

**BASLER  AFRIKA
BIBLIOGRAPHIEN**
Namibia Resource Centre - Southern Africa Library

Thomas Blaser

(University of the Witwatersrand)

Afrikaner Identity After Nationalism

BAB Working Paper No 4: 2006

ISSN 1422-8769 © The author © Basler Afrika Bibliographien

**Presented at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien
12 June 2006**

**Basler Afrika Bibliographien Klosterberg 23 CH 4051 Basel Switzerland
Tel. 061 228 93 33 Fax 061 228 93 30 Email bab@bluewin.ch**

**BASLER  AFRIKA
BIBLIOGRAPHIEN**
Namibia Resource Centre - Southern Africa Library

BAB Working Papers

(ISSN No 1422-8769)

The BAB Working Papers are being published since 1995. Recent numbers include:

Working Paper No 2: 2004 *Albert Grundlingh*

Some Trends in South African Academic History: Changing Contexts and Challenges

Working Paper No 1: 2005 *Martin Eberhardt*

"...sind eigentlich seit der Besetzung des Landes National-Sozialisten reinsten Wassers." Die Deutschen in Südwestafrika und der Nationalsozialismus

Working Paper No 2: 2005 *François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar*

Un point d'eau, sa population. Territoire, mémoire et identité autour de Pella, Afrique du Sud (18^e-20^e s.)

Working Paper No 3: 2005 *Birthe Kundrus*

Die imperialistischen Frauenverbände des Kaiserreichs. Koloniale Phantasie- und Realgeschichte im Verein

Working Paper No 4: 2005 *Robbie Aitken*

The Enemy Within, Gradations of Whiteness in German Southwest Africa

Working Paper No 1: 2006 *Giorgio Miescher*

The Ovambo Reserve Otjeru (1911-1938) The Story of an African Community in Central Namibia

Working Paper No 2: 2006 *Ute Dieckmann*

Hai||om zwischen „Buschmannplage“ und San Aktivismus: Koloniale Repräsentationen und postkoloniale Aneignung von Ethnizität im Namibia des 20. Jahrhunderts

Working Paper No 3: 2006 *Lorena Rizzo*

The Elephant Shooting – Inconsistencies of Colonial Law and Indirect Rule in Kaoko (North-Western Namibia) in the 1920s and 1930s

ORDER (CHF 5.00 each + p&p):

**Basler Afrika Bibliographien Klosterberg 23 CH 4051 Basel Switzerland
Tel. 061-228 93 33 Fax 061-228 93 30 Email bab@bluewin.ch**

Afrikaner Identity After Nationalism

Thomas Blaser

(School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand)

June 2006

Abstract

Why did Afrikaner nationalism come to an end? To answer this question, I proceed along the following avenues. First, from a theoretical perspective, in the study of nationalism, the question why and how individuals become national remains a controversial problem. In my answer, I argue that subjectivity has to be integrated with more traditional, structuralist, political-historical approaches. Second, interviews with young Afrikaners produce narratives of the self.¹ These narratives are then used to analyze what individuals get out of national and ethnic belonging or rather, what they no longer get out of it. Such narratives reflect the life-worlds of individuals and relate them to the wider society and the broader world in which they live. These life-worlds reflect the *Zeitgeist* of late modernity. I suggest then that late modernity influences the formation of contemporary identities and helps us to explain the decline and desertion of Afrikaner nationalist mobilization. In South Africa, like in other parts of the world, we witness today the emergence of post-national identities.

Introduction

Riding on a wave of ethnic mobilization, the National Party gained political power in South Africa in 1948. Under nationalist leadership, Afrikaners advanced economically and socially through state patronage. Afrikaner nationalism grew into a pervasive political, social, economic and cultural force. As a national minority, Afrikaners dominated a diverse society. The policy of apartheid, dividing the people of South Africa according to race and ethnicity, was to ensure Afrikaner dominance. Yet, towards the end of the twentieth century, Afrikaner nationalism declined and power was eventually handed over to the black African majority. The question

¹ In my fieldwork between September 2003 and November 2005, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 33 Afrikaners (white Afrikaans speakers), from the ages 18 to 33. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. At the time of the interview, most were residents of the Greater Johannesburg area.

arises then how to explain the demise of nationalist mobilization. In answering this question, an analysis of Afrikaner nationalism can make a fruitful contribution to the study of nationalism. In recent developments, socio-economic and political approaches have been complemented with micro-analysis, looking at the relationship between mobilization, the state *and* community, cultural canon, cultural practices, civic virtue, language, solidarity and citizenship.² Other approaches to nationalism highlight the role of race and racism in the shaping of the modern nation-state (Gilroy, 2002; 1986). While we should not conflate these concepts, it is today more difficult to consider them in isolation.

The continued violence related to ‘identity politics’ has led to the debate about the morality of ethnicity and nationalism. Will Kymlicka’s *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995) attributes moral standing to ethnic and national identity, but is nonetheless well grounded in liberal political theory. More important, it holds a particular definition of national identity with the claim that there exists a primary identity, national or ethnic, to which all individuals sharing certain characteristics, want to adhere to. Hence, under certain conditions, national minorities deserve rights that should be recognized by the state. This attribution of rights is justified with the assumption that people want to belong to a national group. Although such a view does not mean a return to a primordialist definition of identity, it nevertheless assumes stable boundaries and even a hierarchy of the multiple identities an individual may have.³

The view that people want to belong to a national group, that national identity or belonging is a reasonable ‘primary identity’ however neglects the existence of identities that may be as important to its bearers such as “migrant, gender, sexuality, local, class, religious and urban identities” (Tambini, 2001: 204). What emerges from Tambini’s critique, which is described as post-nationalism, is that individuals may hold multiple, evolving identities and that a hierarchy of

² Included here is a whole range of empirical and theoretical work that deals with multiculturalism and diversity in contemporary societies.

³ Primordial explanations are not necessary to claim that human beings have a need for community and ethnicity. The moral claim for the need of ethnicity can be separated from the ontological view that primordial affinities exist over centuries. Kymlicka adopts a constructivist perspective of ethnicity and nationalism but insist that people value strongly ethnic ties and identities, even above any other (1995). However, often claims for the recognition of ethnicity are supported with primordialist arguments.

these identities is difficult to establish and may never be constant.⁴ The multiplicity of identities compels us to reconsider the argument for a national identity and the recognition of groups with rights. It becomes then very problematic to identify a national identity endowed with rights to which individuals are thought to adhere to. Within South Africa, advocates for Afrikaner group rights and proponents of a strong, state-centred South African national identity both ignore the existence of post-national identities and how they shape contemporary identities. In a context of competing claims to recognition through the state, we need to have a better understanding of processes of identity formation and how the individual relates to the nation and the ethnic group.

I. Approaches to Afrikaner Nationalism

In the literature on Afrikaner nationalism, micro-processes of identity formation have been largely ignored. The most prominent approaches reflect the modernist perspective focusing on state resources that are used to create and advance the nation. In other words, *state makes nation*. This state centered approach explains the success of nationalist movements and the creation of a dominant, national identity based on the acquisition of state power. Herman Giliomee, from a liberal perspective and Dan O'Meara, from a Marxist one, focus on the state and how it was instrumental in shaping a dominant Afrikaner identity. In a slow, but continuous process of political integration, starting with responsible government in the Cape and the creation of the *Boer* Republics in the nineteenth century, Afrikaner leadership acquired power in a racial pseudo-democracy by forging a class alliance and a sense of belonging. Ideology, but foremost material benefits that supported Afrikaner economic and social advancement were instrumental in shaping a sense of identity to which most Afrikaners were willing to adhere to. At the height of Afrikaner power during apartheid, the state was now clearly perceived as the means to protect the newly acquired wealth for a majority of Afrikaners. While both these political-historical accounts relate well the politics of Afrikaner advancement in relation to the state, they struggle to integrate subjective aspects of processes of identity formation. In their account, they sit uneasily together.

⁴ Tambini's approach is situated within a body of work that refers to post-nationalism. Economic globalization, cultural denationalization, migration and transnational institutions are the processes that undermine national citizenship in European nation states. We find similar consequences of globalization in South Africa within a different, local context.

The most prominent explanation for the end of Afrikaner nationalism is the emergence of a class split among Afrikaners which unraveled national unity and led to the split of the National Party. In this process, the consequences of the enrichment of middle-class business people were particularly important. In the 1970s, white business started to become detached from a nationalist, ethnic awareness and twenty years later, in the 1990s, there was no longer the “self-conscious Afrikaner ethnic group” (Giliomee, 2003: 638). The movement to empower Afrikaners and to create a spirit of capitalism was eventually successful. Giliomee observes that “[i]f Afrikaners were beginning to capture capitalism, capitalism was also capturing more and more Afrikaners (Giliomee, 2003: 544). In 1975, even the *Broederbond*, the secret, elite-based society behind Afrikaner ethnic mobilization, was alarmed that Afrikaners valued more materialist considerations than “freedom and sovereignty of the Afrikaner people” (Stals, quoted in Giliomee, 2003: 544). For O’Meara the rural and urban elites, dominant in Afrikaner civil society, had become *bourgeois* (O’Meara, 1996: 146). The advancement of many Afrikaners to middle class status had detached their interests from those of working class Afrikaners. In sum, the break within the nationalist coalition is based on the reduced ethnic awareness and the divergent class interest.

More important, perhaps, Giliomee argues that in the 1980s, the ideological unity of government was crumbling. But indications as to what the end of ideological unity amounted to were conflicting. On the one hand, institutions, like the Church, abandoned apartheid doctrine. Also, business was no longer convinced that apartheid was a useful way to run an economy and even the *Broederbond* suggested that whites could no longer hold on to power alone (Giliomee, 2003: 621-2). On the other hand, surveys indicated that a large majority of Afrikaners still supported key pillars of apartheid, such as a ban on inter-racial sex, segregation and black homelands. Students reportedly believed in the adequacy, morally and politically, of the security apparatus and many Afrikaners indicated preparedness to defend themselves. What emerges here is a conflicting picture of the `state of mind` of the Afrikaners in the 1980s. While key institutions of Afrikaner nationalism were deserted and began to change from within, many Afrikaners still showed commitment to these institutions and indicated a willingness to defend apartheid. The question for us is then how to explain these contradictions? How do people make sense of the political and socio-economic situation that surrounds them? In reflecting upon nationalist mobilization, how can we best make sense of these conflicting attitudes? I want then to suggest that to

study individual life narratives helps us to gain better insights into subjectivities that reflect such contradictory beliefs and statements.

Isabel Hofmeyr, in her analysis of Afrikaner nationalist ideology and movement, suggests looking at the creation of an imaginary suffused with nationalist rhetoric to which individuals came to adhere to. In this process, popular Afrikaans literature played its part in the creation of a dominant Afrikaner identity. Nationalist ideology, as carried in Afrikaans popular literature, developed a strong readership and convinced many to be proud Afrikaners. Yet we need to have more clarity how the individual makes sense of such discourse and ideology. How and why individuals adhere to ideologies remains a challenge to the explanation of nationalism. Alet Norval is more explicit in her treatment of discourse and ideology and suggests that a discourse of apartheid became hegemonic since it offered the best explanation for the dislocations of vast social transformations, such as urbanization and modernization. With such a hegemonic discourse, the formation of a new, nationalist identity became possible. However, in her analysis, it is not quite clear how and why the dominant discourse of Afrikaner nationalist leaders was accepted as valid and 'interiorized'. This is due to an analysis that is primarily concerned with the hegemonic discourse, as articulated by elites, at the expense of the receptivity of this discourse.

Jon Hyslop, in his understanding of Afrikaner nationalism, turns to personal experiences that inform narratives of the self. For many Afrikaners, personal experiences were no longer reflected in the traditional discourse and institutions of Afrikaner nationalism. New subjectivities had emerged that went beyond the confines of a nationalist and ethnic group identity. Locating the impulse for the formation of identities beyond the state, ideology and discourse, he concentrates on how the social world was perceived by Afrikaners and how these perceptions had evolved. In this process, the *Zeitgeist* of late modernity plays an important role. Through individualization, detraditionalization, consumption, risk and globalization, identities were reconfigured. Stable identities were dislocated and new ones were emerging. In narratives of the self, individuals reveal how they make sense of social, economic and political changes.

II. Narratives of the Self

The political and socio-economic changes that the last two decades brought about are experienced by many young Afrikaners in their daily lives and has put demands on how they view themselves and how they relate to society. Previously transmitted patterns of individual and collective identity formations are challenged to adapt. The wide variety of life experiences, perceptions of individual, daily lives and a wide variety of views on society and politics of the people interviewed in this study, testifies to the diversity of identities amongst Afrikaners. Hence, identities are conceptualized as shifting and instable⁵. Also, late modernity is marked by a heightened sense of self-reflexivity. Individuals reflect upon their life situations with the view to change. For example, the interviews reveal that even conservative and racist Afrikaners state that they expect their obsolete beliefs to shift. While this can be interpreted as a politically-correct window dressing, it ignores the various pressures on the individual to change and to fit in with the new, non-racial values of society. The imaginary construction of the South African nation-state has been radically re-oriented. The previously denigrated, black people, with the lowest status in society, are re-habilitated, and, according to the governing ANC, are to assume a leading role in society. In order to remain, or rather to become, members of such a newly, emerging, African society, Afrikaners need to re-think their identities. The conflict between the two apparently so divergent identities, Afrikaner and African, leads to question one's identity. In the realm of public discourse, the on-going public debate whether white people can be considered African reflects this problematic. Young Afrikaners re-orient their identities to belong to an African nation. While a sense of loss dominates among many, the possibilities of the emerging are never far from the surface.

Shifting Identities

Tian and Margaret feel that they live in a society that is “exceptionally sensitive to differences” and it seems to them that such sensitivity is necessary to live in contemporary South Africa. Margaret believes that one has to make a mind-shift to understand the Other better and to be part of society. While they intend to make an effort to relate to society and the Other, the fear of rejection, of being pushed aside by an alien majority, is never far beneath the surface. Margaret is

⁵ This should not be read as saying that identities do not have materialities or that they are not bound. The very slowness of the process of change indicates how structures hold the individual in place.

very cautious in her critique of the name change, such as the renaming of Pretoria to Tshwane, which met strong opposition among Afrikaners. Yet it becomes clear that her concern is less with the financial costs of the re-branding of the city of Pretoria as Tshwane, but with its symbolism. She wants to understand why this name change is important for black people. Hence, her basic position is to understand better the perspective of black people on the issue and why it matters for them to change the name. At the same time, she experiences the disappearance of the name 'Pretoria' as if something had been taken away from her own life-story. She explains:

African people, black people wanting names to be changed – for me, there is something important in the fact if the names stay the same. It's part of your history, it's there for a reason. It's just a name. It doesn't have all these symbolisms for me that it has for people that want to change it, that see this name resembles something that is bad. But in some way I feel it tells a story.

The story is her own and that of her people. Hence, to understand the Other, to adapt to a new country, is a narrative of loss.

Margaret's attempts to understand the Other and why they would want to change names and the symbols of the country, symbols that reflect her origin and belonging, appear to be in conflict with an affirmation of ethnic identity. They feel that their way of thinking was very much formed by the community, language and religion and they find that these institutions shaped and continue to shape their identities. It seems to me that it hardly fits the traditional understandings of ethnic identity according to which identifying with an ethnic identity trumps any other form of identification. Both, Margaret and Klaus, are fluent in English. It is the language of their work place, and as likable and serious professionals, they could make a living all over the English-speaking world, wherever their skills are needed. While they express the need to reach out to black people, to understand them, they also want to keep their love for Afrikaner culture and language.

In light of the long relationship between Afrikaners and English South Africans, there are Afrikaner identities can be described as composite, belonging equally to both ethnicities. Such an equal sense of belonging is progressing among the individuals interviewed. Overall then, there is complex relationship between the individual and ethnicity that reduces the possibilities for ethnic

enclosure and mobilization. As many differentiated meanings and practices of ethnic identity formation emerge, ethnic mobilization faces strong obstacles. In the above section, I argued that Afrikaner identities are changing. While the young people I spoke to have different views about the how, the why and the desirability of such change, they all recognize that Afrikaner identities, how people think of themselves and how they relate to the Other, have dramatically changed. In the above analysis and interviews, references were made to an 'Afrikaner or Afrikaans tradition', to a 'traditional Afrikaner' and a 'conservative Afrikaner' – but what is meant by these terms? On the one hand, they stand for the opposite of the liberal Afrikaner and I suggested that the crucial difference in this dichotomy is the attitude and relationship to black people; in other words, if someone is considered a racist or not. On the other hand, I would like to suggest that whether one is a liberal or a traditional/conservative Afrikaner is reflected in the relationship one has with Afrikaner ethnicity. To ask how far young Afrikaners are still living in an ethnically enclosed community seems an almost presumptuous question. For example, if we take language usage as a measure of ethnicity, the 'ethnic' factor gets very weak, for all the people I spoke to live very much in a bi-lingual world. The exposure to English may be confined to the work place, but the daily practiced bi-lingualism leaves its mark on identity formations, especially when other factors than linguistic practice, such as engagement with the racial Other, grappling with the legacy of the past, an opening up to global opportunities, a newly discovered individualism, and so on, weigh on the formation of identities. Afrikaans-English bilingualism is perhaps another reason why most Afrikaners are, or at least aspire to be, liberal. Such 'liberalism' does not mean that some would not want to defend their ethnicity against dilution, but the complex relationship between the individual and ethnicity reduces the possibilities for ethnic enclosure and mobilisation. As many differentiated meanings and practices of ethnic identity formation emerge, ethnic mobilisation faces strong obstacles.

Veronique identifies strongly with the Afrikaans language and does not see how this could be problematic: "If you have a fierce love for Afrikaans it does not mean that you are a racist!" Rather, she is concerned that the language is used less as a medium of instruction. She observes that "the government is forcing a lot of Afrikaans medium schools to become double medium and Afrikaans classes are being taken away at most universities." At the same time, Afrikaans is a modern language that is very much alive: "Afrikaans is growing, culturally in music, dramas and art festivals". Adam too feels Afrikaans is modernizing and he welcomes the modernization of

the Afrikaans language and the freshness brought about by a new generation of Afrikaans rock musicians. When talking about their creative use of the language, mixing it with English, he feels that “it’s cool that we mix things and if you look at the Afrikaans music that is coming out in the last couple of years, it’s really exciting, people like Karen Zoid”. Yet Adam, like Veronique, deems the defence of Afrikaans a good thing and he feels that the *taalstryders*, like the historian Herman Giliomee, are necessary. This apparent contradictory appreciation for opposing camps, on the one hand, the youthful modernizers and on the other, those who want to preserve the language, is important for an understanding of the complexity of contemporary ethnicities. You want to be part of a modern, emerging culture. This enables you to project yourself into the future. But you also want to carry your cultural tradition with you - language is the dominant legacy of that culture.

Assuming the Apartheid Past

With the legacy of the apartheid past, many young Afrikaners are unsure how to deal with their tradition and heritage. For some, how much and what they want to keep from this tradition is a choice. This reflects the presentness and self-reflexivity of late modernity in which culture is rather playful than regimented and in which identity is optional. Another way of dealing with the past is denying that one has a relevant relationship the apartheid past. This liberates oneself from the burden of living with its legacy. A consequence of this perspective is that this allows defending one’s individual career that is hampered by this apartheid past and the means to overcome it, such as affirmative action. In late modernity, capitalist society emphasizes individual career opportunities and competition, and in such a world, to sacrifice one’s own advancement for the greater good, and for historical justice, undermines self-realization and genuine participation as a full member in a capitalist and competitive society. For many young Afrikaners, to stand out from the group after years of ethnic enclosure is an appreciated achievement.

The past looms large in the formation of contemporary Afrikaner identities. Only a few of the young people interviewed suggest a genuine way that can deal with the guilt-feeling of having created and benefited from the apartheid order. Different strategies are offered how to deal with this burden. Anastasia suggests that there is no easy way out, even the separation of contemporary identities from the past is problematic. She recognizes that she belongs to a specific “cultural

heritage” and a “cultural milieu” and she feels that although, she may have a different outlook on life than previous generations and friends and family, she feels that she is not “being released from this burden”. Identification with the Afrikaner cultural milieu also means that one has to assume the heritage of that culture. Yet given the history of apartheid, it is a heavy burden that one has to carry.

In contrast, Josette, does not want to carry this burden. She explains:

I have never been able to say ...I am an Afrikaner because I feel there is so much baggage that goes along with that I am not happy with the history that goes along with that ...I don't want to be associated with that history.

Yet her answer is not definite. Because of the history, she feels she is not comfortable being called an Afrikaner but she qualifies her statement by saying that this is only the case “at this moment in my life”. There is then a conscious effort on her part not to be too closely associated with being an Afrikaner: “me and my sister ...we don't want to go too Afrikaans”. While Anastasia is not quite sure how to assume that past and carry it into the present, Josette only seems to suspend the problem of her feelings of guilt and responsibility for the moment. But perhaps more important, Josette clearly expresses her view that it is up to her to choose how much ethnicity she would want to acquire.

The feeling of personal responsibility or perhaps even a sense of collective guilt for the crime of apartheid is a heavy burden and some respond by declaring that the racial Other, the black victim, has no right to claim how s/he suffered or is even still suffering from the consequences of the apartheid past. Veronique feels that “there is too many black south Africans my age that blame me for apartheid, even though I was a child at that stage, and that they didn't really suffer under the regime.” That one has no direct relationship to the apartheid past liberates oneself from the burden of living with its legacy. This stance is also to defend one's individual career that is hampered by this apartheid past and the means to overcome it, such as affirmative action. Capitalist society emphasizes individual career opportunities and competition, and in such a world, to sacrifice one's own advancement for the greater good, and for historical justice, undermines self-realization and genuine participation as a full member in a capitalist and competitive society.

From this perspective, it is then clear that contemporary means to deal with the legacy of the past are unjust. For Veronique, the defence of Afrikaner history mingles with the present criticism of affirmative action, “because it is turning into reverse discrimination.” That black people have been victimized is then less a concern: “I know we should set right the past, but at the moment only the rich, black elite benefits from black empowerment, while the rest stays hungry.”

What lies at the heart to dispense so quickly of a long history of white privilege? On the one hand, there is the fear that the traditions of Afrikaners and Afrikaners themselves are marginalized, that they have less space, less of a presence in the nation. Reflecting on society with a black government after many years of apartheid, Magda observes “there are many changes that are good, but I think it is also to show what the country is like.” Furthermore, “I don’t think everything of the past is necessary bad that you have to change everything”. This is not necessarily a statement to support the view that apartheid was not bad, but it is a concern to make sense of your history and to keep it for the present.

Hans, next to Magda, is the most open in admitting that it is difficult for him to cope with the feeling of guilt. He says:

apartheid ...it was wrong. We realize it now ...We said we were sorry. How do you sort of justify 50 years of injustice with ‘I am sorry’, you can’t really do that, but we really are ...If you keep on rubbing this into our faces, we want to go. We don’t feel welcome.

He feels that his apology is inadequate to make up for past injustices and he fears the constant recrimination from this past. The burden seems to be so heavy that to be reminded of it, makes life unbearable. Hence, to move abroad is also a way to try to live free from the burden of the past.

Relation to the Racial Other

One way to deal with the legacy of apartheid is to find a way to relate to the experiences of black people. To do so is a necessity for professional success, but it is also a requirement to be a content subject in a multicultural, mixed and equal society. One has to find a way to relate to

black people and to try to establish a genuine relationship with them. In a new, emerging imaginary, they have to be equal. In the previous section, many stated that only if they are accepted as equal, can the Afrikaners be included in the new nation. But in everyday life, and with a history of racial separation and denigration, many struggle to look at the Other as equal.

While aesthetics can mark a visible difference between people, aesthetics of otherness can also constitute a way to relate to a racialized Other in positive terms. While during apartheid, the dominant ideology, and lived experiences, served to denigrate the Other, living with black people is now a comforting experience. Herman explains: “the blacks, even though I don’t mingle with them, in the sense of socialize, there is something warm about them.” Here speaks an observant of black people, certainly in his everyday experience, but nonetheless from a distance. While previously blackness was denigrated, it is now endowed with positive attributes.

A reversal of the dominant meaning and values in a very short time is that most people I talked to show an appreciation for the country’s diversity. Such diversity is no longer an obstacle to development that requires apartheid and separation, but it is something to be appreciated. Magda reasons that “we like being here, we like the people here and its so many different cultures here. We have English, Afrikaans and all the different black languages and cultures and Indian and French and Dutch and German.” But the way to such appreciation was arduous and for many Afrikaners to see black people as equal was not easy to accept. For her, many Afrikaner students “come from farms” and there, they were taught that “I am in charge of people of another colour. You are my servant. So that is the way they grew up, that is the way they were taught”. It was for her a changing, personal experience to have a close contact with black people. “...it was strange in the beginning ...that my black friend came over to my house and sat on my couch and drank out of my cups and saucers and ate birthday cake with me ...so I saw nothing happened to me doing that...I don’t get degraded.”

It seems to me that especially among young people, close contact with the racial Other fundamentally changes one’s own identity. The narratives of the self show a continuing re-evaluation of one’s self conception as one is reaching out to the Other. The relation to the Other also serves to distinguish your new, progressive identity from the old, conservative, racist one. While there are also racist, Othering discourses, they take place concurrently to a discourse of the emerging

that contemplates the relationship with the Other. Hans, for instance, expresses his frustration that Afrikaners are excluded from the state-nation building project. He feels that they are neglected by the government. In his racialized discourse, he denigrates blackness and Africa. Yet he regrets that these very same black people are not willing to include him in the construction of a common nation.

For Dan, the end of apartheid has many opportunities to bring black and white cultures closer together. In this, his work with cultural festivals plays an important part. In some aspects, his enthusiasm for the creation of a new culture out of the debris of apartheid separation echoes the Latin American intellectuals in nineteenth and twentieth Century who hailed the coming of a new, superior culture out of European and indigenous elements⁶:

...we have got the opportunity now to create a whole new culture from twenty or so different cultures, if you like, where every culture can stand on its own, but the cross-over is fascinating. We can start mixing different folklore and experiences, all in the new South Africa.

A Global Imaginary

For young Afrikaners today, the strength of one's identification with ethnicity is no longer an accurate guide to indicate either your willingness to live abroad or to be bound to your ethnicity and group in such a way that you are firmly attached to the ethnic and local. Both, those who have a more cosmopolitan outlook, and those who understand their ethnic belonging as attached to a place, consider living and working abroad in their life plans. Amongst those who want to seek a future abroad, some argue that it is crime and the ineptitude of the government that pushes them out, while for others a global imaginary integrates a stay abroad as a regular *rite de passage* for skilled professionals in the global economy.

The contact with a globalizing world has changed the perceptions of many Afrikaners. To live abroad is part of a new, global experience, often related to career choices. After years of a self-

⁶ Gerard Bouchard (2000). *Genèse des nations et cultures du nouveau monde. Essai d'histoire comparée* (Montréal: Boréal), 198-212.

imposed exile and with renewed contact with the world, moralities have evolved and taken global standards of behavior, especially with regards to “race relations”, seriously. But perhaps even more important, young Afrikaners manifest a ‘being-in-the-world’ that is global and goes beyond the confines of ethnicity. Young Afrikaner culture can be more than a local idiom, it can travel, it can be global and it can incorporate influences from all over the globe. Individuals can imagine themselves to be of here but also of there.

Living in a Consumer Democracy: Individualism, Choice and Risk

When relating the formation of contemporary identities to patterns of and views about consumption and individualism we can perhaps talk best of a post-national Afrikaner identity. Contemporary everyday life, replete with individual ambitions and enjoyment and dreams of material well-being seems to be beyond the communal sacrifice needed maintain an ethnic community. In the formation of her identity, Josette acknowledges the importance of her Afrikaans heritage. She feels that the language and religion have “laid some groundwork” but she also would like to be able “to choose what I take from it, I don’t necessarily want everything from it.” To be able to choose certainly comes from her experience beyond the limits of Afrikaans culture and family, such as going to an English language university. At the same time, I want to suggest that to be able to choose is an important aspect of a democratic, capitalist consumer society in late modernity in which citizenship and belonging is modified through choice of life-style and in which different modes of being compete with each other. Gilbert also underlines the importance of consumption in making life choices. Reflecting on what differentiates him from his father, he says that “my father’s first dream he had for himself was nothing else but a car. My first dream for myself is a house, something I can call mine.” I think it is important in Gilbert’s statement that family relationships are immediately related to consumption. A new generation has new dreams of consumption.

Material well-being also deserves much attention in Cornelia’s assessment of her life situation. When asked about the future, Cornelia stated that she was positive about it. Her happiness is related to her running a successful business at the age of 29 years:

I am very happy and I think I am part of a business and I am a share holder
and I think for somebody my age I am actually doing actually quite well

The pride and status that goes with having a career and a business is also a dis-incentive to move away from South Africa. "...now I have a house, a car, I am part of a business, why give it up just to have a different experience?" The benefits of consumer society loom large in the choices that she makes.

At the same time she observes that living in South Africa has a certain *risk*. "...there is a lot of unknown I think where South Africa is going." Nonetheless, this is for her not a reason to leave the country. That there is a risk seems to be the weary outlook of a businesswoman and the question is how far this is a South African particularity as a developing country in political and socio-economic transition? Much literature on modernity is concerned with the risk that modern society brings with it. In this sense, South Africa is like any modern society, with risks and opportunities: the risk of venturing into business, of personal relationships, of living in a modern, technology-driven society.

Jennifer also describes the consequences of consumer culture. But here, it is in a negative way, taking people away from their concern for the public good. "People just don't care anymore. You have to work to earn a salary. We have to pay our study loans. I have to get a car. It's just, there is too many other issues for people to really care about politics." Other issues crowd out a concern for politics. It is the desire to consume and spend, to possess, but also the need to own material things to be able to function and participate as a full individual in consumer society. Patriotism and nationalism are considered to belong to the past. The individual wants to be recognized as such in his daily life experience and no celebration of belonging can compensate for such an individual recognition. Herman reasons that

I will never die for my country because I think it is ridiculous nobody
appreciates [it], you become a name on a plaque

The group is seen as negative. Instead, individuals should make up their own mind. Also, our beliefs do not have to be confined to traditional ideologies. Rather, our mind can be fashioned in

different ways. What defined the past, like belonging to a nation, identifying with the project of the in-group, are no longer useful and “you program yourself by thinking this thing over and over, so you have to re-program your mind in this country.” For Herman then, the values we believe in, do not have to be based on our upbringing and the tradition where we come from, but they can be modified by the individual according to circumstances. Individualism helps to adapt to a changing society with new and altered demands. Gilbert also believes in the choices an individual can make, but he mitigates this view by claiming the same for communities. For him, democracy is applauded for giving freedom to each individual. “I am a big believer in democracy because it is a system that is giving everybody his equal right to be what he can be and *to be the one he wants to be*⁷ individually and in his community.” An individual can modify the self according to his/her choice. But he also observes that the individual is still related to the community.

Conclusion

Although Afrikaner nationalism has declined, we should not claim that ethnic mobilization is no longer a possibility. But we should focus our attention on the question what does ethnicity offer to young Afrikaners so that they can lead meaningful lives in contemporary South African society? Ethnic markers are negotiated with individual desires and ambitions. Also, individual self-realization has to find a place within ethnicity if language, culture and so on are to retain significance. In this sense then, ethnic identification has to compete with other markers of identification. To be able to choose is an important aspect of a democratic, capitalist consumer society in late modernity in which citizenship and belonging are modified through choice of life-style and in which different modes of being compete with each other.

Thomas Blaser
 School of Social Sciences
 University of the Witwatersrand
 Private Bag X3
 2050 Wits
 Republic of South Africa

E-mail: blasert@hse.pg.wits.ac.za

⁷ My emphasis.

Bibliography

- Giliomee, Herman (1989). 'The beginnings of Afrikaner ethnic consciousness, 1850-1915', in: L.Vail, ed. *The creation of tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: J.Currey), 21-54.
- . (2003). *The Afrikaners. Biography of a people* (Cape Town: Tafelberg).
- . and Lawrence Schlemmer (1989). *From apartheid to nation-building* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press).
- Hofmeyr, Isabel (1987). 'Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity, 1902-1924', in: S. Marks and S. Trapido, eds. *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth century South Africa* (London: Longman), 95-123.
- . (1988). 'Popularizing history: the case of Gustav Preller', in: *Journal of African History*, 29, 521-535.
- Hylland-Eriksen, Thomas (1999). 'A non-ethnic state for Africa? A life-world approach to the imagining of communities', in: P. Yeros, ed. *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Africa: Constructivist Reflections and Contemporary Politics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press), 45-64.
- Hyslop, Jon (2000). 'Why did Apartheid's supporters capitulate? 'Whiteness', class and consumption in urban South Africa, 1985-1995', in: *Society in Transition*, 31, 1, 36-44.
- Kymlicka, Will (1995). *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- O'Meara, Dan (1983). *Volkskapitalisme. Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner nationalism, 1934-1948* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press).
- . (1996). *Forty Lost Years: The apartheid state and the politics of the national party, 1948-1994* (Randburg: Ravan Press).
- Tambini, Damian (2001). 'Post-national Citizenship', in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24, 2, 195-217.
- . (1998). 'Nationalism: A Literature Survey', in: *European Journal of Social Theory*. Vol. 1, No. 1, (July 1998), 137-154.