



Identity and difference: Some nineteenth and early twentieth century South African texts

Johan van Wyk

To cite this article: Johan van Wyk (1994) Identity and difference: Some nineteenth and early twentieth century South African texts, *Journal of Literary Studies*, 10:3-4, 302-317, DOI: [10.1080/02564719408530085](https://doi.org/10.1080/02564719408530085)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564719408530085>



Published online: 06 Jul 2007.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 16



View related articles [↗](#)

Identity and Difference: Some Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century South African Texts

Johan van Wyk

Summary

This paper explores constructs of identity and difference in various South African texts of the nineteenth and early twentieth century by relating these texts to the development of print, economic transformations and historical events. Investigating constructs of identity and difference is important because of the emphasis placed on these constructs by the discourse of apartheid.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek konstruksies van identiteit en verskil in verskeie Suid-Afrikaanse tekste van die negentiende en vroeë twintigste eeu deur dit in verband te bring met die ontwikkeling van die drukkuns, ekonomiese omwentelinge en historiese gebeure. Die ondersoek van hierdie konstruksies is belangrik vanweë die klem wat in die diskoers van apartheid daarop geplaas is.

This essay forms part of a work in progress and is largely speculative and provisional. The focus is not on literary history, but on the diverse identity formations to be found in South African texts of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. An awareness of these different identity formations is important in the construction of a South African literary history which is a narrative interplay of different voices and different identity constructs.

Identity implies qualities of continuity, sameness and repeatability "To give birth is to multiply one's self" (Kunene 1979: 70), but also suggests difference and otherness. Identity must further be understood as the product of discourse and history rather than as something essential and ahistorical. This article explores how the identity of the self, but also of the Other as difference, was formulated in some South African texts: Olive Schreiner's *Thoughts on South Africa* (1992) (written in 1892 and published posthumously in 1923), Erasmus Smit's *Diary* (1972) (written in 1837-1838), N.P. van Wyk Louw's *Die dieper reg* (1947) (first published in 1938) and H.I.E. Dhlomo's "Dingane" (written in the late 1930s, but first published in his

Collected Works in 1985).

Identity constructs based on physical continuity, history and culture were pivotal to apartheid discourses. Ethnographic studies and ethnographic fiction that assumed pure identities and closed societies, abounded in the apartheid period. The study of constructs of identity and difference is, therefore, of primary importance for an understanding of apartheid as discursive formation.

In her *Thoughts on South Africa* (1992: 60) Olive Schreiner makes the curious statement that the South African Boer (the white and Afrikaans-speaking peasant and farmer of the nineteenth century) is the "most typically South African". She qualifies this statement as follows:

The Bantu and the Englishman may be found elsewhere on the earth's surface in equal and or greater perfection; but the Boer, like our plumbagos, our silver-trees, and our kudus, is peculiar to South Africa.

(Schreiner 1992: 60)

She commences by locating the Boer's history in terms of time and space; she writes "The history of the Boer begins, as is well known, in 1652, when Van Riebeeck landed at the Cape" (Schreiner 1992: 60) and then she personalises the space of origin, making it a space that can be shared by the reader in its printed representation and hypothetically in reality:

If one climbs alone on a winter's afternoon to the old Block House on the spur of the Devil's Peak at Cape Town, and lies down on the ruined stone bastion, with the warm sun shining on one's back - as one lies there dreaming; the town and shipping in the bay below ... then the noisy little life of the valley slips away from one, and through the mist of two centuries one is almost able to put out one's hand and touch the old, long-buried days, when the first white men built their huts on the shores of Table Bay.

(Schreiner 1992: 60)

Space in this text becomes an important index of the Boer's character. The Boer, according to Schreiner, is different from his modern Australian, Canadian, Yankee and American Spanish counterpart in that he shows no attachment to Europe as home. The "untrodden plains of South Africa" (1992: 62) are complementary to the Boer's "unquenchable passion for movement and change, and [his] fierce rebellion against the limitations with which civilised life hedges about and crushes the life of the individual" (p. 62). The Boer descended from the "free-fighting children of fortune, rovers of the sea and the sword" (p. 62), a "small body of French exiles" (p. 67) and girls from "orphan asylums" (p. 63). These girls are especially

important because

the day in which they landed at Table Bay and first trod on African soil, was also the first in which they became individuals, desired and sought after, and not mere numbers in a printed list. In the arms of the rough soldiers and sailors who welcomed them, they found the first home they had known.

(Schreiner 1992: 66-67)

The Boers' origins and identity, their temperament derived from adventurers, exiles and orphans, are somehow inscribed in their shared blood, a product of their incestuous inbreeding:

From this small stock, by a process of breeding in and in, they have developed, there having been practically no addition made to the breed for the last two hundred years; the comparatively large numbers to which they have attained have entirely to be accounted for by the fact of their personal vigour, very early marriages, and prolific rate of increase. Thus the Boer represents rather a clan or family than a nation; and there is probably no true Boer from the Zambezi to the Cape who does not hold a common *strain of blood* with almost every other Boer he meets. Each Boer has in him, probably, at least a *drop of blood* of these women; and their emotional and intellectual peculiarities can hardly have failed to leave their mark, if slight, upon the racial development.

(Schreiner 1992: 67 my italics)

Their identity as adventurers, exiles and orphans is translated into their love for the physical country. The "plains, rocks and skies" (1992: 75) become the transmutation of their existential being.

In *Capital* (1982) Marx identifies the colonial space as one that makes it difficult for the Capitalist from the mother country to turn the settlers with their existence economies into labourers: the settlers cultivate for themselves, make their own furniture and tools, build their own houses, take their produce to the markets themselves, spin and weave, make soap and candles, shoes and clothes (1982: 935).¹ Escaping from the economic and political misery of Europe, the settlers established themselves in a space where they were largely a law unto themselves. This underlies the many images of omnipotence that mark their discourses.

Schreiner describes her narrative as the result of "long and sympathetic" deciphering of Theal's nineteenth century South African histories (especially his *Cape Commanders*) and John Noble's *History of South Africa*. As is to be expected from the contradictory nineteenth century urge to classify races on the one hand and explain evolutionary patterns on the other, she assumes that there is such a thing as an essential Boer whose particular emergence in history can be explained. The description of this "essence" and its origins

is based on existing printed texts, rather than empirical observations and measurements. In this regard Schreiner's text is different from later ethnographic studies with its detailed photographs, measurements of features and statistical data.

Schreiner (1992: 60) makes the point that somewhere beneath the "bare facts" contained in Theal's and Noble's histories there is material to be transformed into "the great epic of South Africa" by a "seer and singer". History to her becomes a source to be fictionalised, somehow removed from itself: providing material for the making of a fetish. Epic, or narratives about the heroic figures in the migration histories or mythological origins of a people, often form the foundation of an assumed national essence. Epic becomes the object through which a nation idolises its own history. Schreiner's observation is based on the fact that the nineteenth century Afrikaner history of South Africa contains typical epic material: the mass migration into the interior of South Africa, the strong leading figures, the battles with the various peoples of the interior with their peculiar and unusual customs, God's supposed intervention, etc. It is not strange, then, that the Afrikaner nationalists of the twentieth century based their foundational fictions on these events. The movement of the Cape Emigrants or *Voortrekkers* into the South African interior in 1837-1838 has been compared by nationalist ideologues of the 1930s with the travels of the Roman epic hero, Aeneas, and his followers (Moodie 1975: 297). Although the "sacred history" of the Afrikaner has never been versified to the same extent as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Camoëns' *The Lusiads* or Mazisi Kunene's Zulu epic *Emperor Shaka the Great*, the Afrikaner nationalist leader D.F. Malan stated: "Our history is the greatest masterpiece of the centuries" (Moodie 1975: 1). This history, according to Malan, was part of a "divine plan" through which God's "will and determination" (Moodie 1975: 1) is revealed.²

In the twentieth century, this history of divinely inspired invasion formed the basis of a metaphysics, a discourse of sovereignty and terror ultimately expressed in the narrative of apartheid. Derrida described metaphysics as "the unfolding of the structure or schema of an absolute will to hear-oneself-speak" (Spivak 1987: 106). This aptly describes the dominant South African political discourses in the period 1910-1994 when Africans were excluded from the democratic process by the constitution of the Union of South Africa. By being excluded from the process Africans were denied a voice. The African identity was increasingly defined from the outside. White laws circumscribed what Africans should and could be, where they could stay, what they could own, who they could marry, and in which positions they could be employed. The system acknowledged Africans only as labourers

and traditionalists. They had to conform to the ethnographic picture presented by the ethnographic text. The transindividual sphere of custom and tradition delineated by the ethnographic text forced onto them a fixed identity, endorsed by law. This made it very difficult for the educated African elite to participate, and write their own identities, in terms of middle class European norms, or "civilisation" as it was called by these subjects in the early twentieth century.

The exclusion from the law-making process and the fact that the law determined their identities from the outside, made Africans into the Other. The fixity of the African's definition as Other has the quality of print. The word "stereotype" derives from plaster moulds of printing type. In its modern use it refers to the commonplace and distorted perception of the Other. The stereotype implies that the Other is perceived as pathological as having lost control over the environment. The African stereotype is rooted in a context where Africans were forced to surrender their authority over the political environment. The new dominating discourses saw Africans as lacking in Western reason and, therefore, not able to participate in the institutions of Western civilisation. The African's assumed exclusion from the world of writing and print, and their resulting inability to be masters of their own voice, played a determining role in the construction of this stereotype.

The English colonial histories that Schreiner used, and her own perspective in *Thoughts on South Africa* (1992), betray a similar prejudice in the construction of the stereotypical Boer. This prejudice derives from Schreiner's position as author in the tradition of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on reason, literature and literacy as signs of civilisation and progress. Access to printed literature, and owning printing technology meant political power in the emerging modern environment. Print placed the subject in a position to control stereotypes. This power to distort and stabilise became the signifier of health and reason.

That which, according to Schreiner, makes the Boer the most typically South African is also that which makes the Boer pathological in relation to her own position as author of the Enlightenment. To her the Boer is "merely a child of the seventeenth century" (1992: 82) who, because of illiteracy, had been isolated from the world revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

For the Boer the awakening of human reason in the eighteenth century, with its stern demand for intellectual tolerance, and its enunciation of universal brotherhood never existed. The cry for Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, with which later on the heart of Europe leaped forth to grasp an ideal for which men's hands

were not yet quite pure enough, but which rent the thunder-cloud of despotism brooding over Europe; the Napoleonic wars and the crash of thrones, the growth of physical science, re-shaping not only man's physical existence but yet more his social and ethical life, of these things the Boer behind his little Taal wall heard and felt nothing.

(Schreiner 1992: 86)

The world revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are very much inscribed into the discourses and texts of the Boer and formed the basis of the Boer's own discriminatory texts, despite Schreiner's image of the Boer as an ignorant illiterate. The Boer's relationship with revolution dates back to the Batavian period when the influence of the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Napoleonic wars were strongly felt at the Cape. The French Revolution had its echoes in the popular uprisings of Cape frontier towns when colonists declared Swellendam and Graaff-Reinet republics with their own national conventions. It is from these towns that the Great Trek took place in 1837. Erasmus Smit, who accompanied the Cape Emigrants into the interior as lay-preacher in 1837 vividly recalls in his *Diary* (1972: 19) the day, 19 January 1795, when he as a child saw the rag-tag French army marching through Amsterdam in the wake of the French Revolution. From this revolution stems the Emigrants' and the twentieth century Afrikaner's obsession with republicanism and the rejection of royal sovereignty. In the late nineteenth century with the discovery of gold, the development of Johannesburg as a city, the Anglo-Boer War and the subsequent urbanisation of the unskilled poor from the rural areas led to an early awareness of Marxist theory amongst many Afrikaners. In the War Proclamation of 17 October 1899, Commandant-General Piet Joubert saw "malignant capitalists" as the cause of the war. He spoke though not from the perspective of a working class, but from a threatened rural position based on the exploitation of African labour.

Identity within the capitalist epoch is a personification of economic relations (Marx 1982: 178). The Emigrants moving into the South African interior saw the Africans they encountered mainly as servants and sources of labour. In Erasmus Smit's *Diary* there are many references to this. Several Africans seeking refuge from the continuous wars were made into servants while others were taken captive by force:

On awakening we found that all the Kaffirs (and also the chief) who since the 1st February were in the service of the emigrants and were very well treated, have fled to the Drakensberg to their villages. There is rumour circulating, and people think that Dingaan has fled from his country, and that these Kaffirs, therefore,

now that the danger is past, wish rather to be in their gardens and in their previous freedom than in the service of the emigrants.

(Smit 1972: 121-122)

In Dhlomo's "Dingane" the Induna Bongoza remarks about the Emigrants:

I hear they make servants of men - men who ought to serve as warriors. No man should be servant to another. Each should serve himself and serve with and for the others. Only a king should have servants, for they who serve the king, serve all. The Boers think they are each a king!

(Dhlomo 1985: 85)

Looking at the sovereign within the context of the Cape Emigrant invasion of African territories in the nineteenth century, makes for interesting comparative analysis in terms of identity constructs. The consequences of the opposing views on sovereignty are illustrated in Erasmus Smit's description of a last conversation with one of Dingaan's captive warriors. The Zulu warrior is sentenced to death by the Council of Emigrants for murdering "2 white women and 4 children" (1972: 134). It was Smit's task to convince "the prisoner of the justice of the temporal punishment of his death sentence by his earthly judges" (1972: 133). It is as if the earthly judges, discovering the relativity of their own metaphysics in confronting the Other, themselves ask to be exonerated by the condemned man. The prisoner defends himself by saying that the sovereign, Dingaan, who gave the order to kill, should bear the guilt. The Emigrants, however, see the prisoner as being primarily responsible and force him to agree "that he had gone with a happy heart on the attack and found pleasure in the murder" (1972: 134). Smit contrasts this with the way they themselves will execute him. He states that the executioners

will ... have sympathy with you even at and in your death; they will not torture you with 30, 40, and 50 stabs, as you and your people have slowly murdered our people in the cruellest way; but your death will be short and compassionate.³

(Smit 1972: 134)

Smit further states that the members of the Council "do not as individuals kill you; but it is the law of our God which condemns you and also me, and all people when we commit murder" (1972: 135). Christianity is Smit's root metaphor. The invisible God is the sovereign and guarantor of the Emigrants' lawless law. Sovereignty is removed from the world. The natural motives for their murdering are projected onto a transcendental god. To the Zulu prisoner sovereignty is embodied in the institution and the physical presence of the king. To him it is Dingaan who "ought to bear the guilt"

(1972: 133). By removing sovereignty from the world, the Emigrants internalise it in the embodied concept of an omnipotent and transcendental God and associate it with the will of the individual. God becomes a force linked to the group's helplessness (as minority in threatening surroundings), but also to a feeling of omnipotence (because God will make them victorious despite their small numbers). This concept of God is at the basis of Afrikaner Calvinism and republicanism. It is best illustrated by N.P. van Wyk Louw, considered to be the most important poet of modern Afrikaner nationalism, in the allegorical verse play *Die dieper reg* (1947) (The Greater Right). The play was written for the centenary of the Great Trek in 1938. In the play the Emigrants are brought before the Eternal Justice, and are charged with plundering the land and with lawlessness. These charges stand against their plea to continue to exist as a people. From a rational and earthly perspective of justice, they are guilty, but they are acquitted because they embody the blind *deed*, the non-rational act that made them mere instruments of God. God, as the ultimate will and justice in history, becomes the sovereign who arbitrarily decides the fate of peoples.

In the 1930s Dhlomo wrote the play "Dingane" (*Collected Works* 1985) possibly to counteract the Afrikaner's version⁴ of the Great Trek which was ritually re-enacted in the 1938 Centenary as part of their sacred history (See Moodie 1975: 2). In this play the Zulu character Bongoza refers to the kinglessness of the Emigrants:

A people with no king is no race - a headless snake writhing nauseatingly to death! Homeless people observe the law of the jungle - destroy, provoke trouble and roam about. A kingless race is like monkeys - noisy, mischievous, restless!
(Dhlomo 1985: 85)

It is possible that Dhlomo, in the context of the 1930s, plays off the royalist sentiments of the British against the Afrikaner republicanist drives.

In the play the king as object of royal praise is transformed into the king as tragic hero. This is done under the influence of the Greek Classical and Shakespearean tradition, although it also has its roots in African ritual. The line linking the African and the European tradition (as embodied in the heroic⁵ and the Shakespearean tradition with which Dhlomo was especially familiar through missionary education) is drawn in the important essays by Dhlomo (1977): "Drama and the African" and "Nature and Variety of Tribal Drama". In the second essay he elaborates on the dramatic structure of the ritual surrounding a king's death and relates it to the "mysteries, miracles and moralities" from which Greek tragedy originated. To Dhlomo literature represents civilisation. Linking Africa's rituals to the Greek

classics was important in order to place the African tradition positively within the foundational fictions of civilisation. Civilisation was the criterion that allowed entry to the dominant Western political processes in the early twentieth century. Literature as proof of civilisation was central to Dhlomo in the African's struggle for national recognition. Literature to Dhlomo is especially important because "Geographical and colour boundaries have no power in the field of art. Here the African can speak on the universal level denied him in the political field" (1977: 72).

The play "Dingane" deals with the very important intersection of the different South African nationalisms: the murder of Shaka, the movement of the Cape Emigrants into the interior and the fall of Dingaan. Together these events signified the beginning of the destruction of the Zulu empire. Twentieth century African literature portrays Shaka as a military leader who through wars managed to unite a number of diverse tribes into a nation and a kingdom. In Dhlomo's essay "Nature and Variety of Tribal Drama" the reign of Shaka is described as follows (based again on the histories of Theal and imbued with the values of the missionaries):

The coming of Shaka brought about great changes and wide repercussions. Life ceased to be hedonistic, peaceful and safe. The policy of *laissez faire* succumbed to one of tyranny. People became military-minded. Shaka's domestic and foreign policy, his great wars of conquest, and his studied ruthlessness transformed tribal life and gave it new patterns of behaviour, new channels of thought, new political ideologies. The demon of war, the menace of invasion, the fear of annihilation, the restlessness of whole tribal migrations and endless group treks, shook the very foundations of African life, and gave birth to a whole catalogue of changes, developments and upheavals.

(Dhlomo 1977: 26)

In the first scene the dying Shaka curses Dingaan's reign by referring symbolically to the eventual fall of Dingaan at the hands of the invading Boer. The drama describes the events that led up to this fall (his defeat by the combined forces of Mpande, Dingaan's brother, the Swazis, the Cape Emigrants and the Bay Europeans - mainly British traders and officials living in Port Natal). It further portrays the killing of the Boer leader, Piet Retief and his entourage, from a Zulu point of view. Jeje, Shaka's body servant, who according to custom should have died with the king, is the antagonist who in the end kills the fleeing Dingaan and so avenges Shaka's murder. In the play Dingaan stands out as the individual. Like a typical Shakespearean character he is tormented by reliving Shaka's murder in hallucinations, soliloquies and dreams. These indicate inner mental processes that distinguish the individual as individual in literary discourse. The fearful hallu-

cinations are focused on Jeje, "Shaka's shadow", which "envelops" Dingaan in its power. Jeje, as embodiment of Shaka's curse, rather than the triumphant armies of the Boers or Swazis, leads to Dingaan's unmaking. In "Dingane" the tragic, but sovereign, king is trapped by and subject to fear, curses and his own mortality. In Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great* (1979), Shaka also has an obsession with mortality that is expressed in his interest in white medicine. Identity and subjectivity amount to nothing when the subject is confronted with death. Dhlomo's Dingaan eventually realises that "I am a shadow - nothing". The hero-king expresses an individuality that is essentially tragic. This tragic dimension is absent in the texts by Erasmus Smit and Van Wyk Louw; the subject here is eternal, is an essence. The condemned man in Erasmus Smit's text must come to "acknowledging God's justice if God wished to subject and punish him with *eternal death*" (1972: 35 my italics). In Van Wyk Louw's play all individuality disappears behind the man, woman and youth, that is the family unit, which represents the eternal and abstract continuity of the people, the nation. It is this abstract nation that inherits eternity, in other words, becomes an essence. *Die dieper reg* (1947) shows an interplay between history and the trans-historical eternity. The history depicted in the drama is grounded in an eternal abstraction.

Skin colour and the Afrikaans language are the two central elements identified by most texts as the basis of Afrikaner nationalism. The emphasis on language makes Afrikaner nationalism very different from African nationalism with its adoption of English. The African adoption of English in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reflects an attempt to transcend tribal divisions and the tribal definitions imposed by whites, but it also points to a strong identification with British values as embodied in the Christianity of the Missionaries and the Cape parliamentary system which allowed African participation on the basis of property and education. The early nationalist African leaders looked down on the tribal past and embraced modernity. The early phases of African and Afrikaner nationalism were formulated by an educated elite who were often also the founders of their respective literatures in printed form. To the early Afrikaner nationalists the transformation of the spoken Afrikaans language into a written language was of primary importance. This should be seen in the light of the resistance to Afrikaans as a language in Dutch- and English-speaking educated circles. Schreiner saw Afrikaans as the factor that isolated the Afrikaner from the important developments in Europe and as having no literary potential:

... so sparse is the vocabulary and so broken are its forms, that it is impossible in the Taal to express a subtle intellectual emotion, or abstract conception, or a wide generalisation; and a man seeking to render a scientific, philosophic, or poetical work in the Taal, would find his task impossible.

(Schreiner 1992: 78)

Gustav Preller's (1961) acclamation of Eugène Marais' poem "Winternag" (1905) (Winter Night), and the emphasis in the first decade of the twentieth century on a metre in Afrikaans poetry that deviates from that of the typical folkish doggerel of the nineteenth century, should be seen as attempts to nurture a type of literature that would repudiate statements like the one made by Schreiner.

The transformation of spoken Afrikaans into a printed language was preceded by similar developments in African languages. In his *Diary* Erasmus Smit mentions "a good room for the printing of books in which stood an excellent press" (1972: 8) in the missionary's residence at Moroka, capital city of the Barolong Chief. Smit made this observation in 1837, four decades before the movement to transform Afrikaans into a printed and literary language. The printing press in Moroka's city is also an indication of its idyllic and petit bourgeois appearance. According to Smit this was due to missionary efforts.⁶ He was apparently unaware of the large Tswana cities such as Lattakoo that had existed about two decades before his diary entry, and which had been destroyed by banditry and invasions.

Missionaries established printing presses at a number of places in the early nineteenth century. One of the first printing presses was set up amongst the Xhosa in the Tyumie valley in 1824. It moved to Gwali in 1826 and was named Lovedale, which became an important centre for the training of African intellectuals. Printing presses were also set up at Beersheba in 1841, and at Morija in 1861 amongst the Sotho, publishing the first grammars of these languages as well as religious books, newspapers and eventually important literary texts. At the missionary schools, especially Lovedale, an educated elite developed who played a major role in the development of modern African nationalism. The first office bearers of the African Native National Congress,⁷ John Dube, Pixley Seme, Sol Plaatje and Walter Rubusana, were all mission-educated and played a pivotal role in the development of literature written by Africans.

The transformation of spoken Afrikaans into a printed language and Afrikaner nationalism followed basically the same developmental pattern as African literature and nationalism. The incentive to establish printed African literatures came from missionary stations. Similarly, the impetus for an organisation to promote Afrikaans as a printed language was religious. According to one of the leading figures, Arnoldus Pannevis, there was a

need to have the Bible translated into Afrikaans, especially for the Afrikaans-speaking coloureds. S.J. du Toit, who was a student of Pannevis, saw Afrikaans not only as the language of the coloureds, but as the national language of white Afrikaners. On 14 August 1875 he initiated the founding of the Association of Real Afrikaners (*Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners*) whose main aim was to develop Afrikaner nationalism, to transform Afrikaans into a printed language and to translate the Bible into Afrikaans. The association printed the first Afrikaans newspaper, *Di Patriot*, and published Afrikaans grammars, literary texts, histories, etc. Similarly grammars, religious texts, newspapers and eventually more substantial literary texts had marked the initial output of the missionary stations amongst Africans.

There are also significant differences between the Afrikaner and the African movements. The African movement emphasised unity based on Christian principles which found expression in the rejection of and conflict with the tribal past in accepting British authority. This is apparent in statements such as Dube's "Onward! Upward! into the higher places of civilisation and Christianity - not backwards into the slump of darkness nor downward into the abyss of antiquated tribal systems" (Walshe 1987: 38) and that of Mvabaza, Thema and Ngcayiya:

We have come ... not to ask for independence, but for an admission into British citizenship as British subjects so that we may also enjoy the free institutions which are the foundations and pillars of this magnificent Commonwealth.

(Walshe 1987: 64)

In contrast to this, early Afrikaner nationalism reacted against British authority, and emphasised its separateness. Rooted in the apparent modernism of petit bourgeois republicanism Afrikaner nationalism nevertheless saw itself as against the emerging modern, material (capitalist) and urban civilisation of the late nineteenth century, while promoting folksy, traditional and rural values. The language was seen as a conveyor of the above values and of a specific identity. The Afrikaans language and literature became the logocentric medium through which the Afrikaner soul became evident. The language was, according to D.F. Malan, a matter of the "existence or non-existence" of the Afrikaner people (Pienaar 1920: 2) while Gustav Preller stated that a language gives an "image of the thoughts of a people, a continuously changing diorama of the inner consciousness of a person" (Pienaar 1920: 18).

Afrikaner nationalism was promoted and became dominant in South Africa especially because of the privileged position of the Afrikaners with regard to their acquisition of the franchise and subsequent parliamentary

power since the establishment of the Union. Africans were excluded from representative politics, which contributed largely to the difference in the Afrikaner and African's conceptions of identity in the twentieth century.

Notes

1. "In the colonies the capitalist regime constantly comes up against the obstacle presented by the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself instead of the capitalist" (Marx 1982: 931).
2. This type of statement was not unique to Afrikaner ideologues, compare for instance the Zulu author John Dube's assertion:

God works through individuals and through nations. We know how He used the Jewish people to introduce Christianity into the world, and we believe that He has a work for the Zulus. Prior to the advent of the white man the Zulus were the dominant race south of the great Zambezi. Today they are intellectually superior to many of the tribes of South Africa, but apart from being specially gifted they have been providentially watched over as their geographical position forces upon them an association with the white man and his civilisation more intimate than that of any other native people in South Africa. The Zulu is thus in the happy position of being the first of the native races to have civilisation forced upon him in anything like a whole-sale-manner. Though he must inevitably suffer during the period of transition, he will be as surely rewarded, so soon as he is fitted to receive the benefits which civilisation invariably confers. As the Zulus were conquerors and leaders of the native tribes of South Africa in physical warfare, has not God ordained that they shall conquer these same tribes by peaceful methods and lead them to individual, intellectual, and spiritual advancement.

(Dube 1907: 372-373)
3. These words are belied when, to the disappointment of Smit, the death shot fell just after the prayer during which Smit "expressed his wish and trust that the Lord might have brought this Kaffir among us for some days for this purpose, to make him become as a chosen soul with Him and His divine word" and to which the captive "moaning agreed with everything" (Smit 1972: 135).
4. The killing of Piet Retief and his followers and the later defeat of the Zulus at Blood river were two important events commemorated in this ritual re-enactment of the Afrikaner. According to the play a number of transgressions by the Emigrants prompted Retief's killing. Retief and his entourage walked through the sacred *Intunja* (the section where the royal women live) and one was seen smiling and greeting an *umdlunkulu* maiden (member of the royal

seraglio). The Emigrant's interpretation of land ownership was also a matter of concern to the Zulus. The character Nzobo states:

I do not see clearly into this matter, this strange Boer request for land. They speak as if when it is given them, the land will actually be theirs. They seem not to realise that the King holds the land in trust for the nation, for the great ancestors, for the generation to come; and that he may allot it to any person who in turn holds it for the nation.

(Dhlomo 1985: 91)

5. Sir Maurice Bowra in an Earl Grey Memorial Lecture at King's College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, stated:

Shaka's ... reign was in retrospect exalted to a heroic age, whose events were turned into saga and drama. A striking case of this is the play *Dingana*, written quite recently by a Zulu, H.I.E. Dhlomo.

(Couzens 1985: 319)

6. "At 9 o'clock I went with my wife and our group on foot on a visit to the great town of Moroka, in which over 7 000 persons are said to live. We met Chief Moroka. He received us in a quiet friendly way, and introduced us to his wife, Mirjana, with her smallest son, three years of age, named Sabadira (*Tsabadira*). The eldest son Sivinel (*Sefunelo*) is being educated at the house of the Rev. Archibald. He showed us also the houses of the minor wives. We were then served with beautiful thick milk. Everything here in Moroka's town has the pleasant atmosphere of gentle peace and quiet assured calm among these people. It was as quiet in the town as if there were only ten inhabitants. We were all encircled and accompanied by the Chief and his bodyguard. The streets were filled with men who, all with happy faces, were busy with their work of preparing skins and making clothes and so on. The women everywhere made fields and gardens in the fertile valleys between the mountains. The children are the herdboys of the calves of the milking cows and of the lambs and of the kids, because with them sheep and goats are also milked. Civilisation has made distinct progress among these heathen ..." (Smit 1972: 7).
7. The name eventually changed to African National Congress.

References

- Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.)
1990 *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.
- Couzens, T.
1985 *The New African*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Dhlomo, H.I.E.
1977 "Drama and the African" and "Nature and Variety of Tribal Drama". *English in Africa* 4(2).
1985 *Collected Works*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Dube, J.
1907 Practical Christianity Among the Zulus. *Missionary Review of the World* xx.
- Freud, S.
1985 *Civilization, Society and Religion, Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works*. Harmondsworth: The Pelican Freud Library.
- Gilman, S.L.
1990 *Difference and Pathology*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Kunene, M.
1979 *Emperor Shaka the Great*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Louw, N.P. van Wyk
1947 *Die dieper reg*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers.
- Marx, K.
1982 *Capital*. Vol. 1. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Meintjes, J.
1976 *The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*. Cape Town: Struik.
- Moodie, T.D.
1975 *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Opland, J.
1983 *Xhosa Oral Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Pienaar, E.C.
1920 *Taal en poësie van die Tweede Afrikaanse Taalbeweging*. Kaapstad: De Nasionale Pers.
- Preller, G.
1961 *Eerstelinge*. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau.
- Schreiner, O.
1992 *Thoughts on South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Smit, E.
1972 *The Diary of Erasmus Smit*. Cape Town: Struik.

Sommer, Dorris
1990

Irresistible Romance: Foundational Fictions of Latin America. In: Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.) *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.

Spivak, G.C.
1987

In Other Worlds. New York: Routledge.

Walshe, P.
1987

The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.