Dancing around the Self

'*Ons is nie so nie*' is a refrain that reverberates through what one used to be able to call Afrikanerdom.[1] Literally, it means 'We are not like that' – We are not that. We are other than that. That is not who we are. That is the 'other' of us, expressed in the title of Jeanne Goosen's 1990 (pre-democracy) novel *Ons is nie almal so nie* and Herman Wasserman's (2010) analysis of racism denialism in the Afrikaans press. The use of the collective *ons* (we) varies. It may be qualified, as in the '*Ons is nie* almal *so nie*' (We are not *all* like that) of Goosen's book title.[2] It can be suggestively unqualified, as in '*Ons is nie so nie*', the title of Wasserman's article 'We're Not Like That' (2010), or ambiguous, as in *Dalk is ons almal so* (Perhaps we are all like that), the title of the 2001 compilation of Goosen's work. The first English translation of Goosen's novel in 1992 was titled *Not All of Us*.

These echoes of uncertainty in a sea of positioning presume an authenticity that is ultimately both real and discernible amid ideological contestations and the swirl of fake news, which makes a simple declaration, such as 'this is it', impossibly difficult. The phrase represents an ambiguous assertion of identity through denial and differentiation, familiar to many groups – for example, Germans in the aftermath of the Second World War – who have sought to redefine their identities to enhance belonging and opportunity. It simultaneously disowns an ascribed

1. Afrikanerdom: Originally understood to encompass the social, political, religious, cultural and economic aspects of a homogeneous Afrikaner 'lifeworld' (Habermas's term) as hegemonic and inextricable from Afrikaner power. With the collapse of Afrikaner nationalism and its dominant influence in national politics and group identity, Afrikanerdom is now taken to mean the threatened position of the Afrikaner minority, although its usage is rare, except in right-wing discourse.
2. Shared 24 years later by Max du Preez's criticism, on his Facebook page in 2014, of the singer Steve Hofmeyr's celebration of 'Die Stem' – the national anthem under Nationalist rule, which translates as 'The Voice', and equally 'The Vote' – in which he protests, with the same qualification used by Goosen, '*Goddank ons is nie almal so nie*' – Thank God we are not all like that.

negative identity and implicitly defends one that is held to be blameless and, if no longer noble, at least deserving of acceptance. This ambiguity is, of course, rooted in South Africa's apartheid history and reflects the difficulty in constructing a new identity amid the contending demands of a society in transformation, while negotiating the emotional and moral debris of the past.

In public discourse the taint of apartheid attaches tenaciously to South African whites in general and to Afrikaners in particular.[3] Apartheid was the creation of white Afrikaners and it is by no means dead. For example, in rebutting the international perceptions of South Africa as a violent society in December 2015, President Jacob Zuma stated that South Africans didn't just become violent. It was planted by apartheid.[4] Dave Steward (2013), the executive director of the FW de Klerk Foundation, argues that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) 'consistently characterises whites as "the other"' through the routine rhetorical invocation of terms such as 'apartheid colonialism', the effect of which is to 'reinforce perceptions of white moral inferiority and black entitlement'. The liberal Afrikaner historian Hermann Giliomee (2000: 98) also notes in the ANC 'an insistence that from the start, European settlement here on the tip of Africa was immoral' and an 'assumption that whites have no right to defend their interests'.

The burden of the past thus continues to weigh heavily on the present. For example, on news of the death in 2013 of one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) most important witnesses, hit squad leader Dirk Coetzee, *City Press* news editor Natasha Joseph ruminated in a tweet: 'Coetzee's death has me thinking about the Nuremberg Trials. Would that model have brought more closure than the TRC?' To which one reply, from Sithembile Mbete, was 'I think we're all scarred by the fact that apartheid went unpunished. Reconciliation without justice is proving meaningless.'[5] Veteran journalist and political commentator

3. Afrikaner: Originally taken to mean colonials who identified themselves as 'of Africa', as opposed to 'European'. Later, with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, throughout the apartheid era and to an extent today, it came to be understood as white, Calvinist, Afrikaans-speaking nationalists and synonymous with 'racist', especially after the 1976 Soweto riots, whose flashpoint was Afrikaans as medium of teaching in black schools. Nationalism has faded as a marker of Afrikaner identity, which nevertheless continues to cluster together the markers of 'white', 'Afrikaans-speaking' and 'Christian' (not necessarily Calvinist).
4. See http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/apartheid-the-root-cause-of-violent-sa-protests-zuma-20151209.
5. See https://twitter.com/TashJoeZA and https://twitter.com/sthembete, 7 March 2013.

Harald Pakendorf admitted on Radio Sonder Grense (Radio without Borders) to ongoing 'mixed feelings' at the 'loss of Afrikaner innocence' that Coetzee's disclosures represented.

In the wake of the traumatic revelations of the TRC, Antjie Krog (1999: 128) asks: 'What is one to do with this load of decrowned skeletons, origins, shame and ash?' In answer to this question, Melissa Steyn (2001, 2004) describes the various discursive ways in which Afrikaners have tried to 'rehabilitate' their 'disgraced whiteness' (while taking shelter in 'white talk'). They range from the 'reactionary' to 'transformative', amid an 'unprecedented level of soul-searching' (Van der Westhuizen 2007: 285).

Some Afrikaners argue that the past is over – apartheid was vanished by Nelson Mandela's signature on the Constitution and therefore behaviour and conduct in the present should not be subject to scrutiny on the same terms. This assumes that both the past and the present are inert, uncontested. In fact, changing economic fortunes, new political actors, the limits of government and manifest social intolerance and inequality mean that identities and senses of belonging are having to be re-evaluated and reshaped every day.

At one end of the scale, identities that have been held up as heroic and appeared for many years to be untouchable have proved as friable as any: 'struggle heroes', from Mandela to Cyril Ramaphosa, find themselves labelled 'sell-outs' in the internecine battle for control of the ANC and within a broader political arena in which new visions for a post-Rainbow South Africa are starting to take shape. Identities that found a place and acceptance within a 'Black' liberation struggle have been dislodged and so-called coloureds and Indians are exploring and asserting essential identitities, invoking particular histories that have been subsumed by dominant narratives of oppression and origins.[6]

6. Black: Under apartheid the population was segregated according to racial classifications of 'black', 'white', 'Indian' and 'coloured'. Capital B 'black' referred to black Africans, while 'blacks' generally referred to all so-called non-whites. During the liberation struggle leading up to the democratic elections of 1994, 'black' was taken to mean all racially oppressed groups. Now, 'black', largely due to the racially preferential prescripts of black economic empowerment legislation, is again used to describe black Africans. It is therefore a political and legal term, which denotes 'black people' and also connotes 'autochthonous/indigenous/native people' who assume a historically legitimised claim to a geographical and national identity.

And at the other end of the scale, the already low tolerance for racism has dwindled further. Penny Sparrow, an estate agent who objected to the numbers of black revellers on the beach at Christmas and called them 'monkeys' on social media was charged in the Equality Court for hate speech and in the Magistrate's Court for *crimen injuria*. Afrikaner singer and white rights activist Steve Hofmeyr has also found his freedom to offend constrained. Hofmeyr has been a media celebrity for decades, accorded the role of a folk hero by the Afrikaans media in spite of his overtly racist views. However, support for racism, explicitly or implicitly, has become socially damaging and social and corporate indulgence of racism has been challenged. The result for Hofmeyr is that sponsors have taken back a vehicle they had supplied to him, the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, the pre-eminent Afrikaans festival of arts and culture, refused to invite him to perform, a restaurant in Holland refused to serve him, and even *Beeld*, a newspaper that used to give him endless coverage, toned down its support and criticised his actions.

However, new social movements have focused not only on individual instances of what is considered conduct unbecoming of a citizen of a non-racial society, but have also questioned the preservation of cultural artefacts from the colonial and apartheid eras. The #RhodesMustFall student movement destroyed artworks and statues, notably at the University of Cape Town, demanding a 'decolonised' physical and academic environment and a displacement of the Western canon (to which white South Africans have subscribed in large, if sometimes ambivalent, measure). While Afrikaans has been consistently under attack as a language, English, too, has found itself under attack as the legacy of Colony, and the writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has found a ready audience on his lecture tours for his advocacy for a rehabilitation of indigenous languages.[7] Reinvigorated discourses of colonialism and racism have also led to a call for radical economic transformation and vigorous challenges to macroeconomic policies, increasing social and financial inequalities and to the persistence of privilege.

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7. Support for indigenous languages has tended to be rhetorical in South Africa. In spite of eleven languages having official status, mother-tongue education in schools and universities has foundered on a lack of political will, practical support and resources such as textbooks. English has, as a result, consolidated its dominance in most spheres of society. However, there has been a notable increase in the number of parliamentary addresses presented in indigenous tongues.

Most of these discourses have come together in the #FeesMustFall movement, which has extended the #RhodesMustFall demands into the broader political domain. Critically, the movement has not limited its focus to eliminating the artefacts of the colonial era and apartheid. By invoking the question of rights to land, it has reframed historical restitution and redistribution into a question of who *may* own the land (as well as any fruits of democracy) and, beyond that, who may have a presence in physical and social spaces.[8] In this discourse, ownership of the land, read as country, is reserved for indigenes, for whom other rights of citizenship, such as freedom of speech and association, are similarly reserved. The inclusive, non-racial discourse of post-1994 democracy (as embodied in the Constitution) has been overtaken by one of exclusion, in the name of an 'authentic' citizenship. This sharpens questions of belonging and identity among groups whose origins stem from colonialism.

Where, then, do I place myself in this discourse of identity, guilt and belonging? Am I subject to the same 'psychic glue' that the poet Stephen Watson (1997: 10) observes holds South Africa together: 'guilt on the one hand and emotional blackmail on the other'. My interest in the issues touched on above has two wellsprings, one personal and the other professional. I describe them below, partly to position myself in relation to the reader, but also as an attempt to inform my point of entry into the debate.

Un-belonging

Personal identity has always been a source of conflict for me: as an English-speaker growing up in an Afrikaans environment, as the child of francophone colonial immigrants and as a student activist on a white university campus in the 1980s, the question of where I fitted in socially, and politically, was constantly under evaluation.

Throughout my teens and into young adulthood I held onto my 'Europeanness' (defined in part by a fluency in English, French and German) to set me apart from, and above, what I saw to be the narrow-minded Calvinism of Afrikaners (in the same way that they held on to their European origins to distance themselves

8. It has become a feature of academic conferences and debates on university campuses, for example, for #FeesMustFall supporters to demand the ejection or silencing of white speakers, regardless of their political positions.

from their black compatriots), in whose language I was nevertheless also fluent. It would be disingenuous to dignify a prejudice against Afrikaners as rooted only in religion (I was Catholic) or language. I took my cue from my father in my 'anti-Afrikaner' attitudes, but it would be many years before I could separate out the sometimes contradictory reasons behind what often felt like a visceral antipathy. Primarily, it was the religiously inspired authoritarianism of nationalism that was objectionable, in that it led to the banning of films and books and, of course, television, all deemed hallmarks of culture and civilisation. It was not the racism of Afrikaners that was objectionable, but the fact that they were 'uncultured', 'provincial' and 'Nazi-sympathisers', a serious crime in the eyes of my parents who had lived through the Second World War and both of whose homes and towns had been occupied by Nazi soldiers.[9] On the other hand, my parents were vehemently anti-communist and so perforce they implicitly supported the *Rooi Gevaar* (Red Menace) rhetoric of the National Party (for whom, however, they never voted, since they never adopted South African citizenship). My bewilderment was therefore great when I was insulted by English children as a 'Dutchman' on account of my Flemish surname.[10] More bewildering was to be insulted by those whom I considered 'Dutchmen' when they called me both an *uitlander* and a *soutie*.[11]

And yet my heart quickens at the sound of Afrikaans. Afrikaners (individually and through the National Party's 'white immigration' policy of the time) gave succour to my family when we arrived as refugees from the Belgian Congo in 1960. My childhood friends were Afrikaans and I was embraced in their homes. And, although the context is different, I find myself in sympathy with Jacob Dlamini

9. The Nazi association was not at that time with reference to the Aryan race policies of the Third Reich, but to the Afrikaners (for example, the Ossewa Brandwag) who objected to joining the Second World War on the side of Britain, and who explicitly or implicitly supported Adolf Hitler because he was the enemy of the colonial power that had subjugated Afrikaners in the Anglo-Boer wars.
10. A pejorative term for Afrikaners, who were also called 'rocks' (for their perceived stupidity) and 'hairy-backs' (for their perceived Neanderthal backwardness).
11. *Uitlander* is the Afrikaans word for foreigner (literally 'outlander'), while *soutie* is a contraction of *soutpiel*, a derogatory term for English South Africans, meaning, literally, 'salt-penis'. It described those who had one foot in England and the other in South Africa, with their penis dangling in the ocean between, and was understood to mean that the English did not belong in South Africa because they had divided loyalties between the two countries.

(2009) in harbouring nostalgic feelings that jar with their shattered historical setting. At the time, my relationship to black South Africans was no more than a murmur on the periphery of my conscience.

Since 1994, I have wrestled with sensitivities of being associated with apartheid by virtue of being white – and having an Afrikaans-sounding surname has not helped. When Krog dedicates *Country of my Skull* (1999) to ‘every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips’, I am aware that the echoes of my own name extend in distressing ways beyond my own person, my own actions and control. When Thabo Mbeki (1996) pronounces ‘I am an African’, I wonder whether I am embraced or excluded in his sentiments, whether his ‘I’ marginalises my ‘I’, whether ‘African’ is inclusive of my whiteness. As Amartya Sen (2006: 3) points out, ‘the adversity of exclusion can be made to go hand in hand with the gifts of inclusion’.

When Julius Malema accuses all whites of theft (De Lange 2011), I find myself abnegatingly agreeing with him, but fearful of the implications of that line of argument. My most visible features, of being white, male and middle-aged, put me firmly in the line of fire and this inevitably informs an awareness of how I am seen, where I fit in and what conditions are required to allow this to happen in a way that meets my own needs as well as broader social imperatives.

The ‘me’ in media

Dilemmas of who is in and who is out also informed my work in newspapers over 25 years, during which time I was a sub-editor, columnist, reviewer, ombudsman and editor. Various questions confronted me in these different roles. There were elementary ones – such as ‘Is this English?’, ‘Is this Style?’ and ‘Is this intelligible?’ – which were the crux of sub-editing. There were more complex ones, such as ‘Is this fair?’ At its most elementary level, if the answer was no, a story could nevertheless be balanced by including sources or viewpoints that had initially been left out. At another level, however, even if the story on its own technical merits was ‘fair’ or ‘balanced’, broad social and political fairness and balance would often prove elusive because there was always an ‘understood’, which excluded swathes of people (notably the very poor and unskilled and until relatively recently black people), opinions and activities. These ‘understoods’ inevitably informed the overarching questions of ‘Is it news?’, ‘Who cares?’ and ‘Will it sell?’, and how such news would be presented – that is, how graphically should a violent rape be reported (not very); how much blood should be seen in a photograph (not much);

should dead bodies appear in photographs (rarely); are breasts permissible;[12] are swearwords permissible (seldom); can we print the word ‘kaffir’ (no).

My early career with the *Natal Witness* in the mid-1980s coincided with the National Party government’s emergency regulations, which almost terminally restricted the commercial press’s scope in covering the full story of what was happening, to which a traditionally white readership was in any case allergic. The dynamic then, as now, was how to tell the full story in a way that did not alienate existing readers, encouraged new ones and kept the newspaper onside with both government and other elites. Even before 1994, however, there was an urgency in trying to move beyond the colonial white focus that had been the *Witness*’s hallmark and to embrace more black readers.[13] A declining circulation suggests the lack of success of that initiative.[14] This decline is not only caused by online media or other commercial onslaughts, although they are mainly responsible for it. Critically, as has been the case with other legacy, English-language newspapers, the *Witness* has struggled to find an appropriate voice to make its ‘meaning making’ relevant and significant to a racial and cultural mass of readers. If, as Arthur Miller put it in *The Observer* on 26 November 1961, ‘A good newspaper is, I suppose, a nation talking to itself’, newspapers in South Africa have lost both their sense of nation and their sense of self.

12. White breasts were taboo in the *Witness* (and other ‘mainstream’ media) because of the paper’s ‘family values’. Black breasts were allowed because it was deemed permissible among blacks and, equally importantly, because black breasts were deemed unlikely to titillate a white reader and so could not be morally ‘offensive’ to family values.
13. There was little, if any, understanding of what might interest ‘black’ readers, who were taken to be a homogeneous mass with ‘collective’ and ‘communal’ interests and who could be addressed en masse. Religion, class, leisure interests, income, aspirations, professional and educational differentiation, political allegiance and understanding: none of these categories was considered to apply. I am simplifying complex dynamics, which changed over time. For example, prior to 1994, the overriding and pressing demand of enfranchisement for blacks took for granted that ‘blacks’ were collectively oppressed and to that extent had a common interest. After 1994, this understanding became more nuanced, but any editorial response to such an understanding was at odds with the expectations of an existing readership, the demands of advertisers and the limit of distribution, that is, where the paper was sold. No concerted efforts were made to make the paper generally available in townships or other ‘black’ areas.
14. The circulation of the *Witness* declined steadily from a high point of 30 000 in 1994 to under 13 000 in 2017, according to Audited Bureau of Circulation figures.

Since the objective was to reach out to a broad readership, we at the *Witness* often envied the easier task of our colleagues at *Beeld* (both papers are now part of Naspers), who were able to focus on a strictly defined audience that still essentially fitted the definition of Afrikaner (white, God-fearing and Afrikaans-speaking).[15] However, it occurred to me that in one crucial way our task was easier, in that we did not consider our role to be holding together an ethnic or linguistic group.

Loss of voice and loss of audience combined to amplify the crisis afflicting the newspaper industry and the ever-present professional questions were: 'Who are we speaking to?', 'How do we speak to them?' and, ultimately, 'Who are we?' Beyond the concerns of readership and circulation, however, are also more profound political and social questions. Relevant answers are as important to newspapers and their continuing role in democratic societies as coming up with new business models. Does niche marketing contribute to social divisions and undermine the ethical objective to inform and empower through knowledge? In the case of *Beeld*, does its catering for (even pandering to) the Afrikaner community sow the seeds of future ethnic conflict by promoting 'a counter-politics of ethnic assertion *against* the jurisdiction of the state' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003: 446), or does it consolidate a sense of inclusive South Africanism in a multicultural society?

Discourses of legitimation

It is in this context that the following questions arose for me in reading *Beeld*: how is the past (and questions of moral culpability) kept in its place or recast in a way

15. Naspers: Abbreviation of Nasionale Pers, a multinational media corporation, founded to further Afrikaner nationalism, which owns Media24, the publisher of all the Afrikaans-language daily newspaper in South Africa – *Beeld*, *Volksblad*, *Die Burger* – and the Sunday *Rapport*. It also owns English papers, the *Daily Sun*, which is the largest circulation daily newspaper in South Africa, *City Press* (Sunday), the *Witness* and News24, the largest online news platform in South Africa, which draws its content from the group's newspapers. Naspers, through its subsidiary Media24, is one of the largest media owners in South Africa, with international interests in Brazil, Russia and China, among others. The other main newspaper publishing groups are Independent News and Media (*Star*, *Cape Times*, *Argus*, *Mercury*, *Pretoria News*, *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, *Tribune*); Tiso Blackstar Group (*Sunday Times*, the largest circulation Sunday newspaper, *Sowetan*, *Daily Dispatch*, *The Herald*, *Business Day*, a business- and politics-focused daily, and *TIMES Live* online network); and Caxton, which owns the daily *Citizen* and dominates the community newspaper market. Naspers also has interests in subscription television, through its wholly owned subsidiary MultiChoice, which has three dedicated Afrikaans channels.

that it does not compromise the present? Why is there a sense that the particular diet of stories about crime and corruption has the effect not of informing, but of determining whose life, in this narrative of victimhood, is 'grievable' (Butler 2010)? How do these two dynamics provide an insight into how an Afrikaner identity may be being reconstituted and usefully (or otherwise) deployed? How is the relationship between 'self' and 'other' being negotiated through this process? Finally, how is this being played out in what appears to be a doomed medium of communication?

Even before the era of fake news, traditional print media, globally and in South Africa, found themselves in a crisis of credibility (N. Davies 2009; Monck 2008; Simpson 2010) and circulation (Allan 2006; Harber 2013a; Myburgh 2011). In addition, Afrikaners are in a crisis of influence (R. Davies 2009; Marais 2011; Van der Westhuizen 2007) and identity (Bornman 2010; Du Preez 2005; Engelbrecht 2007; Steyn 2004). To secure their survival, both are trying to find meaningful roles for themselves in radically changed political and social circumstances. How these dynamics manifest in the Afrikaans press offers insights into South Africa's construction of a national identity (Wasserman 2005, 2009; Wasserman and De Beer 2005), the position of minorities within it and the role of the media in the democratic process.[16]

Since 1994 Afrikaners have had to deploy discourses of legitimation that entail, at the least, an appearance of disowning racism (Van der Westhuizen 2007; Wasserman 2010), apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism, whose spectre nevertheless continues to haunt the political landscape, as evidenced by the debate on land ownership and ethnic origins sparked by Pieter Mulder in Parliament (De Vos 2012) and the alarm triggered by reports of right-wing training camps (Van Gelder 2012). Caught not only between going forward and harking back to the past, and between Africanism and South Africanism, but also between what Dan O'Meara (1997: 2) refers to as the 'contending Siamese twins of globalisation and ethnic nationalism', the Afrikaner identity project is complex, intricate and often contradictory (R. Davies 2009).

As Amartya Sen (2006), Dan O'Meara (1997) and Chantal Mouffe (1994) point out in relation to post-1989 eruptions of ethnonationalism, identity can kill.

16. Minorities have tended to be seen in terms of racial definitions, but other minority differentiations, such as ethnicity and being 'foreign' (particularly foreign African), have gained force in South Africa and are influencing political debate.

Identity is 'fundamentally political' (Elliott 2011) and identity politics are played out through contestations of power and in the media, as Manuel Castells asserts: 'In modern times power is played out in media and communication' (in Rantanen 2005: 138).

These contestations, at the level of representation (Taylor and Willis 1999: 40), tend to pit identity myths of difference and otherness, 'us' and 'them', against each other (Hall 2002: 10). The negotiation of these tensions is crucial to the successful functioning of a plural society and to the very possibility of a democratic politics (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 1994). Failure increases the prospects of violence, as seen in Bosnia and Rwanda and in South Africa's periodic xenophobic purges.

Who are the Afrikaners?

Afrikaners as a group have exerted a considerable force on the course of South Africa's history and arguably continue to do so. But who are these people? What is the definition of an Afrikaner? The very question is enough to arouse a strong reaction: 'How incredible that you should even ask that' is Pieter Mulder's response to the writer Fred de Vries (2012: 9; translated from Afrikaans).[17] On the other hand, according to Giliomee (2009: 715), by 2009 'a considerable section of well-educated white Afrikaans speakers no longer considered themselves to be Afrikaners'. The artist Mark Kannemeyer would be one of these: 'I am not part of that group of people and I do not have a sense of shared destiny with them' (in De Vries 2012: 376; translated from Afrikaans). But there are those torn between these two poles, as represented by one respondent to Mads Vestergaard (2001: 25): 'I am an Afrikaner, though I hate the Afrikaners.'

Rebecca Davies (2012: 5) doubts 'whether an Afrikaner grouping exists in any formal sense', while nevertheless acknowledging the existence of 'Afrikanerness'. Even at the height of Afrikanerdom, the social historian Pieter W. Grobbelaar was moved to ponder the 'puzzle' of the Afrikaner and concluded that Afrikaners live 'under the constellation of the question mark' (1974: 1; translated from Afrikaans).

Identity is not, of course, a constant, although the term 'Afrikaner' has sufficient constancy for it to be understood to refer to the same broad group of people over three and a half centuries of settlement in South Africa. Within the term, identity

17. Pieter Mulder: Former leader of the Freedom Front Plus Party, considered to be the last vestige of Afrikaner nationalism. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

is constantly being redefined. In Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory, discussed in more detail in the chapters to come, periods of historical dislocation, of which the end of apartheid has been a seismic one for Afrikaners, result in a dislocation of identity that, in turn, redirects an identity project that may have become sedimented over a period or is found unfit for its historical purpose.

There is inevitably an existential dimension to any identity project.[18] Post-apartheid Afrikaners, according to Willem de Klerk are 'milling around like a bunch of cornered sheep' (2000: 9; translated from Afrikaans). This aimlessness is also suggested by Vestergaard (2001) in the title of his study of Afrikaner identities, 'Who's Got the Map', and De Vries (2012), whose book title – *Rigtingbedonnerd* – translates roughly as 'buggered direction'. It is also poignantly captured in the lines '*swervers sonder rigting . . . soekers wat nooit vind*' (drifters without direction . . . seekers who never find) in Koos du Plessis's poem 'Kinders van die wind' (Children of the wind) (in Brink 2008: 893). Even so, these journeys form a boundary of identity and it cannot be ignored that one of the founding myths of Afrikaners was the Great Trek, whose 175th anniversary was being celebrated with enthusiasm nearly two decades into the democratic dispensation.

While Karl Marx (1932) could confidently assert that 'in everyday life every shopkeeper is well able to distinguish between what somebody professes to be and what he really is', the 'being' of any group cannot be reduced to an essence and nor can appearances and signs be reduced to mere chimeras. The post-structuralist assumption integral to this book is that identity is a construct (Laclau 2000b) and under a continual process of re-evaluation, redefinition and reconstruction

18. Afrikaners are not the only group having to wrestle with a post-apartheid identity. So-called coloureds, who, because they tend to have Afrikaans as a home language are important to identify within a broad definition as 'Afrikaanses', have increasingly dis-identified with a 'black' identity that was politically expedient pre-1994 – 'Afrikaanses' being people whose identity is based on being Afrikaans-speakers, but not necessarily on nationalism or any other cultural associations of Afrikaners. Affirmative action policies that prioritise 'black Africans' as beneficiaries of employment or, for example, study bursaries and entry to tertiary education, are largely responsible for this and a corresponding sense of marginalisation. Coloureds have, over recent years, sought to counter understandings of their identity as a product of black-white miscegeny and have instead sought to situate it in the legacy of the Malay slaves brought to the Cape in the colonial era, as well as in the first-people history of the Khoi and the San people of South Africa.

(Howarth 2000; Norval 2000; Steyn 2001). Even Breyten Breytenbach, in his foreword to Frederik van Zyl Slabbert's book *Afrikaner Afrikaan* is moved to conclude that any 'blueprint' of Afrikaners that may have existed has been 'conclusively shattered' (in Slabbert 1999: xiii; translated from Afrikaans). Identity is, moreover, 'both a structural and subjective condition determined by historical forces and the prevailing structure of power relations' (R. Davies 2009: 5) and not merely a function of Sartrean voluntarism.

'Ik ben een Afrikander'

The history of Afrikaners begins in 1652 in the Cape, but the first recorded assertion of what is understood to be an Afrikaner identity was that of Hendrik Biebouw in 1707: '*Ik ben een Afrikaander*' (in Giliomee 2009: 22). As a first-generation South African, and as what would still be called a coloured, it is likely that he was not so much asserting a cultural identity as a right of occupancy based on birth origin (in opposition to the status of European interlopers) (De Villiers 2012: 47; Giliomee 2009: 23).

By the end of the first half-century of settlement, a social identity based on being 'of Africa' had consolidated into a 'sense of being Afrikaners rather than being Dutch or French or German' (Giliomee 2009: 51). Steyn (2001: 102) points out that this 'dissociation from European roots, has been important in Afrikaner identity since the earliest time of white settlement. This self-identification with the land also indicated a strong claim of entitlement to the land.'

It would be impossible to claim, however, that Afrikaner identity emerged fully fledged as a discursive construct during this period. Rather, it gathered momentum and shape through key periods in South Africa's history. They are broadly, to use Fransjohan Pretorius's categorisation (2012): the Dutch era in the Cape (1652–1806), British rule in the Cape (1806–34), the Great Trek (1830s to 1840s), nation-forming (1850–1900), the rise and consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism (1875–1948), the apartheid period (1948–94), the post-apartheid period (1994–2004) and the period of democratic puberty (2004 to the present). Spliced into this history are other formative periods: the Mfecane (1750–1835), the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and the growth of black resistance to apartheid (1950s to 1980s).

Throughout, however, conflict defined the political history of Afrikaners (Giliomee and Adam 1981: 7; Roux 1972). This conflict took place within the fold, as *broedertwis* (literally, 'brother conflict'), between groups (whether Dutch,

English or black),[19] and ultimately, in the 1980s era of 'total onslaught', with nations that fell under the influence of the communist USSR and those nations who had imposed economic sanctions and cultural boycotts against South Africa.

It is under the master signifier of 'Afrikaner' that these ideological battles were joined, crystallising in the ethnonationalism that gave the National Party its electoral victory of 1948. *Volk* (people or nation) and racism combined (Van der Westhuizen 2007: 12) to give this ethnonationalism expression through four decades of apartheid rule and it is specifically against this history that post-1994 Afrikaner identity has struggled to reshape itself.

Thomas Blaser and Christi van der Westhuizen (2012: 388) argue that 'while the common political project of a state-based ethnonationalism has been abandoned by Afrikaners, ethnicity and neo-liberalism have emerged as new defence strategies for a whiteness in rehabilitative mode'. Davies (2012) and Van der Westhuizen (2007) both argue that Afrikaners have 'globalised' by riding the wave of neo-liberalism. But while Davies argues that ethnic identification is being eroded and superseded by affiliations of race and class, Blaser and Van der Westhuizen (2012: 386) discern, using Stuart Hall's phrase, a 'return to the local', 'in which a defensive and exclusivist ethnicity is rediscovered as grounding in the face of the destabilisations of postmodernity and globalization'.

These dynamics are clearly complex, operating simultaneously, but not necessarily in a complementary way. Discourse and material forces create further confusion and contradiction. For example, Blaser and Van der Westhuizen (2012: 384) point to the fact that while the trade union Solidarity has euphemised race

19. *Broedertwis* is generally understood to be the ideological battle between the *verligtes* (liberal-minded) and *verkramptes* (reactionaries) to direct the political course of Afrikanerdom during apartheid. The shades of conflict can be more nuanced than this, however, and their origins in the Anglo-Boer War carry through into the present. The spectrum of allegiance to the *volk* (people or nation) has ranged from: the 'joiners', the worst form of *verraaier* (traitor; literally, betrayer) and an accusation levelled in more recent history at the last National Party leader Marthinus van Schalkwyk and foreign minister Pik Botha for his rapprochement with the ANC; the *hensoppers* (capitulators, hands-uppers), applied to Frederik van Zyl Slabbert when he was leader of the opposition (Blake 2010: 266); the *afvalliges* (those who have fallen off or away from the group); the *krygers* (fighters) and the *bittereinders* (bitter-enders, those who fight to the last), the most heroic of the folk heroes and a term that PRAAG (the Pro-Afrikaanse Aksie Groep/Pro-Afrikaans Action Group) and its leader Dan Roodt consider applicable to their mission to 'attain freedom in a Fourth Afrikaans Republic'. See http://www.praag.co.za.

into 'rights' under the Constitution, it is 'successfully mobilising white, Afrikaans-speaking workers'.

There is agreement (Giliomee 2009; Marais 2011; Pretorius 2012) that with democracy, and the disbanding of the National Party in 2005, Afrikaners have lost the political power that constituted a key element of their identity. The figures tell the story: while Afrikaners, under apartheid, made up 60 per cent of the voting population; they are now reduced to 6 per cent, 'a ten-fold reduction of political influence, that was for some traumatic to handle' (Joubert 2012: 599; translated from Afrikaans).

However, their influence has not been scattered in the wind: 94 per cent of white Afrikaans-speakers who voted in 2009 voted for the opposition Democratic Alliance (Joubert 2012: 600), attracted by its policies informed by individual rights, clean governance and neo-liberal economics. Jan-Jan Joubert notes the paradox that such a percentage of Afrikaners congregating under a single banner is unprecedented in their history, a phenomenon that presents interesting challenges to anyone trying to situate Afrikaners ideologically.

There may no longer be a significant, overtly Afrikaner-nationalist ethnic bloc as such. But to define Afrikaners, even shorn of a nationalist ideology, is possible if they are viewed as a Higgs boson group, that is, one whose co-ordinates are known (through language, religion and common history, but also, and still, race), but not visible except when it flares in the particle collider of identity politics and whose presence is known from the way it agitates the world around it. Thus Afrikaners have a material force that serves as a point of reference for any discourse that suggests the marginalisation or victimisation of the group.

Research such as that of Elirea Bornman (2010) suggests that Afrikaners' sense of national identity is becoming more tenuous, contributing to a sense of marginalisation. Afrikaners, because of their history (and because there is no consensus on who belongs to such a group and because only the marginal right wing willingly identifies with the appellation), cannot assert their interests explicitly as those of Afrikaners. This is opposite to (but may account in part for) the ideological repositioning that the Afrikaans media have undertaken (Wasserman 2009) and their explicit and implicit broad embrace of the new political order, although as will be seen in this book, this is not all it seems.

The mechanisms of assertion of Afrikaner identity take various forms. The most aggressive are those adopted by civil rights groups such as Solidarity and AfriForum. Solidarity, for example, has mounted several challenges to the implementation

of affirmative action on behalf of white, mainly Afrikaans-speaking candidates who have been passed over for jobs and promotion. In 2012 AfriForum Youth protested at what it saw as an admissions policy at the University of Pretoria that prejudiced the chances of white students registering at Onderstepoort to study veterinary science. AfriForum itself took on what it considers as hate speech, the singing of the song 'Shoot the Boer',[20] and has also gone to court to block the renaming of streets in Pretoria after liberation heroes such as Nelson Mandela to replace Afrikaner heroes such as apartheid-architect H.F. Verwoerd. The net effect of these actions is that the primary beneficiaries are those formerly constituted as Afrikaners, while the rights of all whites, as whites, are asserted in the process.

The media and identity

It is clear that the construction of identity does not take place in a vacuum. It is part of political contests (Wasserman 2005b) and identity discourses are 'deeply interwoven with the operation of power in society' (Elliott 2011: xvii).

The media play a central role in these discursive practices, in the sense that they 'generate, corroborate and accelerate identity formation, just as they overshadow and negate it' (Hadland et al. 2008: 3). Afrikaans media, as former mouthpieces (to a greater or lesser extent) of the ruling National Party, have been given an ideological makeover, ditching racist, apartheid ideology in favour of a free-market one in which the commodification of Afrikaans as a language has ensured their economic survival. This process is riven by 'contradictions and paradoxes' and, as Wasserman (2009: 75) points out, 'this discourse of consumption and individual freedom of choice seemed to be in tension with the more overtly ideological discourse of cultural politics'. Wiida Fourie (2008), too, shows that largely unchanged typifications of 'the other' in letters to *Beeld* tend to undermine the reconstruction of Afrikaner identity taking place elsewhere in the paper.

What is it, then, that can be seen amid these contradictions? O'Meara (1997) questions who the 'narrators' of Afrikaner nationhood are – I use the term 'nation' in Benedict Anderson's sense of 'an imagined community' (1991: 49) – that is, who is articulating the narrative that allows the group to mobilise as a nation? Is it possible to view a newspaper, as an entity, as such a narrator?

20. The South African High Court ruled in September 2011 that 'Shoot the Boer' constituted hate speech and banned the ANC from singing it.

A newspaper, as all media theory makes clear (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler 2004), does not occupy a neutral zone. Apart from anything else, the relationship between newspaper and reader is an intimate one and communication takes place *en famille*, as it were, whatever space it may otherwise occupy in the public sphere. When the *Daily Sun* erects a cardboard cut-out of a 'blue-collar man' in its lobby to give visible form to its marketing-defined target reader, it indicates that it addresses each individual reader personally and that the product it presents is made under the 'authorship' of the *Daily Sun*. The effect of this is that 'a series of cultural values is invisibly in play whenever authorship is evoked and an author function attributed to a text' (Downing 2008: 64).

To make the invisible visible is the subject of discourse theory. David Deacon et al. (1999: 146) provide a working definition of discourse as relating

> not only to the actual uses of language as a form of social interaction, in particular situations and contexts, but also on forms of representation in which different social categories, different social practices and relations are constructed from and in the interests of a particular point of view, a particular conception of social reality.

These processes of meaning making are encapsulated in Hall's seminal 'encoding/decoding' conceptualisation of the functioning of media (1980a). Located in linguistic theory, the model of encoding/decoding points to the gaps between denotation and connotation in texts, the usefulness of which in critical social theory is that within these gaps lie the conceptual seeds of social change and the prospect of 'freedom' – in this case, the freedom to construct a new(er) identity.

The interplay between denotation and connotation is also for Hall, as it is for Roland Barthes (1972), the domain of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses, the latter of which give insights into what Hall calls 'oppositional' identities. A question that arises in relation to identity discourse in *Beeld* is whether the assertion of what amounts to an Afrikaner ethnic identity is oppositional and, if so, to what? Is it a 'subaltern whiteness' (Blaser and Van der Westhuizen 2012: 383) speaking against its own history, against 'rainbowism' or 'nativism' and is the decline in identification with South Africanism the result of this?

Castells (1997: 8) refines this line of theory by positing three forms of identity: 'legitimising identity', 'resistance identity' and 'project identity', the latter being one in which social actors 'build a new identity that redefines their position in

society and, by doing so, seek the transformation of overall social structure'. Afrikaners, paradoxically, would seem to fuse Hall's 'oppositional' and Castells' 'project' identities. (These concepts are explored in greater depth in Chapter 2.) The two terms capture two components that go hand in hand when considering identity. 'Opposition' (apart from other more dynamic aspects of resistance) refers to situation, or how identity is positioned in the public sphere. 'Project' (apart from its connotations of direction and objective) refers to a process of construction. Each operates in relation to the other.

Othering

The process of 'othering', in turn, is integral to this interrelationship in two ways. The first, drawing from Ferdinand de Saussure, rests on the insight in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1959) that concepts derive their meaning from 'what the others are not'. In other words, meaning is never intrinsic or fixed and is always dependent on context (historical and semiotic), thus establishing differentiation and distinction. The second takes this innocuous recognition of the 'other' and establishes a legitimation of self through an imposition on the 'other' of a set of demeaning and pejorative values that Edward Said (2003), in the context of how the West sees the East, terms 'Orientalism'.

Both these definitions posit an external 'other'. The marshalling of group identity recognises, however, that the positioning of the group entails an internal or reflexive process of othering as well. (Othering, and the interrelationship between forms of othering and what I call 'self-othering', are explained and developed in chapters 1 and 6.) In the case of Afrikaner identity, victimhood, or 'grievability', to use Judith Butler's (2010) term, forms one of the nuances of this dynamic.

Victimhood and innocence

Implicitly or explicitly a narrative of victimhood is being created for Afrikaners, not for the first time in their history (Giliomee 2009; O'Meara 1983). In this book, I argue that, through this narrative, Afrikaners negate the stigma of 'oppressor'. An active, current status of 'victim' serves to neutralise assaults on them as either Afrikaners, or whites, or political reactionaries (depending on the rhetoric of the day). It appeals to an impulse of humanitarian sympathy that wipes away the past and focuses on the present. An immediate need is created that trumps past crimes. In a topsy-turvy world, Julius Malema's 'criminal' becomes Dan Roodt's 'victim'. This is a narrative that finds echoes in plaintive cries of 'reverse racism', allowing

Afrikaners to embrace an identity as the new 'others', victimised and put upon by those they have 'othered' – and continue to 'other' – by largely ignoring them in the pages of *Beeld*, for example.

This erasure of the past, as I hope to show, serves, at least implicitly, to empower the bargaining position of Afrikaners through weakness, a judo move to catch the opponent off guard, so to speak. This operates in conjunction with the 'self-othering' of the 'bad Afrikaner', the displacement of the atavistic Afrikaner associated with and responsible for apartheid.[21] It is these mechanisms of cultural representation manifested in *Beeld* that allow its readers to embrace, or otherwise, their position as South Africans and as Afrikaners.

Discourse and representation do not take place in ethereal isolation. They operate in what the anthropologist Kate Crehan (1997: 172) calls 'landscapes of meaning', the 'social environment within which people live', in which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic battles are fought. This is the terrain within which this book is located. Crehan extends her metaphor to point out that these 'landscapes of meaning' are inextricably linked to, although not always determined by, 'underlying geological formations with their associated tectonic forces'. These 'tectonic forces' refer primarily to politics and the economy, which are not the subject of this book, but whose grinding and heaving I take to reverberate through every aspect of society.

In Chapter 1, I explore the contours of these forces in a way that seeks to show the 'fractal topography' within which Afrikaner identity is constructed and the benefits of the past and the losses (and gains) of the present can be understood. For example, the debate is extensive whether Afrikaners, under the ideological banner of the *volk*, rode the wave of capital (Marais 2011; O'Meara 1983) as it rolled inexorably along, but over which they had little real control, or whether they directed the course of capitalism in an aberrant (Giliomee 2009) or irrational (Lipton 1986) way. The net result is nevertheless a material privilege that is given expression in income and education levels, work skills, leisure activities and cultural and political preoccupations that inform the identity/identities of post-apartheid Afrikaners.

21. However, this 'othering' of the 'bad Afrikaner' is relatively mild and less forceful than might have been expected, given the discourse of 'transformation'.

What is 'self-othering'?

Central to the analysis of *Beeld* and what it reveals of Afrikaner identity construction in this book is the idea of 'self-othering'. First, it is necessary to establish the context and limits within which 'othering' is an integral dynamic in identity construction and group relations. Within these limits, we have to differentiate between the various dynamics of 'othering'. They can roughly be summarised as follows:

- The 'othering' of the external 'other' – those groups or individuals (blacks, women, foreigners) deemed 'other' by the self or 'own group'. They are 'others' who are actively 'othered' or 'other others'.
- A second dynamic is how the self or 'own group' positions itself rhetorically as 'othered' by the external 'other', or how it is indeed 'othered' by the external 'other' in hegemonic contestations.
- Thirdly, there is an othering that takes place within the 'own group'. Here, a notional core group is established and consolidated around certain values or conditions, excluding undesirable elements of the group. As in the other two dynamics above, this process occurs within the self too – an othering of elements of ourselves we dislike or disapprove of becomes what is repressed, or in Jungian terms 'shadow' and projected onto others.

'Self-othering' refers simultaneously to the second and third dynamics, but all the dynamics are constantly at play in relation to each other. Addressing this question seeks to establish whether 'self-othering' contributes to a political particularism and whether this strengthens or weakens the position of a minority on the national political stage.

Identity is constructed in communication (following Castells) and shaped in discourse (following Michel Foucault). The process of representation sets parameters of identification, in relation to which identity will form and flex its muscles. The phenomena of 'othering' and 'self-othering' have latent and manifest aspects in the media and identifying these informs an understanding of processes of social and political signification. Furthermore, this understanding also provides a critique of the ethical implications of how the media engage in representations of 'self' and 'other'.

Identity tends to have its greatest social and political impact when it is able to consolidate unambiguously around a chosen point of reference. One way of viewing identity is through difference, a difference that marks the boundary

between inside and outside. Class, race and language, among other things, are standard markers of difference. However, since no social group, Afrikaners included, is homogeneous in all respects, or devoid of ambiguities, identity battles are fought as much on the external perimeter of difference as along lines drawn in the sand within the laager.[22] While attention tends to be focused on how groupings rub up against each other, of equal import to broader society is how a group rubs up against itself, how it resolves ambiguities in a way that consolidates the core group. How this core is carved out of the multiple contestations for the same space is important to determine because it may contribute to whether the broad group can be accommodated within mainstream political processes. 'Self-othering' is a specific phenomenon within this range of dynamics and plays a role in whether 'Afrikaner identity' is considered to be a marginal or a central issue.

* * *

These concepts are elaborated more fully in Chapter 1, which also explores historical and contemporary considerations of Afrikaans media and their role in South Africa's social, economic and political transformation.

Non-academic readers may wish to skip chapters 2 and 3, which present a theoretical framework for this book, and jump to Chapter 4, which establishes the media and historical setting within which *Beeld* can be read and the semantic framework within which some meanings can be seen as more likely to have resonance than others. The discourses that emerge from a reading of *Beeld* are analysed in Chapter 5, leading to Chapter 6 and how 'self-othering' is a key element in disturbing the historically constructed Afrikaner to enable a more viable, albeit still ambiguous, identity to be constructed.

Finally, I discuss some of the news stories about crime in *Beeld* in relation to what they reveal about Afrikaner identity construction, particularly in chapters 5 and 6. It is important for me to note here, at the outset of the book, that I consider these crimes as, in themselves, horrific, and worthy of attention by any standard of newsworthiness. However, I found no reference to these stories or to

22. Laager: A defensive encampment, historically of ox wagons, to protect Voortrekkers from attack by African tribes. It also refers to a defensive cultural or political mentality, in which sense it resembles social media 'bubbles'.

a 'crime wave' sweeping across the Afrikaans community in the English-language newspapers I read (*Star*, *Sowetan*, *Pretoria News*), but that would be the subject of another study. I feel constrained to make this observation because of an unease that I may be seen to be diminishing or dismissing these crimes as I analyse them as part of the discourse of Afrikaners. Regardless of how I am understanding the representation of these crimes, I consider them traumatic events, for those involved and the broader community in whom they strike fear. I therefore consider these reports important and necessary, even as I express criticism of how they appear to reinforce ethnic exclusions. The problem, in short, is not in the fact of reporting, but in how the reports relate to other reports and how they establish an exclusive 'grievability' that reinforces and exacerbates existing social fault lines.