

## BEMUSED / BETRAYED / BRAZEN: AN OVERVIEW OF ASPECTS OF THE CURRENT DEBATE ABOUT AFRIKAANS

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*The current debate about Afrikaans among Afrikaners is characterized by dismissive and engaged attitudes. Those who are dismissive believe that the debate is out of tune with the demands of time and should not be taking place. Those who are engaged believe it is crucial for identity and for giving substance to the spirit of the Constitution. In this article, these perspectives are juxtaposed with those raised during debates about the 'future of Afrikaans' in the 1980s and 1990s. Some 'dismissive' perspectives can be traced back to the 'future' debate: Afrikaans should exist 'naturally'; Afrikaans should be 'freed' from Afrikaner nationalism and be understood as the language of a much larger group of speakers. The 'engaged' debate has, however, brought to the fore significant developments that were largely unforeseen: the generation conflict within Afrikaner ranks (the 'Boetman' debate), and the re-appraisal of Afrikaner nationalism (by those who had supported the political changes of the 1990s) as a means of asserting Afrikaans language rights, thereby giving impetus to a new language struggle (taalstryd). While this 'struggle' is ostensibly for multilingualism rather than for Afrikaans per se, many regard it as politically insensitive. Greater participation in the debate by black Afrikaans speakers could change this perception. Meanwhile the very existence of a debate about Afrikaans is an indication of a certain distinctiveness of linguistic experience – and language attitude – on the part of many Afrikaans speakers, which future language policy should be flexible enough to recognize.*

*Die huidige debat rondom Afrikaans word gekenmerk deur gesindhede van afwysendheid en betrokkenheid. Volgens die afwysendes is die debat uit voeling met die vereistes van die tyd – deurslaggewend vir identiteit en om beslag te gee aan die gees van die Grondwet. Hierdie twee gesindhede word in dié artikel naasmekaar gestel met die gesindhede wat na vore gekom het tydens die debatte oor die 'toekoms van Afrikaans' in die 1980's en 1990's. Sekere 'afwysende' pespektiewe kan terughertlei word na die 'toekoms' debat: Afrikaans behoort 'natuurlik' te bestaan; Afrikaans behoort 'bevry' te word van Afrikaner nasionalisme en gesien te word as die taal van 'n veel groter groep sprekers. Die 'betrokke' debat het egter betekenisvolle ontwikkelinge aan die lig gebring wat grootliks onvoorsiens gebly het: die generasiekonflik binne Afrikaner geledere (die 'Boetman' debat) asook die herevaluering van Afrikaner nasionalisme (deur diegene wat ten gunste was van die politieke veranderinge van die 1990's) as 'n middel tot die handhawing van die taalregte van Afrikaans en wat sodoende stukrag verleen aan 'n nuwe taalstryd. Alhoewel hierdie 'stryd' hom klaarblyklik beywer vir veeltaligheid eerder as vir Afrikaans as sodanig, ag baie dit polities onsensitief. Groter deelname aan die debat deur swart sprekers van Afrikaans sou hierdie persepsie kon wysig. Inmiddels is die blote feit van 'n debat oor Afrikaans 'n aanduiding van 'n sekere eiesoortigheid van taalervaring – en van gesindheid teenoor taal – wat baie sprekers van Afrikaans aanbetref. Toekomstige taalbeleid sal van genoegsame soepelheid moet getuig om aan hierdie eiesoortigheid erkenning te verleen.*

## INTRODUCTION

In her 'Word from the CEO' in a recent issue of the official newsletter of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), Cynthia Marivate expresses the opinion that '[S]tate departments are... the biggest violators of language rights today'. These violations, she says, should be challenged. She points out that '[t]he Afrikaans-speaking community has already lodged many complaints regarding the language policies and practices of a large number of state departments', and urges '[t]he mother tongue speakers of the nine African languages' to do the same. 'They must make it known whenever they feel that they are not free to use their languages' (*PanSALB News*, 2002: 4).

The PanSALB CEO is here endorsing a certain type of linguistic activism, more commonly found, if she is to be believed, amongst the speakers of Afrikaans than amongst the speakers of South Africa's African languages. Moreover, in highlighting the linguistic activism of *the Afrikaans-speaking community* as an (admirable) example, Marivate is, inadvertently perhaps, also taking part in the debate about Afrikaans. In fact, she is lending support to what I would term the 'involved' perspective on Afrikaans. Rather than keep quiet about the perceived ignorance or neglect of one's language, one should be prepared to make it an issue right there where the *violation* is felt most keenly: in public.

But the debate about Afrikaans is not necessarily about the need to be involved, far from it. Maybe two general points about the nature of the Afrikaans language debate would be appropriate here. First, while the debate about Afrikaans is in some measure an academic debate (conducted by language professionals through papers, articles and books), it is essentially a popular one. It comes into its own in the comment columns and letter pages of the Afrikaans press (*Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Rapport*), while English language newspapers (like *The Mail & Guardian*, *The Citizen* and *The Star*) offer frequent insights from outside the Afrikaans-speaking community. The debate further takes place in magazines like *Huisgenoot*, *De Kat*, and *Insig*, not to mention an increasing number of Internet websites, of which *Litnet* is the best known. Both *Radiosondergrense* (SABC) and *KykNet* (MNet) devote regular slots to questions of multilingualism and the place of Afrikaans within it. Now, one might be excused for finding rather trivial many of the issues raised in these popular debates: the umpteenth lament about the discontinuation of Afrikaans on *SAB* beer cans and *Parmalat* yoghurt containers, angry invective at English-only municipal accounts and provincial number plates. Second, given the fact that this kind of debate is largely limited to only one language community (as the CEO of PanSALB seems to suggest), one might be excused for wondering whether it really *is* a debate about language. Far from being about language and language rights, are the issues it raises not, in fact, of a decidedly more *political* nature? To put it bluntly: is the debate about Afrikaans not just a symptom of a peculiar *Afrikaner* nostalgia for the cultural self-indulgence offered by political power? It is precisely this close identification with the (white) *Afrikaner* that tends to cast the Afrikaans language debate in a somewhat dubious light.

Embarrassment at this possibility is an important factor behind the attitudes of what I have called the 'dismissive' perspective. Those who are dismissive of the Afrikaans language debate are, frankly, *bemused* – and not a little bored – by it. The 'involved' group, by contrast, generally believe the Afrikaans language issue to be, at the very least, worthy of discussion. For purposes of analysis, I divide this group into two. The first relates to a largely inward-looking debate arising from what is essentially a conflict of generations *within* white

Afrikaner ranks, popularly known as the 'Boetman' affair. The idea of *betrayal* provides the emotive framework for this conflict. The second fosters a more outward-looking debate, more militant in word if not exactly in deed, more or less concerned with the idea of protest: in short, it is *brazen*.

The Afrikaans language debate is to a large extent the result of the major political changes of the last ten years, and it continues to be influenced by political events (policy statements by ministers and university vice chancellors, for example) virtually on a daily basis. While a properly historical concern with the different *topics* that have stimulated the Afrikaans language debate over the past decade or so lies beyond the scope of this article, I do briefly reflect on the debates of the future of Afrikaans in the 1980s and 1990s. This 'future debate', which informs the thinking of *both* the 'dismissive' and 'involved' groups, today recalls those (recent) times when the future indeed looked like another country and when, in anticipation of the 'new South Africa' on the horizon, so much concern was expressed about what was to happen to Afrikaans. This *future* is today already the present, and occasionally in ways unforeseen. In the final analysis, however, what needs to retain our attention – and, crucially, that of South Africa's language planners – is less the *arguments* put forward in the debate about Afrikaans than the *concern with language* (as evocative of a certain history, experience, identity) that it represents. South Africa's eleven official languages are accorded formal (constitutional) equality, which amounts to an essentially 'passive' language equity. But the language *concerns* of the speakers of South Africa's official languages are not equal, and there should be recognition of the fact that certain linguistic groups – notably speakers of Afrikaans – will feel the need to strive towards a comparatively higher degree of assertiveness for *their* language. The principle of legal equity enshrined in the Constitution should be sufficiently flexible to allow for such a diversity of language attitudes.

## THE DISMISSIVE DEBATE

The dismissive attitude (ironically, very much part of the debate) is occasionally given expression outside the white Afrikaner community. The most forceful recent expression of this attitude is without a doubt the tirade against the KKNK (Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunst Fees) by the Cape Town poet Zebulon Dread in the pages of the *Mail & Guardian (M&G)* at the conclusion of the 2001 festival (see *M&G*, April 20, 2001). Dread is disgusted by what he sees as a self-indulgent celebration of traditional Afrikanerdom ('die volk') with 'no notion of ever reconciling with their African nationhood'. And though he is, by his own admission, perfectly fluent in Afrikaans, he is unable to experience any sense of identity<sup>1</sup> with the language. Writes Dread:

My black face would find itself plastered in many media giving the notion, maybe, of some inclusivity [of the festival], whereas, if truth be told, there is practically none. This is a festival that demands that Afrikaans is spoken by everyone. I myself engaged fully in this Afrikaans... until I felt the chains of neocolonisation pulling too tight at my throat. I was playing into their hands, giving *their language* credibility beyond what it really deserves. (My emphasis)

Zebulon Dread is an exception. Most black Afrikaans speakers express their lack of identification with the debate by keeping quiet. They simply don't take part. It is important to note that frustration with the very fact of a debate about Afrikaans is overwhelmingly

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future, in this sense, referring to the position of Afrikaans in a unitary non-racial democracy that was then either anticipated or, post-1994, just beginning to emerge. We may briefly summarize some of the features of this future (of) Afrikaans which, whether foreseen or not, is of course today already with us.

Afrikaans should be neither the language of (white) Afrikaners, nor, for that matter, of any other racialized identity, but the language of *Afrikaanses*. Hans Du Plessis sees this re-appropriation of the language as the result of a fundamental rethink, on the part of Afrikaners especially, of the 'whiteness' of Afrikaans, as well as the recognition of 'all the variants' of Afrikaans. (From the point of view of Afrikaans historiography, this process is already well under way by the time Du Plessis is writing, thanks to the work of people like Achmat Davids and Tony Links, to name but a few). While Du Plessis stops short of attributing an *identity* to the *Afrikaanses* – he sees them instead as a 'belangegroep' (interest group) – he stresses the deep changes in attitudes and symbolism (for example with regard to Afrikaans as language of the oppressor / Afrikaans as language of apartheid) that will need to underlie this development (see Hans Du Plessis, 1992: 38-43).

Fundamental to this (broader) appropriation of Afrikaans by *Afrikaanses* beyond the apartheid-enshrined boundaries of the white Afrikaner, was a *rejection* of the link between Afrikaans and Afrikaner nationalism. There was a degree of recognition for the 'positive consequences' of Afrikaner nationalism for the language, such as the institutionalisation of Afrikaans as official language (since 1925) and its concomitant development as a vehicle for a wide range of functions – educational, economic, legal, scientific (see, for example, Ponelis, 1987: 13; also Steyn, 1987: 94-96, where Afrikaner nationalism, albeit interpreted in a strongly racist sense, is, in fact, seen as a *prerequisite* for the future survival of Afrikaans). Yet it seems fair to say that most commentators – and particularly influential ones at that – find Afrikaner nationalism simply unpalatable as far as a future Afrikaans is concerned. The reason for this is simple enough: Afrikaner nationalism had become virtually indistinguishable from the apartheid ideology. Neville Alexander (1994: 27) called Afrikaner nationalism a 'racist ideology' which should not be allowed any growth; Jakes Gerwel (1988: 12) saw the status of Afrikaans as official language and its relatively strong position in education (this is written 15 years ago!) as *the product of apartheid*. This negative attitude towards Afrikaner nationalism was evident even (especially?) where, under the influence of PW Botha and FW De Klerk's reform policies of the 1980s, certain cultural institutions that owe their existence to Afrikaner nationalism (Die Afrikaanse Taalfonds, Die Federasie vir Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniging, Die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns) had opened their doors to people outside the Afrikaner establishment (see Theo Du Plessis, 1987: 114-115). In fact, these seemingly inclusive institutions were to be seen as examples of Afrikaner ideological co-option; as such, they merely represented Afrikaner nationalism as a 'modernisation of race domination' (Leatt, Kneifel & Nürnberger, 1986: 84).

Thus abandoning what has arguably been the main rallying point for arguments seeking to explain the development and growth of Afrikaans – Afrikaner nationalism – the outlook on the future of Afrikaans as expressed in the preceding decades remains (surprisingly?) optimistic (with the notable exception of Steyn). This optimism can be ascribed, no doubt at least partially, to the numerous language surveys (see for example Webb, 1992) that point to the relatively strong statistical and demographic position of Afrikaans. Afrikaans is the third largest mother tongue in South Africa but with the greatest geographic spread; up to 15 million South Africans are able to communicate in Afrikaans (Van Rensburg, 1997: 82); the

Afrikaans language community has a collective economic and buying power that *should* make Afrikaans an attractive agent for marketing and advertising (Van Rensburg, 1997: 95). But the strongest element in this optimism has to do with the *expectations* of the new democratic dispensation, which would foster free expression through genuine multilingualism in an atmosphere unfettered by racially based political and cultural domination. This situation is interpreted by many as freeing Afrikaans – not to mention the debate about Afrikaans – from the apartheid-style isolation that has long stifled it. For the first time in its history the debate about Afrikaans would also be a debate about the *other* South African languages. Afrikaans would be a carrier, not just of the narrow interests of a small Afrikaans-speaking minority, but would also express and symbolise the linguistic and cultural aspirations of *all* South Africans, especially the speakers of African languages – for is Afrikaans not *in reality* a language of Africa? Alexander (1994: 27) expresses this idea as follows:

The future of Afrikaans is not to be doubted. Afrikaans is part of the freedom struggle and is a language that, just like IsiXhosa or IsiZulu or SeTswana or XiVenda, alongside English, has already played a great ('grootse') role in the building of the new South African / Azanian nation and will continue to do so.

The fact, stated here by Alexander, that Afrikaans is regarded as 'part of the freedom struggle' is, of course, in itself a strong cause for optimism. The period of the mid 1980s to early 1990s (coinciding with the rise of the United Democratic Front) was, indeed, characterized by a strong movement on the part of black Afrikaans-speaking intellectuals in the Cape to *reclaim* Afrikaans, and to assert Cape Afrikaans (sometimes – not always unproblematically – referred to as 'alternative' Afrikaans) *against* the standard Afrikaans of the Afrikaner establishment (see Van den Heever, 1988).

The 'Kaapse beweging' saw itself as ideologically inspired by the liberation struggle, be it in its Black Consciousness or Charterist / UDF guise (see Theo Du Plessis, 1987: 105). It thereby largely distanced itself from the 'future of Afrikaans' debate, which would be a *white* debate. Yet it cannot be denied that the impact of this movement was widely interpreted, particularly in the Afrikaans press, as favourable to Afrikaans. This was the era when Allan Boesak, then a leader of the UDF, could be heard on SABC TV referring to the ANC as the 'Afrikaanse Nasionale Kongres'. Prof Jakes Gerwel, vice-chancellor of the University of the Western Cape, featured in the pages of the intellectual (now long defunct) *Die Suid-Afrikaan* – and at least once on its cover. It was also the time when the (black) University of the Western Cape had just about the biggest and most dynamic Afrikaans Department in the country (Alexander, 1994: 24).

A significant contribution to the debate about Afrikaans, which in many respects provides a reflection of the main perspectives of the 1990s as discussed above, was made on television. *Groep sonder grense* (Group without frontiers) was shown over a period of four weeks around the middle of 1999. Sub-titled 'Die Gemeenskaplike Afkoms van die Afrikaanssprekende' (The Common Descent of the Afrikaans Speaker), it was produced by Marius Bakkes on commission of SABC 2, and presented by Erald Felix. Interestingly, the programme borrows its title from a research report, published in 1984, on the early slave community at the Cape, with the sub-title 'Die Rol en Status van die Gemengde Bevolking aan die Kaap, 1652-1795' (The Role and Status of the Mixed Population at the Cape, 1652-1795). This research was carried out by Hans Heese, who is also credited with carrying out

the research for the television programme. The main thrust of the programme is that the Afrikaans-speaking community (the majority of whom are Afrikaners classified white under apartheid) is essentially without frontiers – i.e. as racially and ethnically *mixed* – as the 17th and 18th century mixed population at the Cape, composed of the descendants of relationships of European men, mostly Dutch and German, with slave women of Malay, Indonesian, Indian and African origin (more rarely, with Khoikhoi women), and of relationships of slave men with Khoikhoi women (see Heese, 1984: 5-14; *Groep sonder grense*, Episode 1). The upshot of this set of circumstances, long swept under the carpet during apartheid rule, is that most of the major Afrikaner surnames (Ackerman, Albertyn, Alberts, Barnard, Basson, Beyers, Bezuidenhout... the list goes on) can be traced to one or several black ancestors – certainly an effective way of making the point that Afrikaans is *not* a ‘white’ language! The programme also goes to great lengths to dispel assumed notions regarding the migration of the Afrikaans language into the South African interior. We learn, for example (Episode 2), that as many as 20 years before the arrival in the area of the Voortrekkers led by Louis Trichardt, one Coenraad Buis had settled as far north as the Soutpansberg with his Xhosa-speaking wife, Elizabeth, and their Afrikaans-speaking offspring. And the first Afrikaans to be heard north of the Orange River (in the *Trans-Gariep*) was that of the Griquas under Chief Adam Kok I (Episode 3). We may reflect, finally, on the strong metaphor of a language and its speakers without frontiers. Surely no metaphor could be better calculated to *undermine* the apartheid notion of the Afrikaans language as a *witmanstaal* (white man’s language) and the racial purity of its speakers? We are also reminded that there must be much more to the name of the major Afrikaans radio station, *Radiosondergrense*, than mere commercial speak.

## THE INVOLVED DEBATE

Let us return, at this point, to the debate about Afrikaans as it is playing itself out in the present. We have already seen how a significant ‘dismissive’ group expresses a certain frustration with the debate itself – with the same old hackneyed questions of Afrikaans language rights and identity... – drawing on the notion that the Afrikaans speaker (but we have reason to suspect that the intended audience is really the white Afrikaner) should keep quiet, roll up his sleeves and work for the common good of nation-building. But there is another, more involved side to the debate, and we may well ask ourselves to what extent its perspectives, often expressed with great vehemence and emotion, could have been foreseen by those speculating on the future of Afrikaans even as recently as the early to mid 1990s.

### *The Boetman Debate*

There are essentially two dimensions to the ‘involved’ debate, neither of which, I believe, could really have been predicted. The first stems from a division within white Afrikaner ranks. Importantly, this division has little to do with the political divisions of the pre-1994 era: the more or less reform-minded (or liberal) group represented by FW De Klerk (or even Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert) versus the die-hards of the right and far right. Rather, it is a *clash of generations* which, though unfolding in a context infused with political ideology (mostly concerning the last two decades of the apartheid era), is less a matter of political *disagreement* as such, than of mistrust and a sense of betrayal.

In response to the text-type of the ‘dismissive’ group, *Afrikaners: kroes, kras, kordaat*, radio journalist Chris Louw wrote an ‘Open letter to Willem De Klerk’. At first posted up at the

*Boekehuis* in Mellville, Johannesburg, Louw's 'Ope Brief...' made its way into the pages of *Beeld*, where it appeared under the sub-title *Boetman is die bliksem in* (Louw, 2001: 23-24). The overwhelming response it generated (in the press and on radio - Louw is the producer of the *Monitor* actuality programme on *Radiosondergrense*) ensured that it was also soon published in book form. In the early days of his career Louw had worked at the *Transvaler*, then under the editorship of Willem De Klerk. One day in the corridor the editor acknowledged the rookie reporter with the rather anonymous *Dag, Boetman* (Louw, 2001: 8). The avuncular, ever so slightly condescending attitude of this greeting is a key element in the clash of generations highlighted by Louw. At issue is the anger of a generation of Afrikaners - Louw's generation - who, having dutifully kept quiet and done as they were told in the name of defending a racially repressive Afrikaner nationalism, are now once again urged to do exactly the same, i.e. 'keep quiet and do as you are told', but this time in the name of democratic nation-building, and by the very same elders who legitimised (politically and morally) the erstwhile repression! Under the system of compulsory military service, the *Boetman* generation were the ones to take up arms against 'the enemy'. But the elders - 'the *verligte*, intellectual face of apartheid' (Louw, 2001: 13), perfectly embodied in the image of the pensive, bespectacled newspaper editor - kept their hands clean. It was they who formulated secret plans to negotiate with the very same 'enemy'. It was they who signed away the political control many of the Boetman generation had been called upon to kill (and die) for (see Louw, 2001: 7-22).

As already pointed out, the Boetman debate is not really an ideological debate. Both Willem De Klerk (the elder) and Chris Louw (the somewhat upstart Boetman) had been, in their own way, critical of Afrikaner nationalism. The elder had encouraged *verligtheid* in his editorials, even on occasion, quoting NP Van Wyk Louw, 'lojale verset' (loyal resistance) (Louw, 2001: 8). Boetman had expressed his revolt by cracking jokes with his friends (*gatskeer*) about the 'Christian National colonels' of the system (Louw, 2002: 10). Neither, of course, ever broke with the apartheid system (Louw could presumably have refused to serve in the apartheid army and gone into exile). But both could certainly, within the political context of the time, be described as reform-minded, even 'liberal'. Their *clash*, then, born of a sense, on the part of the younger generation, of having been deceived and betrayed, should be seen as one of *identity* - more precisely, how the Afrikaans (Afrikaner) identity should be interpreted and expressed in a South Africa where the Afrikaner is no longer in political control. In other words, it is about how the Afrikaans (Afrikaner) identity should respond to authority, an authority of which it is no longer itself immediately part. In this sense the Boetman debate, though not overtly directed at language, provides a crucial perspective on the debate about Afrikaans. The generation, now in their late thirties and forties, who, in the wisdom of their elders - and their new political masters? - should, *once again*, keep quiet, may well find a kind of assertiveness in the simple practice of their language. This could make Afrikaans and the linguistic human rights associated with it a more important ally in the way they position themselves as South Africans than they may have thought possible as recently as ten or fifteen years ago.

### *The 'Protest' Debate*

It is exactly this consideration (of Afrikaans as a crucial element in *identity*) that brings us to the second dimension of the 'involved' debate. The Boetman debate is a debate of generations and, in that sense, inward looking; Peet Kruger, then editor of *Beeld*, likened it, in fact, to a kind of Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Afrikaners (Louw, 2001: 23).



But there is also a 'protest' debate, more directly assertive, even militant, if largely at a metaphorical level. Although today spread across the popular press, this debate owes its existence to the more overtly intellectual slant of the internet magazine *Litnet* (MWeb), under the initial editorship of the author Ernst van Heerden. Its most vocal protagonist is Dan Roodt, a student activist and academic of the 1970s and 1980s who, upon his return to South Africa after a lengthy spell in France (he had initially gone to France to avoid military service) is today known as a philosopher – and, of course, *taalstryder* or language activist. He launched the pro-Afrikaans Action Group *Praag* in 1999. Characteristic of Roodt's arguments, and reflected in the Prague spring connotation of the acronym that makes up the name of his movement, is their constant appeal to 'resistance against the reigning order' (see Roodt, 1999: *Wat is Praag?*).

With the protest debate we find ourselves fully in the 'future' so earnestly anticipated, predicted and projected during the years of political transition. And it is a *present* that disappoints, hence the call to resist the 'reigning order'. The notion of disappointment is important here. As I said earlier, I am excluding the perspectives of those who, pre-1994, were aligned to the Afrikaner political right. By and large, the adherents of the protest debate *looked forward* at that stage to the establishment of a democratic order in South Africa and its major political and cultural (linguistic) promise, namely a unitary (non-partitioned) state. We may characterize their disappointment at two levels.

The first has specifically to do with the reduced – some would say increasingly marginalized – position of Afrikaans, directly reflecting concrete issues like the airtime set aside for Afrikaans on SABC television, the use (or rather non-use) of Afrikaans both in the business and state sectors, and the perceived threat to Afrikaans (particularly as carrier of academic and scientific functions) through the policy of bilingualism at traditionally Afrikaans-language universities<sup>2</sup>.

At a second level, one gets the impression that the disappointment of the current movement of *taalstryders* is a direct result of the failure of the principle of multilingualism, as enshrined in the Constitution, to, so far at any rate, encourage multilingualism in society at large and *particularly* in the state. We may recall here the enthusiasm the future multilingual South Africa elicited amongst Afrikaans-speaking intellectuals of the 1980s and 1990s, who saw in the practice of Afrikaans *alongside* the (other) indigenous languages a real condition for its recognition – in a way much better than under apartheid – as the vehicle of a distinct South African identity. But multilingualism, in the sense of the *visible* use of South Africa's African languages in the social, economic and political context, has not thrived in the democratic South Africa<sup>3</sup>. What has thrived, is English. Ironically – for this recalls the situation a century ago! – Afrikaans is, once again, the *sole counterpoint* to the encroachment and domination of English. We may well have constitutional multilingualism in South Africa. But the defence of this multilingualism, at least as a public debate, remains largely monolingual, taking place in Afrikaans only. It is significant that *Praag*, in its call for a mobilisation in favour of Afrikaans, also calls upon speakers of *other* languages to engage in similar struggles.

The reference to a century ago is highly appropriate here. Of course, the setback to Afrikaans occasioned by the victory of the African National Congress in 1994, can hardly be compared to that suffered as a result of the defeat by Britain in 1902 (and Kader Asmal is not Lord Milner!). But it brings into view Afrikaner nationalism. As discussed earlier, Afrikaner

nationalism, organically linked to apartheid racism, was seen as a highly negative factor for Afrikaans in the 'future' debates of the 1980s and 1990s. We may ask ourselves today whether this setting aside of an entire nationalism – and the identity associated with it – was not, perhaps, a little naïve. For today Afrikaans is *not* spoken by *Afrikaanses*, a concept with at best dwindling support amongst both white and black speakers of Afrikaans (even if taken in its narrowest sense of interest group). If anything, the term 'Afrikaner' (rather than 'Afrikaanse') *as well as* Afrikaner nationalism seems, in the current debate about Afrikaans – at least within what I have called its protest dimension – to be enjoying something of a reappraisal.

Roodt has been quick to approve the 'onverskrokke' (courageous) adherence to the concept 'Afrikaner' by a respected liberal like Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, even though Van Zyl Slabbert can hardly be considered party to Roodt's protest debate. Cautious (overly-cautious, in Roodt's view) not to encourage any 'minority' interests that might be construed by the new government as undermining its concern with a 'common South African patriotism', Van Zyl Slabbert sees the concept Afrikaner as applying to 'all Afrikaans speakers who wish to promote the Afrikaans language through their association with South Africa as a nation state and their identification with Africa' (Van Zyl Slabbert, 1999: 46; see Roodt, 2000: *Van Zyl Slabbert se Afrikaanse Liberalisme*). In this respect, Van Zyl Slabbert is, in fact, not far from the sentiments expressed in *Afrikaners: kroes, kras, kordaat*. Roodt, by contrast, is not at all afraid to intersperse his sophisticated (mostly French) post-modernist deconstructions of identity with frequent analyses of Afrikaner history *and* approving references – even appeals – to Afrikaner nationalist sentiments (see Roodt: *Taal, landskap en identiteit*).

Roodt's over-zealous defence of Afrikaner nationalism at times (especially in his generally rather light assessment of the injustices committed in the name of Afrikaner nationalism, which he offsets against the excesses of European colonialism) has occasionally led to his being accused of racism and right-wing politics (the letter by Danie Hefers, referred to earlier, is a case in point). But Roodt's appeal to Afrikaner nationalism, in the name of the 'gelykberegtiging' (equalisation of rights) of Afrikaans and English, clearly owes little to any particular admiration, on his part, for the specific ideological *content* of Afrikaner nationalism (Calvinism, for example, or the myth of racial purity). It hinges, rather, on a certain *attitude* he detects in it, which can perhaps best be described as an attitude of contestation (contestation of authority, of received wisdom – and of political correctness). Nowhere is this attitude better exemplified than in the image of the nomadic frontier *Boer* whom Roodt sees as a 'sovereign individual' living a 'stateless' life, moving ever further away from his European origins until he 'forgets' his 'European national identity' – to the consternation of those (the English) who wanted him to be civilized! (see Roodt, 1999: *Taal, landskap en identiteit*). Roodt's mythical view is firmly rooted in Afrikaner nationalism's main metaphor, the Great Trek. But is this *myth* really that far removed from the one of the cultural and linguistic *hybrid* projected in SABC TV's *Groep sonder grense*?

## CONCLUSION

In addition to *Praag*, the protest debate has given rise to other activist and lobby groups, the most notable of which is the *Groep van 63*, largely made up of Afrikaans writers and academics. It would be a fair claim to say that the activism is, at this stage, very much at an ideas level. Nothing came of Roodt's grandiose plans, posted on *Litnet* in 1999, to have a

'groot Afrikaanse betoging' (great Afrikaans protest march). (Roodt, 1999: *Die groot Afrikaanse betoging*).

We must of course never forget that the protest debate, as represented by Roodt and other Afrikaner intellectuals, is but an aspect of a larger, frequently dismissive, debate. Significant, in my view, is the phenomenon of the *tussen-in* (in-between) generation, brought to light in the Boetman debate. It is probably no coincidence that this is also the generation of Roodt and the other *taalstryders*: young enough not to have conceptualised and implemented apartheid (though they had to fight its wars), old enough to *suffer the consequences* (materially, culturally and politically) of the political transition.

This set of circumstances may no doubt suffice to explain the rather surprising recourse to 'Afrikaner' and Afrikaner nationalism by the *taalstryders* of the 2000s. I would certainly argue the *content* of this nationalism, illustrated by way of example in the figure of Dan Roodt's *Boer* who 'forgets' that he is a European, to be quite different to that upheld under apartheid ideology. But in the current South African context of sensitivity to continuing social and economic imbalances, the *effect* of this nationalism (or 'linguistic nationalism?') is uncomfortably familiar; it comes across as arrogant, brazen. This is unfortunate, for does there exist a model for a language struggle *other* than the one associated with Afrikaner nationalism?

The 'Kaapse beweging' of the 1990s briefly provided a glimpse of such a model, but its momentum was soon lost. The political struggle that fired the effervescence of the Cape intellectual movement of the time has long run its course, and the notion of Afrikaans (and of a debate about it) as a medium of *co-option* into a cultural and political objective alien to their own interests, remains today firmly ingrained in the minds of black Afrikaans-speaking *intellectuals*. But could this momentum be regained? There are occasional signs that *ordinary* black speakers of Afrikaans are prepared to make themselves heard in the debate, voicing their disagreement not only with the brazen Dan Roodts, but also with the progressive black ('bruin') intellectuals who tend to dismiss the debate about Afrikaans on their behalf (see, for example, Jason Lloyd, 2002: *Bruin mense moet berokke raak by Afrikaans*). The extent to which a black middle or working class can assert their identification with Afrikaans could eventually lend a more nuanced face to the 'engaged' debate, and genuinely advance the rights of Afrikaans speakers to use their own language.

It is of course sobering to reflect that the current debate about Afrikaans is far from being the first one. True, Afrikaans no longer has to free itself from Dutch. Also, the *taalstryd* of today is justified by its protagonists as a struggle for multilingualism (against the unilingual domination of English) rather than for Afrikaans *per se*. (This, of course, still leaves us with the paradox of a struggle for multilingualism conducted monolingually by speakers of only one language!) But many of the aspects of the debate, notably the concern with the domination of English and the internal division between pragmatists (what I have called 'dismissive') and nationalists ('engaged'), can be traced back to the times of the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners* of 1875, the *Cape Afrikaner Bond* of 1880 (see, for example, Davenport, 1966:322f), not to mention the Boer republics of the turn of the 20th century. Finally, much concern has been expressed in the newspapers about the apparent lack of concern for Afrikaans shown by the youth, controversially baptised the 'Zoid generation' by *Beeld*'s Tim Du Plessis on account of the Afrikaans pop singer Karin Zoid. It is no doubt significant that there *is* a Karin Zoid. (The current upsurge in Afrikaans pop and rock music

furnishes a topic of research all of its own). But without getting into any specific predictions about the future of the debate about Afrikaans – or, for that matter, of the Afrikaans language! – it seems to me reasonable, in light of the debate, to make a closing observation on Afrikaans and national language policy.

The Constitutional preoccupation with the equality of South Africa's eleven official languages ('... all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem...' – *Founding Provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996), which Thipa (*PanSALB*, 2002: 5) refers to as the (equal) rights of languages, is certainly justifiable to the extent that languages are *objects* (objects of heritage, objects of culture, objects of study). But this preoccupation gives no account of the attitudes of different language communities towards their own mother tongues. Languages may have legal equality, but to pursue *sociolinguistic* equality is to 'take language planning on a wild goose chase' (Ridge, 2001: 32). Attitudes to mother tongues are closely related to the lived experience of individuals and language communities, and in South Africa the language experience of Afrikaans speakers has in many ways been unique. In spite of its predominant Indo-European linguistic origins, Afrikaans ('African') shares with the indigenous African languages of South Africa a cultural frame of reference that draws unquestionably on a spatial and historical experience of *Africa*. On the other hand Afrikaans, the language of Afrikaner nationalism, has been the political vehicle for a nationalism of the entire country (as opposed to a particular region), a characteristic it shares with English, which was first the language of British imperialism, then the language of African nationalism (Munger, 1967: 7-8). These two roles historically intersect in no South African language, except in Afrikaans. The very *existence* of a debate about Afrikaans bears out the specificity of Afrikaans vis-à-vis the other official languages. To the extent that this specificity is reflected in the linguistic nationalism of *Afrikaners* – the kind of linguistic nationalism that 'makes them stand up for their [language] rights' (Christa Roodt, in *PanSALB*, 2002: 8) – it will be surprising if it does not, at some stage, also *transgress* the condition of equality of languages as framed in the Constitution. Hopefully our future language policy will be flexible enough *not to deny* that individual language rights are more of a priority to some South Africans than to others.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is, however, interesting to note that the editor of the *M&G*, in a 'conciliatory' editorial about Dread's controversial article (claiming that it was offensive and racist to Afrikaners, the article had been referred to the Press Ombudsman by Pieter Mulder, leader of the Freedom Front), justifies its publication 'in view of the ribald, satirical and ironic treatment of its subject matter, which, [they] considered, evinced a paradoxical *empathy* with Afrikaners (*M&G*, 5 October, 2001. My italics).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the almost daily debates in *Beeld* and *Die Burger* in the course of June / July 2002 on the position of Afrikaans at the universities of Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom. Although named in the government-commissioned Gerwel report as the two universities with 'special responsibility' to uphold and develop Afrikaans as a language of science, the fact that both institutions are at the same time urged to *also* offer all instruction in English is widely interpreted, notably by Roodt himself, as well as by eminent liberal academics like Hermann Giliomee, as an inevitable erosion of the deployment of Afrikaans as a vehicle of knowledge. The debate eventually elicited a conciliatory statement on the matter from the minister concerned, Prof. Kader Asmal (see *Beeld*, 5 July 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Part of the disappointment at the failure of a genuine multilingualism derives no doubt from the expectation, expressed in the late 1990s (therefore within what I have called the 'future' debate) that 'Afrikaans is an example which may be followed by users of African languages concerning the development of their languages' (Van Rensburg, 1997: 97, quoted in Ridge, 2001: 25). As Ridge shows, this expectation was (is) naïve anyway.

The main difference between the development of Afrikaans and that of the African languages lies in the strong relation, in the case of Afrikaans, between language development and political and economic power. The speakers of African languages do not share the 'single-minded political will' of Afrikaners in the context of language development. The cultural institutions of speakers of African languages have not been organized to achieve the goal of developing individual African languages, neither has 'African capital [unlike Afrikaner capital in the first half of the 20th century] ... shown a strong interest, backed by its resources, in any sectional identity or language struggles' (Ridge, 2002: 26-27).

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