stay slightly in the background. De la Rey, it appears, speaks more powerfully to men than to women. **[xxx]**

It is understandable that if one looks at the phenomenon from a different angle,

both the lyrics of De la Rey and the emotive nature of the song are enough to make one suspect that a resurgence of sectional nationalism is apparent. In the absence of largescale formally organised nationalistic Afrikaner structures that are striving for the return of the old political dispensation, it would however be difficult to channel the possible power of De la Rey into meaningful avenues. Today, without the backing of state power, Afrikaner organisations such as the 'Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurkringe' and 'Solidariteit' have a different role than in the past.

In this respect, the song at best caused political stirrings. It should also be taken into account that some of the Afrikaner youth see the 'old' Afrikaner nationalism as a strange, distant phenomenon with which they find it difficult to identify; it has an archaic and problematic character. It is even experienced so negatively that it is felt it should rather not be studied. **[xxxii]** The idiom and register in which some of the youth discover De la Rey differs altogether from the way in which older generations experience it.

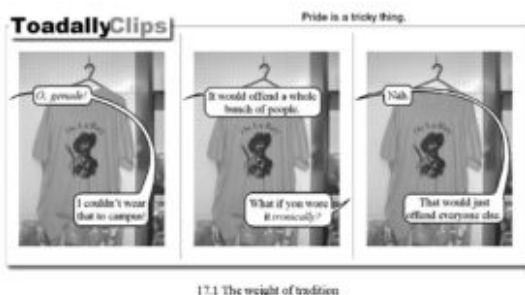
A somewhat unexpected reaction to the De la Rey phenomenon at one stage was that the government deemed it advisable to issue a statement on the matter. The statement read that each group has the right to freedom of speech but that it is necessary to be aware of 'De la Rey and its coded message to fomenting revolutionary sentiments'. **[xxxiii]**

The dynamic of such an exaggerated reaction points to a distrustful state. The Afrikaner establishment reacted in a similar manner to the Afrikaans anti-apartheid music of the Voëlvry Movement in the late 1980s. **[xxxiiii]** Likewise, under communism in Eastern Europe, popular music was frequently seen as subversive. Garofalo points out that this was a widespread phenomenon: *[The] suspicion [exists] on the part of the authorities that even the most innocuous songs contain subversive political content, which is received as such by a 'knowledgeable' audience. The tendency has had the effect of politicizing music which is not intentionally political and enhancing the power of music which is.* **[xxxv]**

In this way, exactly the opposite is achieved of what was initially desired. It is not too far-fetched to suspect that the ANC's reaction to the song possibly lay in the fact that during the anti-apartheid struggle the term 'Boere' was synonymous with the enemy and that it was expressed, among others, in the slogan 'Kill the

Boer, kill the farmer'. Today, thirteen years after 1994, the term 'Boer' has not yet lost its negative political connotations in certain black circles.**[xxxv]** In the light hereof it is understandable that a song in which the 'Boers' are mobilised might cause suspicion. Sean Else, one of the cowriters of De la Rey, found it 'quite worrying that we be analysed under a political microscope' as a result of 'a song that is about a Boer general of 100 years ago'. According to Else, a song that the previous deputy president Jacob Zuma regularly sang at gatherings, 'Awulet' umshini wam' ('Bring my machine gun') had the potential to befar more inflammatory than De la Rey.**[xxxvi]**

5. Reservations about the song probably emanate from an assumption that the Afrikaner youth in the new South Africa ought to create a new and more appropriate identity. The irony however is that for some supporters De la Rey, as indicated, is in fact regarded as a positive, forward-looking expression of identity, supported by a relatively uncontaminated pre-apartheid South African version of history. Since many of these young people have a limited understanding of the past, they see De la Rey as new and fresh, despite the possible repugnance that it may evoke in others.



17.1 The weight of tradition

17.1 The weight of tradition

In a concluding perspective, it is useful to compare De la Rey with the way in which the South African War was used as a historical marker in Afrikaner circles in the past. During the 1930s and 1940s, at the time of the flourishing of Afrikaner nationalism that finally came to political fruition at the polls in 1948, the prevailing discourse on the South African War mainly centred on regaining political power after the defeat suffered in 1899-1902. When the results of the 1948 election became known, some Nationalists took it to mean that the injustices of the past had been redressed.**[xxxvii]** In 2006 and 2007, the discourse mainly

centred on a cultural expression and rediscovery of identity without conveying a message that focused on the regaining of power. In fact, in a certain sense, the song reflects the sense of futility in realising that power has been surrendered for good, thus the almost plaintive appeal to a bygone leader whose time is, likewise, long past.

The great majority of Afrikaners are level-headed enough to realise that erstwhile political power cannot be regained. During an interview in 2004, Tim du Plessis, the editor of *Rapport*, made the following comment on the creation of a new Afrikaner identity: 'No-one sees a political Afrikaner any longer. Politics is a sore point that white Afrikaners in particular avoid, apart from on election days ... but there are other spaces that they explore intensely.' In this regard there is 'a golden thread that runs through everything: continuing interaction with the country that is just as dynamically and unpredictably changing as the Afrikaans community'.**[xxxviii]** Two years later, the De la Rey phenomenon would prove to be a manifestation of the process. The chords of the song resounded loudly in an apparent attempt to mobilise the Afrikaner. But this does not necessarily imply any sinister intent. Given the constant shifts occurring in the Afrikaner community it appears to be little more than a temporary flare-up that could be taken over by other voices promoting an identity strain containing different accents. Be it as it may, it will be difficult in the future to ignore De la Rey as a retrospective pointer in Afrikaans popular culture - even if it is only enshrouded in spectral mists.

NOTES

- i.** A. Grundlingh, 'Reframing remembrance: The politics of the centenary commemorations of the South African War of 1899-1902', in: *Journal of South African Studies* 30(2) (June 2004), 369-375.
- ii.** Die Burger, 7 February 2007, 'Dié Bok se bokkies wil hom hééé!'
- iii.** Die Huisgenoot, 15 February 2007, 'Hoe rey die boere? Jil-Jil so!'
- iv.** Beeld, 28 September 2006, 'Bok van Blerk se magtige dreuning'.
- v.** For example, 'Bok maak hart oop oor De la Rey', in *Rapport*, 26 February 2007.
- vi.** L. Goehr, 'Political music and the politics of music', in: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (52)1 (Winter 1994), 107.
- vii.** *Rapport*, 24 February 2007, 'Bok maak hart oop oor De la Rey'.
- viii.** *Ibid.*
- ix.** *Rapport*, 21 October 2006, 'Bok van Blerk staan styf oor sy De la Rey-lied'.

- x.** Die Matie, 21 March 2007, 'Krog positief oor De la Rey'.
- xi.** H. De la Rey, Die ware generaal Koos de la Rey [compiled by Lappe Laubscher]. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis 1998; F. Pretorius, Generaal JH de la Rey, Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis 2007; H.J. May & I. Hamilton, Die dood van Generaal de la Rey, Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel 1968; A. Grundlingh, 'Probing the prophet: The psychology and politics of the Siener van Rensburg phenomenon', in South African Historical Journal 34 (1996), 225-239.
- xii.** A. Krog, 'The myth, the general and the battlefield', Lecture, Department of Sociology, Stellenbosch University, 16 March 2007.
- xiii.** A. Grundlingh, 'Rocking the boat in South Africa? Voëlvry music and Afrikaans anti-apartheid social protest in the eighties', in: International Journal of African Historical Studies 37(3) (2004), 483.
- xiv.** Andries 'Roof' Bezuidenhout, 'From Voëlvry to De la Rey: Popular Music, Afrikaner nationalism and lost irony', LitNet Seminar Room, 28 February 2007, <http://www.litnet.co.za> (accessed 2 March 2007); M. Bosman, 'Die FAK-fenomeen: Populêre Afrikaanse musiek en volksliedjies', in: Tydskrif vir Letterkunde 41(2) (Winter 2004), 36-37; Akropolis, 16 June 2007, 'Die jeug se vastrap'.
- xv.** For a general discussion on the nature of nostalgia see D. van Zyl, 'O boereplaas, geboortegrond': Afrikaner nostalgia and the romanticisation of the platteland', Unpublished Honours research essay, Stellenbosch University, 2006, 3; F. Davis, Yearning for yesterday: A sociology of nostalgia. New York: The Free Press 1979, 37-38.
- xvi.** E. Kloppers, 'Die postmodernisme, nostalgie en die himniese geheue', in: Stilet (XV(2) (September 2003), 205.
- xvii.** Compare J. Fishman, Language and nationalism, Massachusetts: The Open Press 1972, 9.
- xviii.** Sarie, June 2007, 'Gister se dinge'.
- xix.** C. Shaw & M. Chase, The imagined past: History and nostalgia. Manchester: Manchester University Press 1997, 27.
- xx.** Beeld, 17 November 2006, 'Besige bok is 'n bok vir sports'.
- xxi.** 21 H.H.B. Zaayman, 'Leandri jou doring', 6 December 2006 <http://www.litnet.co.za> (accessed 2 February 2007).
- xxii.** S. Terreblanche, 'Mag en onverdiende rykdom in Suid-Afrika', in Vrye Afrikaan, 15 February 2007.
- xxiii.** Die Burger, 11 May 2007, 'De la Rey-verwagtinge en die pad na oorlewing'.
- xxiv.** Die Burger, 12 February 2007, 'Repliek: Ope brief aan Koos de la Rey'.
- xxv.** Ibid.

- xxvi.** Die Huisgenoot, 15 February 2007, 'Hoe ry die boere? Jil-Jil so!'
- xxvii.** Die Huisgenoot, 1 March 2007, 'Forum: Brief van L.M. Janse van Vuuren'.
- xxviii.** Die Huisgenoot, 15 February 2007, 'Hoe ry die boere? Jil-Jil so!'
- xxix.** R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1995, 71.
- xxx.** Personal observation by author and independent observations by Sandra Swart and Lize-Marie van der Watt.
- xxxi.** Feedback of Stellenbosch University History students, 2007.
- xxxii.** 'Press statement', <http://everfasternews.com> (accessed 7 February 2007).
- xxxiii.** A. Grundlingh, 'Rocking the boat in South Africa? Voëlvry music and Afrikaans anti-apartheid social protest in the eighties', in: *International Journal of African Historical Studies* (37(3) (2004), 491.
- xxxiv.** R. Garofalo (ed.), *Rockin' the boat: Mass music and mass movements*. Cambridge MA: South End Press 1992, 10.
- xxxv.** Mail and Guardian, 18-24 May 2007, 'De la Rey - Is it just a song?'
- xxxvi.** Beeld, 'Almal ken die wet, sê Sean Else oor 'De la Rey'.
- xxxvii.** A. Grundlingh, 'The war in twentieth-century Afrikaner consciousness', in: D. Omissi & A. Thompson (eds), *The Impact of the South African War*. Basingstoke: Palgrave 2002, 29.
- xxxviii.** Rapport, 3 October 2004, 'n Groep wat herskep word'.

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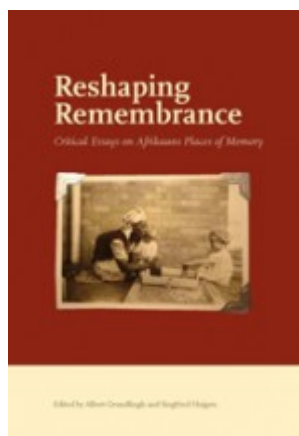
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Reshaping Remembrance ~ Boeremusiek



In the twenties and thirties traditional boeremusiek was played widely throughout South Africa. Many evenings the sounds filled houses and public places, sounded out over our land and gladdened the hearts of Boer people.[i]

1.
On 18 January 2001, I am sitting in the lounge of Professor Stanley Glasser in his house in London. Glasser is the retired Head of Goldsmiths College, University of London, and an expatriate South African. We talk about South African composition, and the imperative for South African composers not to compose European music for South Africa, but rather South African music in which Europe could be interested because it is South African. Glasser advances the notion of a kind of composition engagée. He asks where the desire is to hear the sounds of the land, where the intimate engagement with the music of the people is to be found. And then he says:

Go to a Vastrap and see what you can do with it. Go to a Vastrap evening in Nelspruit or wherever. And see what it means, the dancing, the life, it's all part of the music ... I'm talking about if there's a dance in Nelspruit on a Saturday

night and all the farmers are coming in and the locals are coming in and there is a boereorkes. Where are you guys ... do you ever roll up to that sort of thing? No. It's the composer who has got to do that. It's all very well to take poems by Van Wyk Louw or Leipoldt and set them. You could set it twelve tone, whole tone, keys. Whatever you like. It doesn't matter what you use, but it's the feeling you have that's got to be very attached and respectful to the community as opposed to the university, I may put it that way. I used to live in Bethel, going to a dance in the local hall, with a Boereorkes playing. It was so lively and everybody was in a good mood and you'd see African children looking through the window and everybody was enjoying it in their own way. [ii]

'You guys'. The musicologists. The academics, including and especially Afrikaners, in the suburbs and the universities. The only paper on boeremusiek at a local academic conference for music researchers ever heard by the present writer, was in Pretoria in 2002. The secretary of the local boeremusiek club addressed delegates at the invitation of Professor Chris Walton, a born Englishman who had recently arrived from Zurich to take up the Headship of the Department of Music at the University of Pretoria. Walton found boeremusiek fascinating, partly because of the significant similarities between the local sound and the folk music equivalent in Switzerland. It was a memorable occasion, not only because the paper was so interesting and the presenter very knowledgeable, but also because of the reactions of the small audience consisting of academics and music students. As the presenter demonstrated, on one of the concertinas he had brought with him, a retired English-speaking professor from the University of the Witwatersrand started moving to music, looked merrily to her neighbour and asked: 'Where are the days?' If the music had continued for a little while, I am convinced that she would have started to dance. The Afrikaans students and academics cringed in their seats in the lecture room. Boeremusiek is not Culture (with a capital 'C'). It is a little low, a little feeble, a little simple, a little direct, a little too close to our uncultivated needs and past.

It is therefore hardly surprising that there are no entries on boeremusiek in Jacques Malan's *South African Music Encyclopaedia*. There is no reference to boeremusiek in Jan Bouws's *Komponiste van Suid-Afrika* [Composers of South Africa] (1971), Bouws's *Die Musieklewe van Kaapstad 1800-1850 en sy verhouding tot die musiekkultuur van Wes-Europa* [The Musical Life of Cape Town 1800-1850 and its relationship to the musical culture of Western Europe]

(1966), Peter Klatzow's *Composers in South Africa Today*, or in any of the twenty-five editions of the *South African Journal of Musicology* (SAMUS), or any of the congress proceedings of the then *South African Musicological Society* or the *Ethnomusicology Symposium*. Nothing either in *Ars Nova*, *Muziki*, *The Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* or *Musikus*. The 'sounds that filled houses and public places' in the twenties and thirties clearly did not reach universities, at least not in the form of published research, research papers or documents. Academically institutionalized musicians and researchers never made this 'place' their own. The boeremusiek that 'gladdened the hearts of Boer people' is not the music of the Afrikaner intelligentsia. **[iii]**

2.
Conviviality is perhaps too light-hearted a description of the function implied here. Boeremusiek is a performance practice, a form of musical expression that links closely with memory as a performative entity. It recalls and carries memories, even maintains them. Boeremusiek is perhaps the most exemplary form of cultural expression connected to Afrikaners that can claim to maintain the collective memories of a 'group' in this way, without also imparting to the group political, social or racial definitions. In Japie Laubscher's *Ou Waenhuis* ('The old barn'), the concertina playing has a meticulous, picky quality, just like Japie's thin moustache. It is very different from Manie Bodenstein's broad, lyrical sound in *Lentebloeisels* ('Spring blossoms'), or Dirkie Smit's unsteady rhythm in *Mielieblare* ('Mealie leaves'). In his *Jampot Polka* ('Jam pot polka') on the accordion, Nico Castens is a virtuoso performer who can do absolutely everything and with intense energy alternates each repeated fragment with small appoggiatura's, syncopated beats or changes in articulation. The sorts of memories that Mieke Bal calls 'cultural memory' are inherent to these sounds.

The spirit of cultivation that characterized the Afrikaner in power misunderstood this energy of boeremusiek. For the Afrikaner concerned with Culture, boeremusiek was a matter of identity, of tradition, of cultural distinctness. It is therefore not strange that the FAK (Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge, translated here as Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies) Music Commission considered the matter of the 'quality of boeremusiek' in 1953. The minutes of that meeting read as follows:

It has transpired from discussions that there is no clarity about what 'Boeremusiek' and a 'Boere-orke' ['Boeremusiek band'] really means. Originally,

the bands now called 'Boere-orkeste' used to provide the accompaniment to dances. Later, they were also used at Boere events, where the term 'Boere-orkes' seemed to originate. The problem of the SABC [South African Broadcasting Corporation] is that listeners are asking for more 'Boeremusiek'. [iv]

The Gallo-music archivist and David de Lange expert Rob Allingham describes boeremusiek as follows:

As I've come to understand it, boeremusiek is not just any type of Afrikaans music - in the minds of most of its fans (and detractors), boeremusiek can be typically categorised as an instrumental dance genre which, more often than not, features the concertina as the principle instrument to render the melodies. (There are 'modernised' boeremusiek variations where the melodic leads are played with a piano accordion or even electric keyboards but the concertina, although originally of English origin, is so imbued with Afrikaner-ness in the minds of most boeremusiek fans that it has become a virtual cultural touchstone.) Another defining element is the repertoire: boeremusiek melodies draw almost exclusively on Dutch-German- French sources or sometimes, Cape Coloured/Malay influences. The characteristic off-beat rhythm that came to dominate the genre from the fifties onwards derives directly from the Cape goema-based rhythm - prior to that, the rhythm patterns were also Dutch-Germanic. [v]

Allingham ends his e-mail to the current writer by saying that David de Lange would not normally be described as a boeremusiek musician, as he sang instead of playing an instrument. And yet, in his book *Tradisionele Boeremusiek*, Piet Bester devotes a long section to De Lange. [vi] It is this uncertainty with regard to genre definitions (not unique to boeremusiek and applicable to most if not all popular music culture) that points to a living, fast-evolving practice rather than an expression in dialogue with tradition. The estrangement between a South African academic musical discourse and boeremusiek is confirmed in Piet Bester's rich notes on boeremusiek as a musical practice of autodidacts:

One day [Hansie van Loggerenberg] heard a black man play a concertina and he stepped up to listen more closely. The Black played only one tune on an old boere concertina, but Hansie became interested. After the Black taught him a bit, he bought his own concertina and not long after he could play Sarie Marais fluently. [vii]

At the age of six, Fanie Bosch exchanged some of his best doves for a ukulele. After that, he also taught himself the pump organ, guitar and banjo: 'Fanie says

that he never had any lessons or teaching and that he had to struggle on his own to master the concertina.' **[viii]** Oom (Uncle) Nelie Janse van Rensburg was taught the concertina by his uncle, Kerneels Pienaar, whose sheep he tended during the winter in Swaziland: 'Uncle Nelie kept his blood warm with the soft, melodious sounds of his boere concertina'. **[ix]**

Boeremusiek cannot be reduced to a nationalist discourse. There is something provisional, unregulated, spontaneous, unwritten about boeremusiek. **[x]** One day, when Fanie Bosch was busy recording an LP, *... a new tune came into his head. When the next number had to be recorded, he gave the orchestra the rhythm and the key in which he wanted to play and launched into the new piece. He says that it went surprisingly well and the piece was recorded without a single mistake. His banjo player, old Banjo Botha, was apparently almost crazy with frustration. He just failed to understand how something like that could be done!* **[xi]**

Hendrik Susan apparently composed the number *Ons lag, sing en dans* ('We laugh, sing and dance') only minutes before a performance. **[xii]** It is the same Fanie Bosch of the improvised recording who, after he had lost two digits of his right index finger, had to do a radio broadcast with a bandaged finger. He then composed the *Seervinger wals* ("Sore finger waltz"). **[xiii]**

3.
Die *Seervinger wals*. Boeremusiek titles represent an Afrikaner topography far removed from the triumphalism of Afrikaner monuments, statues, theatre complexes and sport stadiums. And it is a topography that stirs memories rather than encourages historical reflection: *Soepvlees-polka* ('Soup-meat Polka'), *Lekker Kafferbier* ('Tasty Kaffir Beer'), *Pinana Booi* ('Banana Boy'), *Kamiesberg settees* ('Kamies Mountain Settees'), *Jou Flerrie* ('You Flirt'), *Eensaam wals* ('Lonely Waltz'), *Dik Dawid settees* ('Fat David Settees'), *Die Soebat wals* ('The Pleading Waltz'), *Lentebloeisels* ('Spring Blossoms'), *Pannekoek wals* ('Pancake Waltz'), *Ou Willie se vastrap* ('Old William's Vastrap'), *Rietspruit Galope* ('Reed Stream Gallop'), *Die Blomkool polka* ('The Cauliflower Polka'), *Die Skelmvy-wals* ('The Slap-and-tickle Waltz'), *Vaalhoed* ('Faded Hat'), *Eensaamheid* ('Loneliness').

The titles refer to food, places, love, seasons, people. The references are far removed from the exclusivities that would characterize the Afrikaner community during its years in power. We find in these titles a subtle evocation of mood and

an artless poetry of existence. Karel Schoeman writes about his visits to the Free State farm of Dot Serfontein and her family:

... what I now recognize clearly as influences, are the historical and genealogical interests of Dot's husband and the boeremusiek that he played from records. I remember one particular visit when we only departed late on that Sunday afternoon from the farm. Sitting in the back seat of the car during the long return journey to the city I saw the dusk-encroaching veldt pass by with the maudlin music inseparably a part of it: 'Eensaamheid' ['Loneliness'] by Sewes van Rensburg is particularly clear in my memory. The name, no longer the tune. First the emotion, then the rhythm and then the images and the words fit: it was that evening in the car on the road back to Johannesburg that the passage came to me that I used in 'n Lug vol helder wolke ['A sky with clear clouds'], 'The silence and loneliness were intertwined in the sound of their words and weighed on the spirits; their music spoke of their isolation and deep silence, and of infinite space around every word and each flickering candle in the dark.' **[xiv]**

Although Schoeman writes that it is the name of the music that lingers - 'Loneliness' - it is impossible to separate the 'maudlin music' from his observations. The fact that Schoeman can't remember the tune, but instead distinctly connects the music to the dusk-encroaching veldt separating the farm and the city, tells us something about the kind of memory work performed by boeremusiek. The representation of the past in this music is not direct, but spatially concrete, emotionally highly tuned and historically informed.

Not only the names of boeremusiek numbers evoke, create, imply the 'isolation and deep silence, and ... infinite space around every word', but also the names of people who made the music. Jewish names appear in the band lists. Names like Saul Benjamin (Boy) Solomon, Harry Bartz and 'a Jew, Postma, who also played the violin'. **[xv]** English names too like William Schreiner (Willie) Cooper and Morgan O'Kennedy. And then the names of bands and groups: Die Soetspelers ('The Sweet/Good Players'), Die Vyf Vastrappers ('The Five Vastrappers'), Die Vier Transvalers ('The Four Transvalers'), Die Vyf Voortrekkers ('The Five Voortrekkers'), Die Vyf Dagbrekers ('The Five Day Breakers'), Die Vier Huguenote ('The Four Huguenots'), Die Ses Hartbrekers ('The Six Heart Breakers'), Die Baanbrekers ('The Pioneers'), Die Hoogekraal Orkes ('The High Kraal Orchestra'), Die Vier Staatmakers ('The Four Dependables') and Die Naglopers ('The Night Riders'), described by Rian Malan as follows:

[To my mind De Lange is by far] *the most compelling figure in the history of Afrikaans popular music. His music is electrifying. His banjo player was Coloured in days when that was unthinkable. He danced and drank like a demon. He screwed everything that moved. His band was called the Naglopers ... How cool can you get?***[xvi]**

4.
Boeremusiek was, surprisingly perhaps in the light of the rigid paternalism of the governing Afrikaner, a music also practiced by women. There was Cissie Cooper who played the piano and sang, Carolina Leeson who played the piano and dreamt the melody of *My mooi Carolina* ['My pretty Carolina'],**[xvii]** Lettie Palm who played guitar, piano and concertina, Anna van Loggerenberg who played the drums in the band of her husband, Hansie. Many women played in Pietie le Roux's Stellenbosch-boereorke: Laetitia Louw, Elise van Vuuren, Bettie van der Merwe, Annette Scheepers, Ena Krige, Lena Theron, Martha le Roux, Hester le Roux, Petra Schoeman, Rykie Smit, Anna Minnaar, Dux van Niekerk.**[xviii]** And then there is the extraordinary tale of Jo Fourie, born in Zwolle in the Netherlands in 1884. In 1934 she created her own boereorke in the Groot Marico and began to notate all the boeremusiek tunes she encountered. After her husband's death in 1939, and after her children were married off and had left the house, she began travelling though the country to find all the old and almost forgotten tunes and songs. She was particularly interested in old people who could still play or sing these songs. In the back of her car she had an old duet concertina, because many of the old people no longer had an instrument on which they could play. This quest lasted almost eleven years ...**[xix]**

It is an indication of the disregard for boeremusiek in intellectual discourse that Jo Fourie is not recognized as South Africa's first female ethnomusicologist. Stories such as these collected by Piet Bester call for the kind of historical treatment enabled by the rhetoric of fictional narrative. It emphasizes, once again, something about the kind of collective cultural memories activated by boeremusiek.

Who listens to Boeremusiek today? And what do they hear when they listen to it? One of the most beautiful stories written by Piet Bester in his ethnographic treasure trove *Tradisionele Boeremusiek* is the story of Sakkie van Wyk. His father Gert, a good violinist, farmed on a piece of land called Morkanie, close to Schweizer Reneke. Gert stopped making music after the death of his two

daughters and thereafter also forbade his sons, Sakkie and Gert, to play any dance music. Gert was so talented that he could make the most beautiful sounds by blowing into the spout of a coffee kettle. Apparently the sounds thus made sometimes sounded like a violin, and sometimes like a saxophone.

The two boys secretly acquired a concertina and a guitar and started practicing in the veldt, far from the house. The instruments were hidden under a large halved paraffin drum under a bush on the bank of a small stream. [xx]

Hidden instruments. Secret musicking. One thinks of old instruments that can no longer be played by young people. Concertinas, banjos, accordions, pump organs. And then one thinks of empty dance halls, hotels, bars, empty barns, farm houses, recording studios. One thinks of the clerks, hospital porters, teachers, farmers and mine captains that Piet Bester writes about. There is a hidden history in these things, in the spaces where this music sounded and in the colourful lives of the musicians. This is neither the canonized history of Western art music in South Africa, nor the now dominant history of jazz and other forms of black music performance. Boeremusiek is a kind of secret music, connected to a silenced history in an ever more competitive South African historiography. It calls for curatorship because of the pasts it allows, in ever diminishing degrees, to infiltrate the present.

NOTES

- i. Lourens Aucamp cited in Piet Bester, *Tradisionele Boeremusiek: 'n Gedenkalbum*. Pretoria: Afrikanervolkswag (1987), unnumbered page 'Voorwoord'. Translated from the Afrikaans. All translations from the Afrikaans are by the present author.
- ii. Interview with Stanley Glasser on 18 January 2001 at his home, 46 Weigall Road, London.
- iii. There are exceptions to this generalization. Professor F.E. (Charles) Fensham was well-known in boeremusiek circles. Later State President C.R. Swart composed the Maluti song and there is a photograph of him in Piet Bester's *Tradisionele Boeremusiek* where he plays his traporreltjie (pump organ) (see p. 125). When Anton Hartman remarks that 'even the symphony orchestra' can't play the Zoutpansberg se settees like the Vier Transvalers (see p. 27 in *Tradisionele Boeremusiek*) this observation only serves as an illustration of the chasm between high and low musical culture.
- iv. Minutes of the FAK Music Commission's meeting held on Saturday 25 April

1953 in the FAK offices in Johannesburg. Translated from the Afrikaans. See PV 1/2/3/4/2/2/1, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Five 'solutions' were also suggested by the Music Commission, including that Anton Hartman would draft a statement on boeremusiek which would be published under the name of Stephen Eyssen 'to stimulate further discussions and criticism'.

v. E-mail to the current writer, 20 February 2007.

vi. Piet Bester, *Tradisionele Boeremusiek*, 50-53.

vii. *Ibid.*, 54. Translated from the Afrikaans.

viii. *Ibid.*, 138. Translated from the Afrikaans.

ix. *Ibid.*, 146. Translated from the Afrikaans.

x. Boeremusiek is a performative culture that survives mostly through oral transmission. Piet Bester writes in *Tradisionele Boeremusiek*: 'Of course Hansie [van Loggerenberg] could read music ... The most of the old Boere musicians and even many performers today were not as privileged. '; 56. Translated from the Afrikaans.

xi. Piet Bester, *Tradisionele Boeremusiek*, 140. Translated from the Afrikaans.

xii. *Ibid.*, 66.

xiii. *Ibid.*, 139.

xiv. . Karel Schoeman, *Die laaste Afrikaanse boek: outobiografiese aantekeninge* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2002, 399. Translated from the Afrikaans.

xv. Piet Bester, *Tradisionele Boeremusiek*, 206. Translated from the Afrikaans.

xvi. Letter of Rian Malan on Sênet, 3 July 2006. Translated from the Afrikaans. See also the significant body of correspondence between Rian Malan, Rob Allingham, CIA and Puris that appeared on LitNet about David de Lange at <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/senet/default.asp>. This 2006 correspondence is dated 14 June, 15 June, 26 June, 3 July, 10 July, 1 August and 2 August.

xvii. *Ibid.*, 17.

xviii. See list in Piet Bester's *Tradisionele Boeremusiek*, 61.

xix. Piet Bester, *Tradisionele Boeremusiek*, 130. Translated from the Afrikaans.

xx, *Ibid.*, 150.

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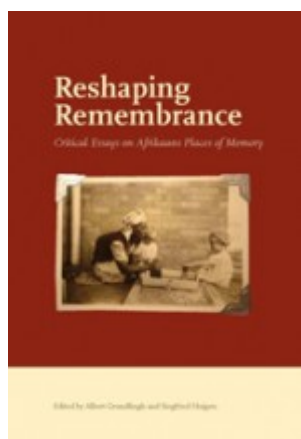
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Reshaping Remembrance ~ Die Stem



1.[i]

Music is high or low. It can ascend or descend (like mountains and valleys) with an ascending run or descending scale. It is here, close to home (tonic), or there, close to relatives (relative or parallel minor/major, perhaps dominant or subdominant keys). Sometimes it moves, as is envisioned in Schoenberg's idea of tonality, to far-off reaches of larger tonal geographies, to the furthest of such places before it returns (if it returns at all) to the known world of the tonic.

Music as a kind of *res extensa*. [ii] Orchestration could be airy and spacious in the hands of Webern, or constructivist and muscular when done by Brahms. Music creates horizontal contours and arches through the distances between notes (intervals). These distances are determined during performance by controlling the time-space separating the end of one tone and the beginning of the next (articulation). Music is architecturally monumental in form, like a

Beethoven symphony, or it is in expression and form as intimate as the salon.

We cannot approach music in language without the metaphors of place and space. Individual combinations of tones (musical 'works') constitute designated spaces. When these spaces become known after frequent visits, they become inhabited by cultural memory. The evocative nature of such spaces is inherent to the fact that the sentiment (emotional and/or cultural) is felt precisely, but cannot be expressed accurately in language. It is a language-resistant space. To consider *Die Stem* as collective memory depends on this metaphorical understanding of music in general, and of a specific work in particular. This is not a perspective that demands clarification of the song's history. C.J. Langenhoven's poem is only the foundation of this place. M.L. de Villiers's melody is only the outer walls thereof and Hubert du Plessis's official orchestration only the interior decorating. **[iii]**

Questions on memory and remembering and of how these things relate to this particular text, are not questions about historiography. The imagination in search of memory has to find more poetic avenues to knowledge.



Figure 19.1 David Goldblatt's photograph with the description 'Die Heldeakker, The Heroes' Acre: cemetery for White members of the security forces killed in "The Total Onslaught", Ventersdorp, Transvaal, 1 November 1986'.

Figure 19.1 David Goldblatt's photograph with the description 'Die Heldeakker, The Heroes' Acre: cemetery for White members of the security forces killed in "The Total Onslaught", Ventersdorp, Transvaal, 1 November 1986'. **[iv]**

2.

The closing phrase of *Die Stem* is literally displayed 'triumphantly' (the character indication in the music) as meaning-giving banner over this demarcated space. It lends definition to the space of the military cemetery. Does the reader hear it? The two security force members buried there are lifted up by the contour of the melody: B flat-A flat-G-B flat-C-D-E flat. The dotted rhythmical introduction to the phrase, undergirded by the secondary dominant harmony, assuages doubt, presses forward, aims towards the solution at the end of the phrase. The end is comforting as an end. It brings us home. Goldblatt's photograph dates from 1986. It is understandable if one hears *Die Stem* in this time as a military song; the contours and rhythms and harmonies sound like bulwarks against the enemy, as encouragements to those who would doubt the final victory. However, for André P. Brink, *Die Stem* is also the song of torture in the seventies:

... every time the rebel leader is arrested, and tortured, and killed, leading to new protest, and to new martyrs; this goes on until a deadly silence remains, lasting an agonising eternity, a silence out of which, almost inaudible at first, the national anthem rises while a group of folk dancers in white masks begin to dance on the bodies of the martyrs. [v]

It is also this 'Stem' that, at the end of J.M. Coetzee's *Age of iron*, provides the sound track to the author's nightmarish vision of hell. 'I am afraid', says the dying Mrs Curran, 'of going to hell and having to listen to *Die stem* (sic) for all eternity'. [vi] *Die Stem* that accompanies the coffin of Milla Redelinghuys into her grave at the end of Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* has a different tenor. When the Grootmoedersdrift farm is taken into possession by the coloured woman, Agaat, who was formed by the white woman who loved and rejected her, it is *Die Stem* that articulates ambiguously change and continuity:

Gaat making people by the graveside sing the third verse of Die Stem: ... When the wedding bells are chiming, Or when those we love depart. And then all eyes on me for: ... Thou dost know us for thy children ... We are thine, and we shall stand, Be it life or death to answer Thy call, beloved land! Wake up and smell the red-bait, as Pa would have said. Poor Pa with his ill-judged exclamations. Did at least make a note for my article on nationalism and music. Thys's body language! The shoulders thrust back militaristically, the eyes cast up grimly, old Beatrice peering at the horizon. The labourers, men and women, sang it like a hymn, eyes rolled back in the head.

Word-perfect beginning to end. Trust Agaat. She would have no truck with the new anthem. [vii]

But how did historical reception develop the fascistic timbre that characterized performances and receptions of *Die Stem* in the 1980s, so apparent in the quotation above? Surely there was a time when *Die Stem* was a freedom song for Afrikaners, an alternative text for collective musical mobilization to God Save The Queen. This essay wants to connect the cited examples of fiction-mediated memories of *Die Stem* to the historical process represented in FAK (Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge, directly translated as Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies) archival documents from the 1950s.

In 1952, five years before *Die Stem* became the only official anthem of South Africa, the Afrikaanse Kultuurraad (Afrikaans Culture Board) of Pretoria launched an initiative to elicit 'opinions by three authorities regarding suitable occasions when an anthem should be sung or played'. From Stellenbosch, Dr C.G.S. (Con) de Villiers wrote as follows:

*I am of inclination and education extremely conservative, particularly when it concerns the holy things of our volk. And Die Stem has become one of those. I even lamented it bitterly that Die Stem was sung and played at the end of rugby football matches in England ... There is for me only one indicator to justify singing it: does the meeting possess poids et majesté in the Calvinist sense? Then Die Stem can be sung!***[viii]**

De Villiers's answer can only be quoted in part. In the rest of the letter he also expresses opposition against the singing of *Die Stem* at political meetings because, as a member of the National Party, he would find it 'sad if the Sappe [South African Party] viewed *Die Stem* as the calling card of the [National] Party'. For De Villiers the most terrible violence against *Die Stem* constitutes 'a young lady who goes to sit at the piano and makes her own, apocryphal harmony to the tune'.**[ix]**

It is clear that by 1952 *Die Stem* had already become for De Villiers one of the 'holy things' of the Afrikaner, a place of worship. His dislikes point to possible contaminating influences: sport, politics and 'young ladies'. With regard to the latter, the danger of contamination is located specifically in the harmony and not any of the other musical parameters. Historically (one thinks here of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Council of Trent), this fear can be connected to a philosophical and ideological privileging of the word, the clarity of which is endangered by complicated vertical musical activity. More about this later.

For De Villiers, *Die Stem* as holy space is a space of good taste and of higher things in life. These political and gender biases expressed as pseudo-aesthetic judgements can also be found in his published writings. Mussolini's signed portrait displayed in his lounge linked with his Verdi worship, the influence of English songs that clung like a bad odour to his past, the memories of the 'passionate, barbaric Gypsy folk dances that the young Jew played for the modest, civilized Afrikaner family';**[x]** coordinates aiding the reconstruction of De Villiers's camp 'poids et majesté'. *Die Stem* as 'soete inval'.**[xi]**

Dr H.C.E. Bosman, then secretary of the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns [South African Academy for Sciences and Arts], writes on 16 June 1952 that *Die Stem* might be sung at 'occasions where the feeling of the nation is naturally expressed'. For him, this includes 'general national festivals [Volksfeeste], Dingaan's Day festivals [16 December], Union Day [31 May], Hero's Day [on Paul Kruger's birthday, 10 October], Van Riebeeck's Day [6 April], parliamentary events, functions where the provincial and city administrations are involved'.**[xii]** Bosman does not deem *Die Stem* inappropriate at big political meetings, and is of the opinion that it can also be sung at 'cultural events, camping-out gatherings [laertrekke], folk dances, big events for the young, international matches or events'. Excluded from his list are 'weddings, dances, cocktail parties, cinemas, camps, plays, concerts and picnics'. He justifies these exclusions by saying that such performances would be continuing 'the English practice, which is in part monarchical-traditional, and in part deliberate imperialist propaganda'.**[xiii]**

Die Stem, therefore, is an anti-British space, but even more: it occupies the places of the state. In this emerging discourse, *Die Stem* as symbol is no longer a space being occupied, but an object with a place. For Prof A.N. Pelzer of the University of Pretoria, a national anthem [Volkslied] is

*... an elevated utterance of the fixed aspirations that live deep in the soul of a nation. It indicates the longing that nation and State should continue to exist and serves to unite the nation into an indivisible whole and to strengthen it in realising the high ideals expected for nation and state. It rises above what is temporary and points to everlasting and imperishable values.***[xiv]**

Die Stem is thus a metaphysical space of aspiration and idealism. According to Pelzer it can only be honoured by performing it at 'events where the aim of the event is not limited to the event itself, but points to the cultivation of values that

will be meaningful to the future'. He also fears that Die Stem could be misused by subjecting it to the same 'lowly treatment of the English anthem'.**[xv]** The transcendental, we are given to understand, is not an English space.

The intervention of the Afrikaans Culture Board of Pretoria on this important matter forced the FAK to conduct a further investigation. Asked about their opinion, the South African Teachers' Union (SATU) recommended the singing of the song at school functions in order to 'create amongst the youth of our country healthy love for the fatherland'.**[xvi]** After all this consultation, a decision was taken at a meeting of the FAK's Music Commission on 25 April 1953:

The meeting recommends to the FAK that the following be propagated to the nation:

- a) That '*Die Stem*' be sung only at events where the value of representing the country is evident;
- b) that care should be taken to prevent '*Die Stem*' being used in the same way as [God save] 'The Queen';
- c) that where '*Die Stem*' is played, it is played as a whole and not only in part;
- d) that, at the end of events, other songs, like Afrikaners Landgenote, be sung.**[xvii]**

It is important to articulate clearly what was happening here: control, anti-British sentiment, the propagation of a museum aesthetic alienated from ordinary people, the creation of a perception that *Die Stem* was not just a song, but a mystic key to the independence of the Afrikaner nation. It is therefore not surprising that in 1957, when *Die Stem* was proclaimed the only official anthem of the Republic, no superlative sufficed to express the joy amongst the song's supporters in the FAK. A telegram of congratulations was sent to the prime minister, J.G. Strydom:

To: *The Honourable Prime Minister, House of Assembly, Cape Town*

The declaration recognizing The Call of South Africa as the official and only anthem of South Africa is for everyone of the thousands of members of the FAK a source of the highest ecstasy. With this act, an old national ideal has been accomplished and one of the most important milestones on our road to full nationhood has been achieved. Having achieved this, the last of the former conqueror's symbols that have towered over us, has disappeared. We honour Your Excellency personally, and also every member of the government.

From: Secretary FAK**[xviii]**

Highest ecstasy! One of the most important milestones on our road to full

nationhood. Die Stem had become the Afrikaner score to nationhood. Three days after this telegram was dispatched, the Chairman of the FAK, Prof H.B. Thom, wrote a congratulatory letter to J.G. Strydom in which he formulated the importance of *Die Stem* as follows:

You have led the Afrikaners, and indeed the whole of South Africa, to advance an important step on the road to full, unqualified spiritual independence, which is such an indispensable prerequisite for real economic and political independence. I am convinced that History will one day acknowledge the outstanding contribution of your leadership in connection with our national hymn. **[xix]**

Full, unqualified spiritual independence. This is one way of articulating the meaning of this song in the ears of Afrikaners of that time. But even after *Die Stem* was adopted as the only national anthem of the republic, the desire of the Afrikaner leadership to control it did not abate. Spiritual independence is, alas, no substitute for good taste. Not only was the melody required to remain the property of the volk, but the cancerous corruption against which Con de Villiers had warned - deviant harmony - also had to be removed from *Die Stem* as alien to the volk. The minutes of a FAK Music Commission of 12 March 1960 documents the following discussion:

Mr A. Hartman reported that the SABC wants to record and market a LP of Gideon Fagan's arrangement of *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*, and then to request that the Government approve this as the accepted official arrangement. The Music Commission did not view this arrangement as acceptable, especially since it radically changes the harmony. The Commission favoured the arrangement of Rev M.L. de Villiers.

Mr A. Hartman also mentioned that Dr F.C.L. Bosman, Chairman of the South African Music Board, had consulted Prof [Friedrich] Hartman (sic) of the University of the Witwatersrand about this matter. The opinion of the latter, written in English, was read to the Commission. From this it transpired that he attacked Rev De Villiers's arrangement on technical points.

Mr A. Hartman's opinion was that the stamp of approval should be given to that which fits with our national tradition ['volkstradisie'] and not necessarily to the best technical arrangements.

Dr G.G. Cillié pointed out that Prof Hartman (sic) had praised the arrangement of Gideon Fagan in such superlatives and rejected that of Rev M.L. de Villiers

so radically, that they could emphatically conclude that this was not an objective and scientific opinion, making it possible to reject it in its entirety. **[xx]**

On 14 March 1960, a letter was sent on behalf of the Music Commission of the FAK to Prof H.B. Thom, presumably written by the secretary of the FAK. In this letter, an 'urgent matter' was raised, namely the SABC's planned recording of *Die Stem* on LP. The source of unhappiness was the Fagan 'four-part arrangement', so lavishly praised by Prof Friedrich Hartmann:

We have also seen the (English) remarks of Prof Hartman. Briefly, the contents thereof comes down to the fact that the M.L. de Villiers arrangement is hopeless and the Fagan arrangement faultless. The Music Commission is of the opinion that such an absolute condemnation of the one and absolute extolling of the other cannot be accepted as a scientifically objective judgment.

This was followed by the coup de grâce:

*The tempo of 60 crotchets per minute of the Fagan arrangement is unacceptably slow and seemingly an imitation of the tempo of God Save the Queen. **[xxi]***

Die Stem is thus anglicized by making it sound more like a hymn and less like a march. But the antagonism against everything English, from the character of the English anthem to the continuing references to the negative remarks being made 'in English', makes it clear that these motives are strongly anchored in nationalist discourses. The existence of an underlying mistrust in 'the best technical settings' is clear, and the possibility that this mistrust could be located in the (unconscious) confirmation of the Afrikaans word as potentially vulnerable to 'alien' harmony, is a rich idea. The writer of the letter to Thom explains the petty Afrikaner politics behind this polemic step by step. In short it constitutes a 'devious plan' by the 'enemies of the volk' to install Gideon Fagan as the principal conductor of the SABC, instead of appointing the chairman of the Music Commission of the FAK (Anton Hartman). Whether Friedrich Hartmann's opinion could be motivated musically or not, was not deemed relevant:

*The opinions they canvassed are exclusively from people who are not part of our Afrikaner nation's ideals. If folk songs and the harmonization of such songs were to be judged purely on musical merits, *Die Stem* would never have been adopted in the first place. **[xxii]***

Subsequently, the FAK also sent Dr H.F. Verwoerd a letter with an appeal to the

effect that the M.L. de Villiers setting be recognized by the government as official arrangement. [xxiii]

3.
What can be deduced from the pitiful politics about harmonization, the suitability of places and events, the discourses on dignity and gravitas? At least the fact that there is nothing neutral about this song, and that the political ballast weighing down *Die Stem* is not only of our time, imagined retrospectively by the 'enemies of the Afrikaner', but that it has been historically conceived and understood by Afrikaners themselves. Also that the restrictive control that would characterize the Afrikaner Republic would stunt this song in self-glorified mediocrity. Finally that music, too, could not escape the machinations of the secret Broederbond.

Die Stem as Afrikaans place of memory: Goldblatt's tragic emptiness, Brink's martyr's dirge, Van Niekerk's set-piece on the burial of the Republic, Coetzee's version of hell, Con de Villiers's 'poids et majesté', Anton Hartman's national tradition, H.B. Thom's 'spiritual independence'. Different conflicting memories, representing different histories.

NOTES

i. The full title of the anthem is *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*, officially translated into English as *The Call of South Africa*. Throughout this essay the anthem will be referred to only as *Die Stem*.

ii. Compare the discussion on the rhetoric of tonality in Brian Hyer's 'Tonality', in: T. Christensen (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Western music theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, 726-752, esp. p. 733.

iii. This essay is not about the history or the ideological context and meaning of *Die Stem*. More can be read about these aspects in S. Muller, 'Exploring the aesthetics of reconciliation: rugby and the South African national anthem', in: *SAMUS* 21 (2001), 19-38; See also W. Lüdemann's "'Uit die diepte van ons see": an archetypal interpretation of selected examples of Afrikaans patriotic music', in: *SAMUS* 23 (2003), 13-42.

iv. D. Goldblatt, *South Africa: the structure of things then*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press 1998, 154 and 243.

v. A.P. Brink, *Looking on darkness*. London: W.H. Allen, 1974, 308.

vi. J.M. Coetzee, *Age of iron*. London: Penguin, 1990, 181.

vii. M. van Niekerk. *Agaat*. tr. Michiel Heyns. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball and Tafelberg 2006, 675.

- viii.** Compare file PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- ix.** Compare file PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- x.** Compare Soete inval: nagelate geskrifte van Con de Villiers. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1979, 26-27 and 50-51. Also see Die sneeu van anderjare. Cape Town: Tafelberg 1976, 72. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- xi.** De Villiers's flat was situated in a block called Soete Inval, approximately translated as 'gentle strains'.
- xii.** File PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- xiii.** File PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- xiv.** File PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- xv.** File PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- xvi.** See the letter of 14 February 1953, PV 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.
- xvii.** Compare the minutes of the meeting by the Music Commission, 25 April 1953, PV 202 1/2/3/4/2/2/1, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author. Also see Appendix to the agenda of the Music Commission meeting of 6 July 1954, entitled 'Verslag van die FAK-kommissie insake "Die Stem" soos gewysig deur die Afrikaanse Nasionale Kultuurraad' ['Report of the FAK-Commission regarding "Die Stem" as modified by the Afrikaans National Culture Board'], PV 202 1/2/1/4/2/2/1, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.
- xviii.** See telegram of 3 May 1957, PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- xix.** Letter of H.B. Thom to J.G. Strydom, 6 May 1957, PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- xx.** Minutes of a meeting by the FAK Music Commission, 12 March 1960, PV 202 1/2/3/4/2/2/3, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.
- xxi.** File PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.

xxii. Letter to H.B. Thom, 14 March 1960; File PV 202 2/4/1/3/1/4, INEG, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.

xxiii. The letter is dated 21 March 1960. The Prime Minister's Office acknowledged receipt on 28 March 1960 and a comprehensive answer was sent to the FAK by the secretary of the Prime Minister on 25 May 1960. In this letter the government wisely decided to remain neutral and not choose sides with regard to 'all harmonisations or arrangements of the composition for orchestra or voices or anything else', with the understanding that such arrangements should 'stay within the framework of the acknowledged composition and be performed with dignity and devotion at suitable occasions'. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.

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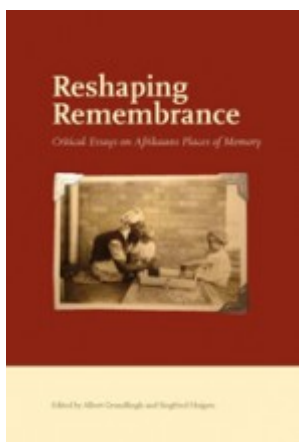
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Reshaping Remembrance ~ ‘In Ferocious Anger I Bit The Hand That Controls’ - The Rise Of Afrikaans Punk Rock Music



On a night in 2006, a Cape Town’s night club, its floor littered with cigarette butts, plays host to an Afrikaner (sub)cultural gathering. Guys with seventies’ glam rock hairstyles, wearing old school uniform-like blazers decorated with a collection of pins and buttons and teamed up with tight jeans, sneakers and loose shoelaces keep one eagerly awaiting eye on the set stage and another on the short skirted girls. Before taking to the stage, the band, Fokofpolisiekar, entices the audience with the projection of their latest music video for the acoustic version of their debut hit single released two years before and entitled ‘*Hemel op die platteland*’.

In tune with the melancholy sound of an acoustic guitar, the music video kicks off with the winding of an old film reel revealing nostalgic stock footage of a long gone era. Well-known images make the audience feel a sense of estrangement by means of ironic disillusionment: the sun is setting in the Cape Town suburb of Bellville. Seemingly bored, the five members of Fokofpolisiekar hang around the Afrikaans Language Monument. Against the backdrop of a blue-grey sky, the well-known image of a Dutch Reformed church tower flashes in blinding sunlight. Smiling white children play next to swimming pools in the backyards of well-to-do suburbs and on white beaches while the voice of the lead singer asks:

can you tighten my bolts for me? / can you find my marbles for me? / can you stick your idea of normal up your ass? / can you spell apathy? can someone maybe phone a god / and tell him we don’t need him anymore / can you spell apathy? (kan jy my skroewe vir my vasdraai? / kan jy my albasters vir my vind? / kan jy jou idee van normaal by jou gat opdruk? / kan jy apatie spel? kan iemand dalk ’n god

bel / en vir hom sê ons het hom nie meer nodig nie / kan jy apatie spel?)



And whilst the home video footage of a family eating supper in a green aced backyard is sharply contrasted with images of broken garden chairs in an otherwise empty run-down backyard, the theme of the song resonates ironically in the chorus: *'it's heaven on the platteland'* (*'dis hemel op die platteland'*). On the dirty

floor of the night club, a young white Afrikaans guy kills his Marlboro cigarette and takes a sip of his lukewarm Black Label beer, watching more video images of morally grounded suburb, school and church and relates to the angry words of the vocalist:

'regulate me [...] place me in a box and mark it safe / then send me to where all the boxes/idiots go / send me to heaven I think it's on the platteland' (*'reguleer my, roetineer my / plaas my in 'n boks en merk dit veilig / stuur my dan waarheen al die dose gaan / stuur my hemel toe ek dink dis in die platteland / dis hemel op die platteland'*).

As the video draws to a close, the young man sees the ironic use of the partly exposed motto engraved on the path to the Language Monument: *'This is us'*. He has never visited the Language Monument, but he agrees with what he just saw and because he feels as though he just paged through old photo albums (only to come to the disillusioned conclusion that everything has been all too burlesque) he puts his hands in the air when the band takes to the stage with the lead singer commanding:

'Lift your hands to the burlesque [...] We want the attention / of the brainless crowd / We want the famine the urgent lack of energy / We are in search of the search for something / We are empty, because we want to be' (*'Rys jou hande vir die klug [...] Ons soek die aandag / van die breinlose gehoor / Ons soek die hongersnood die dringende gebrek aan energie / Ons is op soek na die soeke na iets / Ons is leeg, want ons wil wees'*).

Tradisiemasjien

Since the band's conception in 2003, the controversial Afrikaans punk rock group who named themselves Fokofpolisiekar, sent a series of shock waves through the remnants of conservative Afrikaner Nationalism. This was especially evident in

the polemic consequences and media frenzy sparked off by the bassist Wynand Myburgh writing the words *'Fuck God'* (instead of an autograph) on the wallet of a young fan after a show the band played. Fokofpolisiekar however claims not to be anti-Christian but rather see themselves as heathens. Sceptic heathens bore forth from the Afrikanervolk during the uncomfortable aftermath of Christian National education. As Afrikaans rockstar-heathens, they would challenge things like the *'tradisiemasjien'* in their lyrics. Fed up and bored with the vicious cycle of mediocre Afrikaans Christian life in white middle class suburbs (dubbed by them as small beige palaces on the outskirts of Cape Town), they chose music as a means to not only lash out, but also to question.



Fokofpolisiekar's Wynand Myburgh and Francois van Coke (Photo: Annie Klopper)

Exploding onto the South African music scene, Fokofpolisiekar sang of the time bombs left in the gaping holes of their upbringing. These time bombs started ticking when the Afrikaner Nationalist establishment actively strove to sanction any *'volksvreemde'* influences that might carry any subversive messages to the Afrikaner. During the late 1960's it was proven elsewhere in the world (especially in the USA and Britain) that rock music can play an instrumental role in the challenging of the status quo. Afrikaner cultural entrepreneurs saw rock music as a dangerous threat to the sober, wholesome Afrikaner culture they advocated. They feared it might bring the Afrikaner youth to moral demise and labeled it communist (ironic, considering the USSR was trying just as hard to withhold Western music from the ears of the Soviet youth). Until 1975 rock music could still make its way to many a South African ear via short waves. LM Radio broadcasted from Mozambique and played (among other music) contemporary American and British rock and pop. With the FRELIMO liberation movement taking over in Mozambique that year, LM Radio was closed. By this time the Broederbond held most of the senior positions in the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) from which they could play an active role in repressing any

possible subversive musical notes. They also saw the closing down of LM Radio as a perfect opportunity to launch South Africa's own rock radio station, Radio 5. With the rigid censorship maintained by the SABC, this station however failed to be much more than a pop station. Moreover, the same strict control of the airwaves was maintained when television broadcasts started in South African households in 1976.

Lekkerliedjies

The dictation of the Afrikaner's musical tastes and preferences commenced with the inception of Die Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (FAK) in 1929. The FAK was functional in judging whether music was '*volksvreemd*' or '*volksvriendelik*'. One of the aims of the first publication of the FAK *Volksangbundel* (folk songbook) in 1937 was to probe the Afrikaner youth into proudly singing Afrikaans '*lekkerliedjies*' at picnics, in choirs and at school. Songs with words to the likes of: *And do you hear the mighty rumbling? / Over the veld (field) it comes widely soaring: / the song of a volk's awakening that makes hearts shiver and tremble. / From the Cape up to the North the chords rise thunderously loud: / It is the SONG of Young South Africa. (En hoor jy die magtige dreuning? / Oor die veld kom dit wyd gesweef: / die lied van 'n volk se ontwaking wat harte laat sidder en beef. / Van Kaapland tot bo in die Noorde rys daverend luid die akkoorde: / Dit is die LIED van Jong Suid-Afrika.)* The legacy of these Afrikaans volksliedjies (of which the melodies was often imported from foreign folk songs) set the precedent to, and paved the way for trite and conformist Afrikaans lyrics lacking the questioning of convention that still resonates in Afrikaans music today. By the late 1970s, while most Afrikaans singers were still echoing the love of '*volk*' and '*vaderland*' and not contesting norms and convention in their lyrics (keeping to the unchallenging Afrikaans folk song), a small revolution hit mainstream Afrikaans music. By this time, the Afrikaans youth was far more intent on listening to the music of foreign English speaking artists and groups. It was also believed that Afrikaans was far too guttural a language to be used in the creation of rock & roll.

A major shift in this belief would occur with the release of Anton Goosen's debut album *Boy van die suburbs* in 1979 and the accompanying phase in Afrikaans music dubbed *Musiek en Liriek* lead by Goosen and Laurika Rauch. *Musiek en Liriek* managed to renew the traditional folk song and successfully replaced the '*lekkerliedjie*' with songs of a somewhat more challenging nature, especially with

regard to the lyrical content. However, clear-cut social and political commentary was still lacking. Where elements of protest could be detected in the lyrics of Goosen, the songs in question was banned outright by the SABC or received only very limited airplay on the radio. It would only be due to the culmination of the sobering fall of apartheid, the state of emergency of the 1980s and the international condemnation of the South African government that a group of youths would take up their instruments in a rock & roll protest against the order of the day. With Johannes Kerkorrel (pseudonym of Ralph Rabie), Koos Kombuis (also known as André Letoit) and Bernoldus Niemand (alias of James Phillips), and with Dagga-Dirk Uys as manager, the Voëlvry movement saw the light in the late 1980s with the Voëlvry Tour as highlight in 1989. The members of Voëlvry came from respectable middle class households where they grew up with the SABC, Sunday School, 'Whites Only'-signs and censorship. They realized that the time was ripe for change and that Afrikaans rock music could be the weapon of choice in attacking the already weakening Afrikaner Nationalism. With sharp Afrikaans lyrics satirizing and parodying well-known Afrikaner cultural elements, this weapon could hit straight to the spot where the impact would have the greatest effect: the eardrums of the Afrikaner youth.

The Voëlvry anthems encapsulated themes like conscription, patriarchy, racism, the evils of apartheid, the ignorance of the white middle class and the ever waving index finger of P.W. Botha. The impact of the message was strengthened by the fact that they were performing in Afrikaans, thereby giving this language a fresh identity. Afrikaans became cool. Cooler even than Anton Goosen's *Boy van die suburbs*, Laurika Rauch's soulful voice and David Kramer's Boland Blues began to make it in the early eighties. Afrikaans music would cease to be the same after Voëlvry. With their biting socio-political commentary, Voëlvry rejected a formal Afrikaner identity whilst reformulating what it meant to be Afrikaans, with the creative implementation of music. Realizing new possibilities in Afrikaans music, it became evident that there shimmered more in Afrikaans music than Bles Bridges' sequenced waist coats and the red plastic roses he so liberally handed out. Afrikaans rock legends of later years like Valiant Swart and Karin Zoid were given footsteps to follow - as did many Afrikaans punk rock bands that would ultimately still shake South African stages - but in the meantime the 1990's had to happen.

K.O.B.U.S.

At about the same time as the musical tsunami called Voëlvry was rocking the Afrikaans community, Apartheid was abolished and steps were being taken towards the introduction of a democratic South Africa. These political currents caused the tsunami to subside and the wave of protest music retreated, leaving behind a silent but still somewhat fertile ground as legacy. Koos Kombuis and Johannes Kerkorrel each embarked on solo careers together with a few other rock musicians like Paul Riekert (of the band Battery 9) and Valiant Swart who would keep the remnants alive at the music and cultural festivals that became one of the characteristic elements of the nineties South Africa.

But the *Afrikaans* rock revolution started losing steam as the conscience of the Afrikaner. James Phillips died after a car crash in 1995. Kerkorrel would go on to expand his solo career to the Netherlands and Belgium where he spent extensive time performing until his suicide on 12 November 2002. The South African political landscape was changing at a rapid pace with the country's transition to democracy. There was no longer a finger waving PW to condemn and, moreover, in its vast oversaturation, the Afrikaans music industry was beginning to develop an ever worsening identity crisis. The Afrikaans rock and metal band K.O.B.U.S.! sums it up as follows in a 2004 song: *We are hostages in one big cultural festival tent / entertained by people with more self confidence than talent / Every Tom, Dick and Harry has a CD on the shelf / we are choking on the 'hits' however ridiculous or poor. (Ons is gyselaars in een groot kultuurfeestent / word vermaak deur mense met meer selfvertroue as talent / Elke Jan Rap en sy maat het 'n CD op die rak / ons verstik aan al die 'treffers' hoe belaglik of hoe swak.)*

Meanwhile South Africa was no longer closed off to musical influences from the outside. On the contrary, with the abolition of apartheid, sanctions and boycotts South Africa was open to international influences to come pouring in. Influences of grunge and metal could be heard in many a suburban garage where every second Jan, Francois and Arno was starting a band. Usually these bands were singing in English because Kerkorrel was sounding quite old school compared to Kurt Cobain who together with many other internationally acclaimed English bands were influencing the musical styles of the South African music scene and youth. On the bedroom walls of teenagers from Bellville to Melville, posters of South African rock bands like Springbok Nude Girls, Just Jinger and Wonderboom were appearing next to those of international acts like Nirvana, Metallica, Bon Jovi, Counting Crows, Pearl Jam, Greenday and Smashing Pumpkins.

In 1997 journalist Ilda Jacobs reported in the Afrikaans magazine *Die Huisgenoot* on a new rock explosion in South Africa:

One can barely count on one hand the amount of South African pop and rock artists who has been successful locally or internationally a couple of years ago [...] But in the new South Africa a wave of inspiration is sweeping through the country. The fingers of two hands are no longer enough to count all the up 'n coming stars. For an evening of live entertainment, you can choose from a whole range of groups who play new, original music. And more and more people are getting together to listen to them on a regular basis. (Die Suid-Afrikaanse pop- en rock-kunstenaars wat tot 'n paar jaar gelede oorsee of voor hul eie mense hond haar-af gemaak het, kan jy amper op een hand tel [...]. Maar in die nuwe Suid-Afrika is dit asof die inspirasie soos 'n golf oor die land spoel. Twee hande vol vingers is nie meer genoeg om al die opkomende sterre af te tel nie. Vir 'n aandjie se lewendige musiek kan jy kies uit 'n tros groepe wat nuwe, oorspronklike musiek speel. En ál meer mense ruk gereeld op om na hulle te luister. But despite the rock explosion the 'cultural festival tent' K.O.B.U.S.! sings about was becoming increasingly crowded. In a 2004 interview, veteran musician Piet Botha comments on the Afrikaans music industry: The industry is being run by people who know nothing about music but a lot about money. The whole market is saturated with Bokkie songs and braaivleis tunes and such irrelevant nonsense [...] The world is morally bankrupt. The youth of today will start seeking more depth in music than what they find in the rubbish they are currently being fed with. (Die bedryf word gerun deur mense wat niks weet van musiek nie, maar baie weet van geld. Die hele mark is besaai met Bokkie songs en braaivleis tunes en sulke irrelevante nonsens [...]. Die wêreld is moreel bankrot. Die jeug van vandag gaan meer diepte in musiek soek as die snert wat hulle nou gevoer word.)

And they did. The same Afrikaans teenagers whose parents still sent them to Sunday school in the nineties, slowly but surely became irritated by the atmosphere in the 'cultural festival tent'. Moreover, they started wondering about the sins of their fathers and the demons of the past. It was these very same teenagers of the late nineties who, with their torn jeans, walked around with skateboards, went to music festivals and had mixed tapes with Nirvana on side A and Springbok Nude Girls on side B playing in their walkmans. To them the Dutch Reformed Church started looking all the more like an oppressing artifact from the apartheid era and they wanted nothing to do with an oppressing organization of any kind. English charismatic churches gave some of them a momentary sense of

belonging.

It was in an English charismatic church that the members of Fokofpolisiekar would find each other. Two of the members (the two lyricists), Francois Badenhorst (who later changed his surname to Van Coke, most probably in the interest of his father, a Dutch Reformed minister) and Hunter Kennedy were members of the English Christian rock group New World Inside whilst the other members (Jaco 'Snakehead' Venter, Johnny de Ridder and Wynand Myburgh) were also involved in other gospel bands (22 Stars and 7th Breed). But they turned their backs on the church, probably because in their existential anguish, they came to the conclusion that they did not need the god of their forefathers, or any god for that sake, anymore. Whatever their reasons, they longed for the emancipation from the institutions and ideas that were forced on them by their ancestors and *'in ferocious anger bit the hand that controls'* by means of a punk rock protest.

Sporadies Nomadies

Biting the hand that controls has the purpose of taking the leash from this hand and thereby appropriating an own identity (or merely expressing the search for this identity). In this regard the youth's relationship with (and use of) music plays an imperative role. After the Second World War the American youth, for example, used rock music as a means whereby the status quo could be challenged and at the same time a sense of solidarity could be expressed. This solidarity is gained and expressed by the identification with the music maker(s), the music's content or message as well as with the fellow fans. This gives a sense of belonging and at the same time it creates a space within which there can be struggled with old identities and new ones can be appropriated - even if the identification is with a common *lack* of identity, as it is worded in the lyrics of Fokofpolisiekar's song *'Sporadies Nomadies'* (*'Sporadically Nomadic'*): *'Come let's agree / We are all confused'* (*Kom stem saam / Ons is almal deurmekaar*). Evidence of the confusing period and experiences the Afrikaans youth (especially those in the suburbs) could relate to, can be found in the diverse sources of inspiration that Fokofpolisiekar listed in a press release of their debut EP *As jy met vuur speel sal jy brand* in 2003:

Thundercats. God. Three years intensive church attendance. Doug. Pornography. Punk. Cigarettes. Worship leading. He-man. Bellville. Durban. Cape Town. Stellenbosch. Airwolf. Growing up. Knightrider. Rugby. Biltong. Spirit.

Bitterkomix. Skateboarding. Toy Machine. Metal. Rock. Tygerberg Hospital. Rodney Seale. McDonalds. Post-apartheid. Mandela. De Klerk. Internet. Spiderman. X-men. Punk shows. Weed. Cigarettes. Johannes Kerkorrel. City. Farm. CD's. Safety bubbles. Alcohol. Reggae. The Oudtshoorn police station. Dad. Minister. Uncle. Head of the ACSV. Student body. David Iche. Friends. Girlfriends. TV. Mr Video. Orkney Snork Nie. Koos Kombuis. Pets. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Chat-rooms. Mr Nice. The world according to Garp. Europe. America. MTV. Imaginary personality restrictions. Psychology. Sound. Satanism. Nkosi Sikelela. Die Stem. Jeugsangbundel (Youth Song Book). Fashion. Ernest Movies. Beetle Juice. Tim Burton. Waking Life. Photo albums. Coffee table books. Art school. School. Headmaster. Vetkoekpaleis. Weed. Egoli. Loving. Democracy. Red wine. Afrikaans alternative. AWB. ANC. NNP. PAC. NP. PAGAD. Republic. Soweto. Rage Against the Machine. Wayne's World. Playstation. Doom. Death metal. Children. Eye drops. Home. Joystick games. Streetfighter. Zimbabwe. Rape. Camps. Osama. Warcraft. Hansie Cronje. Naas Botha. Tolla van der Merwe. Casper de Vries. David Kramer. Alex Jay. No Jacket Required. The 80's. Ferrari's. War. Tadpoles. Silkworms. Dirty socks. Spiders. Bionic Six. GI Joe. Duke Nukem. Wielie Walie. Liewe Heksie. Swartkat. Borrie van Swartkat. Dawson's Creek. All those fucking American College movies. Acid. Bob Dylan. Willem Samuels. Valiant Swart. Tamagotchi. BB guns. Airgun. A-team. Mannemarak. Swear word. Fokofpolisiekar!



Fokofpolisiekar (Photo: Annie Klopper)

Fokofpolisiekar was the first commercially successful punk rock band in Afrikaans becoming one of the many voices (and speaking to) a youth who had to find their marks in a transitional phase of a country with a problematic history. The sometimes angry lyrics, dripping with underlying themes of nihilism and uncertainty, advocated purification or regeneration by means of destruction, as in the songs 'Destroy yourself' ('Vernietig jouself') and 'Burn South Africa' ('Brand

Suid-Afrika). At the same time, it gave a liminal Afrikaner youth, longing to shout their frustrations from the rooftops, something to relate to. The members are also clever musicians with an exceptional knowledge of marketing to boot. After the band's debut in 2003, the full length album *Lugsteuring* (2004) was released, followed by the EP's *Monoloog in Stereo* (2005) and *Brand Suid-Afrika* (2006), the full length *Swanesang* (2006) and the EP *Antibiotika* (2008).

The impact the musicians had as rebellious rockers is obvious when one looks at the way the band was perceived and portrayed in the media. To quote but a few headings: *It's enough to make one grey: Afrikaans punk is sweeping everything flat; Fokofpolisiekar: a dosage of rebellion in Afrikaans music; With their back on the church, 'Afrikaner mentality'; Afrikaans rockers challenge the status quo; Straight to hell; Fokofpolisiekar rocks church; Fokof divides church; Rebel Rockers; Polisiekar in trouble after member blasphemes; Anger because school asks scholars to boycott Fokofpolisiekar; Controversial Afrikaans band suffers Christians' wrath; Outcry over band's invitation to fest; Keep Polisiekarre away from KKNK - church authority; Stayaway-polisiekar; Dutch Reformed Church asks for calm in struggle over Polisiekar; 'Karre pop prophets; Borders, Christians and the 'Karre; Commission asked to give constitutional direction with regards to Polisiekarre ...*

The flood-gates were now opened far too wide to ever be closed up again. Many an Afrikaans rock and punk rock group took to the stage listing Fokofpolisiekar as their number one inspiration. Just as the Sex Pistols stand out as iconic marker in British punk, Fokofpolisiekar became an undeniable beacon in the Afrikaans music industry: a point of reference still fresh in the memory of a youth who would now more than ever refuse to keep quiet about the crises of their time. The song of young South Africa was rewritten. The social observing K.O.B.U.S. words it as follows in the song '*N.J.S.A. (Lied van die Nuwe Jong Suid Afrika)*' which can be translated as '*Hymn of the New Young South Africa*' :

Famine, Aids death Homeless, Jobless, Despondent, Frail Presidentia in Absentia Mismanagement, Purgatory, Monsterous pleasure Orania, Azania Early morning Venom spewing, Culture-bomb fuse Obsession, Depression Youthslaughter, School-rape, Dead Expectation Oh yeah, Oh yeah we refuse to carry the sins of your parents Oh yeah, Oh yeah The Hymn of the New Young South Africa Cybersex, SMS Pentium-Jugular, Stork-Computer Soul stolen, Pain dulled Dark days, Thunderclaps, Narcotics Heavy Metal, Anti-Social Critic-school, Word-

Conjuring, KOBUS! Hyperbole Guiltcomplex, Mudpool Pain unlearn, Dispense with, Distantiate Oh yeah, Oh yeah cut our wings and we grow another pair Oh yeah, The Hymn of the New Young South Africa Oh yeah, Oh yeah cut our wings and we grow another pair Oh yeah, The Hymn of the New Young South Africa Oh yeah, South Africa Oh yeah, South Africa Oh yeah, Oh yeah, Oh yeah The Hymn of the New Young South Africa.

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See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vo%C3%ABlvry_Movement