

# Postcolonial Cultural Identity in Recent Afrikaans Literary Texts

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## Summary

This article investigates constructions of cultural identity in recent works of short fiction written in Afrikaans. These texts were read within the framework of postcolonial discourse theory, since they were published in the period after the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 and form part of a discourse of writing back to colonial discourses, including that of apartheid. The framework proposed by Mishra and Hodge ([1993]1994) of an oppositional and complicit postcolonial was combined with insights by Homi Bhabha (1994) and Stuart Hall (1992, [1993]1994) regarding essentialism and hybridity in identity construction to establish to what extent Afrikaans texts of after 1994 can still be read in terms of a so-called “fused postcolonial”, a typification that according to Viljoen (1996) was applicable to the Afrikaans literature prior to 1994.

## Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek konstruksies van kulturele identiteit in onlangse kortverhale in Afrikaans. Die tekste is gelees binne die raamwerk van postkoloniale diskoersteorie, aangesien hulle gepubliseer is in die tydperk ná die eerste demokratiese verkiesings in Suid-Afrika in 1994 en omdat hulle deel uitmaak van 'n diskoers waarin daar teruggeskryf word na koloniale diskoerse, insluitende apartheid. Mishra en Hodge ([1993]1994) se voorgestelde raamwerk van opposisionele en medepligtige post-kolonialisme is gekombineer met insigte van Homi Bhabha (1994) en Stuart Hall (1992, [1993]1994) rakende essensialisme en hibriditeit in identiteitskonstruksie, ten einde vas te stel in watter mate Afrikaanse tekste van ná 1994 steeds gelees kan word in terme van 'n sogenaamde “saamgestelde postkolonialisme” wat volgens Viljoen (1996) toepasbaar was op Afrikaanse literatuur van voor 1994.

## 1 Introduction

This article is based on research into constructions of cultural identity in recent works of short fiction written in the Afrikaans language. The investigation was conducted within the framework of postcolonial literary theory, with specific reference to the work of Homi Bhabha (1994), Stuart Hall (1992, [1993]1994) and Mishra and Hodge ([1993]1994). Conceptual apparatus concerning postcolonial reconstruction of cultural identities adversely affected by the discourse of

colonialism, was applied to certain Afrikaans short stories to establish to what extent these texts could be considered a “writing back” to the colonial discourse of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid. The research focused on texts that had been published after 1994, being the date of the first democratic elections in South Africa, but also investigated their relation to certain literary traditions (for instance the tradition of the farm novel as an integral part of both colonial and postcolonial literature in Afrikaans) that preceded this date.

## 2 The Double Position of Afrikaans Literature

When applied to literature written in Afrikaans, it soon becomes clear that theorisation regarding postcolonial literary processes following European colonisation – of which the book *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989) is arguably the most well-known – can only be applied to Afrikaans literature when certain adaptations are made (Viljoen 1996: 162). Afrikaans literature can namely neither be seen as purely a settlers’ literature, nor can it be seen as the literature of a colonised people who have appropriated the language of their colonisers and are now writing back to the colonial centre. Rather, the Afrikaans literature and language occupies a peculiar double position in the history of colonial and postcolonial discourse in South Africa. It has, because of its association with Afrikaner nationalism and the apartheid government, often been labelled the “language of the oppressor”. While Afrikaans came into being as a result of Dutch colonisation of the Cape, its genesis is strongly associated with colonised speakers. Afrikaans developed from Dutch with influences from Malay, Portuguese, Khoi, German, French, Arabic, indigenous black languages and English (Ponelis 1993: 99-120), therefore between speakers who for a large part belonged to the slave- or working classes. As Viljoen (1996: 163) points out, Afrikaans is not the exclusive possession of white speakers, as the term “Afrikaner” might suggest. Although the term “Afrikaner” denotes a part of the Afrikaans language community who formed the ruling class in the dispensation of apartheid, just more than half of the speakers of Afrikaans<sup>1</sup> are not white, and were thus excluded from the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism that underlay apartheid, on the basis of their “race” (Viljoen 1996: 163). Afrikaner nationalism, instead relied on the negation of the true origins of Afrikaans in the black and largely Muslim community:

The history of Afrikaans is clouded by Afrikaner-nationalist ideology. It was a myth fashioned for the purposes of an emerging ethnic nationalism. Pupils were taught that Afrikaans was used for the first time in a white school in Paarl, ... that its origins were pure and lily-white. But nobody told them that in fact a Muslim school in Bo-Kaap

happened to be the first to have Afrikaans medium instruction .... The first piece of formal Afrikaans appears to have been written in Arabic for the purposes of religious instruction.

(Willemse 1992: 30)

For this purpose the speech of the black Afrikaans speakers was already marked as stereotypical and inferior within the Afrikaans literary discourse by the time of the so-called Second Language Movement, 1903-1925 (cf Gerwel 1987: 95). In an attempt to reconstruct Afrikaner identity after the defeat of the Afrikaner in the Anglo-Boer War, Afrikaans was again represented as a “white man’s language”. This was done by stressing its links to Dutch, which gave Afrikaans a point of entry into the Greco-Roman tradition of “civilization” (Hofmeyr 1987: 105; cf Van der Merwe 1994: 5).

Afrikaans is especially seen as the language of the oppressor because of its role in the discourse of apartheid. Social texts such as the 1976 Soweto uprisings against the ruling National Party regime are often seen as unproblematic proof of the relationship between the language and supremacist rule (cf Willemse 1992: 29). As Brigitte Mabandla (1997: 23) puts it:

It was regarded as the language in which many black people were humiliated. It was regarded as the language of security policemen in the dark cells of solitary confinement.

(Mabandla 1997: 23)

Afrikaans literary texts did indeed also play a role in the construction of binary oppositions between “races” and the setting up of a cultural hierarchy.

However, Afrikaans literature has also long been characterised by a resistance against the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid. This tradition of tension between Afrikaans literature and the Afrikaner establishment, a tension which has especially been noticeable since the 1960s but continues to this day, is not limited to texts written by black Afrikaans authors. A significant cause of the crisis of identity – which, according to Renders (1996: 250), permeates the whole body of Afrikaans literature – is exactly this problematic relationship of subjects who, on the basis of their “race” and culture, belong to the colonising group but display a strong aversion to the very same identity because of its link with colonial power. Afrikaans subjects thus had to constantly reinvent their identity in relation to a community and culture which were integral parts of what Spivak calls epistemic violence. The complex status of Afrikaans as both a language of the coloniser and colonised is thus further complicated by the fact that it was also the language in which a fierce literary counterdiscourse against apartheid was conducted by members that on the basis of their “race” belonged to the colonising group. It follows that postcolonial literary

processes in Afrikaans are not simply a question of appropriation and abrogation of the coloniser's language.

Added to the above problematic positioning of Afrikaans literature within postcolonial theory, is the fact that the period after the end of apartheid rule in 1994 is not the first South African era to be called postcolonial. The discourse of Afrikaner nationalism, which gave rise to the colonial system of apartheid, has ironically also originated from the experience of white Afrikaners as themselves being colonised by the British. The end of British rule in 1961 was thus also seen as a postcolonial era (Viljoen 1996: 162). While 1994 has brought about the end of centuries of colonial rule in South Africa, the question can in turn be asked whether the distribution of economic power has indeed changed much since the end of apartheid, or whether class and "race" still largely imply each other. Visser (1997: 79) warns that the focus on apartheid as a system founded on the discourse of "race", in fact obscures inequalities regarding class, and as such obscures the material effects of colonialism which still exist. Furthermore, South Africa as a Third-World country could also be seen as being in a colonised position within the international division of labour, which serves to sustain the supply of cheap labour to First-World countries (Spivak 1988: 288).

### **3 Different Forms of Writing Back, Different Ways of Constructing Cultural Identity**

Faced with the above-mentioned intricacies, the position of Afrikaans postcolonial texts that write back to the discourse of apartheid seems best theorised by the dichotomy suggested by Mishra and Hodge ([1993]1994) and also applies to Afrikaans literature by Viljoen (1996). Mishra and Hodge distinguish between an oppositional postcolonial and a complicit postcolonial as two frameworks for reading postcolonial texts. When these two types coexist, they call it a "fused postcolonial" (Mishra and Hodge [1993]1994: 277). These two forms of postcolonial writing back to the centre differ in the way that they are related to colonial power. In an oppositional postcolonial a clear difference between colonised and coloniser is emphasised. Characteristics of such a postcolonial are a striving towards autonomy and political independence from the imperium as well as a concern with second language and "race" (Mishra & Hodge [1993]1994: 286; cf Viljoen 1996: 162). A complicit postcolonial on the other hand is typified by a closer relation with the imperial centre, and the resistance in this form of postcolonial is rather located in the fragmentation, discontinuities and instability of the colonial discourse itself (Mishra & Hodge [1993]1994: 277). Whereas the identities of coloniser and colonised are constructed as separate and distinct in an oppositional postcolonial, a complicit post-

colonial instead foregrounds the instability of attempts made in the colonial discourse to oppose coloniser and colonised in a binary pair. This two-part framework of Mishra and Hodge seems a suitable one in which to read Afrikaans postcolonial texts because of the above-mentioned double position of Afrikaans literature with regard to the centre of colonial discourse. While the notion of an oppositional postcolonial provided a way of theorising literary opposition against apartheid from a perspective of active resistance by those who strove to gain autonomy from the power structures of the colonising regime, there also needed to be a way in which resistance from within the structures of racial privilege and power could be read. The idea of a complicit postcolonial proved an adequate way to describe the processes of undermining of and aversion to the master discourse of apartheid that could be noted in the Afrikaans literature at least since the sixties. Viljoen (1996) has already shown that Afrikaans literature prior to 1994 could be read in this way. One of the hypotheses of my study was that the Afrikaans literature after 1994, being texts that were written in the (literally) postcolonial era, could still be read within this dichotomy suggested by Mishra and Hodge.

Because the objective of my study was also to establish the way in which cultural identity is constructed in postcolonial Afrikaans texts, a correlation between identity and postcolonial resistance against the discourse of apartheid had to be found. This was provided by the observation of Stuart Hall ([1993] 1994: 393) regarding the two moments of cultural reconstruction after a period of colonialism. Hall shows that culture can either be regarded as a static, stable framework of meaning, or as a fragmented, discontinuous and dynamic process. Within the “first moment” of cultural reconstruction, as Hall calls it, cultural identity is seen in terms of a shared culture, a collective “true self” which people with a shared history and genealogy have in common. Cultural identity then reflects the shared historical experiences and shared cultural codes that provide this group with a stable, unchanging and continuous framework of meaning and reference, regardless of divisions and contingencies of history. This unity of often diverse postcolonial subjects is sometimes achieved by a reactivation of precolonial myths and traditions, in order to reconstruct an essentialist identity which can be opposed to the identity of the coloniser. The positive appreciation of the cultural marker “black” in the Black Power movement or Senghor’s Negritude is an example of such a homogenising principle (cf Brah 1992: 127). This strategic reconstruction of an essential cultural identity, called “strategic essentialism” by Spivak (1990: 11-12), shows similarities with what Mishra and Hodge identify as an oppositional postcolonial, where a distinct colonised identity is also constructed to oppose the identity of the coloniser. It thus follows that within an oppositional postcolonial, culture would be seen as more or less static, as an inherent or essential quality that shapes identity, and which can be rediscovered as it was in a precolonial era, before it was damaged by the colonial discourse of cultural superiority.

The second moment of cultural reconstruction that Hall refers to, is one in which a realisation dawns that the colonised culture can never again be rediscovered in its precolonial, pristine state. The colonised cultural identity is thus seen as discontinuous, heterogenous and fragmented. These very fragments can constitute the uniqueness of a certain colonised community. Cultural identity in this sense is as much a process of becoming as a state of being. Cultural identity is thus not seen as transcendent above place, time or history. It can indeed be rooted in experiences, rituals and remembrance of the past, but it is directed towards the present and undergoes change, subject to the processes of history and shifting power relations.

Far from being grounded in mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.

(Hall [1993]1994: 394)

Cultural identity, seen in this second moment to which Hall refers, is not an essence but a positioning in relation to history and to the future, within full knowledge that the schism with the past is complete. Cultural identity is thus seen as a *construct* by means of memory, phantasy and myth, a complex position between the forces of continuity and fracture, sameness and difference (Hall [1993]1994: 395-396). If cultural identity is seen as such a never-ending process of change, of moving forward and backward between present, past and future, it would have to be constructed in relation to the ever-changing cultural signifiers that the postcolonial subject is surrounded with. Culture, not being static or essential, would thus be something that is constantly being reinvented, negotiated, produced in interactive processes. Here Bhabha’s concept of hybridity provides an explanation for the way in which such a cultural negotiation takes place. In his *Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha shows that cultural identity is negotiated in a Third Space of enunciation (1994: 37). Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which makes the claim of hierarchical “purity of cultures” – as claimed in colonial discourses as well as postcolonial discourses in which a pristine precolonial culture is being reactivated by strategic essentialism – untenable (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 118). For Bhabha cultural identity is thus always a relational identity, shifting as the social processes change and rendering impossible notions of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Whereas the exoticising notion of diverse cultures could serve to uphold hierarchies of power, hybridisation rather undermines power structures connected to cultural differences, the latter often simplified into binaries of race within a colonial discourse. Bhabha’s concept of hybridisation of culture therefore works contra-hegemonically to overturn claims to cultural superiority that arise from the notion that cultures are fundamentally and essentially different and separate

entities. Bhabha shows how, through the strategies of ambivalence and mimicry, the claims made by colonial discourse of cultural purity and superiority of the colonisers are refuted on the basis of transcultural movement. The cultural identities of coloniser and colonised are therefore not separate entities, but entwined. This form of anticolonial discourse could thus be linked to Mishra and Hodge's above-mentioned concept of a complicit postcolonial. In a complicit postcolonial the cultural identities enforced by colonial discourse are also not undermined by opposition, but rather by a foregrounding of the ways in which claims of cultural superiority made by the colonised are fractured by the crossing of other cultural narratives. The ambiguities, undermining influences and internal destabilising forces of the colonial discourse itself are considered to constitute a complicit postcolonial, according to Mishra and Hodge ([1993]1994: 277). The interdependence and mutually constructedness of coloniser and colonised subjectivities, which Bhabha's theory of hybridisation entails (cf Ashcroft et al. 1998: 118), is such an inherent and underlying destabilising factor in colonial discourse. Because the notion of hybridity shows that culture is neither essential, static, nor containable, the colonial hierarchy of cultural identities are dispelled and replaced by an awareness of the transcultural processes inherent to all colonial encounters.

Examples of both the above-mentioned perspectives on cultural identity and of both forms of postcolonial writing back to the discourse of apartheid can be found in recent Afrikaans short fiction. Because these postcolonial texts offer resistance against the discourse of apartheid in an oppositional as well as a complicit way, the Afrikaans short fiction since 1994 can still be read as a "fused postcolonial" (Mishra & Hodge [1993]1994: 277). While certain texts place the previously colonised in a direct opposition vis-à-vis the former coloniser, other texts instead focus on the way in which postcolonial subjects who in the colonial discourse of apartheid were relegated to different cultural or racial groups are mutually involved, their cultures entwined and their identities negotiated in relation with one another. In other words: while some texts retain the colonial binary but only turn it around so that the former Other now becomes a postcolonial Self, other texts hybridise the colonial binary so that cultural or racial opposition is no longer possible.

Another category could be identified within which Afrikaans short fiction after 1994 could be read. In several texts a resistance towards new forms of imperialisation could already be noted. In these texts criticism is levelled against conditions in postapartheid South Africa which are seen as new forms of repression or stifling of individual freedom as well as continued material inequalities. Indications can be found that a discourse of discontent is starting to appear in postcolonial Afrikaans texts, where a new antihegemonic sensitivity is displayed alongside attempts to dismantle the legacy of the previous hegemony.

This tendency should not, however, be hastily dismissed as a nostalgia within Afrikaans literature for the privileges of the past, nor should it be seen as an attempt

to reinvokethe clear-cut binary divisions of colonial discourse. It is rather an example of a disillusionment that according to Hawley (1996: xix) is often a characteristic of postcolonial texts. According to Hawley the phase after postcolonial nationalism is frequently marked by a dissatisfaction with the national identity that was the unifying factor in an anticolonial discourse. This dissatisfaction arises mainly from the discontinuity between the utopia that was envisaged in the anticolonial discourse and the dystopia that eventually came into being (Hawley 1996: xix). Whereas anticolonial discourses homogenise the experiences and interests of an often diverse colonised group, a postcolonial era often brings a renewed focus on individual, group or class interests, Matsikidze (1996: 139-147) points out.

This tendency can also be seen in Afrikaans short fiction after 1994, regarding issues such as individual safety in an extremely violent society, sustained or increasing poverty and what is seen as an imperialising stance of the postapartheid government towards cultural and linguistic rights of minorities. This disillusionment often stems from the marginalised position of the (especially white) Afrikaans postcolonial subject's minority position in a society where he (and the pronoun is used advisedly) was previously in a position of power. The above-mentioned disillusionment noticeable in Afrikaans short fiction after 1994 is not, however, simply equatable to the colonial discourse of superiority. It should rather be seen against the background of ideals that were strived for in the dissident Afrikaans discourse since the 1960s but were not realised in the postcolonial South African context after 1994. For instance, whereas a critical uncovering of the violence perpetrated by the coloniser against the colonised formed the focus of many anti-apartheid literary texts before 1994, dissatisfaction with the high level of violence in the postapartheid society is now expressed in recent Afrikaans short fiction. While the claims to cultural and racial superiority made in the discourse of apartheid came under attack in dissident Afrikaans writing prior to 1994, the perceived relegation of minority cultures to the private sphere is one instance of the continued resistance against the exertion of political power based on cultural difference. Afrikaans writing thus continues to resist cultural imperialisation, even if the hegemony against which its dissent is aimed has shifted from a colonial minority to a majority. This does not mean that Afrikaans texts in which criticism is levelled against the postapartheid hegemony should not be subjected to a critical reading to establish whether they in fact do strive to perpetuate the colonial discourse of privilege rather than attack new forms of imperialisation.



#### 4 Speaking on Behalf of the Subaltern

The mediation of previously colonised cultures within the previously dominant Afrikaans literary discourse is an obviously problematic one, as this speaking on behalf of the other of apartheid could bring about a further silencing of the subaltern, in the manner which Spivak referred to in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988: 308). Speaking on behalf of another, marginalised cultural and linguistic group from a position within the literary discourse which in the past contributed to this marginalisation, could also serve as a writing back to the colonial discourse and facilitate a hybridisation of the former master culture. According to Brink (1991: 11) a postcolonial reconstruction of identity would also have to entail a rewriting of past history from the point of view of the colonised. This could result in a transcultural exploration of cultural difference and a better understanding of previously estranged cultural groupings (cf Roos quoted in Van Niekerk 1996: 20). But, such a change in focus could also produce an exoticism similar to that of the colonial discourse, especially due to an insistence on authenticity, which could represent an essentialist position (cf Ashcroft et al. 1998: 21).

In the texts that were analysed, it seems as if a greater sensitivity for the problems surrounding a mediation of a cultural Other has been incorporated in post-1994 Afrikaans short fiction that attempts to mediate the experiences of the previously colonised. Some texts acknowledge the position of power associated with narration on behalf of the marginalised by inscribing self-consciously the role of the observer and his/her culturally constructedness. In Riana Scheepers’s short story “Klipsop” [Stone Soup] (1994: 33) for example, this is done by metaphorically extending an adventurous excursion by a group of Afrikaans Boy Scouts (“Voortrekkers”) to become a parable of the colonial invasion of the interior by white colonists. The key role that the boys’ observation of a group of rural Xhosa-speaking women plays in facilitating their overpowering of the women to steal firewood for their campfire, could be read as a foregrounding of the power that underlies the observation and narration of a culturally different group. Although this story seems to be an attempt to criticise the violence perpetrated by colonial power in transcultural contact, it itself falls prey to an exoticising and mystifying representation of the Xhosa culture.

A more self-reflexive awareness of the role of the observer in a mediation of the other, could be found in the texts of Izak de Vries. In his story “Die mooiste meisie” [“The Most Beautiful Girl”] (1998: 71), the assumptions with which “traditional” South African cultures are assimilated and consumed by Western tourism is brought into focus. The story shows how a traditional myth about virginal sacrifices is transformed by a tour guide as well as by the tourists themselves to suit a Western conceptual framework. In metafictional passages (cf p. 73) the narrator of the story comments on how the tourists are displacing the Venda legend to a world inhabited by telephones, room service, ice cream, discos, MTV and tranquilisers (pp. 75-76)

even as they are hearing the tour guide telling the story. In doing so the narrator not only indicates the impossibility for colonised culture to stay pristine and precolonially intact in the postmodern, late-capitalist age where tourism can be seen as a form of neocolonialism (cf Van Elteren 1995: 59; Gunew 1997: 38), but also self-consciously declares the complicity of his own narration in this process of cultural consumption. By coinscribing himself into his narrative, the narrator indicates that he is not only able to claim objectivity but is also culturally determined even while he attempts to reactivate a legend from a marginalised culture.

These and other examples were found in texts published after 1994 which made it possible to conclude that there is a definite attempt to broaden the scope of Afrikaans literature to include the experiences and cultural codes of the previously colonised and in so doing to give impetus to a transcultural exploration of difference. It was, however, also established that the tendencies of the colonial discourse have not completely been left behind: the representation of the Other of apartheid is often still marked by exoticism, paternalism or the construction of the subaltern within a repressed position, thus perpetuating the silence to which colonial discourse has condemned the subaltern.

As a brief illustration of how the above-mentioned dichotomy of Mishra and Hodge ([1993]1994: 277), namely a complicit and oppositional postcolonial, is manifested in Afrikaans short fiction after 1994, an example in each of these categories will subsequently be given. I will also attempt to show how the reconstruction of cultural identity according to the different views on culture as either essential or dynamic articulates with Mishra and Hodge's dichotomy when applied to Afrikaans short stories. Because of the limited scope of this article, only one example of each category will be given.

## **5 Oppositional Postcolonial**

Although the opposition between Self and Other might seem obsolete in the cultural discourse of postapartheid South Africa (cf. Oliphant 1999: 8), where the oppressive racial opposition between coloniser and colonised has been replaced by majority rule, a reading of Afrikaans short texts of this period does suggest that this opposition is still upheld in certain cases. The existence of these oppositional texts alongside ones in which the colonial binary is discarded in favour of hybrid postcolonial identities, proves Spivak's remark as applicable to Afrikaans literature: "[T]he itinerary from colonial through national to post-colonial and/or migrant subjects is complex, diverse, many-levelled" (1994: 147).

The retaining of the colonial binary in these texts can be seen as a consolidation of identity on the side of the previously colonised, in which strategies such as

essentialism and homogenisation might serve as a means of social binding. The underlying motivation of this discursive stance is the reconstruction of a cultural identity damaged by colonialism, a choice for cultural restitution instead of new hybrid formations. The colonial binary is now turned around to place the previously colonised at the centre of the production of meaning.

As an example of how Mishra and Hodge's concept of the oppositional postcolonial is manifested in Afrikaans short fiction after 1994, S.P. Benjamin's story "Op soek na 'n somer" ["In Search of a Summer"] from his collection *Die lewe is 'n halwe roman* ["Life Is Half a Novel"], published in 1999, could be read.<sup>2</sup>

Although Benjamin's story deals primarily with a love affair rather than overtly addressing postcolonial issues, the milieu in which the two main characters find themselves, namely a squatter camp, is incorporated in the story's theme as an identity-producing environment. The detailed description of the characters' living conditions and the influence it has on their identity, could also be seen as a rectification of the silence that surrounded colonised subjects in the Afrikaans colonial discourse. In this reinscription of the living conditions of the former colonised, the categories of apartheid are largely kept in place by distinguishing between "white", "black" and "coloured" subjects.<sup>3</sup> Since class could be seen as a corollary to "race" in the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid (according to Visser 1997: 79 class is in fact the determining factor in this power discourse), the centering of meaning in the experiences of the working (or rather unemployed) class in Benjamin's story is significant. The detailed account of their material conditions could be seen as part of the reversal of the binary, which is not only based upon "race" but upon class as well.

"Race" does, however, inform the construction of identity in "Op soek na 'n somer". Instead of a shift towards a broader South African cultural identity, difference is still seen in terms of colour. A "coloured" identity is now charged with positive meaning and counterpoised to the identity of "black" or "white" subjects. The material circumstances of these subjects do, however, determine the construction of their "race". The identity of the central character, Stienie, as "coloured" is formed by her difference from "the bloody rich people on the other side of the main road" (Benjamin 1999: 36; my translation),<sup>4</sup> namely the white couple whom she refers to as the "white ones" (p. 41; my translation)<sup>5</sup> in whose house she works as a domestic servant where she "sweats in front of the pots and stoves of strangers" (p. 40; my translation).<sup>6</sup> The determining role of Stienie's material circumstances in the construction of her subjectivity is metaphorically present in the observation of her home by the character Sylvester, a suitor, who comes to visit. He notices that her humble home does not have any interior decorations, because she could not even afford photographs. The walls are instead finished with newspaper. Sylvester then remarks on the fact that, unlike the people living "in big brick homes on the other side of the main road and in town",<sup>7</sup> they

have to get used to strange faces staring at them from the walls. “Your own photos ... , your own memories you keep in a drawer, or even in an old shoe box” (pp. 37-38).<sup>8</sup> The individual subjectivity of the colonised (iconically represented here by photographs) is thus repressed by her *class* position, and this upholds the *racial* division between herself and the “whites” on the other side of town.

A homogenisation of the colonised is indeed not part of the opposition drawn up between the previously colonised and former colonisers. Stenie’s identity is contrasted with that of “black” or “white” people, although she is specifically identified as a speaker of Afrikaans, but differentiated from white Afrikaans speakers, here denoted by the derogatory word “boers” (“boere”). Stenie describes as follows her problematic position – which illustrates the point made earlier about the double position of Afrikaans – as Afrikaans speaker belonging neither to the former colonisers nor to one of the other previously colonised, indigenous languages:

The old TV is tonight probably only showing a lot of boer nonsense, or stories that she cannot follow because of the strange languages. And it isn’t worth the trouble to try reading the English underneath. It is so damn difficult on her portable black and white set.

(Benjamin 1999: 36; my translation)<sup>9</sup>

Stenie levels criticism against both whites (as being racist) and blacks (stealing from the affluent class), thus positioning herself as an outsider of both groups. In reply to a question on whether she still works for a certain white family, she says:

No, those people don’t live in town anymore. They began sneering at the blacks who suddenly started lying about in the town’s streets on Saturday mornings. I am not so sure whether there is still place for people like that in this country. We are just good enough to stand around in their kitchens. But, well, that’s not the only reason they left town. The bloody blacks can’t keep their hands off other people’s property, you know.

(Benjamin 1999: 43; my translation)<sup>10</sup>

On the basis of passages like the above, Benjamin’s story could be read within the framework of an oppositional postcolonial. It writes back against the discourse that formed part of the historic privilege of whites and caused people of other “races” to occupy lower-class positions. The living conditions of the victims of apartheid are reinscribed by the story into the Afrikaans literary discourse, while at the same time destigmatising Afrikaans as “language of the oppressor” by indicating that Afrikaans speakers also counted among the former colonised. A “coloured” identity is constructed that differs from that of other former colonised, thereby preventing a homogenisation of the colonised that could again lead to a silencing of a specific subaltern group. By linking “race” to class, the story also serves as a warning against

too early a celebration of South Africa as a postcolonial state without bearing in mind the immense material inequalities that still exist. As Ama Ata Aidoo put it: “Ask any African village woman how post-colonial her life is ... Colonialism has not been ‘posted’ anywhere” (Aidoo quoted by Schipper 1996: 9).

## 6 Complicit Postcolonial

Several short stories written in Afrikaans since 1994 could be read within the framework of a complicit postcolonial, where the resistance against the discourse of apartheid does not take the form of a binary opposition that has been turned around. In these texts the internal instabilities and ambivalence of the colonial discourse are rather foregrounded and the colonial binary undermined by strategies such as mimicry (Bhabha 1994). In this form of postcolonial writing, coloniser and colonised are not seen as naturally opposed groups because of their cultural differences being reduced to the biological categories of “race”. Rather the ways in which their cultures interact, overlap and are negotiated in what Bhabha (1994: 37) calls a Third Space of enunciation, are highlighted.

One of these stories<sup>11</sup> is “Ons moet vir jou ‘n bees slag” [“We Must Slaughter an Ox for You”] by Izak de Vries (1998). In this story a former officer in the apartheid army, Johannes, still has nightmares about his experiences in the Angolan war. He feels guilty about the transgressions that he had a part in, to such an extent that he is unable to have a normal relationship with a woman (p. 79). After having tried unsuccessfully to find redemption from his guilt in the Christian faith, he turns to the Zulu culture. His girlfriend is of the opinion that he suffers from “classic white guilt” (p. 83) and says that Johannes has told her of his deep respect for the Zulu culture and that he would like to become part of it (p. 83).

The former officer then oversteps the cultural boundaries laid upon him by the colonial discourse by exposing himself to a purifying ritual that is part of the previously colonised culture. His experience does not simply equal a colonial appropriation of the subjugated culture. Rather, the authority passes from the former colonial culture to the colonised culture, which now inscribes its values on the culture of the former coloniser. The colonised culture is not merely *exotica* that can be collected without the coloniser’s frame of reference being altered, as is the case in the colonial discourse. In De Vries’s story it is the coloniser’s assumptions and preconceptions that are subjected to re-evaluation. Johannes even considers undergoing physical change in the form of ritual circumcision (p. 83). As preparation for the ritual, he exchanges his clothes for a blanket, a symbolic token of the shedding of his cultural prejudices. Johannes, the former coloniser, now becomes the object of observation, thus turning around the process of surveillance typical of colonial

encounters (cf Aschroft et al. 1998: 226-229). Note in this regard the narrator's remarks about the Zulu traditional healer's interrogation of Johannes:

The man started asking questions .... I first want to know about her, he says. "Did you have sex with her while she was menstruating?" "No", says Johannes, "we are both virgins". Johannes has trouble verbalising the concept, because the Zulu concept, "intombi emsulwa", usually refers to a young girl and not a man. The man, however, nods. Still he continues asking ....

(De Vries 1998: 82; my translation)<sup>12</sup>

The narrator sums up the situation by emphasising how little Johannes speaks compared to how much he listens (De Vries 1998: 82).

The former soldier then undergoes a Zulu ritual in which an ox is slaughtered in order for him to lay down the burden of the past. As preparation he has to drink a mixture that puts him in a trance (pp. 86-87) in which he hears the voice of one of the victims of a military operation that he commanded. The voice, which is probably mediated through the Zulu traditional healer who possesses the "gift of ventriloquism" (p. 85; my translation), exposes the secrets about the operation to the others present. The information that comes to the fore in this act serves as criticism of the war that was conducted on the Namibian border and in Angola by the apartheid government, and as such De Vries's story could be seen as a continuation of the important genre called "grensliteratuur" ["border literature", also "weeping literature", by way of a pun on the Afrikaans word "grens" which means "border" or "blubber"]. The spirit divulges information about the cold-blooded killing of innocent civilians during said military operation (De Vries 1998: 88). The enormous physical and spiritual damage done to soldiers as well as their enemies by the border war, which could be seen as the protection of the interests of the colonial apartheid government, is thus foregrounded in the text.

The Zulu ritual is seen by Johannes as a substitute for the Christian tradition in which he was brought up. He is of the opinion that Western religion has closed the communication channels with God (De Vries p. 83).

After the cleansing ritual, where the "strange spirit" of the victim is exorcised (p. 85), Johannes is able to revisit his own culture and transfer new meaning to it. He gets married in the Church of the Vow in Pietermaritzburg (p. 92), a building which commemorates the colonial expansion of Afrikaners in the interior during the Great Trek of 1838. The centenary of the Trek in 1938 also played an important role in Afrikaner nationalist myth forming (cf Cameron & Spies 1986: 260). The wedding in this church, however, rewrites colonial history by placing the traditional Afrikaner, Christian ceremony in a postapartheid, culturally hybrid space. Outside the church minibus-taxis can be heard transporting passengers to a gathering commemorating the unbanning of the ANC's armed wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (p.

92), thus an alternative history, that of the struggle against apartheid is inscribed on the space. Another layer is thereby added to the cultural palimpsest. The narrator further hybridises the Afrikaner wedding by wrapping his wedding gift in a newspaper which carries the political vision of the ANC leader Ronnie Kasrils (p. 92).

At the end of the story it seems impossible to clearly separate the cultural identities of the coloniser and the colonised. The former colonisers still inhabit their traditional Christian world, but its borders have been shifted to include the cultural practices of the previously colonised. Culture is therefore not seen in this story as a fixed essence, but rather as a process of negotiation between coloniser and colonised. In Bhabha's Third Space cultural identity is constructed without boundaries ever being finalised and with cultural frameworks overlapping. De Vries's story could be read as a complicit postcolonial because the resistance against apartheid and the Christian religion associated with it – a religion which to a large extent has not only provided the legitimising principles of colonial discourse in South Africa, but has also in other contexts been criticised for its Eurocentric assumptions (Aschroft et al. 1998: 92) – comes from a representative of colonial power itself. Although Johannes cannot claim autonomy from the colonising culture, he criticises the transgressions that stemmed from assumptions about the superiority of this culture. The sympathetic representation of the main character's attempt to confess his political guilt by engaging with the past, contributes to the reading of the text as a complicit postcolonial, because it foregrounds the instability within colonial power itself rather than to oppose it from a position outside the colonial discourse. Johannes is not simply portrayed as the cruel other of an antihegemonic discourse, but also as a postcolonial subject that works towards land restitution by giving the families of apartheid victims back their ancestral burial ground (De Vries 1998: 86). By eschewing a stereotypical portrayal of the white Afrikaner in favour of more complex relationships between coloniser and colonised, a simple reversal of the binary is made difficult, even impossible.

While a complete break with the past is not possible, the text nevertheless revisits the past with an openness to new cultural influences and with the conviction that the colonial past has to be atoned for in some way. The main character shares the responsibility for apartheid against which he now takes a stand. The message is that redemption can be found in the renegotiation of cultural boundaries and the abdication of power by the coloniser's culture in favour of a new, hybrid cultural identity.

## 7 Postcolonial Disillusionment

While the writing back to the colonial discourse of apartheid has been the preoccupation of Afrikaans short stories since 1994 that engage with postcolonial subject matter, critical voices can already be heard with regard to what is perceived as new forms of imperialisation. As mentioned above, this criticism could arise from a dissatisfaction with the identities that were constructed in an anticolonial discourse or from a disillusionment with the dystopia that has been realised instead of the utopian expectations envisaged in anticolonial discourse.

To name a few themes: the prevalence of violent crime in postcolonial South Africa is dealt with in Riana Scheepers's stories "Boek" ["Book"] and "Maar daar is" ["But There Is"], both from her 1999 collection "Feeks" ["Shrew"]. In "Maar daar is" the wife of a white farmer is brutally attacked, but finds solace in the presence of her black domestic worker. While the class difference between them is still evident, it seems that the white character can only see a future for herself in the country in relation with the former colonised. The story should be read in the context of the farm-novel tradition in Afrikaans, which formed an important part of Afrikaner-nationalist discourse as well as the reaction against it (cf Wasserman 1997). The farm as ideal space where white Afrikaners found their true identity in the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism (J.M. Coetzee 1988: 80; Ampie Coetzee 1990), is now a space where identity is lost: "She had to try to find out who she was. Because the laughing woman that she had been ..., that woman she was no longer" (Scheepers 1999: 66; my translation).<sup>13</sup> Identity is then *reconstructed*, this time in conjunction with the previously colonised. Nevertheless a strong sense of disenchantment with postcolonial South Africa prevails:

The silent woman bowed her head, down, until it was against the black woman's shoulder. She could smell the woman against her: the smoke of wood fires that curl up against a thick thatched roof, the fat with which she rubs in her skin, the sweat and the dust of a long way on foot. She could still smell, she thought.

There is no consolation in this country, the woman knows, but there is.

(Scheepers 1999: 68; my translation)<sup>14</sup>

Whereas this story shows a disillusionment with the state of affairs in post-colonial South Africa, overt criticism is directed against the politicians in power in another story in the same collection by Scheepers. "Dis hulle storie" ["It's Their Story"], is told from the first-person point of view of a previously colonised resident of a township who has lost all faith in the ability of politicians to change his living conditions. He suspects that he might have contracted Aids, and hears of a superstition that sexual intercourse with a virgin can cure it. He declares that he would rather trust this information, received from his fellow residents ("men who



know life from the bottom up”, 1999: 81; my translation),<sup>15</sup> than the wisdom of politicians:

Never has one of the lot of high-to-mighties in their navy suits on TV and the lot of ruttish women with their shrill shouting to canvass votes for their own political parties done something for me and the people of Plakkiesdorp. From the NP with its bald-headed men all the way to Mandela and his hangers-on and all the rest not one of them has ever once come to see what it is like here in the shacks and the streets. Nothing. I owe them nothing. So, if they come shouting about rape and crime and democracy and the New South Africa, I'll close my ears and fuck off. It's their story, not mine. It's easy to speak if you stay in Bishopscourt, Plakkiesdorp is another storie and it has fuck all to do with the New South Africa.

(Scheepers 1999: 81)<sup>16</sup>

The contrast that the narrator makes between the affluent suburb of Bishopscourt and his township, confirms the remarks made by Matsikidze (1996: 139-147) that class interests in a postcolonial discourse at some point become more important than liberation from oppression. In this story by Scheepers repeated reference is made to the way class informs moral choices, whether it is about child molesting (1999: 81-82), gangsterism and drug abuse (p. 82) or the futility of the police to enforce the law (p. 83).

The importance of class in a postcolonial South Africa is also seen from a white point of view in the stories by Jaco Fouché in his 1997-collection *Paartjie by Jakes* [“Party at Jakes’s”]. In the above-mentioned stories by Scheepers, the New South Africa has not bettered the class position of the former colonised. In Fouché’s stories it has worsened that of the white Afrikaner male. In one of Fouché’s stories, “Van Jaarsveld uit die as” [“Van Jaarsveld out of the Ashes”], a link is established between the main character’s pitiful situation and the shift towards a new cultural hegemony where Afrikaans has fallen out of favour. This brings about a hypocritical denial of Afrikaans in day-to-day life and a relegation of the language to the private sphere, typical of liberal pluralism, where ethnic difference is privatised so as not to interfere with the dominant culture (cf Papastergiadis 1996: 81). The main character in Fouché’s “Van Jaarsveld ...” remarks on this, not completely without critical irony:

He again looks at the WAITRESS WANTED sign in the window. Typical, it strikes him, even in Bellville [a suburb known for its predominantly Afrikaans-speaking population], business transactions are done in English. You speak Afrikaans at home, but when you go out, then you live in English.

(Fouché 1999: 96; my translation)<sup>17</sup>

This foregrounding of the perceived new marginalisation of Afrikaans corresponds with Hawley’s remarks about the renewed focus on individual interests in a period following anticolonial nationalism and stemming from postcolonial disillusionment

(1996: xxi). This disillusionment is made very clear by the narrator of Fouché's story:

Hell, how things have changed in the country! Ten, twelve years ago he could walk out of university with a partial degree and walk straight into a job and within three months have a new car, within a year stay in a house of his own, then meet Madie .... He stops this train of thought. The past looks too appealing to think about for long.

(Fouché 1997: 97; my translation)<sup>18</sup>

## 8 Conclusion

From the Afrikaans short stories that have been read within a postcolonial framework, it can be concluded that the Afrikaans literature after 1994 can still be read in terms of what Mishra and Hodge ([1993]1994: 277) calls a fused post-colonial, a typification that according to Viljoen (1996) is applicable to the Afrikaans literature prior to 1994. The cultural identity constructed in these texts is similar to the two moments of cultural reconstruction that Hall (1992) mentions, namely a strategic essentialism of the colonised subject on the one hand and a hybridised cultural identity that is the result of an ongoing, dynamic process of negotiation on the other. A discourse of resistance against particularly new forms of cultural imperialism, arising from a broader disillusionment with the perceived dystopia of postcolonial South Africa, could also be inferred from certain Afrikaans short stories that have appeared since 1994. As far as a renewed undermining of imperialising tendencies is concerned, these texts can be considered a continuation of the dissidence that has been characteristic of Afrikaans literature for several decades.

## Notes

1. Approximately 5,8 million South Africans have Afrikaans as their mother tongue, which constitutes 15,7% of the South African population. Afrikaans has the third most first-language speakers in South Africa, after Zulu (21,61%) and Xhosa (17,44%). Approximately 9 million South Africans can speak and/or understand Afrikaans as a second or third language. 15 million people in total – 48% of the population – can therefore understand or speak Afrikaans (Van Rensburg et al. 1997: 80-82).
2. Some other texts that can be read as part of an oppositional postcolonial are for example Hein Willemse's "n Donker meisie in Tépótlán" ["A Dark Girl in Tépótlán"] in Rode & Gerwel (1995), Anton Basson's "Die oudisie" ["The Audition"] in Jooste (1996), J.M. Lenake's "Vervloë jare" ["Years gone by"] in Jooste (1996) and Riana Scheepers's "Armband" ["Bangle"] (1999).

3. Although the author in an interview (Wasserman 2000: 4) distanced himself from the classification of his work as “coloured literature” (described as such by a reviewer, Potgieter 2000: 8), the publisher’s note on the back flap of his book states that a world is laid bare in Benjamin’s collection of stories that has seldom before been described in Afrikaans.
4. Original Afrikaans: “die bleddie rykes aan die anderkant van die hoofstraat” (Benjamin 1999: 36)
5. Original Afrikaans: “wittes” (Benjamin 1999: 41)
6. Original Afrikaans: “voor vreemde mense se potte en stowe staan en sweet” (Benjamin 1999: 40)
7. Original Afrikaans: “groot baksteenhuse oorkant die hoofpad en op die dorp” (Benjamin 1999: 37)
8. Original Afrikaans: “Jou eie foto’s ..., jou eie herinneringe hou jy in ‘n laai of somer in ‘n ou skoendoos” (Benjamin 1999: 37-38).
9. Original Afrikaans: “Die ou TV wys vanaand ook seker weer net ‘n klomp boeregemors, of stories wat sy as gevolg van die vreemde tale nie kan volg nie. En dis ook nie die moeite werd om die Engels onderaan te probeer lees nie. Dis dêm moeilik so op haar draagbare swart-en-wit stelletjie” (Benjamin 1999: 36).
10. Original Afrikaans: “Nee, daardie mense woon nie meer op die dorp nie. Hulle het hul neuse begin optrek vir die swartes wat skielik so Saterdagoggende die strate van die dorp begin vollê het. Ek weet darem nie of daar nog plek is vir sulke mense in hierdie land nie. Ons is net goed genoeg om vir hulle in hul kombuise rond te staan. Maar nou ja, dis seker nie al rede hoekom hulle op die dorp weg is nie. Die bleddie swartes kan mos ook nie hul hande van ander se goed af hou nie” (Benjamin 1999: 43).
11. Other examples are “Die verlede lê nog voor” [“The Future Still Lies Ahead”] by Izak de Vries (1998), Lindsay King’s “Die beach” [“The Beach”] in Willemse (1999), P.J. Bosman’s (1998) “In die skaduwee” [“In the Shade”], Marita van der Vyver’s “St. Christopher op die parade” [“St. Christopher on the Parade”] in Rode & Gerwel (1995) and J.M. Gilfillan’s “Rosita se storie” [“Rosita’s Story”] in Jooste (1996).
12. Original Afrikaans: “Die man begin baie vrae vra .... ‘Ek wil eers weet oor haar’, sê hy. ‘Het jy met haar seks gehad as sy menstrueer?’ ‘Nee’, sê Johannes, ‘ons is albei maagde’. Johannes sukkel om die begrip te verbaliseer, want die Zulu-begrip, ‘intombi emsulwa’, het gewoonlik betrekking op ‘n jong meisie en nie ‘n man nie. Die man knik egter. Tog hou hy aan vra ...” (De Vries 1998: 82).

13. Original Afrikaans: “Sy moes probeer agterkom wie sy is. Want die laggende vrou wat sy wás, die een wat soggens vroeg met arms vol veldblomme van buite ingekom het, haar wange gloeiend soos die blinkgeskuurde koperpote waarin sy die vreugde van haar blomme geranskik het; die vrou wat mandjies vol aarbeie gepluk en uitgedeel het, en vroeëperskes en suurlemoene soos die seisoen en die oes op die plaas was, daardie vrou was sy nie meer nie” (Scheepers 1999: 66).
14. Original Afrikaans: “Die stil vrou het haar kop laat sak, af, tot teen die swart vrou se skouer. Sy kon die vrou teen haar ruik: die rook van houtvure wat opdwarrel teen ‘n dik rietgrasdak, die vet waarmee sy haar vel insmeer, die sweet en die stof van ‘n lang pad te voet. Sy kan nog ruik, het sy gedink. Daar is nie troos in hierdie land nie, weet die vrou, maar daar is” (Scheepers 1999: 68).
15. Original Afrikaans: “... manne wat die lewe van onder af ken” (1999: 81).
16. Original Afrikaans: “Nog nooit het die spul high-to-mighties in hul navy suits op die TV en die spul loopse vroue met hul skril geskree wat stemme werf vir hul eie political parties één dag se iets vir my en die mense hier van Plakkiesdorp gedoen nie. Van die NP met sy kaalkopmanne tot dwarsdeur Mandela en sy aanhangsels en die hele spul van die res het nog nooit een dag iemand van hulle kom kyk hoe dit gaan hier in die shacks en strate nie. Niks. Ek skuld hulle niks. So, as hulle begin skree oor rape en crime en aids en democracy en die New South Africa, dan maak ek my oë en my ore toe en fokof. Dis hulle storie, nie myne nie. Dis maklik om te praat as jy in Bishopscourt bly, Plakkiesdorp isse ander storie en dit het fokol uit te waaie met die New South Africa” (Scheepers 1999: 81).
17. Original Afrikaans: “Hy beskou weer die WAITRESS WANTED-teken in die venster. Tipies, val dit hom op, selfs in Bellville geskied saketransaksies in Engels. Afrikaans praat ‘n mens by die huis, maar wanneer jy uitgaan, dan leef jy in Engels” (Fouché 1997: 96).
18. Original Afrikaans: “Hel, hoe het dinge in die land nie verander nie! Tien, twaalf jaar terug het hy met ‘n gedeeltelike graad uit varsity uit dadelik in ‘n job ingestap en binne drie maande ‘n nuwe kar gehad, binne ‘n jaar in ‘n huis van sy eie gebly, toe vir Madie ontmoet .... Hy stuit dié gedagtegang. Die verlede kom te aanloklik voor om lank daaroor te dink” (Fouché 1997: 97).

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