

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST AND THE PRESENT: AFRIKANER EXPERIENCE OF AND REACTION TO THE “NEW” SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction

I would like to begin this lecture by referring to the keynote address of the renowned Afrikaans historian, Hermann Giliomee, on the occasion of the Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Association celebrating the centenary of the History Department at the University of Stellenbosch in April 2004. In 2003 Giliomee published his seminal study on the history of the Afrikaners, entitled *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People*. In his Stellenbosch keynote address Giliomee, in reference to the historian C. Vann Woodward, who hailed from the American South, stated that “history has also happened to Afrikaners recently”. According to Giliomee, they discovered that their power was fragile and transient. Even while they possessed the strongest army on the African continent, they had to relinquish power because they had clung to it too long rather than sharing and distributing it. Instead of planning for a transfer of power, they thought that South Africa could never be governed without them.

While still in power Afrikaners sought their security in plans and projects (apartheid) that would render the realization of real security impossible. Once they relinquished power, they discovered that they were being treated like King Lear figures. Because they were now powerless, they were ridiculed and disdained even by those who had praised them while they were still in power.

Similarly, F.W. de Klerk, the last Afrikaner president of South Africa, said the following during a speech he made in London in 1997 on the process of the transition from white to black rule:

“The decision to surrender the right to national sovereignty is certainly one of the most painful any leader can be asked to take. Most nations are prepared to risk war and catastrophe rather than to surrender this right. Yet this was the decision we had to take. We had to accept the necessity of giving up on the ideal on which we had been nurtured and the dream for which so many generations had struggled for and for which so many of our people had died”.

These statements indeed reflect a very frank view by two prominent Afrikaners of their people’s experience of the transition of power in contemporary South Africa.

But how did ordinary Afrikaners perceive and experience the dramatic and fairly rapid change of the South African landscape since the 1990s? In this regard, I shall refer to politics, the economy, sports, language and culture and the church.

Politics

It would be no understatement to say that in general Afrikaners experience the transition in South Africa as nothing less than traumatic. A telling example of ordinary Afrikaners' traumatic experiences of the dramatic changes that were beginning to take place in almost all spheres of life occurred at a protest meeting in the old eastern Transvaal (Mpumalanga today) after several farm murders, where a farmer was loudly cheered when he exclaimed: "The country does not belong to Afrikaners anymore, it belong to blacks. We voted it away and we can't get it back".

In 1994 the majority of politically moderate Afrikaners were pragmatic and willing to countenance reform of South Africa's political system with a sense of expectation that issues such as their cultural interests, job security, etc. would be respected by a new political dispensation. Although the road to a negotiated settlement was at times a bit rocky, with some black demonstrators being killed by the police during mass protest rallies, and although a few bombs were set off by the right-wing white "lunatic fringe", to the amazement of the world, and of the Afrikaners themselves, the first democratic election of 1994 was an astonishingly peaceful process. There was a kind of a relief in the air, enhanced by an artificially created feeling that suddenly and miraculously all differences between blacks and whites had been resolved and that a new solid South African nation had come into being.

This euphoria was continued when in 1995 South Africa won the Rugby World Cup in Johannesburg for the first time and when President Nelson Mandela, in a gesture that won the hearts of many white South Africans and which has since become a very touching and powerful symbol of reconciliation, wore a replica of the jersey of the triumphant South African captain at the cup final – rugby being the predominant passion of Afrikaner sports fans.

However, especially since the administration of President Thabo Mbeki, who introduced an accelerated programme of the Africanisation of almost all spheres of public South African life, a huge disillusionment with the new South Africa has permeated the mindset of the average Afrikaner. According to the recent surveys of Professor Lawrence Schlemmer, a respected South African sociological analyst, an alarming degree of alienation has developed between the Afrikaner community and the new political and social order since 1994. According to Schlemmer, Afrikaners feel "switched off" and marginalized, and do not take much interest in mainstream (i.e. black) South Africa. They had believed that in any negotiated settlement their representatives would drive a hard bargain and their hubris had convinced them that they alone could rule the country. Instead, they had been proven wrong on both accounts.

Flip Buys, the general-secretary of Solidarity, the trade union with probably the biggest Afrikaner-based worker constituency in South Africa, very aptly put these attitudes in words in an article in *Rapport*, the national Afrikaans Sunday paper. According to Buys, in 1994 the majority of Afrikaner voters were convinced of the

necessity for blacks to obtain full political rights, but now they are concerned that the political changes went further than the granting of equal rights and that the Afrikaners' own rights are now under threat. They voted for a different form of government, but instead they got a different political and social order. Afrikaners wanted to grant blacks the franchise, but did not anticipate a process that would seriously diminish the influence of their own voting power in what Schlemmer and Giliomee refer to as trapping voters in racial (minority) constituencies and relegating elections to becoming mere "ethnic censuses" with a permanently entrenched black majority.

Buys further argues that Afrikaners wanted a full and equal democracy, but did not anticipate their own democratic rights to be marginalized. They thought it right and just that blacks should obtain full civil rights and equal opportunities, but simultaneously did not anticipate feeling like second-class citizens themselves. They voted for the abolition of racial discrimination, but did not expect that they themselves would become a target of this phenomenon. They regarded it as just that indigenous languages reached their full potential, but were of the opinion that this could be achieved without marginalizing Afrikaners. They agreed to black economic empowerment, but are now concerned that black empowerment in some instances can lead to their own disempowerment. They were willing to let the ANC exiles return from abroad, but did not anticipate circumstances changing so dramatically that their own loved ones would leave South Africa in droves. They conceded that Afrikaner control of the state media could not be justified, but did not expect this to be exchanged simply for ANC control. They felt that blacks should get their rightful share of revenue without they themselves losing their own fair share.

They accepted that black history should find its rightful place in the national discourse, but did not expect to see Afrikaner history almost criminalized. Afrikaners understood the ANC's viewpoint that their place-names and heritage should receive greater recognition, but did not wish their own historic place-names and heritage to be side-lined. They realized the necessity of improving black education, but protested at the election polls when they began to see how the ANC government was taking control over Afrikaans education and institutions, a process that went hand in hand with anglicizing them. Whites understand the necessity for the implementation of affirmative action, but reject its misuse to anglicize Afrikaans institutions and bring them under black control under the pretext of striving for representativity. White electors exchanged minority control for a democratic legal state, but are extremely concerned that the country is beginning to change into a "transformation state". Schlemmer deduces from results in surveys that, had Afrikaners suspected that the negotiation process would lead to the loss of executive powers in central government for the parties they supported, there would have been very little support for the shift away from white power dominance.

The feeling of disillusionment was also stimulated when at the end of 1996 F.W. de Klerk, in response to the ANC's refusal to accept a power-sharing cabinet as a principle in the final post-apartheid constitution, took the National Party, historically the political home of the majority of Afrikaners and which in the 1994 election had taken its white support for granted, out of the Government of National Unity. De Klerk and the NP's abandonment of the GNU in 1996 left the Afrikaners and the larger white community without formal political power. In response, *Die Burger*, the

largest and probably most influential Afrikaans daily, asked whether the leader of a party that had fared so poorly in the post-1990 negotiations to secure some form of power-sharing for Afrikaners, could continue in a leadership position.

A spate of critical letters appeared in the Afrikaans press that lambasted the NP and its leadership. These letters, written by NP supporters, stated that the NP had received a mandate from them to protect and secure their interests at all times. De Klerk did not get a mandate to lead, like a Pied Piper, his unsuspecting people to the political abattoirs. The NP's withdrawal from the cabinet vividly underscored the political displacement of the party and the Afrikaner ruling group. The ensuing disillusionment and dismay among Afrikaners was made worse by a spiralling crime rate and a sharp drop in the rate of arrests and successful prosecutions, which contributed further to their feeling of powerlessness. Crime and the policy of affirmative action were cited as the main reasons why, for the first time, Afrikaners were emigrating in numbers as large as those of white English speakers.

In addition, some of the old Afrikaner elite, such as Pik Botha, embraced the new ruling elite "without missing one goose step" as Breyten Breytenbach, the renowned Afrikaner poet, playwright, essayist and anti-apartheid activist, put it. In 2000 a controversial Afrikaner radio journalist, Chris Louw, caused a literary sensation in Afrikaner ranks in what came to be known as the so-called "Boetman debate". (In a specific context the Afrikaans word "Boetman" can imply the belittlement of someone and expressing a low opinion of him, reflecting the superior attitude of an older man towards a younger man). Louw wrote a furious open letter to Willem de Klerk, a prominent nationalist opinionmaker and elder brother of F.W. de Klerk, in which he charged the former and his generation of Afrikaner leaders with paternalism and political cowardice and deceit. Without ever having fought a war themselves, they had sent a younger generation of Afrikaners to war on the country's borders against ANC insurgents and into black townships to defend apartheid as a noble cause, but then collapsed when confronted with a tough ANC at the negotiating table.

The NP's own opportunistic oscillation between various political positions to try and halt its own decline also contributed, to a very large extent, to a growing disillusionment among Afrikaners. Soon after the withdrawal of his party from the GNU in 1996, F.W. de Klerk himself resigned from politics, creating a kind of feeling among his erstwhile political supporters that he had left them in the lurch. He was succeeded as NP leader by Marthinus van Schalkwyk, a career political opportunist per excellence. Under Van Schalkwyk's leadership, and faced with extinction, the NP first merged with the Democratic Party to form the Democratic Alliance after the 1999 general election. Discontent with the DA's leadership culminated in the Nationalists abandoning the alliance and re-aligning themselves with the ANC, but this time without obtaining the approval of its constituency for such a step at the polls. This step was made possible by the floor-crossing legislation enacted by Parliament but thus far it has overwhelmingly benefited the ANC more than the opposition parties.

After the 2004 general election, and after having received a mere 250 000 votes on a national basis, partly as "punishment" from its constituency for abandoning the DA without the approval of the electorate, Van Schalkwyk committed the "ultimate treason", as it was referred to by critical writers to the Afrikaans press, by announcing

the demise of the NP and advising the remaining NP MPs to join the ANC. Once again this step was taken without the approval of its constituency. Public and private commentators alike denounced this step as an utterly opportunistic move designed primarily to save the political careers of Van Schalkwyk and his cohorts. They were accused of an unauthorized handing over of Afrikaner votes on a silver plate to the ANC, which already enjoys an “unhealthy” parliamentary majority of almost 70%. At present the political esteem of NP leaders is probably at its lowest ever.

In a strong denunciation of actions taken by Afrikaner leaders, Giliomee argues that the greatest loss that whites have suffered in terms of Afrikaner politics was at the level of what he calls community and social capital. Before the onslaught against apartheid took on a more stringent quality in 1976 with the Soweto uprisings, the Afrikaners were a strong community with a great deal of social capital. There was a high level of equality within the community and differences in income levels between Afrikaners shrank between 1948 and 1982. There were also mutual ties of friendship and great trust between Afrikaner leaders and their followers; there was also a feeling of reciprocity: the leaders would not expect their followers to pay a price they themselves were not willing to pay. The leaders would play open cards with their followers. A 1978 survey showed that 60% of Afrikaners trusted their leaders, although they did not always understand what the latter were doing.

However, according to Giliomee, over the subsequent twenty years the leaders squandered this social capital and mutual trust. The list of breaches of faith is long: the Information Scandal, the war in Angola that was kept secret from the white electorate for six months, broken promises in 1989 and in 1990 that referendums would be held on the issue of the negotiated new constitution, whereas a referendum was held only on the question if negotiations with the ANC should be continued, the NP leadership’s unsubstantiated claims that there are checks and balances in the constitution and proper protection for minorities, and the “shameful demise” of the NP, when its leaders refused to hold a federal party congress on the issue of dissolution. Thus the NP sadly ended up with a leader who had no followers, except for a few for whom political posts could be secured in the floor-crossing process.

Over the years the leaders had mobilized the Afrikaner youth for apartheid, introduced military conscription to fight a border war, instituted the Tricameral Parliament, engaged in the politics of negotiation and eventually opted for political domination by a majority that offers little protection to minorities. The Afrikaner leaders have misused their trust by not utilizing the norm of reciprocity and each time the consequences of such politics were at the expense of the Afrikaner youth. The community capital was squandered by leaders who took key decisions without full consultation with their followers on party congresses or the party caucus. The price to pay, therefore, Giliomee states, was very high. Today there are still numerous Afrikaner organizations, but they have very few active members. The Afrikaners’ leaders have largely vanished and a new, open and inclusive Afrikaans community will have to be built almost from scratch. In this regard it is the Afrikaans press, rather than political and cultural leaders, that is coming to the fore to take up the cudgels to champion the cause of Afrikaans language and cultural rights.

Perhaps the most serious form of frustration that some whites felt against the new political regime was manifested in an alleged plot by a group of right-wing Afrikaners

to seize political power via a coup d'état. The plot was uncovered earlier this year by South African intelligence and security forces. Among other things, the conspirators, consisting of a group of middle-rank army officers and middle-class citizens, had manufactured enough explosive devices to blow up several installations and damage infrastructure. Apparently, as is being revealed in the ongoing trial of the so-called Boeremag (Boer Force), the plan was to create havoc and panic in the (black) state and in the ensuing chaos literally drive all blacks out of South Africa along certain of the major motor highways.

According to National Police Commissioner Jackie Selebi, the most distressing aspect of these developments was the fact that the ill-conceived plot was not hatched by the "lunatic" blue-collar right wing, as used to be the case in the immediate post-1990 and pre-1994 period, but by a much more sophisticated white-collar middle-class grouping. However, it is quite clear that the majority of whites, and Afrikaners in particular, has no stomach or sympathy for such absurdly racist ideals and that the conspirators hopelessly overestimated their supposed potential support among whites. The uncovering of the plot also does not seem to have had any serious political or even economic ramifications. Indeed, when the sensational disclosures broke in the national media, neither the Johannesburg Stock Exchange nor the South African currency responded negatively.

Economy

As far as the economy is concerned, on the one hand, whites adapted well financially to the political transition, despite gloomy predictions that an ANC government would turn the previous capitalist and market-orientated economy in a socialist direction and steer it towards economic ruin. On the contrary, the new black government introduced a widely respected fiscal and monetary policy and Trevor Manuel, the ANC Minister of Finance, is almost unanimously being hailed as the best finance minister South Africa has ever had. Not only has the national budget deficit been reduced considerably, especially since 1996, but the middle class enjoys substantial income tax concessions and since last year the South African currency has strengthened considerably against the US\$ and the Euro. Afrikaners still own most of the farmland and control about a third of the listed companies on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

On the other side, however, the ANC government's policy of affirmative action and black economic empowerment, in many instances at the expense of whites, is a major source of disillusionment and dissatisfaction among Afrikaners. In 1994 whites held 44% of all posts in the civil service; by the beginning of 1999 they held only 18%. Medium and large corporations faced heavy fines by 2002 if they failed to reach the affirmative action targets they had projected in plans submitted to the state. The public corporations were rapidly transformed by the removal of a large proportion of senior white staff. Radio journalist Chris Louw probably voiced the frustrations of thousands of white males when he expressed his dismay after a senior black executive at the South African Broadcasting Corporation publicly remarked that whites in the corporation had been eliminated from the top management and the senior news management, and that the next target was middle management, where white managers, according to the executive, were still "resisting transformation".

Angrily Louw asked: "What transformation? Transforming ourselves out of our jobs, rolling over and playing dead?"

Such sentiments were also echoed by spokespersons of Solidarity, while letters from Afrikaners to the press expressed shock and indignation at the inadequate protection the constitution offered against affirmative action. In addition, the government's new liberal economic policies encouraged the retrenchment of thousands of workers, black and white, both in private and public corporations. Such retrenchments had a dramatic and traumatic impact on the Afrikaner working class which saw, for the first time since the 1930s, the re-emergence of poor whites in substantial numbers, especially in the industrial centres surrounding Johannesburg.

In this regard, Solidarity, the previously conservative white Mineworkers' Union, which had weathered the transformation drive well and reinvented itself in accordance with the realities of the new South Africa, positioned itself to offer assistance to its membership of 130 000 (87% Afrikaners) in problems they encountered with the policy of affirmative action. Thus Solidarity has, to a certain extent, taken up the responsibility of catering for the Afrikaner working class, who seemed to have been abandoned by their former political leaders. Solidarity recently put forward suggestions about introducing a so-called "sunset clause" to affirmative action, arguing that a foreseeable end to the process should be envisioned. According to Solidarity, affirmative action is being perceived by Afrikaners as perpetual economic retribution for apartheid, while they feel that the Afrikaner youth should not be punished for the "apartheid sins" of their parents. Thus far, however, these suggestions have had a cool reception from the ANC.

Affirmative action and the bleak possibilities for especially young tertiary-trained whites looking to secure job opportunities within South Africa have unleashed a considerable "brain drain" and "white flight". It also initiated - for the first time since after the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, when groups of Afrikaners emigrated especially to Argentina (in the 1930s the majority were repatriated to South Africa) - a new Afrikaner diaspora to countries such as England, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Socially, these developments also have a traumatic impact on Afrikaner family structures. Families are torn apart by emigration and grandparents are experiencing the trauma of saying farewell to Afrikaans-speaking infants at international airports only to be greeted by culturally estranged teenagers during occasional family reunions as time goes by. There are probably very few Afrikaner families in South Africa today who do not have some or other émigré relative abroad.

Johann Rossouw, a prominent young Afrikaner philosopher, accuses some affluent Afrikaners of failing to appreciate the creeping poverty that still afflicts the majority of black and Coloured South Africans. According to Roussouw, the disparagement of those Afrikaners who can afford such affluent lifestyle manifests itself in the embracement of an individualistic materialism: flashy vehicles, large mansions and consumerism. He warns that should South African communities not succeed within the next decade in putting the inherited colonial state structure at the service of the masses, at a time when the anger of the poor black and Coloured masses is mounting and middle-class Afrikaners try to express their need for recognition through material possessions, the scene will be set for a populist insurrection with racial undertones against the country's frail democratic dispensation.

Sports

Afrikaners are sport lovers par excellence and therefore responses to the fortunes or woes of national sports such as rugby and cricket, athletics, soccer, hockey, etc. are more often than not a reflection of the nations' emotional state. Affirmative action in the form of racial quotas to reflect the demography of the nation as a whole is also enforced upon provincial and national teams, sometimes in a subtle ways and in other cases more blatantly. Especially at school level racially inflated representative sports teams are regarded by some Afrikaners as a matter of political expedience. However, there are more and more signs that the government is beginning to realize the powerful potential of sports as an agent for nation building and the creation of a South African loyalty and allegiance through national sporting teams which perform successfully in the international sporting arena. The national rugby, cricket, soccer and Olympic teams, for instance, are selected solely on merit, a strategy which is beginning to prove its worth on the playing field. Successful sports men and women, regardless of creed or colour, are embraced as national heroes in a country longing for international achievements. For instance, it has become noteworthy how predominantly Afrikaner spectators at international rugby tests are beginning to sing the whole multi-lingual South African national anthem with passion.

Language and culture

Probably the most dramatic changes that Afrikaners experience with regard to the new South Africa concern their language and culture. In 2002 Ton Vosloo, chairman of the board of the largest Afrikaans press group, Naspers, and of the largest Afrikaner-owned life insurance company, SANLAM, observed: "It is not to spread panic when one says that Afrikaner people are in a crisis with red lights flashing along their survival path. The examples of marginalization are numerous; the places where space to exist had been conquered, negotiated or established on own initiative are increasingly being questioned. This includes even the self-evident right to be served by the authorities in a language that is officially recognized".

The main underlying cause of the crisis that Vosloo identified was changes in the structures for the reproduction of a language, culture and an ethnic community. Between the 1920s and 1980s single-language Afrikaans schools and universities were the main institutions for socializing youth with a particular set of cultural values into the Afrikaner community. Soon after the transition in 1994 the new government claimed that Afrikaans was used as a language to retain "apartheid-style racial exclusivity". It put pressure on formerly white schools to introduce parallel courses in English to cater for black learners. By the beginning of the 1990s there were 1 800 schools which were white and Afrikaans; by 2002 only 300 single-medium schools remained, of which almost all were racially inclusive.

In 2003, however, the constitutional court ruled in a landmark decision that Afrikaans-medium schools, under a constitution that recognizes Afrikaans as one of the country's eleven official languages, have a right to existence. Therefore the efforts by the Limpopo Provincial Government to encroach on former single-language Afrikaans primary schools in the province by introducing English were constrained, provided that such schools shall not be used as a smokescreen for racial exclusivity.

Three historically Afrikaans universities introduced a full set of parallel-medium courses, while Potchefstroom and Stellenbosch have remained predominantly Afrikaans universities. By 2000 more than half the students at five institutions were not white, almost all following courses in the medium of English. The growing use of English as a language of instruction in schools and universities was a major source of concern. According to Giliomee and Schlemmer, studies had shown that elsewhere in the world dual-medium education had led inexorably to the displacement of the local language. It also undermines the resolve of the management of these institutions to take responsibility for the transfer of the language from the present to future generations.

After 1994 the government appointed large numbers of civil servants who could not speak Afrikaans and failed to introduce appropriate language legislation to give substance to the language clauses in the constitution. In practice both the government and public corporations promoted English as the lingua franca. In the state television service the share of Afrikaans in prime time has dropped precipitously from the pre-1994 situation, when it alternated with English on one channel in prime time, to less than 10% of the channel. This happened despite the fact that a quarter of those who owned television sets were Afrikaans-speakers.

The steady decline of the Afrikaner nationalist movement since the early 1970s accelerated after 1994 and further weakened Afrikaans. The first to “defect” was Afrikaner business, eager to shed its ethnic character in order to attract custom across language and racial lines. By the end of the twentieth century big corporations founded by Afrikaners were making rapid strides, but they showed little interest in financially supporting the cash-strapped Afrikaans cultural organizations or cultural festivals.

In 1998 the most eloquent Afrikaans voice, that of Breyten Breytenbach, told Afrikaners that losing power would enable them to terminate the self-abasement of racism and that they could now embrace the reality that most Afrikaner families had bastard origins. The time was ripe, he said, to expand their consciousness and develop a deeper humanism. But he also urged: “Take your stance to the English”, and rhetorically asked why the old intra-white tensions had not disappeared: “Is it because of their pretence to cultural superiority? The fact that they are always on the right side, never responsible for any injustice, never to have to question their assumptions? Is it because they look down on white and brown Afrikaners alike?”.

In general, Afrikaners felt far more disaffected than white English speakers by the ANC-led cultural revolution, which tried to impose British-American notions of respectability and other cultural values. Four-fifths were unhappy at the way their language and culture were being treated, against one-fifth in the case of white English speakers. Support for the proposition that “people should be part of the new South Africa and forget their differences” was much weaker among Afrikaners than English speakers (57% vs 81%). A marked feature of “Africanised” cultural festivals on public holidays is the almost complete absence of whites, who still seem to feel alienated and marginalised in the atmosphere of the new “indigenous” South African culture. Afrikaners are not attracted to the nation-building creed of one history, one public language and one “patriotic” party. At the same time many of the Afrikaner

elite were defecting from their language group. About a quarter of (white) Afrikaners – mostly belonging to the upper-income category – indicated in polls that they considered it futile to continue the struggle to maintain Afrikaans as a public language and the same proportion had decided to educate their own children in English. However, approximately 40% of white Afrikaans speakers identify with what one can call an ethnic Afrikaner identity. The evidence is that the more unfairly Afrikaans speakers feel treated the more they identify themselves as Afrikaners.

By 2004 it appears as if Afrikaners have become a minority linguistic group rather than an organized ethnic group with myths of origin and kinship, capable of mobilization as a potent force. Leading black intellectuals are prepared to support this non-ethnic linguistic identity in a strategy of avoiding a confrontation with the government on the language issue. They reject any effort to promote Afrikaans under the banner of a resurgent Afrikaner ethnic group. Indeed, a very positive development was the first so-called “language audit” conference that was held at Stellenbosch in August 2004 to determine the position of Afrikaans in the new South Africa. The significance of this conference was that it was voluntarily attended by Afrikaans-speakers from across the colour line. For Neville Alexander, one of the Coloured facilitators, the significance of the conference was that it represented the very first complete South African language movement ever.

Speakers at the conference were of the opinion that a new solidarity and umbrella identity among Afrikaans-speakers seems to be emerging and that it could be the beginning of a new dynamic for the whole of the Afrikaans-speaking community that will eventually also provide the thrust for a process of co-operation between the various African languages within South Africa. As this language movement represents a civil initiative in the true sense of the word, it helps to shape a new kind of Afrikaans community politics and autonomy that has emerged beyond the largely outdated party politics of the past. There is a sober realization that the responsibility for Afrikaans and multi-linguism in the new South Africa cannot be entrusted to the state. Thus, the preservation of Afrikaans will not depend on a renewal of Afrikaner party politics in order to regain state control as a prerequisite for its survival, but will demand a sustained engagement by Afrikaans-speakers themselves.

The Church

A salient feature of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 1995 to investigate human rights violations that occurred after 1960, when the ANC and other extra-parliamentary organizations were banned, was the disappointment expressed by the co-chairperson, the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu at Afrikaner perpetrators’ apparent lack of remorse and his demand that they publicly confess their “apartheid sins” and regret for their deeds. However, from an Afrikaner point of view Tutu’s remarks and expectations were a huge strategic blunder and to a very large extent contributed to Afrikaners’ alienation and denunciation of the TRC proceedings as they regarded it as nothing but a “hypocritical ecclesiastical and political spectacle”. Tutu’s big mistake was to expect Afrikaners, who are predominantly staunchly Calvinist Protestants, to confess their transgressions before a priest as is the tradition in the Anglican Church, while Calvinists traditionally only confess in private to God.

Of all the Afrikaner denominations the Dutch Reformed Church remains the largest and probably most influential church in Afrikaner ranks. The DRC has indeed come a long way since its theological justification of apartheid in the 1960s. Ironically the late Reverend Beyers Naudé, a prominent Afrikaner cultural leader (he died on 7 September 2004 at the age of 89), who was placed under house arrest by the NP government and who was ostracized by the DRC after 1960 for his unwavering criticism of apartheid and for his active support of the anti-apartheid struggle, was instrumental in the moral rehabilitation of the DRC. Originally Naudé was vilified as a traitor and rejected by the Afrikaner community for his convictions, but he persevered and became a symbol and an icon of reconciliation between black and white. At its core the DRC remains a church for the Afrikaner people. While there was a decline in the support for the main Afrikaans churches, the Afrikaners remained strongly committed to the Christian religion.

Since the 1980s the DRC has adopted a pragmatic rhetoric, arguing that common sense dictated the replacement of apartheid as a system that could not work. As a result, it lost 9% of its members between 1981 and 1999, predominantly to the racially exclusive Afrikaans Protestant Church, which had seceded from the DRC as a result of the latter's moral condemnation of apartheid. Since then very positive initiatives towards the eventual reunification of the racially fragmented DRC has emerged. In 1994 the DRC was readmitted to the South African Council of Churches and the debate for the racial reunification of the DRC family of churches is gaining momentum. The DRC's former white theological seminary at the University of Stellenbosch and the former Coloured theological seminary at the University of the Western Cape have merged at Stellenbosch, the white and Coloured YMCAs have merged and in 2003 the Western and Southern Cape Synods of the DRC and those of the United Reformed Church (a merger of the former Coloured and black DRC churches) held their first joint sittings and resolved to strive towards unity as soon as possible. Some Western Cape DRC and URC congregations have also begun to organize joint sermons, while many DRC congregations already reflect a multiracial character.

In the light of these initiatives a former obstacle towards unity, namely the DRC's refusal to sign the URC's so-called Belhar Confession of 1982 (which called the theological justification of apartheid a heresy) on the grounds of it being a "political statement" rather than a confession of faith, seems to have become obsolete. Hopefully therefore the racial reunification of the DCR family of churches is imminent. Some racially-inclined rural DRC congregations in the Free State and the former Transvaal might still object to reunification, but they represent a minority. Ironically the greatest stumbling block to unity at present is a dispute over property, finances and synod structures between the URC and certain congregations of the old (black) DRC in Africa in the Free State, who refused to merge with the former.

Concerning the future allegiance of its Afrikaans members, the DRC will have to emphasize its particular faith and spirituality, care for them without prejudice to others, and will have to articulate the grievances of its members to those in power.

Conclusion

Although it might seem that Afrikaners in a new South Africa are an angry, frustrated and disillusioned ethnic minority that reacts in an obstructionist manner to the political, economic and social transformation of the country, in practice this is not the case at all. Rather it is a reflection of a people struggling through some traumatic experiences to adapt to a radically changed environment and to come to terms with their past.

With the demise of both apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism, Afrikaners had to discard much of their historic thinking about survival as obsolete. The Afrikaner literary giant of the mid-twentieth century, N.P. van Wyk Louw, had suggested that Afrikaners had to choose between “mere survival” and “survival in justice”. The white “yes” vote in the 1992 referendum could be interpreted as a choice for the latter option. In a 1992 poll only 4% of Afrikaners agreed with the statement “South Africa is today a land for blacks; whites will have to accept that they will have to take second place”. By 1998 Afrikaners who agreed with this statement had risen to 43%, compared to approximately a quarter of English South Africans and Coloureds. But 1994 also brought with it a sense of relief. Many of the younger generation were delighted to be rid of the stifling cultural conformity of Afrikaner society and the anxieties about security of the final decades of apartheid. They are proud to be living in a democracy and love the country’s inclusive national symbols. Unlike their parents in the past, they can travel all over the world.

Although there are some diehards who still nurture racist attitudes and although the process of nation-building is at times tedious and trying, the overwhelming majority of Afrikaners are progressively minded people who opted for an equal, free and just society despite the sacrifices they had to make. After all, most of them still regard South Africa as their only homeland and do not intend to join the “white flight”. After three hundred years on the African continent, they have become adaptable. They have learned the art of survival and know that Africa is not a place for the faint-hearted. Living in an inclusive democracy, Afrikaners are predominantly a religious, law-abiding and pragmatic people, enjoying freedom of speech and other individual rights. They no longer speak of themselves as a separate people with a special calling and destiny, but accept a common South African identity and the duty to address the challenges that confront the country. Afrikaners are now without strong leaders or organizations, but are rediscovering their own particular identity, one that was forged by their complex and turbulent history and their love for the language they speak and the harsh land in which they live.

But for most of them Afrikaans as a language still remains the symbol of their sense of place and community. Ton Vosloo called Afrikaans “the single issue around which all the minority demands of Afrikaans people revolve”. Indeed, the survival of Afrikaners as an ethnic cultural people will probably depend on the future possibility of maintaining Afrikaans as a language of higher functions in education, especially as far as tertiary education is concerned, and in religion. In the words of Hermann Giliomee, the greatest challenge for Afrikaners and all Afrikaans speakers in the present millennium will be to nourish and replenish their love for their language and their land, and accept the responsibility to hand over their cultural heritage to the next

generation. If they are to accept this challenge, they will become part of a new, democratic South Africa in their own special way.

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