

Table of Contents

<i>Preface And Acknowledgements</i>	3
<i>Abbreviations</i>	5
<i>Introduction</i>	6
PART ONE	13
Chapter One: Identity And Nation Building.....	14
1.1 The Construction Of Identity	14
1.1.1 Essentialism.....	15
1.1.2 Constructivism.....	15
1.2 National Identity	18
1.2.1 Nationalism: Some Definitions.....	19
1.2.2 Conditions For National Identity.....	20
1.3 Conclusion.....	20
Chapter Two: Reshaping the Past: Collective Memory	22
2.1 The Origin Of Collective Memory.....	23
2.1.1 The Social Framework Of Memory.....	23
2.1.2 The Legitimation Of The Past	24
2.2 History Versus Memory	25
2.2.1 The Difference Between History And Memory	25
2.2.2 Pierre Nora’s History Of Memory	26
2.3 Memory And The Nation.....	27
2.3.1 The Nation As An Imagined Community.....	27
2.3.2 The Invention Of Tradition.....	28
2.4 Zerubavel's Mapping Of Collective Memory	29
2.5 Conclusion.....	30
Chapter Three: Mapping the Past: the South African National Calendar.....	31
3.1 The National Symbols	32
3.2 The Politics Of Nation Building After 1994.....	33
3.3 The History Of A Calendar	35
3.3.1 The First Official Calendar: 1910.....	35
3.3.2 The Calendar During Apartheid: 1949.....	37
3.3.3 A Calendar Of Change: 1980.....	38
3.3.4 The Post-Apartheid Calendar: 1994.....	40
3.4 Conclusion.....	42
PART TWO	44
Chapter Four: December 16: Dingaansdag.....	46
4.1. History Of The Great Trek 1836-1854.....	46
4.1.1 The Battle of Blood River	46
4.1.2 The Covenant With God.....	47
4.2 The History Of A Commemoration.....	48
4.2.1 Dingaansdag: 1864-1886.....	49
4.2.2 Further Centralisation Of Dingaansdag: 1886-1938.....	51
4.2.3 The Highlight Of Afrikaner Nationalism: 1938.....	51
4.2.4 Dingaansday Becomes Geloftedag: 1938-1952.....	52
4.3 Conclusion.....	53
Chapter Five: December 16: Geloftedag.....	55
5.1 The Reinterpretation Of History.....	56
5.1.1 Reconsidering History: 'The Myth of the Covenant'.....	56

“The Struggle To Become South African”
National Identity And Collective Memory In South Africa: Reconciliation Day

5.1.2 Afrikanerdom And History.....	61
5.1.3 The Role Of The Church.....	66
5.1.4 The 'Other Race': The Black Historians' View	68
5.1.5 Conclusion.....	71
5.2 The Public Perception Of The Reinterpretation Of History.....	72
5.2.1 Different Opinions: 'Verlig' Versus 'Verkramp't'.....	72
5.2.2 From Exclusion.....	74
5.2.3 ...And The Interpretation Of History.....	77
5.2.4 ... To Inclusion And Reconciliation.....	79
5.2.5 Conclusion.....	81
Chapter Six: December 16: Reconciliation Day.....	82
6.1 The National Question.....	83
6.2 Mandela's Heritage: The Rainbow Nation.....	84
6.2.1 “Unity And Diversity”.....	84
6.2.2 The Interpretation Of The Battle Of Blood River/Ncome.....	85
6.2.3 Afrikanerdom And Reconciliation: Loss Of Identity?.....	90
6.2.4 The Perception Of The Day Of Reconciliation.....	90
6.3 Mbeki's Heritage: African Renaissance.....	91
6.3.1 “I Am An African”.....	91
6.3.2 The 'Home For All' Campaign.....	92
6.3.3 `Unity In Diversity`.....	96
6.4 Conclusion.....	98
Chapter Seven: The Road To A New Future.....	100
<i>Literature</i>	108
Primary Sources.....	108
Books and Articles	114
APPENDIX	119

Preface And Acknowledgements

My decision to go to South Africa was rather randomly made. I wanted to go abroad, preferably to a non-European country. I never knew much about South Africa or about Africa, but was certain that the country would provide me an interesting perspective on history. However, I did not expect this country, and more specifically this continent to change me as much as it has done.

I knew I wanted to do research on identity and nationalism, but the lack of a certain point of view and the abundant research that was done already caused me to travel to South Africa with a lot of ideas, but without a fixed plan. Thanks to many conversations with prof Grundlingh, head of the history department at the University of Stellenbosch, a plan started to develop and the complexity of the South African society became clearer than ever.

Writing a Master Thesis is a lonely process, but one I could not have realised without the help of many people. It is not only a Thesis I complete, but also an academic study that comes to an end. It is an impossible quest to name everyone that made the completion of this study possible, but there are a few that I would like to thank in particular. First of all I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Gijsbert Oonk for his patience, his understanding and his guidance. He has given me a lot of space for self-initiative for this thesis to develop and provided me with the necessary feedback to finally come to a structured entity. Thanks to Prof Grundling of the University of Stellenbosch who has been of great inspiration, and whose office was always open for me and my many questions. The interesting courses on theoretical history and South Africa have further triggered my interest in the theories of history, identity and memory. My gratitude also goes to the many lecturers of the University of Rotterdam, who helped to develop my own interest and provided me with the necessary skills and tools to complete this Master Thesis.

During the research in South Africa, the librarians at the University of Stellenbosch had always time to help me with a friendly smile. Thanks to them. I will not forget the trouble the librarians at the Parliament of South Africa went through and the many calls they had to make, to find some document that appeared to be lost. Thanks for finding them.

Having a job and writing a Master Thesis was not always easy and I could not have done it without the support of my colleague Belen. Her honesty and cheerfulness helped me finalising this thesis. Thanks! I will never forget the metaphor of the mosquito. And thanks to Joke for her comments on part of this thesis but especially for your friendship. And also thanks to Miranda, for designing the cover, and for taking me out on weekend nights to force me to relax during times of stress.

Last but not least, I want to express my gratitude towards my family. My parents for giving me the freedom to find my own way in life and the strength to follow my dreams. Thanks to my brother in law, one particular conversation changed my perspective and gave me new strength.

“The Struggle To Become South African”
National Identity And Collective Memory In South Africa: Reconciliation Day

After writing about history, identity and collective memory I have learned that our personal past has an evident space in our daily life and that we are products of our past. As I have mentioned before, it is impossible to name every one that deserves my gratitude. Some persons are part of my past now, but that does not mean that their support to complete this academical study is not remembered anymore. Thanks!

Abbreviations

ANC	African Nationalist Congress
AWB	Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DAC	Department of Arts, Culture and Religion
DACTS	Department of Arts, Culture, Technology and Science
FAK	Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation)
NGK	Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church)
NP	National Party
PAC	Pan African Congress
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADC	South African Development Community
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TWG	Technical Working Group
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Front

Introduction

If we are exploring major turning points in the history of South Africans, what do we mean by South Africans? What makes us South Africans? Is it the land? Is it the sky? Is it our family, our roots, our heritage?
Kader Asmal, Minister of Eductaion in "Turning Points of History", 2004

The well-known South African cartoonist Zapiro's idiomatic representation of the past's burden represents the country's struggle on how to interpret the past and deal with memories "on the road to reconciliation".¹ The black man's burden of how to deal with experiences from the 'past of oppression' has now become the white man's burden.² The cartoon was published in 2004, ten years after the transition from a repressive white government to a democratically elected one. Notwithstanding the fact that it was a transitional and relatively peaceful process, questions of sovereignty and what it meant to be South African increased.

Not only the socio-economic and political reality had been dominated by whites, the interpretation of its past was to a great extent aimed at finding a genuine justification for the presence of the white population in South Africa and their dominance over the non-white population. History writing in South Africa often took the form of a mythologisation of the past and "more than in most countries, historical writing in South Africa has had a political purpose."³

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the belief in the superiority and the progress of the British civilisation was the main theme in South African historiography. The British had captured the Cape in 1795 which meant the end of Dutch hegemony and caused the 'trek' of many Dutch descendants to the inland of South Africa.⁴

¹ The image of 'road' and 'walk' is often used in South Africa when addressing the issue of reconciliation and the new post-Apartheid nation. It emphasises the notion of process with reconciliation between all people as endpoint.

² "The White Man's Burden" refers to the well-known poem by Rudyard Kipling.

³ Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past, Major historians on Race and Class* (Cape Town 1988) 193.

⁴ Traditionally, history writing on South Africa's history has been divided along five historiographical schools: British imperialist school, Settler or Colonial School, Afrikaner nationalist, liberal school and Marxist historical realism. White historians dominate South African historiography as there are less Black historians in South Africa. History writing was and still is dominated by whites. The realisation that South Africa was part of the larger British Empire and the expansion of the British empire and its achievements were central to the historians of the *British imperialist school* and they disapproved of the Boer republics. See also: Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past, Major historians on Race and Class* (Cape Town 1988), Wessel Visser, *Trends in South African Historiography and the present state of historical research*, Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, 23 September 2004. and Hans Erik Stolten, *History Making and present day politics*,

The emphasis in historical works in the nineteenth century was on white civilisation that was imposed on the 'wild blacks' and it was written in an acceptable way to both Afrikaners and British to "promote the emergence of one white South African nation through a common history."⁵ Nonetheless, during the second half of the nineteenth century, Afrikaner historical consciousness emerged and led to anti-British imperialist work and the struggle between Boers and Britons became the master narrative.⁶ Key themes were the Great Trek and the Second Anglo-Boer War. The focus in these works was on political history and on the rise of the Afrikaner nation.⁷

During the years of apartheid, society was divided into four racial categories, distinct by appearance or descent.⁸ The term apartheid had changed from a slogan into a systematic programme of social engineering. During the 1970s, due to socio-economical problems, the apartheid state began to show signs of weakness and disintegration. The anti-apartheid struggle peaked in the 1980s and due to national and international developments, negotiations concerning the transition to a democratic regime, started in the beginning of the nineties by F. W. De Klerk and Nelson Mandela. A new, interim democratic constitution was ratified by the outgoing apartheid Parliament in December 1993. The first democratic elections were held in April 1994. The negotiations that prevailed the transition may have been mainly political, consequences of this major turning point were abundant.⁹

Enthusiasm and commitment were significant as words of hope and progression were uttered. Mandela speaks in his inaugural speech of "a major step forward in history" which seems at first glance a contradiction in terminis. The metaphor of the 'step forward' established a synchronisation of different time perspectives. The future is addressed in the notion 'forward', and the present alluded to as a reference point for the past. History was

the meaning of collective Memory in South Africa, Uppsala 2007.

⁵ Leonard Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven 1985) 57.

⁶ Wessel Visser, *Trends in South African Historiography and the present state of historical research*, Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, 23 September 2004. 3.

⁷ Wessel Visser, *Trends in South African Historiography and the present state of historical research*, Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, 23 September 2004. 5.

⁸ Right after its victory, the NP government legislated several acts that endorsed segregation, for instance the *Population Registration Act*, the *Immorality Act* and the *Group Areas Act*

⁹ For a more extensive overview of South Africa history, see also: Hermann Gilliomee and Bernard Mbenga, *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town 2007). This recently published work encapsulates the history of South Africa with contributing historians each writing on their specific area of interest. The illustrated 'New History' thus offers an easy to read and comprehensive representation. However a extensive bibliographical list, the use of notes is limited and remains my main comment on this project. The editor, Hermann Gilliomee is associated with the History Department of the University of Stellenbosch. Other recommendations are Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven and London 1990), William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa, 2nd edition*, (Oxford 2001).

written while immediately historically experienced. In relation to nation-building and dealing with the past collective memory was addressed through a re-interpretation of the past. This policy gave rise to all sorts of heritage and education projects, every one of them pertaining to the construction of a South African national identity by creating and reshaping collective memory. “Memory is identity”, the Minister of Education Kader Asmal explicated at the launch of the “Historical Turning Points” education project. Similar to the canonisation of history in the Netherlands,¹⁰ South African history is now rewritten around major “turning points” assembled according to their contribution to a South African identity.¹¹

Against this background, I arrived on South African soil. Did I expect a balanced, unprejudiced and peaceful society? Did I expect a historical culture that knew no social dilemmas? The answer is no. But I did not expect to be absorbed by its complex, multifaceted racial division and certainly not did I expect to feel guilt for the nation's past. Even as a foreigner I was absorbed in the difficult social debates and the negotiations over the country's history. These mixed feelings fascinated me and I wanted an answer to the question: how do South Africans see themselves? What do they consider being South African? Is there a South Africa? My South African roommate answered me: South African identity is merely political. No further comment. But how can one relate to identity only in political terms? The policy makers are not the only agents in the social and historical debate. The problem how the complex South African past was now remembered by the people – or collectively forgotten – and how this was related to their national identity, fascinated me and provided me with the ground for the question central to this thesis: How does the South African calendar of public holidays relate to the dynamic process of enhancing national identity and collective memory? In answering this question I focus on the commemoration of the battle of Blood River as a case study.

The process of nation-building is ongoing. Collective memories are still created and reinvented and the socio-economic, political and cultural domain is changing rapidly and continuously. Because of the efforts to correct the inherited legacies of the past, the field of

¹⁰ I refer hereby to the Dutch Canon, initiated in 2007: “A canon for all Dutch people, as a story of the country we all live in, not as a vehicle for national pride, but rather a canon that evokes involvement.” See also: <http://entoen.nu> (10.06.2009). Maria Grever defines a canon as: “a shared framework of historical interpretations. It is a dominant narrative, consisting of a range of selected historical facts and interpretations, which have been acknowledged by the members of a community to represent their common past, assuming a measure of continuity between the canonized protagonists and those who acknowledge the represented past.” in Maria Grever, “Plurality, Narrative and the Historical Canon” in Grever and Stuurman, *Beyond the Canon*, 40.

¹¹ As minister of Education Kader Asmal explained “If we are exploring major turning points in the history of South Africans, what do we mean by South Africans? What makes us South Africans? Is it the land? Is it the sky? Is it our family, our roots, our heritage?”

research on South African history is thriving, with heritage studies booming.¹² Disregarding the fact that heritage primarily covers the past, its main scope lies in the present and the future. The consequence of its focus on the present and on the nearby past, limits the historical distance the historian has to his or her research item. It might seem to confine the research and its general assumptions, but I believe that on the contrary, it can enrich knowledge about the past and ways of dealing with it. My own background will also determine my perspective on these issues. I am white, European and writing about South Africa, where I have only spent six months of my life. But I trust my education and own capacity to create the necessary distance to the object of my research. By critically analysing the discourse of the manifestations and the reception and perception of the past, the contested images of the past can be reframed and a more critical awareness towards the nation's past can be created.¹³

In order to study the politics of history and the concerns on history, memory and the nation state, the first two chapters of the first part present a theoretical framework that can be used to clarify the different concepts. Following Grever and Ribbens' point of view that the meaning of national identity is strongly influenced and dependent on the political culture of a country, the political history and its discourse of South Africa will be explored.¹⁴ In the first chapter I explore the notion identity and comprehend the different theories that exist regarding the construction of identities and link them to nationalism. In the second chapter, I raise the question how the past is embodied in collective memory in the process of creating national identity and I will arouse some difficulties that occur when dealing with concepts that are as complex as memory and identity. The theories of Halbwachs, Anderson, Nora and Zerubavel will be dealt with. With this theoretical framework as background, I will take the reader on a journey through the complexity of South Africa's interpretation of the past.

The interpretation of the past is connected with heritage, a domain that is booming in South Africa. Political power also means having a certain ownership over the nation's heritage. Dealing with the study of memory, we also question the agency of memory: who are the

¹² On the tension between heritage and history; Christopher Saunders, "The transformation of Heritage in the new South Africa" in Hans Erik Stolten, *History Making and Present Day Politics, The Meaning of Collective Memory in south Africa*, (Uppsala 2007), 183-195. His main point is that "historians provide an interpretation of what happened in the past. Those involved with heritage are concerned with specific aspects of that past. It is the duty of historians to judge heritage critically, and to point to its inadequacies and failings." See also: Ciraj Rassool, "Museums, Heritage and the Transformation of South African Memory" in Grever and Stuurman, *Beyond the Canon*, 145-159.

¹³ Iwona Irwin Zarecka answers this question quite adequately when she argues that "It allows us to evaluate different telling about the past, most notably, to see what has been included – and excluded – within the various "texts". And, when dealing with the construction of memories still grounded in lived experience, it greatly enriches our ability to interpret the work being done." See: Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Jersey 1994) 16.

¹⁴ Grever and Ribbens, 'Geschiedenis, herinnering en identiteit' 19.

custodians and intermediaries of memory, its producers, distributors, and consumers?¹⁵ Because of its link with both history and politics, the integration into the academic field of history is important. The research done on the matter sometimes lacks a multi-perspective point of view. In 2007, a conference on the role of collective memories held in Norway provided a useful set of essays dealing with its meaning in current South Africa and it offers a main perspective of where the study of history now stands in South Africa. Nuttall and Coetzee published in 2004¹⁶ *Negotiating the past*, a compilation of different perspectives on heritage and memory supplemented with case studies. I do not claim or pretend to have the ability to present a full perception of the memory construction in South Africa but I have attempted to look at it from a more temporal-social and from a theoretical framework that comprised the interrelated concepts of memory, identity, nationalism and history. It relates to the metaphysical notion of time: how some events are being commemorated and others left out. The idea of researching an annual cycle of events is derived from Eviator Zerubavel's work. According to him a national calendar can be seen as a timeline that offers a biography of a history of a nation.¹⁷ It is a 'master narrative' that indicates the most important periods in a nation's collective past.¹⁸ In South Africa a new national calendar was implemented in 1994 after the transition to democracy.

In the third chapter I want to answer the question how the South African calendar relates a temporal-historical structure to the shape of collective memory. What shifts occurred in the calendar since its implementation and how are these related to the process of identity formation? An analysis of the public calendar provides us with a useful window into the specificity of national identity and collective memory together with the vision of a society and thereby its official past that the national government is imposing on its citizens. To support my thesis, I went through all the reports of the different committees concerning public holidays. The debates of the Parliament and the Senate regarding these committees and the corresponding acts were studied to offer a complete image of the formation of the calendar. The theoretical framework alongside the analysis of the national calendar forms the first part of this dissertation. Best case scenario would have been to analyse the meaning and perception of every public holiday. However, an historian too is limited by time. Furthermore it would not necessarily provide a better argument. The theoretical framework and the history of the national calendar entail the first part of my thesis.

¹⁵ Gary Baines, 'The Politics of History in Post Apartheid South Africa' 4.

¹⁶ Sarah Nuttall, Carli Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past: Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town 1998)

¹⁷ Eviator Zerubavel, 'Calenders and History: a Comparative Study of the Social Organization of National Memory' in Jeffrey K. Olick, *States of Memory: Conflicts, Continuities, and transformations in National Commemoration, (Durham)* 68-113. 2.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 3.

The question how December 16 has been re-interpreted several times, is answered in the second part. I have chosen to extend my thesis with a case study on one particular public holiday. I analyse the contested meanings that were attributed to Day of Reconciliation commemorated every December 16. That specific day is one of the oldest public holidays on the South African national calendar – except for the Christian holidays – and its meaning has shifted many times. From a truly Afrikaner nationalistic holiday it is now considered a symbol of the reconciling capacity of South Africans. Again, I had to make some choices concerning the scope of my research. After reading on the subject, I soon discovered that the turning point of 1994 was rooted in the reconsideration of the meaning of history in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the fourth chapter I first present an overview of the events that December 16 refers to. This rather factual history is followed by the first interpretation of the day: Dingaansdag and its early commemorations. Principally the latest shift of meaning and the consequences of current re-consideration of history, concern me, and therefore I decided to use only secondary sources for the first time period – the early commemorations from 1836 to 1952. In this chapter I discuss the evolution of the commemoration from its beginning until the years of apartheid.

My examination of primary sources in chapter five will start with the 1970s when historians started to critically analyse the meaning of the commemoration. It provided us with abundant information for an analysis of the historian's considerations. Meanwhile the name of the day had changed again and was now called Geloftedag or Day of the Vow or Day of the Covenant. Regarding methodology, some historical works used as secondary source in the fourth chapter are analysed as a primary source in the next chapter. That means that in chapter five, the subject of my analysis is the interpretation of historians of the commemoration of Geloftedag. Apart from historical works, I looked at more than 200 articles of mostly South Africans newspapers covering from the 1970s until 2004. By using a digitalised system, I could look for keywords or sentences, but unfortunately I noticed that some newspaper issues were missing, or wrongly coded.¹⁹ Even then, I could go through enough articles to support the general perception of the commemoration itself, as well as on the reconsideration of its meaning. The same accounts for the reading of the political debate. The sources that I used were governmental debates and bills, supported by political speeches.

Finally, in the sixth chapter, I deal with the post-apartheid interpretation of the Day of

¹⁹ When analysing the newspaper, John E Richardson's *Analysing Newspapers was a* comprehensible guide in the world of Critical discourse analysis. The author explains how to apply this functionalist theory to newspapers and stresses the qualitative content analysis and the function of language to mean things and to do things related to the wider socio-political, cultural and historic contexts. See also: John E. Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers, An approach from critical discourse analysis* (New York 2007).

Reconciliation and how it forged new identities on the people. Geloftedag has changed name again and is now called Reconciliation Day. I will discuss the discursive construction of national identity relating to the public holiday and the ambiguous form in collective memory. While scrolling through newspaper articles, speeches, yearbooks, schoolbooks I looked for references to Day of Reconciliation. To contemplate a full account of its perception, surveys would have to be done among all classes of society and all ethnic entities. However, I have limited myself to written media and accounts of speeches or debates and an analysis of its discourse. Sources were found in the library of the South African Parliament in Cape Town, in the library of the University of Stellenbosch and across the country. More recent sources were found online, on the government's website and on the African National Congress' (ANC) website.

Last but not least I will conclude by summarising the three interpretation and discuss how it reflects South African present reality and its difficulties on coming to terms with their past. To end with I shortly give my perspective on the study of national identity and collective memories in non-western societies.

Writing is also making choices and rejecting certain pieces of information. When writing about South Africa and its people, I had to make choices too, disregarding the fact that I do not always fully support them. The power of language should not be underestimated and when writing about a sensitive topic that includes different ethnic groups, it is better to explain one's choices. To describe the different communities, I had to name them. Unfortunately the easiest way to refer to them in current South Africa is still by dividing them among the colour lines as created by the apartheid government. These consist of: blacks, whites (Afrikaners and British), coloureds and Indians or Asians. When writing about the commemoration of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome, I switch between Dingaan's Day, Day of the Vow and the Day of Reconciliation, or their Afrikaner counterparts: Dingaansdag, Geloftedag and Versoeningsdag, depending on what it was called the time period I write about.

PART ONE

*“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of
memory against forgetting”*

Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

Chapter One: Identity And Nation Building

*The time for the healing of wounds has come.
The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come.
The time to build is upon us.*

Nelson Mandela, inaugural speech, 1994

Every action we undertake as a person, we do with a certain motivation. This action ground can be consciously or unconsciously shaped, but there is always an explanation otherwise psychoanalysis would have no footing. Subsequently, actions take place in a specific social context and people rely on past and present matters to act and justify their actions. Humans are social beings and they do not see themselves apart from their social surroundings. It is here that the notion of identity emerges. Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? Many works have been written on the subject of identity within various academic fields. A short exploration of the notion identity and the two most important theories that prevail on identity, will provide a window to deal with the complexity of these concepts and a more comprehensive approach of the South African case. In addition, I will shortly mention some conditions for national identity and allude to the link between identity and nationalism.

1.1 The Construction Of Identity

In its very psychoanalytical core, Freud describes identity as "The earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person".²⁰ Everything we do as human beings we do in a particular place and time, from a culture and history which is very specific and context-dependent.²¹ As Jeffrey Weeks defines it: "Identity is about belonging (...) At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality." Moreover, Weeks underlines social relationships as being central to one's identity and as the trigger of a variety of "potentially contradictory identities, which battle within us for allegiance."²²

²⁰ Quoted in Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London 1996) 3.

²¹ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural identity and Diaspora' in Jonathan Rutherford, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London 1990) 222-223.

²² Jeffrey Weeks, 'The Value of Difference' in Jonathan Rutherford, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London 1990) 88.

1.1.1 Essentialism

The question of identity has mainly been a sociological matter. The identity concept originates in classic sociological constructions such as the Durkheimian notion of 'Collective Conscience' and Weber's 'Verstehen'. These notions stress the 'we-ness' of a group and thus the shared attributes of group members.²³ According to essentialism, members of a collectivity were thought of as having a singular social experience that enhanced their identity. Correspondingly, it defines identity as a shared culture and as 'one true self'. This one common identity is underlying all other differences. However, this non-flexible and non-changeable meaning does not include the constructive and formative significance of identity and identification.²⁴ The essentialist view that there is an underlying and unchangeable essence which determines someone's identity, has been repudiated by constructionists and the social construction of identity was then perceived as the more feasible basis of collective identity.²⁵ Moreover, social constructivism gives the study of collective identity a historical background.

1.1.2 Constructivism

The discursive approach contemplates identification as a constructive process that can never be completed.²⁶ Identities are constantly beleaguered by forces of history, power and culture and are fragmented and fractured, especially in modern times.²⁷ Identities are “never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicisation and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.”²⁸ In other words, at university I am a student, in a family-related context I am a daughter, granddaughter or a sister. In a more political and racial sense, I am white and European, and different cultural aspects determine what and whom I identify myself with. As a historian, it will influence my capacity of analysis and my point of view. Some of these aspects can change over time and it forms the narrative of my own life and the place I wish to obtain compared to other identities.²⁹ We can also make the distinction between identity and identification, whereby identification can be described as the position one takes and defines oneself by among other people to establish a certain self-awareness or togetherness with others,

²³ Karen A. Cerulo, 'Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions', *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997) 386-387.

²⁴ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', 223.

²⁵ Karen A. Cerulo, 'Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions', 387. Kath Woodward offers a clear discussion on the different meanings of identity and the tension between essentialism and non-essentialism in Kath Woodward, *Understanding Identity* (London 2002).

²⁶ Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London 1996) 2.

²⁷ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', 225.

²⁸ Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 4.

²⁹ Jonathan Rutherford, 'A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference' in Jonathan Rutherford, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London 1990)24.

the concept identity embraces a more permanent state, as a result of this identification.³⁰

When discussing identity, we often speak in terms of difference and polarity, and the 'Self' is conveyed against the 'Other' where one usually holds a dominant position compared to the other.³¹ Doubts about self-identity are being solved by creating the image of the “Other”.³² The case of coloured identity in South Africa offers an example; it is an in-between identity, between polarities of black and white.³³ The meaning of national identity between all other social identities, such as the ethnically defined identities will prove to be a problematic issue in South Africa.

By marking out differences with other cultures or ethnicities, identities are created or recreated. Stuart Hall explains that “difference exists in and along continuity”.³⁴ In South Africa, Xhosa, Zulu, Afrikaners, coloureds, and so on all live in the same country, and call themselves South Africans. South Africa serves as a unifying component.³⁵ People’s identities cannot refer to a fixed common origin when having a past of rupture, difference and exclusion. However, identity in South Africa can be discussed in terms of the dialectic relationship of continuity and discontinuity. Notwithstanding the language and cultural and religious values Afrikaans-speaking coloureds and white Afrikaners share, and thus the continuity and similarity they share, there is a discontinuity in identity as well. One that relates directly to the apartheid past. For example coloureds were considered inferior to whites, and therefore the construction of identity was ruptured in this context of subordination and domination.

In many cases, in a critical situation such as a conflict or in the process of nation building, one sense of identity takes over and becomes the dominant identity. Control over identity means power.

³⁰ Grever and Ribbens, 'Geschiedenis, herinnering en identiteit' 23.

³¹ Jonathan Rutherford, 'A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference' 10.

³² William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (2002 Minneapolis) ix.

³³ In the Cape Colony most people were white or coloured. Until the turn of the twentieth century the term “Coloured” denoted all non-European people. In the 1880s, an official redefinition of coloured identity took place where the term ‘Coloured’ now denoted a group intermediate between “Whites” and “Bantu”. This policy was based on Social Darwinism and scientific racism that endorsed a racial hierarchy. Furthermore, it was above all the economic motives and the government’s policy of ‘divide and rule’ that helped to create a coloured identity. Coloured identity was set against black identity, by granting coloureds more rights and contrasting whites, who would remain the dominant race. Verwoerd argued that the total segregation of Coloureds was necessary for the development of both White and Coloured identity. From the beginning, coloured identity was a source of ongoing social conflict. Social barriers were created to correspond with racial differences. Ian Goldin further explains that different historical conditions are of importance when shaping and re-shaping coloured identity: “The extent to which Coloured identity was able to bind Coloureds could never be determined a priori, for the identity of each person, each group, was a product of a different set of historical circumstances. Racial identities are the unresolved outcome of a conflict which is constantly being reshaped.(...) And of course racial identities at all times co-existed with other forms of identity.” For more on coloured identity: Ian Golding, *Making Race* (Cape Town 2000). Two proficient works on coloured identity that give a full overview of the development and intricacy of Coloured identity are Ian Golding, *Making Race* (Cape Town 2000) and Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: a History of South African ‘Coloured’ Politics* (Cape Town and Johannesburg 1987).

³⁴ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' 227.

³⁵ Ibidem, 227.

Identity politics as a concept originated in the 1960s by and for the new social movements that came to the public consciousness: the black movement, gay rights, feminism, and so forth. Issues of identity became central to politics. When governments interfere with details of the history curriculum, they are defining a cultural and political identity. A cultural politics can break this polarity that is expressed in inequality and discrimination, when addressing the differences themselves.³⁶ In this context of difference I would like to introduce Antonio Gramsci because he highlighted the negotiable and incomplete character of identity: “Each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations but of the history of these relations. He is a précis of the past.”³⁷ He particularly emphasised the importance of cultural politics as means of addressing identity and thus gaining control over human consciousness. To achieve this, Gramsci advocated the control over the institutions that shape consciousness: schools, universities, religion, art institutions and especially the media. To have a hold over the cultural expression of a community of people means to have power over public opinion as well. The social expression of identity is culture and constructing a common cultural social playground is a way of shaping national identity. Gramsci linked politics and culture in a way that does not narrow identities down to one underlying totality but he sees it as “a product of the historical process to date which has deposited an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.”³⁸

The discursive, anti-essentialist view on identity accepts that – especially in modern times – identities are never fixed or unified but rather fragmented and disintegrated. In my research, I will particularly draw on Stuart Hall’s notion of cultural identity as it accommodates the importance of the past and the fluctuating, meaning of identities. Identity is a signifier in our daily, social life. As Hall reasons, identities are necessary tools of giving meaning to ourselves and to be able to function in a social environment. Identity is a social process, and by linking past to present, it creates a sense of certainty in everyday chaos.

“Representations produce meanings through which we can make sense of our experience and who we are.(...)Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not “who we are” or “where we come from” , so much as that we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they

³⁶ Jonathan Rutherford, ‘A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference’ 10.

³⁷ Gramsci quoted in Jonathan Rutherford, ‘A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference’ 19-20.

³⁸ Ibidem, 19.

oblige us to read not as an endless reiteration but as ‘the changing same’:
not the so called roots but coming to terms with our ‘routes’.”³⁹

Identity cannot be seen apart from discourse, because it is within discourse that identities are created. Certain narratives are created or reinvented to function as identifying signifiers and according to Hall these narratives are constructed within specific historical and institutional sites and different strategies are applied. “Identities are created through, not outside difference.”⁴⁰ Anthony Giddens’ “theory of structuration” explains identity as the interaction between agency and structure, and corresponds with Hall’s constructivist concept.⁴¹ According to Giddens, human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, whereby the acts of individual agents reproduce the structure. He acknowledges that there is a social structure consisting of institutions, traditions, moral codes, and so on but that these can be changed when people decide to act differently, or starting to replace or reshape them. Questions of identity are a consequence and a cause of changes at the structural level. To put in a nutshell, it is in the interaction between structures and agency that identities are invented. In South Africa, ethnicity according to certain ethnic characteristics in particular skin colour, was the main identifier. This was embodied at the institutional level. Its impact on the agents was considerably high, and it determined everyday life in South Africa. After apartheid, identities were reshaped and a new discourse of reconciliation and nation building was implemented by the new South African government. The new identity was now expected to be inclusive, and the heritage and cultural policy was expressed in terms of reconciliation and nation-building. However, it is not a one-way approach, because this new identity still has to be embraced by the agents: South Africans.

1.2 National Identity

What makes me Belgian? What makes someone else Dutch or South African? What is a nation and what is national identity? It bothers all of us. Of course it is not my ambition to answer all those questions, but an exploration of definitions and theory might shed some light on why these matters are so difficult to answer. Furthermore, there are always competing configurations of what constitutes national identity in nation states.

³⁹ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ in Jonathan Rutherford, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London 1990).

⁴⁰ Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 4.

⁴¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley 1986) and Vivienne Jabri, *Discourses on Violence: Conflict Analysis Reconsidered* (Manchester 1996).

1.2.1 Nationalism: Some Definitions

It is quite unattainable to give one complete definition for national identity or nationalism. However, some theorists have tried. The German historian Peter Alter defines nationalism as “both an ideology and a political movement which holds the nation and sovereign nation-state to be crucial in dwelling values, and which manages to mobilise the political will of a people or a large section of the population.”⁴² The sociologist Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as “a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state – a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation – should not separate the power-holders from the rest.”⁴³ This definition immediately refers to ethnic and political boundaries, hereby already denoting the difficulties that enfold when nationalism is not state-bound. Gellner builds his definition on the notions of state and nation which are intertwined because if there is no state, the question whether or not its boundaries are congruent with the limits of nations, is not applicable.⁴⁴

In that case, what is a nation? Gellner does not produce an unambiguous answer to the question. He relates nation to culture and uses the concept of culture to analyse societies in his work *Nations and Nationalism*. He understands nationalism in terms of structural and radical transformations within the development of industrial societies.⁴⁵ These developments were necessary in order to create a big community of people who all shared certain fundamental qualities necessary for the economical and industrial developments that were taking place.⁴⁶ Grever and Ribbens describe the nation state as relating to a community where the political and national territorial boundaries correspond more or less and where the majority of people recognise the legitimacy as such.⁴⁷ Gellner also refers to the transformation of a rural into an industrial society as one of the main incentives for nationalism and nation-building. One last theory I would like to mention here, is Benedict Anderson’s who argued that the fact that people started to identify with social, imagined groups outside of their religious communities, was caused by the creation of new cultural institutes. People now identified with people all over the new community without ever having met them all, the so-called ‘imagined communities’⁴⁸ In the next paragraphs, I will further go into detail about the conditions for nationalism and identity.

⁴² Peter Alter, *Nationalism* (London 1994) 4.

⁴³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalisms* (Oxford 1983) 1.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 4.

⁴⁵ John Scott, ‘Ernest Geller’ in *Fifty Key Sociologists: the Contemporary Theorists* (London and New York 2007) 97-101.

⁴⁶ Loyd Kramer, ‘Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism’ in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 58; 3 (1997) 529.

⁴⁷ Grever and Ribbens, ‘Geschiedenis, herinnering en identiteit’ 25.

⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London 1983) and Loyd Kramer, ‘Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism’, 529.

1.2.2 Conditions For National Identity

According to David Miller, being part of a national group, with the nation as ethical community and the nation as a political, constitutional structure, is the first of five main conditions for national identity. The fact that a nationality “only exists when its members believe that it does.”⁴⁹ It puts the emphasis on the side of the agent and refuses to see identity as a top-down creation. The second condition he mentions is the historic continuity of national identity. By way of illustration, the mentioned argument that we as human agents, owe a responsibility to our past: “Because our forebears have toiled and spilt their blood to build and defend the nation, we who are born into it inherit an obligation to continue their work.”⁵⁰ The important role of the past and the historian is thus identified here. Thirdly he argues that national identity is an active identity, and that the purpose of a nation is to decide things together. The fourth aspect is the geographical feature of national identity. The last argument Miller presents is similar to that of ‘difference’, meaning that national divisions have to be natural and correspond to real differences between people.⁵¹ This corresponds to the polarisation of the Self against the Other and the often ethnic boundaries between different national identities. This notion of difference represents the socially-constructed component of identity and its continuous process of creation and recreation.⁵²

He recognises that national identities have often been formed by taking over elements from the group or culture that happens to be dominant in a state, but this *an sich* is not a condition of national identity. According to Miller, national identity’s aim is to be inclusive, so it can easily incorporate sub-groups.⁵³

1.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed several theories on identity and on nationalism. The essentialist view on identity does not provide a framework that is dynamic enough to form any conclusion on South African identity. The constructivist or structuralist theory considers the formation of identity as a process and links human agency to the structural components of society. In this process, identity is reproduced. I have used Giddens' and Hall's theories on identity to produce the conceptual framework of theory that can be used to examine South African identity reproduction. Different identities can co-exist, and for my research I am predominantly interested in national identity. I see national identity as a two-way process

⁴⁹ David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Oxford 2000) 28-29.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 29.

⁵¹ Ibidem, 30.

⁵² Loyd Kramer, ‘Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism’, 526.

⁵³ David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*, 31-35.

and I use Giddens' structural model, human agency reproduces identity by using the – changeable – structural components of society through dialogical discursive narratives. Additionally, the structure itself is used and re-used in this process of becoming through and within its representations. The structure interacts with human agency by creating and influencing identifiers. Here I introduce identity politics and nation-building, when the structure is constructed to reproduce a national identity and the meaning of the nation is constructed through different narratives such as school books, cultural practices, politics, and so on. The way a nation represents or imagines itself, can take on many forms, and these are represented in the form of narratives that we can deconstruct in terms of nation building and national identity. A nation thus consists of conflicting narratives.⁵⁴ To draw an image of the identity and identification processes within a certain nation or community, these narratives are important. Grever and Ribbens point out that academical research on national identity and identity in general – especially theories on hybridity of cultures, creolisation and on 'othering' differs from the political discourse. An essentialist approach of culture with a strong stress on a fundamental 'core' of culture has become popular in many Western countries.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ In *Whiteness just isn't what it used to be*, Melissa Steyn investigates white identity in the post-Apartheid South Africa. She mentions the reflective image of the outside world on South African identity as another important factor for the self-image of the people and therefore one cannot speak of a nation as a unity with only one narrative. Melissa E. Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To Be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (New York 2001) xxxviii.

⁵⁵ Maria Grever and Kees Ribbens, 'Geschiedenis, herinnering en identiteit' 17.

Chapter Two: Reshaping the Past: Collective Memory

"Nations try the same. When they have had a bad, painful history, some have said, "Let us forget the past and they have what they call a blanket amnesty, or a general amnesty. It is more like a general amnesia. And they discover; Hey! You can't do that to the past. It comes back and it haunts you."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 1994⁵⁶

The past, in whatever societal form, is everywhere. Everything and everyone has a past and it is a permanent condition of the human consciousness. In everyday life, the presence of the past is formed by our memories and experiences. This personal past occupies an evident space in our daily life. However, this is also significant for our collective past. Besides the fact that our collective past is usually more distant from us in time and space, it is an indispensable part of our lives.⁵⁷ We are the products of our past, and this means that the crimes, failures as well as successes of earlier generations have their legacy in our present and as Nietzsche said: "it is impossible to extricate oneself entirely from this chain."⁵⁸

History, memory and identity are closely related: "to have a history is to possess an identity. Without memory there can be no personal identity in any meaningful sense of that term."⁵⁹ To exist as a social whole, the existence, or at least the illusion of a shared past is necessary. Controlling the shared memories of the past is a way of sustaining one's power and status. Controlling the past itself would be impossible since the past is made up of bygone moments and we only have memories as residues of this past. Most political actors know that to control the past is to control the present, and memory has become a medium of power.⁶⁰ In the interaction of remembering and forgetting, of memory and oblivion, a sense of historical identity is constituted. Forgetting will prove to be of equal importance, as not to say more important, than remembering or to use the famous quote by Ernest Renan: "L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la formation d'une nation."⁶¹ Although historical facts lie in the past, the history itself is a construction of the present. History is being constructed by the historian

⁵⁶ <http://www.hiroshimasummit.jp/en/03ReconciliationandPeacebuilding.html>

⁵⁷ Kees Ribbens, *Een eigentijds verleden: Alledaagse historische cultuur in Nederland 1945-2000* (Hilversum 2002) 15.

⁵⁸ Quoted from: Siep Stuurman, 'In the long run we shall all be dead. Contingency, structure and memory in history' in Mieke Bal, Inge Boer, *The Point of Theory. Practices of Cultural Analysis* (Amsterdam 1994) 126.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 125.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey K. Olick, 'Products, Processes, and Practices: A Non-Reificatory Approach to Collective Memory' in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006) 7.

⁶¹ "Forgetting and I would even say, historical errors are of importance when building a nation.", quoted in Grever and Ribbens, *Nationale Identiteit en Meervoudig Verleden*, 28.

and thus open to different interpretations. Extreme post-modern notions of history take this concept remarkably further by challenging the possibility of accurate knowledge about individual events and even regarding it as entirely unattainable.⁶²

In this chapter, I want to have a closer look at the dynamics and theories of the construction and the shaping of collective memory in particular. I will deal with some problems concerning the interpretation of collective memory and its interrelation with history and the question of identity. How is the past embodied in collective memory in the process of creating national identity. The theories as formulated by Halbwachs, Anderson and Zerubavel will provide a basis for the remainder of my research.

2.1 The Origin Of Collective Memory

2.1.1 The Social Framework Of Memory

The sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs was one of the first to use the term 'collective memory' in the beginning of the twentieth century when he put memories within a social context.⁶³ He understood collective memories as collectively shared representations of the past and distinguished between collective and historical memory.⁶⁴ Historical memory is memory that reaches us only through historical records, as opposed to autobiographical memory, which is memory that is directly experienced. History is a remembered past to which we no longer have an organic relation. This aspect differs from collective memory which is the active past that forms our identities. The link with the present is unavoidable because collective memory is a reconstruction of the past but one that adapts the ancient image to the cultural, political or religious needs of the present.⁶⁵ Halbwachs emphasises the fact that people remember together, as a social collective and he considers it impossible to remember outside these 'social frameworks of memory'. Groups and collectivities give people the stimulus to remember.⁶⁶ Jan Assman speaks instead of 'cultural memory' referring to the objectified culture of texts, images, buildings, monuments, rituals, etcetera that are meant to remember and cultivate events in the history of the collective. This cultural memory has what he calls 'figures of memory', fixed points of events of the past

⁶² Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London/New York 1997) 55. This relativist position is based on the argument that the truth of a statement is relative to the position of the one making the statement.

⁶³ Jeffrey K. Olick, Joyce Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices' in *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998) 107.

⁶⁴ Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies' in *History and Theory*, 14 (2002) 181.

⁶⁵ Barry Schwartz, 'The Reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln' in David Middleton and Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering* (London 1990) 82.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey K. Olick, Joyce Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices' in *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998) 111. and Jeffrey K. Olick, 'Products, Processes, and Practices: A Non-Reificatory Approach to Collective Memory' in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006) 11.

and its memory is conserved through cultural artefacts such as those mentioned above.⁶⁷ He makes an important differentiation between potential and actual cultural memories. Potential means that representations of the past exist in archives, museums, texts, etcetera. They become actual memories when people de facto adopt these representations and give meaning to them in a specific historical and social context. This is what he calls the capacity of cultural memory to reconstruct but it is not the only characteristic of cultural memory. Memory stands in relation to a group, and the manifestation of cultural memory is defined through identification in a negative or positive way. It is here that the distinction between who belongs to a group and who does not, is created. The access to this cultural memory and its body of knowledge is thus controlled by a ‘need for identity’.⁶⁸

2.1.2 The Legitimation Of The Past

Collective memory is a communal experience that only manifests itself in actions and behaviour of individuals. Its interest lies in the contemporary and not in the past even though those memories might refer to events in a remote past.⁶⁹ This is important since it explains why certain past events are hardly remembered at one time, but often rediscovered in another time as references to the then present - often political or social – reality. The past is then called upon to legitimise present conditions. Certain events or experiences are remembered while other are not. We can conclude that it is not the event itself that forms the memory, but how it is interpreted and used afterwards that determines its commemorative level.⁷⁰ By mnemonically socialising a society within textbooks, commemorations, museums and so on, a selective framework of history is being created. When studying memory, one realises that our recollections of the past are not at all objective since we do not all remember in the same way.⁷¹ Authorities determine to a great extent - whether politically or culturally - what past should be remembered as well as the manner in which that should be done. By their institutions, they try to influence and sometimes control the memories.

In authoritarian states, the past is used to justify the present, as happened with Afrikaners when they interpreted their past according to their own demand and constructed their own collective, historical memory. Cultural heritage and historical memory was politicised to promote Afrikaner nationalism. Hegemonic projects were raised and if we explain hegemony in Gramscian terms, we can consider it an attempt of political elites to generalise their interests to the populace at large. It encompasses an effort to engender foundational myths that define and institutionalise a certain illusion of nationalism. This

⁶⁷ Jan Assmann, John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural identity’ in *New German Critique* 65, *Cultural History/Cultural Studies* (1995), 129.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, 130.

⁶⁹ Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory’, 180.

⁷⁰ Grever and Stuurman, *Nationale Identiteit en Meervoudig Verleden*, 29.

⁷¹ Eviator Zerubavel, *Time Maps, Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago 2003) 2.

particular world view is achieved by acceptance of the view as such and as linked to the state. Therefore, this view is prompted through formal institutions and according to Gramsci, also by the agents of civil society, for instance education and religion. In South Africa, the clergy played an important role in upholding the rationalisation of apartheid and white dominance in general. As Gramsci argued, not only political dominance important to advocate a certain regime, but also intellectual and moral leadership.⁷² To understand what happened in South African collective memory, it is necessary to examine the processes whereby an increased interest in the past became a key component of nationalistic political discourse and why collective memory assumed specific forms at particular points.⁷³

2.2 History Versus Memory

2.2.1 The Difference Between History And Memory

As discussed earlier, history and collective memory are two different concepts. Collective memory refers to an active past that forms our identities while history itself is a remembered past to which we no longer have access. When studying collective memory, not only the issue whether the memories correspond with the past is at stake, but also how the agents construct their memory.⁷⁴ Narratives are being deconstructed which causes a rupture between history and memory.⁷⁵ John Gillis also speaks of this rupture when he argues that “memory has turned inwards, cutting itself off from history (...) It has become memory remembering memory.”⁷⁶ According to Gillis “we are kept so busy remembering to remember that we have no time or energy to do anything more memorable.”⁷⁷ Often controversies around the remembering of an event have taken over the remembering of the event itself. What people will remember then, are the controversies and not the actual event.⁷⁸ This implies a difficult task for the historian because memory continues to represent itself differently and is reshaped over and over again since mnemonic traditions are a not a static but a dynamical process. It is important not to consider collective memory as an aggregate of individual memories that can be studied with psychological, psychoanalytical methods.

⁷² For his research on collective identity and historical memory, Eric Davis explored Gramsci's theories on nation and hegemony and looked for answers to the issue of nation building and how authoritarian rule constitutes and sustains itself by examining the state of Iraq's understanding of the past until its collapse in 2003. Eric Davis, *Memories of State, politics, history and collective memory in modern Iraq* (Berkeley 2005).

⁷³ See also: Eric Davis, *Memories of State*.

⁷⁴ David Middleton, Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering*, 3.

⁷⁵ Pierre Nora called this the “Cracking of the mold”, when the national myth collapsed and the social minorities emancipated. Each minority wanted to have its own history and memory appreciated by the state. See: Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France, Les Lieux de Mémoire, Volume I the State* (Chicago 2001) XIV.

⁷⁶ Gillis, ‘Remembering Memory’ 92.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, 92.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, 99.

2.2.2 Pierre Nora’s History Of Memory

The question remains why we are so obsessed with memory. “Memory is constantly on our lips, because it no longer exists”, the well-known French historian Pierre Nora argues. In his work *Lieux de Mémoire*, he gives an overview of the history of France in terms of its memories. These *lieux de mémoire* - sites of remembrance – shape for the individual an image of a past that he did not experience himself. Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* reminds us of Assmann’s *figures of memory* discussed earlier. A process of claiming a past that is not one’s own takes place whereby one identifies oneself with the experience of a past actor.⁷⁹ “Lieux de mémoire arise out of a sense that there is not such a thing as spontaneous memory, hence that we must create archives, mark anniversaries, organise celebrations.”⁸⁰ These cultural reproductions have become substitutes for imagination. “Lieux de mémoire are there because there are no longer any milieux de mémoire, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience.”⁸¹ Analogous to Gillis, Nora speaks of the rupture between memory and history. To explain this, we will have to go a bit further into Nora’s history of memory.

He divides this history into three periods: pre-modern, modern and post-modern memory. In pre-modern times there was a natural relationship between people and their past. This was expressed in rituals and traditions that provided people with a stable sense of time. In the nineteenth century, due to the acceleration of everyday life, these old traditions lost their meaning and new traditions needed to be invented with the nation state as referent. This is Nora’s modern period. The twentieth century, which he marks as the post-modern period is even more complex because of the disappearing of the nation state as identifier: “National identity was replaced by social identities.”⁸² He speaks of a crisis of memory and intertwines this crisis with the crisis of identity. “The equilibrium between the past and the present is disrupted” he maintains “so that things tumble with increasing rapidity into an irretrievable past.”⁸³

Because of the deterioration of the nation state as the main identity framework throughout the twentieth century, the past has become, in David Lowenthal’s words, “a foreign country”⁸⁴ and people are shut off from the past. “Memory is now a matter of explicit signs, not of implicit meanings,” and we can only represent and invent what we no longer experience.⁸⁵ Nora especially emphasises the decline of the nation state and the influence of globalisation. The nation state as a traditional identifier is at stake in modern Europe.⁸⁶ Because of mass media and globalisation, collective memory and identities have

⁷⁹ Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France*, XVIII-XX.

⁸⁰ Quoted in: Peter Fritzsche, ‘The Case of Modern Memory’ in *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (2001) 92.

⁸¹ Nora, *Rethinking France*, XVIII-XX.

⁸² *Ibidem*, XV.

⁸³ Quoted in: Fritzsche, ‘The Case of Modern Memory’, 92.

⁸⁴ “The Past is a Foreign Country” is the title of David Lowenthal’s book on memory. David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge 1985).

⁸⁵ Olick, ‘Introduction: Memory and the Nation’, 379.

⁸⁶ Pierre Nora writes about France, and although he provides us with an adequate theory, one must keep in

shifted from the national to the global scale and have put a lot of stress on the nation-state.

2.3 Memory And The Nation

For a long time, scholars have seen the nation-state as the determining factor in the shaping of collective memory in order to secure the future of a nation. Here, collective memory stands in close relationship to national identity. Yael Zerubavel argues that “Collective memory continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas.”⁸⁷ This social aspect of remembering is also recognised by the much more psychological-oriented Middleton and Edwards in *Collective Remembering*.⁸⁸ They argue that both the reconstruction of the past, by which they mean remembering things collectively, and the general process of commemoration is providing frameworks within which is specified for adults and children what to remember and what it is to be remembered as part of a social enterprise.⁸⁹ Regarding identity, Middleton and Edwards even go a bit further: “It is not just that ‘he who controls the past controls the future’ but he who controls the past controls who we are.”⁹⁰ Collective remembering is essential for the construction of identity within a community. Familiarising someone with a collective history is a way of assimilating someone in a new group or community. This is an important, and highly political aspect of the relationship between identity and collective memory.⁹¹ Maria Grever argues in *Beyond the Canon* that national governments have become increasingly aware of this link and how they “lose control over who and what constitutes the 'common' past.”⁹² For the historian, the difficulty arises how to include or do justice to all the different perspectives and voices into one narrative. In the South African case, where history and identity was ethnically determined, the nation is re-imagined in an attempt to assimilate all minorities.

2.3.1 The Nation As An Imagined Community

Nationalism has long been using memory as an instrument to influence national identity and history was considered its high counsel.⁹³ The interest in the past was mostly stimulated by those whose actual

mind that when writing about African nations, the context is different. Although the fact that his work only focuses on the French society and might often seem nostalgic, it is a way to get a grip on the national past while denouncing nationalist grand narratives. National holidays such as Reconciliation Day in South Africa can be considered as *Lieux de Mémoire*.

⁸⁷ Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory’, 187.

⁸⁸ David Middleton, Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering* (London 1990) 8.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, 8.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, 10.

⁹¹ Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 3.

⁹² Maria Grever, “Plurality, Narrative and the Historical Canon” in Grever and Stuurman, *Beyond the Canon*, 32.

⁹³ Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘Introduction: Memory and the Nation – Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations’ in

interest lay in the future. The nation relied on historical narratives to provide continuity with the past and create identity.⁹⁴ A national history was created. Benedict Anderson believed the nation to be the main identifying form and history as its tool. Because of the modern acceleration of life, the nation made up for the loss of the existential securities the religious world view previously offered. Michael Kammen agrees with Anderson by insisting that national memory was a kind of substitute religion “filling up the void created by the eclipse of old forms of faith. When nations began to worship themselves, they turned to history as their sacred text and catechism.”⁹⁵

An important scholar in the field of nationalism is Benedict Anderson who calls the nation an “imagined community” because even though people will never know all their co-members, there is still a sense of unity. This sense of unity and community exists in the minds of these people and is thus imagined.⁹⁶ Although the nation-state is a relatively modern concept and perceived as if new, the political claims of the past it makes is one of an “immemorial past”.⁹⁷ Shifts in meaning and interpretation of events can occur and collective memory is related to the sense of collective – and in many cases national – identity.

2.3.2 The Invention Of Tradition

This brings us to Eric Hobsbawm’s work, *The Invention of Tradition*. An invented tradition is defined as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”⁹⁸ He also remarks that invented traditions more often than not try to ascertain continuity with a suitable past. This is characteristic for any tradition, but what distinguishes a invented tradition is its “factitious continuity with the past.”⁹⁹ These traditions use the method of ritualisation and formalisation and are enforced by repetition.

Not only when a community – or a nation – is created but also when a repressive government falls from power, the citizens search for historical evidence of the government’s offence in order to verify and establish their new identities. “History and historical evidence is crucial to constructing identities and the evidence itself becomes the focus of struggle”.¹⁰⁰ The way the past is remembered in collective

Social Science History 22, Special Issue: Memory and the Nation (1998) 378.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, 379.

⁹⁵ John R Gillis, ‘Remembering Memory: a challenge for public historians in a post-national era’ in *The public historian* 4 (1992) 97.

⁹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London 1983)15-16.

⁹⁷ Ibidem, 19.

⁹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 1983).

⁹⁹ Ibidem, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, ‘Telling the Truth about the history’ in Keith Jenkins, *The Postmodern Reader* (London/New York 1997).

memory is influenced by the construction of identities and is closely related to the issues of the purpose and responsibilities of history. As Grever argues in *Beyond the Canon*, “most historians acknowledge that nations and nation states are 'invented traditions' and fields of contention rather than enduring numinous realities.”¹⁰¹

2.4 Zerubavel's Mapping Of Collective Memory

Sociologist Eviator Zerubavel examined the social map-like structures in which history is organised in our minds. He linked the academic field of sociology with that of history when analysing how we remember what happened in history. From the social perspective, he examined the structure of social memory, more specifically the “social meaning of past events is essentially a function of the way they are structurally positioned in our mind vis a vis other events.”¹⁰² As human agents, we need to make a selection of what we will remember and what we cannot remember, and this process of selecting is influenced by many actors. The place of certain events in history is not objective, and can involve what Zerubavel calls *mnemonic battles*. In line with the other theories that were presented here, he agrees that we remember as social beings and more importantly, we have the ability to “experience the things that happened to the groups to which we belong long before we even joined them as if they were part of our own personal past.”¹⁰³ When discussing issues like assimilation, especially in multicultural societies and taking into account the effects of globalisation, Zerubavel's analysis can be useful.

Significant for my research is the way he links the sense of togetherness and the recalling of the past together with the actual moment it is remembered. As he explains: “On the same day, an entire mnemonic community manages to focus its attention on the very same moment in history (...)” and calls it “mnemonic synchronization” and considers it the fore glimpse of the modern 'global village'. The way we remember is influenced and determined by various factors, most of them impersonal. These mental filters are commonly shared by the same mnemonic community and socialized into different mnemonic traditions. Here we can link Zerubavel's theory to Hobsbawm's theory of invented traditions. This mnemonic socialisation links different people to each other and therefore can be a powerful tool. “Far from being a strictly spontaneous act, remembering is also governed by unmistakably social 'norms of remembrance' that tell us what we should remember and what we should essentially forget.”¹⁰⁴ One of the tools of this mnemonic socialisation is the public calendar. He considers the public, national holidays a calendrical bridge to connect the past and the present and a tool to “help coagulate essentially non-

¹⁰¹ Maria Grever and Siep Stuurman, *Beyond the Canon, History for the Twenty-First Century* (Hampshire 2007) 5.

¹⁰² Eviator Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 7.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, 2-3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, 5.

contiguous patches of history into a single, seemingly contiguous experiential stream.”¹⁰⁵

2.5 Conclusion

Although post-modern theorists now focus on the decline of nation-states, they have always had a special place in the history of memory and identity and their relations towards each other. Identities that are now competing with the national, allude to the role that memory has in the nation state.¹⁰⁶ However, nations try to find a new approach to their histories and often appeal to the mnemonic shapes of collective memory. People try to reconnect with the past in various ways and one of them is by presenting history in museums, and other places of remembrance. History is more and more organised around what I call memory hooks or mnemonic frameworks. Often this history is created by the national government who tries to get a grip on their nation’s past and therefore uses a pictorial way of representing the past. I consider debates concerning these issues a consequence of the post-modern rupture of history and memory; and people’s efforts to reconnect with the past even though the past has become more and more fragmented.

In this process, traditions are invented and re-invented, and a continuity with the past is searched for. Disregarding the tendency towards national identities and a political canonisation of history, there is also a rise of counter-memories and counter-identities, for example the history of gender, public history and the history of ethnic minorities. These gave rise to different and often conflicting perspectives and histories.¹⁰⁷ The notions of collective memory linked up with identity will be tools during my research on South African collective memory and identity. In this theoretical chapter, I have introduced many theorists and notions regarding identity and collective memory that will provide me and the reader with a theoretical framework to understand underlying processes of identification and historicisation better, but also bestows us with some analytical tools throughout the case study of Day of Reconciliation as a politicised, contested 'Lieu de Mémoire' and 'Invented Tradition'.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Olick, ‘Introduction: Memory and the Nation’ 379.

¹⁰⁷ Grever and Stuurman, *Beyond the Canon*, 6.

Chapter Three: Mapping the Past: the South African National Calendar

The general shape of our collective memory is a product of mental processes of differentiating marked historical periods during which a lot seems to have happened from essentially unmarked 'lulls' that seem relatively uneventful.

Eviator Zerubavel

The public holidays in a national calendar of a nation can be described as an “annual cycle of commemorative holidays”. When we commemorate a certain day or event, we synchronize past and present and present and future. To use the Dutch historian Ankersmit’s words, the public holidays form a cycle of “historical experiences”. The days of the calendar refer to events that happened in the past and are for that reason ‘historical’ since they contain a historical meaning and express a shared experience. These commemorations are not individual occurrences but they epitomise the sense of collectivity and togetherness. Ideas of identity are a central factor in sustaining commemorations and explain the popularity of certain commemorative happenings over others. As Eviator Zerubavel argues in his article on the sociology of memory, our collective memory selects certain historical periods. A national calendar can thus be seen as a timeline that offers a biography of a history of a nation.¹⁰⁸ This cycle of holidays creates a ‘master narrative’ that indicates the most important periods in a nation’s collective past.¹⁰⁹ This memory “serves to articulate social commitments to various transhistorical ideas such as nature and work they usually help mnemonic communities preserve their collective memories”.¹¹⁰ When looking into all the mnemonic days in the American calendar, Zerubavel encountered what he calls a ‘mnemonic density’ that refers to certain periods in time that seem to be ‘more popular’ to commemorate than others.¹¹¹ My inspiration to examine the public holidays in South Africa is essentially expressed by Zerubavel’s own motivation:

“Such remarkable simultaneity of past and present (likewise attempted through re-enactment rituals like Christmas and Thanksgiving pageants) is what nations basically aim for when they try to organize time to flow isochronally at the levels of both the calendar and history. And it all rests on our ability to symbolically condense thousands of years of history into a single

¹⁰⁸ Eviator Zerubavel, ‘Calenders and History’, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, 3.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem, 3.

¹¹¹ Eviator Zerubavel, *Time maps*, 29.

annual cycle of holidays – arguably one of the most spectacular cultural arrangements that help transform people into nations.”¹¹²

In this chapter I take a closer look at the South African public holidays in a similar way by studying their chronological distribution, meaning, commemorative events and the history of the calendar in South Africa in an attempt to provide an answer to the question how the South African calendar presents a temporal-historical structure of the shape of collective memory by studying the shifts that occurred in the official public holidays and how they are related to the process of identity formation.

3.1 The National Symbols

In his article on national symbols published in 1994, André Wessel already conveyed that the controversy relating to the public holidays cannot be seen separate from the debate around the national symbols in South Africa. As many theorists on national symbols and national identity have argued before, symbols clarify and create society and make people conscious of their moral unity. Similar research includes that of Cerulo who coded the structure of flags and anthems.¹¹³ These studies offer interesting perspectives and conclusions, for instance Cerulo’s generalisation that more ethnologically homogeneous states have simpler flags. When applied to the South African case, the national flag can indeed be seen as an indicator of the country's complexity. The design and colours are an outline of the country’s history and represent different people. In 1993, it was decided after the multi-party negotiating council that the new country needed new symbols and the flag was one of them. The public was invited to make submissions and different designs were composed. Eventually this did not lead to a usable design and in the end two negotiators were appointed to design new flag and in April 1994 they introduced a new flag.

“The central design of the flag, beginning at the flag post in a 'V' form and flowing into a single horizontal band to the outer edge of the fly, can be interpreted as the convergence of diverse elements within South African society, taking the road ahead in unity. The theme of convergence and unity ties in with the motto Unity is Strength of the previous South African Coat of Arms.”¹¹⁴

The colours of the flag are red, white and blue, which were common colours in the historical flags of South Africa, referring to the Dutch and British flag, and green, black and gold were the colours associated with the black history of the country and with the ANC. However, no official meaning was

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¹¹³ Karen Cerulo, *Identity Designs: The sights and sounds of a nation* (New York 1995).

¹¹⁴ <http://www.info.gov.za/gazette/notices/2001/22356.pdf> and the government’s website: <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/symbols/flag.htm> (18.01.2009)

attached to the flag, and every citizen can attach his or her own meaning to the flag.¹¹⁵ The two lines coming together at one point also mirrors the 'road to unity'. Nevertheless, different people have tried to look for different meanings in the flag and it has been argued by Afrikaners that the green colour is too dominant in the flag, or it is sometimes thought that the black and white colours represent the White and Black polarisation in the country. This, however points out that in such a complex country as South Africa, even the creation of a national flag is highly sensitive. The debate about national symbols is closely related to the issue of legitimacy. The public calendar in its many forms is an indicator of the legitimacy of the South African state, and its history of memory a history of South Africa.

The historical turning point of 1994 coincided with the formation of a relatively new calendar. One could say that because of the historical turning point, the calendar had to be readjusted accordingly. The implementation hereof did not go easily and was subject to several discussions, debates and papers. By investigating these papers and debates, I will formulate an answer to the question which national holidays have been created and commemorated in South Africa and how they evolved through time. Hereby I especially focus on the problematic implementation of these commemorative days. An overview of all the holidays is represented in an appendix.¹¹⁶

3.2 The Politics Of Nation Building After 1994

Before 1994, the apartheid system was a defining item in South African society. Whether supporting or opposing apartheid, it was a truly national South African issue. The question is whether the discourse of rainbowism and reconciliation can offer a central reference point in the fragmented public life. South Africa has one of the most liberal and enlightened constitutions worldwide with the most modern notions of democratic pluralism and human rights. Furthermore, its conception of citizenship both transcends and tolerates diversity. However, already from the beginning, scholars speak of a 'crisis of culture'. I will not go further into this matter, but it is important to remember that constitutionally South Africa has an excellent new policy, but that from its implementation onwards, questions of sovereignty arose.¹¹⁷ Additionally, having political power also means having a certain ownership over the nation's heritage. Dealing with the study of memory, we also question the agency of memory: who are the custodians of public memory, its producers, distributors, and consumers?¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ André Wessels, 'In search of acceptable national symbols for South Africa', 268-269.

¹¹⁶ Appendix

¹¹⁷ For a comprehensive work on the issues of cultural identity and pluralism and citizenship in post apartheid South Africa, see: Steven L. Robins, *Limits to Liberation after Apartheid. Citizenship, governance and culture* (Oxford 2005). This work discusses the limits of liberation and liberalism in South Africa on a theoretical level, further illustrated by different case studies.

¹¹⁸ See also: Gary Baines, 'The Politics of History in Post Apartheid South Africa' 4.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) regarded an arts and culture programme as a crucial component for developing South Africa’s human resources. According to South Africa’s Yearbook of 1995, one of its main goals was to “promote the development of a unifying national culture, representing the aspirations of all South Africa’s people and to conserve, promote and revitalise the nation’s cultural heritage.”¹¹⁹ The Yearbook described reconciliation as “the main theme of nation-building since the election in April 1994.”¹²⁰ The reconsideration of the national public holidays was one of the many projects, organisations and commissions that were brought to life.¹²¹ Through recreating memory, peace with the turbulent South African past is sought and a platform for people to express their oral histories was installed.

Different definitions, views, approaches exist when it comes to nation-building and the nation-state. I have already discussed these in the introduction. I would only like to point out one that is specifically important to the issue of identity and nationalism in South Africa when discussing the commemorative days. A difference occurs between *civic nationalism* and *ethnic nationalism*. The first one is based on equal civil rights and citizenship. Ethnic nationalism however refers to belonging to a certain ethnic entity instead of a democratic common state.¹²² However theoretically the concept of the civic nation creates a multicultural society with space for individual freedom, it often withdraws in ethnic segments.¹²³ This issue has been questioned by many sociologists, politic scholars and historians. “Building a nation - whose nation?” is a question often heard. According to Colin Bundy, national identity was the main concern for the country: “In the political catechism of the New South Africa, the primary inquiry remains the National Question. What is the post apartheid nation? Who belongs or is excluded and on what basis? How does a national identity gain its salience and power to transcend the particularities of ethnicity and race?”¹²⁴ This question provided the backdrop for the re-installment of the national calendar in 1994 when according to the *Technical Working Group on Public Holidays* the national days had to promote both diversity and unity and emphasise civic nationalism.¹²⁵ Again, similar to the pre-1994 discourse, the issue was inclusion versus exclusion. While nation-building before 1994 was based upon separateness and ethnicity, after 1994, the new catch phrase was *United in diversity*.

¹¹⁹ South African yearbook 1995, 359.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, 360.

¹²¹ Sebetlela Petrus Mokhesi, *Nation-building in South Africa: Mandela and Mbeki compared*, Master Thesis (Cape Town 2003) 2.

¹²² Ibidem, 3.

¹²³ For criticism on the civic nation, see: Ed Jonker, “Sotto Voce, Identiteit, burgerschap en de nationale canon” in Maria Grever (red.), *Controverses rond de canon* (Assen 2006) 9-11. (No English translation available).

¹²⁴ Colin Bundy, ‘New nation, new history? Constructing the past in post apartheid South Africa’ in Hans Erik Stolten, *History Making and Present day politics, the Meaning of collective memory in South Africa* (Uppsala 2007) 79.

¹²⁵ Report of the Technical Working Group on Public Holidays to the Minister's Committee (1994) 4.

3.3 The History Of A Calendar

The current South African national calendar has not been constructed without debate and consideration. Different reports and commissions had been in charge of reformulating and re-inventing the public holidays. In the twentieth century, there are four reports that were an important contribution to the debate. The advice as proposed by the commissions has not always been implemented by the government but it does offer an insight into the matters relating to the commemorations and the sensitiveness of certain commemorations. Therefore, the commemorations of public holidays in South Africa have a history of their own and it is this history that I depict here by examining the different reports of the commissions.

In contemporary South Africa twelve national holidays exist, and they were implemented in 1994. As the political, socio-economic and cultural climate profoundly changed after 1994 in South Africa, the public calendar did correspondingly.

3.3.1 The First Official Calendar: 1910

The first institutionalised national calendar in South Africa was implemented in 1910 by the Public Holidays Act 1910 (Act No. 3 of 1910).¹²⁶ It was the first formal introduction of ‘national holidays’ after the union of the country.¹²⁷ Chronologically, these holidays were: New Years Day (1 January), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Victoria Day (24 May), Union day (31 May), the King’s Birthday (first Monday in August), the first Monday in October¹²⁸, Dingaan’s Day (16 December), Christmas Day (25 December) and Boxing Day (26 December). The British authority and dominance was confirmed by this calendar.

All of them were investigated by a select committee in 1925, who suggested quite a few alterations to the calendar. An important issue during the debates was the inclusion of a day that represented the whole South African Union and would be celebrated by the whole population and not only by the British part.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ André Wessels, ‘In search of acceptable national symbols for South Africa’ 262-287.

¹²⁷ On May 31, 1902, the Peace or ‘Vereeniging’ was signed in Pretoria and the two former Boer republics were annexed by Britain. From then on, Britain had four colonies in what in 1910 became to be known as the Union of South Africa.

¹²⁸ In the report of the committee, no actual name for the day was mentioned for 1910. However in 1925 it was referred to as “Spring Day”.

¹²⁹ The differences between Afrikaners and the British remained an issue after 1910. Afrikaners were usually farmers and belonged to a poorer class than the British who held all the entrepreneurial, managerial and skilled positions. Although the existence of a class of “Poor Whites”, the categories class and race were closely related and the capitalist economy was depended upon black labour. See also: Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven and London 1990) 155. However, educational standards among Afrikaners remained low and an increasing class of poor whites emerged, mostly living on the countryside. (See: Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa* and Thompson, *A History of South Africa* .

“(….)With reference to your suggestion that we should have a national day, when the people as a whole can come together and discuss their common history so far as this country is concerned, I think there is a necessity for a day like that.”¹³⁰

By 'whole people', the report meant only the white part of the population, as non-whites, were increasingly excluded from all parts of society. Trivialities, for example climatic conditions were considered. “The chief thing is what to name such a day, and further, the correct date to fix for it, because, take Union Day, that falls during the rainy season in Cape Town.”¹³¹ But the speaker came with a solid solution and considered Dingaan’s Day a good alternative, although it was proposed to change the name into ‘Voortrekkers Day’. “The fixing of a day when both the English and the Dutch sections of the population would be a matter of great importance in a country like this where we are all desirous of cultivating good relations.”¹³² What the members of the select committee had in mind was an American-like Thanksgiving Day that could be celebrated as a religious day but also as a convivial day. This way the public holiday would have the potential to include all whites of different religious beliefs. Nonetheless the committee was aware of the fact that the name Voortrekkers Day might appeal more to the Dutch than to the British settlers. In spite of this, the link with the British empire was not to be undone and it was argued to keep at least one of the royal family’s birthdays “not to forget what the British commonwealth has done for South Africa.”¹³³ If we take the changes of 1925 into account, we see that the British hegemony decreased when during the 1930s and 1940s, many Afrikaners were forced to the cities. Due to the depression of the early thirties they had to 'trek' again and many of them were working in low-paid jobs, missing the required skills for higher employment. Poverty among Afrikaners was most common and “through group identification and cooperation it was hoped that the position of Afrikaans speakers could be improved.”¹³⁴ This coincided with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the ongoing discrimination of the non-white population.¹³⁵

Although the committee proposed some clear alterations and remarks, that referred clearly to the economical and political situation of that time, the advice was further ignored by the government without further explanation.

¹³⁰ Mr Krige in Minutes of evidence, Wednesday 29th April, 1925, in *Union of South Africa, Report of the select committee on amendment of public holidays act (Cape Town 1925)*. 2

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² Ibidem.

¹³³ Mr du Toit in Ibidem, 4.

¹³⁴ A M Grundlingh, ‘Afrikaner nationalism and white politics’ in *B J Liebenberg, S B Spies, etc. South Africa in the 20th century* (Pretoria 1993) 269.

¹³⁵ Racial segregation and discrimination was used to control and dominate the Africans. During the years more and more privileges were being denied for Africans, for instance the Natives Land Act of 1913, that prohibited Africans to purchase land outside reserves from people who were not Africans.

3.3.2 The Calendar During Apartheid: 1949

In 1949, one year after the Afrikaner National Party, with D.F. Malan as leader, had won the first election under its slogan of ‘apartheid’, a new *Commission of Inquiry into Public Holidays* was assigned and its report published.¹³⁶ The report pointed out that the public holidays consisted of a threefold: “religious days, holidays of historical and cultural significance and ordinary days for relaxation and pleasure” and that the most important days were those that contained most meaning, namely those of cultural and historical significance, according to the commission.¹³⁷ A new day, namely Van Riebeeck Day on April 6, was recommended by the commission. Its advice was based upon the ‘nation’s people’ who could evince their aspirations for the different holidays. As the commission argued, Van Riebeeck Day was one with overwhelming evidence and besides, one on which “the Afrikaans and the English speaking sections agree”.¹³⁸ As this report shows, the relation between the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking white population was sometimes arduous. Note also the change of tone compared to the 1925 report. In 1925 the word ‘Dutch’ was still mentioned, while now a change in nuance occurred because they are now referred to as “Afrikaans-speaking”. This discursive reformulation reflects two things. It represents Afrikaans as a language distinct from Dutch and additionally, it denotes the Afrikaner as a separate and African people. The phrase ‘Afrikaner’ replaced ‘Dutch settler’ and represented more directly the values and characteristics of the Afrikaans-speaking people.¹³⁹

It was not the first time Van Riebeeck Day was suggested as a holiday as the 1925 and the 1949 report raised the same issues. The debate about naming certain days occupied a prominent part of the reports: Founders’ Day, Settlers Day, or Van Riebeeck Day. Meanings of events are altered or adjusted – often in the slightest way - to include some South Africans and exclude others. As an illustration, the new meaning attributed to Van Riebeeck Day was described in the 1949 reports as “the day that Christian civilisation was brought to South Africa”¹⁴⁰ By adding this Christian feature, it was possible to include the British and the Dutch settlers and not only the Afrikaner inhabitants. In 1949, the emphasis was still very much on white Afrikaner identity and during the early apartheid years, South African society was being ‘Afrikanerised’. While in the beginning the NP had predominantly Afrikaner support, from the Sixties, English-speaking white support was increasing and while British were included more and more, blacks were excluded without any further discussion.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Union of South Africa, ‘Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Public Holidays’, Government Notice 2377 of the 4th November 1949, published in the *Government Gazette of the Union of South Africa*, 4th November 1949.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, 2.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, 5.

¹³⁹ the Dutch-speaking had started to call themselves Afrikaners since the 1820s according to Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 56.

¹⁴⁰ Union of South Africa, ‘Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Public Holidays’, 6.

¹⁴¹ One of the pillars of apartheid, was the formation of a nation for the white population – Afrikaans and English-speaking – while Africans belonged to other nations, the so-called homelands where self-

Notwithstanding the impossibility to find a historical date that suited both groups of settlers, the first Monday of September was suggested as Settlers Day, to commemorate the British settlers of 1820 and those of 1849-1851 in Natal.¹⁴² In addition, a typical Afrikaner commemorative day would then be Kruger Day¹⁴³. As mentioned in the 1949 report: “He (referring to Paul Kruger) is to be regarded as the embodiment – par excellence – of Afrikaner heroes of all time, typifies all the outstanding noble qualities of the Afrikaner nation (...) and there can be no doubt as the desirability of recognising this day”¹⁴⁴ While Settlers day, Kruger day and Van Riebeeck Day were still disputed, there were no reservations on having Dingaan’s Day on the National Calendar. There was yet a difference of opinions on the naming of Dingaan’s Day and more objections were raised against it. Some arguments against the name were: the impression that it involved an esteem for Dingaan, the fact that this name contributed to raising antipathy among natives against Europeans and the strangeness of such a day being named after the ‘vanquished’.¹⁴⁵ The name Voortrekkers Day was dissented and it was considered to be too vague and “to bestow a measure of honour on the Voortrekkers as human beings, while (...) the honour is exclusively to God.”¹⁴⁶ The name was thus changed to Geloftedag, Day of the Covenant or Day of the Vow and more and more the emphasis was put on the religious aspect of the commemoration and Day of the Vow was mentioned as a sabbatical day in line with other religious days equivalent to Christmas Day, Good Friday and Ascension Day.

Although a clear effort was made to include both British and Dutch settlers, the report was mostly composed by Afrikaner politicians and cultural institutions. The report of the commission eventually led to the Public Holidays Act of 1952 and the Public Holidays Amendment Act of 1973 when Family Day and Van Riebeeck Day were both abolished.¹⁴⁷

3.3.3 A Calendar Of Change: 1980

The disagreement that arose about the abolishment of Van Riebeeck Day was the stimulus in 1980 to implement another *Commission of Inquiry into Public Holidays*, chaired by Dr. J. S. Gericke. Among the bodies advocating the re-introduction of Van Riebeeck Day was the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (FAK) which reveals the input the Afrikaner nationalist civil society had in the

governance was permitted for Africans. See also: Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* and Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*.

¹⁴² In 1820, the British government decided to send settlers to the Cape Colony.

¹⁴³ Paul Kruger was the president of the South African Republic or the Transvaal and was elected in 1880 and stayed president until 1899. He had lead the resistance of the Boers against the British during the Second Boer War from 1899 until 1902.

¹⁴⁴ Union of South Africa, 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Public Holidays', 9.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem, 13.

¹⁴⁷ Republic of South Africa, Department of the Interior, *Report of the commission of inquiry into public holidays*, 1-4-1980, (Cape Town 1980), 1.

decisions on public holidays and nation-building in South Africa during the apartheid era.¹⁴⁸ The 1980 report differs slightly from the other reports because it tries to encapsulate the different reasons and requirements for public holidays. We will see that the requirements mentioned here, will remain until today: “It must have a religious content, it must be of cultural/historical significance, it must have a general traditional basis, it must serve a very special social service.”¹⁴⁹ The most controversial remains Van Riebeeck Day, because of its exclusive character. Although most discussions include the differences between the Dutch and British settlers in the naming and commemorating of holidays, in the 1980s report a slight change of tone is starting to materialise. “It was further pointed out that Blacks, Indians, the descendants of the Huguenots and various other national groups that have come to this country as immigrants, and that all have made their contribution to help rear the ‘child born on 6 April’ would then be able to celebrate April 6 as a national day worth enthusiasm”¹⁵⁰ and the discourse changes into one of compromise. The same accounts for May 31, when the installment of the Republic of South Africa was being commemorated and the commemorations would have to appeal to all South Africans, regardless of religion or race.¹⁵¹ Remarkable is the fact that in the end, there were a few members of the board of the commission who refused to sign the report for the reason that the economic, social and political reality in South Africa was changing a lot and the public holidays were not accustomed to it. According to board members de Villiers and Marais, the report was not in line with the reformation of racial relations and the ethnic reality that was taking place in South Africa.

Only seven years later a new report was published. The government established a new committee to investigate and report whether the present calendar of public holidays as stipulated in the Public Holidays Act of 1952 with the exception of Republic Day, Workers’ Day and religious holidays or days with such a purpose met the requirements of the respective population groups and communities of the republic.¹⁵² Only a few days were taken into consideration: New Year’s Day, Founders day, Family day, Kruger day and Day of Goodwill and it was concluded that these five days only partly satisfied the needs of the various population groups and communities in the Republic.¹⁵³ The government wanted to stress its ‘neutrality’ and not have any public holidays associated with ethnicity.¹⁵⁴ For the first time, Soweto Day was mentioned, which was in fact already a commemorative day for a large part of the (black) population.

The committee was looking for new guidelines to construct a national public calendar by

¹⁴⁸ The FAK or *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* was founded in 1929 and of main influence on Afrikaner cultural identity and legitimisation.

¹⁴⁹ Republic of South Africa, Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Public Holidays*, 1-4-1980, (Cape Town 1980), 3

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 4.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 5.

¹⁵² Republic of South Africa, President’s Council, report of the Committee for Economic Affairs on Public Holidays, March 1987 (Cape Town 1987), 1.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, 37. Day of Goodwill was the new name for Boxing day.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 38.

comparing the South African one with the calendar of other states overseas, “mainly those with a strong provincial or federal character”¹⁵⁵, such as the United Kingdom, Brazil and West Germany. The committee, however, acknowledged that no coordination at the international level had been accomplished regarding public holidays and that the South African case was unique. Nevertheless, they did notice the fact that every country had a public holiday celebrating the nation. The recommendations articulated by the committee were ambiguous: on the one hand the committee recommended more autonomy to local communities to decide which days to celebrate. However, it recognised the difficult situation and conflict that could arise from this autonomy. On the other hand the report clearly stated that “generally observed holidays should serve neutral interests.”¹⁵⁶ Neutral interest meant that no ethnic discourse or understanding was to be attributed to any of the public days.

Apart from the official national calendar, different commemorative days existed in South Africa, often celebrated regionally. As said earlier, a decentralisation of holidays was one of the options the committee had formalised in 1987. Due to the changing socio-political climate in South Africa, more claims on commemorative days becoming official, were made. In 1987 Workers Day was introduced as an unambiguous illustration of the increasing influence of the Worker's Party on the national government. Day of the Covenant – or Day of the Vow – was mentioned again for a change of meaning. Several other names were mentioned: Day of Thanksgiving, National Unity Day and so on. The African Nationalist Congress had changed its meaning to Heroes Day, whereas in the province of Kwazulu Natal, September 24 was celebrated as Shaka Day.¹⁵⁷

3.3.4 The Post-Apartheid Calendar: 1994

The current calendar of public holidays now consists of twelve official, paid, public holidays. However, they had to correspond to some principles namely the respect of the internationally recognised holy days of Christianity and the historic experience of the people of South Africa. The unity had to be symbolised by the spirit of accommodation, mutual acceptance, forbearance and reconciliation fostered by those national days and the promotion of both unity and diversity.¹⁵⁸

This gave rise to tensed debates in the senate in 1994 as a large group of Afrikaner politicians had difficulties renouncing certain holidays, for example October 10 and May 31 because as a member of the senate explained: “specific religious days, or days that form an inextricable part of that group’s history” should not be abandoned. He suggested to have certain holidays appointed to certain

¹⁵⁵ Ibidem, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem, 14.

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.polity.org.za/article/ndebele-king-shaka-commemoration-heritage-day-24092006-2006-09-24> (25.06.2009). Since 1994, this day is nationally commemorated as “Heritage Day”, however the meaning of this day does not provide any tie with King Shaka day on a national level.

¹⁵⁸ Report of the Technical Working Group on Public Holidays to the Minister’s Committee (Cape Town 1994) 4.

communities, similar to the Jewish holidays in other countries.¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, he was not supported by most other members. The selection of the days can be grouped into three categories and in the appendix the meaning of each of these days is explained: First, the Christian holidays: Good Friday (Friday before Easter Sunday), Christmas Day (25 December), Reconciliation Day used to belong to this group, but this changed in 1994. Secondly, several ‘neutral’ holidays: Family Day (Monday after Easter Sunday) New Year’s Day (1 January), Day of Goodwill (26 December) and Heritage Day (24 September) and finally days with a historic meaning: Day of Reconciliation (16 December), Human Rights Day, formerly known as Sharpesville Day (21 March), Freedom Day (27 April), Workers Day (1 May), Youth Day, previously known as Soweto Day (16 June), and National Women’s Day (9 August).

The process of designating those different days and to find a balance between diversity and unity, was complex. The technical working group that served as an advisory organ for the committee in 1994, regarded September 24 as a neutral day, to which every different community in South Africa could attach its own significance and celebrate in its own way but would still foster a spirit of accommodation. Therefore, it decided to name this day Heritage Day.¹⁶⁰ The spirit of nation-building was elucidated in Nelson Mandela's speech in 1996: “We knew that our rich and varied cultural heritage has a profound power to help build our new nation.”¹⁶¹ While Heritage Day is specifically celebrating the richness of South Africa and a profound attempt to create a reference point for identity, local commemorations continued. For example, in Kwazulu Natal King Shaka Day celebrations continued to take place among the Zulu population.¹⁶² Correspondingly, the other commemorative days were negotiated and some brand new holidays were created to erase racial segregation. “For the first time in the history of SA our entire nation celebrated these holidays with pride, dignity and patriotism. For the first time black and white could join hands and commemorate these holidays.”¹⁶³

Thus in South Africa cultural identity is, similar to political identity, being imposed top-down, and dictated by the government. Arts, culture and religion are in support of national unity, and it is the aim of the Department of Arts, Culture and Religion (DAC) to “promote the development of a unifying national culture, representing the aspirations of all South Africa’s people and to conserve, promote and revitalise the nation’s cultural heritage.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Senator de Ville of the Freedom Front in the minutes of 'Public Holidays Bill: second reading debate: Tuesday 15 November 1994', *Debates of the Senate, first session, first parliament, 14 to 16 November 1994*, (Cape Town 1994), 3702.

¹⁶⁰ Report of the Technical Working Group on Public Holidays, 7.

¹⁶¹ Nelson Mandela on Heritage Day 1996. <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/holidays.htm#24september> (16-11-2008).

¹⁶² <http://www.polity.org.za/article/ndebele-king-shaka-commemoration-heritage-day-24092006-2006-09-24> (25.06.2009).

¹⁶³ Mrs N B Gxowa of the ANC in the minutes of the 'National Assembly: Second session-first parliament. 11 May 1995' *National Assembly* (Cape Town 1995) 1150.

¹⁶⁴ South Africa Official Yearbook 1995 (Pretoria 1995) 359.

3.4 Conclusion

In his paper on state memorialism in South Africa, Nsizwa Dlamini acknowledged that “Heritage is an important resource in the making of new nation states .”¹⁶⁵ He also argues that state memorialism was built around the idea of inclusion and reconciliation, and this is clearly reflected in the discussions around the national calendar.

If we look at the current national days, we notice that, except for the Christian days, most of them are somehow linked to the apartheid history of the country. Hardly any references to pre-colonial times are included and those that refer to older events, are Christian holidays. In terms of time density, we can conclude that especially the twentieth century is represented, more specifically the anti-apartheid struggle. Zerubavel explained that “annual cycles of commemorative holidays, calendars normally entail seismogram-like narratives encapsulating groups' histories in the form of some highly memorable sacred peaks sporadically protruding from wide, commemoratively barren valleys of virtually unmarked, profane time (...) these commograms thus capture the uneven chronological distribution of historical “eventfulness”.”¹⁶⁶ With this theory as background, we notice that the current calendar has a high density in the twentieth century and that certain periods in time are historically stretched and left empty in the nation's collective memory. The efforts by the South African government to include all citizens, of all ethnic background, are demonstrated in its discourse. It is not surprising that apartheid history is the most important issue in the South African past and that questions around reconciliation and inclusion constructs the political identity that is imposed on the people by the government. Throughout the twentieth century, questions of national unity have preoccupied the ruling government. All four reports mention the difficulty to have one inclusive national day. It reveals that national identity has always been an ambivalent issue in South Africa.

Whether the modern public calendar is accepted and embraced by all people, remains vague. As a matter of fact, during my stay in South Africa, I often heard comments on the fact that the country has a lot of national commemorations. Nonetheless these are mainly seen as a political invention and South Africans usually consider it an opportunity to spend a day with the family instead of holding massive commemorative events. I would like to mention National Braai Day here, as it has become one of South Africa's most popular celebrations and is now linked to the Heritage Day celebration. It demonstrates that meanings are still renegotiated right now and that heritage can be a all-inclusive notion. On the one hand the government is trying to stress the importance of reconciliation by referring to the years of apartheid: Youth Day, National Women's Day, National Human Rights Day and Day of Reconciliation, while on the

¹⁶⁵ Nsizwa Dlamini, 'The Battle of Ncome Project: state memorialism, discomfoting spaces' in *Southern Africa Humanities*, 13, (Pietermaritzburg 2001) 125.

¹⁶⁶ Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 32-33.

other hand it tries to break with that past and accentuate a common past and heritage for all the people in the country, Heritage Day being an example. Likewise other national symbols, intense political correctness influences this process and we cannot consider the calendar separate from other cultural and social processes and institutions, for instance education. The education department is still engaging in creating a non-racial, 'correct' history curriculum, a canonisation of history, that can be taught to the children.

To conclude with, the national calendar that imposes several commemorative days on the people and exposes a discourse of reconciliation and nation-building, as well as political correctness, uses the past and the interpretation of the past in terms of national identity. The shifts that occurred in the calendar reveals the complex past of the country.

PART TWO

The Different Interpretations Of December 16

Dingaansdag/Dingaansday

Geloftedag/Day of the Vow

Versoeningsdag/Day of Reconciliation

In the second part of this dissertation, I would like to present to the reader the history of one particular date: December 16 and how it has been interpreted, re-interpreted and again re-interpreted. I have chosen December 16 because it entails South Africa's history since the Great Trek of the 1830s. The analysis of the date is done chronologically, because its chronology follows thematical lines. While there is one chronological synchronic line in the different meanings following the official interpretations of December 16, there is also a *asynchronical* and thematical line to comprehend. I analyse the official discourse and its meaning.

One cannot understand the meaning of the Great Trek without having any background on it. Therefore the first chapter shortly summarises the basic events of the Great Trek. December 16, 1838 one particular battle took place between Zulus and a group of Afrikaners: the Battle of Blood River/Ncome. Likewise every event in our past, it was interpreted and described in plenty historical works. But when history is used to serve a people's political, religious and cultural needs, different, usually contested meanings occur. Dingaansdag was born as the first interpretation of December 16. I describe its evolution from battle to commemoration in chapter four in what I consider the early commemorations. These are characterised by a strong sense of Afrikaner nationalism.

Dingaansdag as a public holiday did not last forever and in the 1940s it was decided to change its name to Geloftedag, translated into English as Day of the Vow or Day of the Covenant. Not only did its name change, its interpretation did as well. It was reinterpreted religiously and historically. National and international socio-economic and political influences caused a re-interpretation of the meaning of December 16 in the 1970s and 1980s which I discuss in the fifth chapter. I will focus on the role of the historian in the debate and on the public perception of the re-interpretation.

The third official re-interpretation happened after the fall of apartheid. It was initiated in the 1970s and 1980s but its official reconsideration is represented by another change in naming: Day of Reconciliation. The change of political power changed the agency of collective memory and we will see that this last interpretation is a discursive one of struggle over South Africa's complex past. In the sixth chapter I present the reader the post-apartheid interpretations of December 16.

Horizontally, this analysis presents a chronological history of a commemorations and its political and cultural reinterpretations. It was a public holiday that enhanced Afrikaner nationalism and therefore most of its discourse is written by and for Afrikaners. However, if we look at it from a more vertical point of view, and consider December 16 thematically, other communities perceived December 16 differently giving rise to chronological and thematical contested meanings. The meaning of the public holiday thus changes over time and within time.

Chapter Four: December 16: Dingaansdag

The Early Commemorations Of The Battle Of Blood River (1836-1952)

In the first two chapters, I discussed several theories concerning identity, nation-building, collective memory and nationalism. In the previous chapter, some of these theories have shown their usefulness when examining the annual cycle of public holidays. Now, I will look into one of these commemorative days, the one I believe has changed meaning the most often and has been subject to debate and reinterpretation many times. To understand its implications fully, it is necessary to explain what it is referring to within a broader context. I will briefly discuss the circumstances of the Battle of Blood River and the Great Trek within the framework of South African history. The battle is considered by most historians as one of the most famous battles in South African history, not only because of its high number of casualties, but mainly because of the religious covenant with God that was pledged there and has been commemorated ever since. The covenant that was pronounced, bound the Afrikaner people to the promise to commemorate the glorious victory and to express gratitude to God because, according to the religious Voortrekkers, it was God who delivered the Voortrekkers the triumph over the Zulu warriors. All of this happened during the Great Trek which took place in the 1830s and 1840s. First I will shortly discuss what happened at the Battle of Blood River, identify the Battle's heroes and explain the importance of the Battle within the events of the Great Trek before I elaborate on how the battle was commemorated between 1836 and 1952. The latter is the year that a new calendar under the apartheid government was implemented.

4.1. History Of The Great Trek 1836-1854

During the Great Trek, about 12.000 Voortrekkers, mostly farmers of Dutch descent and of strong Calvinist faith, migrated from the Cape Colony to the inlands to withdraw from British colonial rule and to look for fertile lands. Several groups of Afrikaners set out with their ox wagons, cattle and their other personal belongings in search of new land to settle.¹⁶⁷

4.1.1 The Battle of Blood River

When the Voortrekkers trekked over the mountains in the lands of Natal, where the ground was more fertile, they entered Zulu territory that was ruled by Zulu King Dingane. Voortrekker leader Piet Retief advanced further and further into the lands of Natal but during his second expedition he and his

¹⁶⁷ See also: Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 87-96, and Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, 112.

expedition party were killed by Zulus.¹⁶⁸ The confrontation between the Afrikaner boers and the Zulus mounted into the Battle of Blood River/Ncome. Meanwhile, Andries Pretorius had arrived in Natal in November 1838 and he wanted revenge on the Zulu King Dingane for the murdering of Retief. Historian Leonard Thompson describes the events as follows:

“Led by Andries Pretorius, it (referring to the expedition) trekked with fifty-seven wagons toward the heart of the Zulu Kingdom. Every white member of the commando possessed at least one gun, and the expedition also had two small canons. As they advanced, they formed a laager at night by lashing their wagons together. On 15 December, they laagered in a strong defensive position on the banks of Ncome River. The next day, a vast Zulu army - perhaps ten thousand strong - launched a series of attacks. (...) Eventually they retreated, leaving about three thousand dead around the laager. The commando lost not one member.”¹⁶⁹

4.1.2 The Covenant With God

A few days before the battle, Andries Pretorius had had the idea of forming a covenant with God. This covenant had been performed by Sarel Cilliers in the form of a prayer in which victory over the Zulus was pleaded. In return the Voortrekkers would build God a church and the coming generations would thank and honour God and celebrate the day.¹⁷⁰ In later commemorations, this would be referred to as the 'covenant' or the 'vow' with God. However, the exact words of this vow, have not been preserved. Because there is no 'absolute' or 'objective' source on which one can rely on to acknowledge the vow, re-interpreting the vow and its meaning has been an ongoing process.

The commemoration is based on several documents that originate in the 1830s. One was written by Jan Bantjes, who kept a diary during the battle, and another one was a letter to the *aanvoerder*, written by Andries Pretorius.¹⁷¹ The other source document is Sarel Cilliers' journal, written thirty-three years after the battle and right before he died. Most historians that were writing on the meaning of the covenant in the 1970s and 1980s, agreed that Cilliers' memory was not completely intact anymore in his old days and most probably he had lost his ability to give a detailed and correct description of the past.

It was Great Trek historian Gerdener who 'reconstructed' the vow and added a few things - 'n

¹⁶⁸ H. J. Van Aswegen *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika tot 1854* (Pretoria 1989) 261.

¹⁶⁹ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 91. For details on the battle itself, see also: J. Laband, 'The military significance of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome', speech presented at the one day seminar for the re-interpretation of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome held at 31 October 1998 at the University of Zululand Kwa Dlawgezwa.

¹⁷⁰ F. A. Van Jaarsveld, *Die Afrikaners se Groot Trek naar die Stede en ander opstelle* (Johannesburg 1982) 300-301.

¹⁷¹ F. A. Van Jaarsveld, *Die Afrikaners se Groot Trek naar die Stede en ander opstelle*, 46.

paar wysigings wat hy as nodig beskou het”¹⁷². In fact, the result is a summary of the different documents, but with the appearance of an actual original source. The vow as commemorated since then is the following:

“Mijne broeders en medelandgenooten, hier staan wij thans op dit oogenblik voor een heilige God van Hemel en Aarde om een belofte aan Hem te beloven, als Hij met zijn bescherming met ons sam weren, en onze vijand in onze handen zal geven, dat wij hem overwinnen, dat wij die dag en datum elke jaar als een verjaardag en een dankdag, zoals een Sabbat in zijn eer zal doorbrengen, en dat wij een tempel tot zijn eer stichten zal waar het hem zou behagen, en dat wij het ook aan onze kinderen zal zeggen, dat zij met ons erin moeten delen, tot gedachtenis ook voor onze opkomende geslachten. Want de ere van Zijn Naam daardoor zal verheerlijkt worden, dat de roem en eer van de overwinning aan Hem zal worden gegeven.”¹⁷³

Until now, it remains unclear whether the church (or the ‘temple’ as the vow mentioned it) was de facto ever erected. A church was built in Pietermaritzburg in 1841, but whether it was truly built as fulfilment of the vow, was never clear. Nevertheless, later in time the church came to be known as ‘*die Geloftekerk*’¹⁷⁴.

4.2 The History Of A Commemoration

At first the vow was commemorated in closed circles and there was no collective service or celebration, due to individualism, conflicts and the lack of means of communication.¹⁷⁵ Not even Andries Pretorius was commemorating the vow. How and by whom it should be celebrated was included in the vow itself and the victory was ascribed to God.¹⁷⁶ Spoelstra noticed that the Boers at that time, except for Sundays, hardly had any commemorative or sabbatical days and festivities were usually limited to prayers at home followed by the daily habits of life on a farm.¹⁷⁷ How then, did it become a public holiday, when it was meant only to be celebrated in a small circle?

¹⁷² Translation: 'a few changes that he considered necessary'.

¹⁷³ “Debat oor Geloftefees”, *Die Transvaler*, 05.01.1978. Translation: 'Here we stand before the holy God of heaven and earth, to make a vow to Him that, if He will protect us and give our enemy into our hand, we shall keep this day and date every year as a day of thanksgiving like a sabbath, and that we shall erect a house to His honour wherever it should please Him, and that we also will tell our children that they should share in that with us in memory for future generations. For the honour of His name will be glorified by giving Him the fame and honour for the victory.'

¹⁷⁴ The church of the Vow'

¹⁷⁵ F A van Jaarsveld, 'Geloftedag in die ban van die tyd', *Tydskrif vir geesteswetenskappe* 18 (1978) 227.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem, 229.

¹⁷⁷ B. Spoelstra, *Kan Geloftedag Oorlewe?* (Potchefstroom 1982) 22.

4.2.1 Dingaansdag: 1864-1886

Two foreign reverends from the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) of Natal, Huet and Cachet, were the first to organise a collective celebration of the vow in 1864.¹⁷⁸ It proved to be successful because June 1865, the government of the Transvaal declared December 16 a public holiday “als een algemeende dankdag (...) den Heere gewyd (...) ter nagedachtenis, dat de Emigranten, onder Gods zegen van onder het juk van Dingaan zich vrygevochten hebben,”¹⁷⁹ That day was called Dingaansdag referring to the defeated King of the Zulus. In spite of the fact that it was already a public holiday in the Transvaal province, it was only in 1880 that collective celebrations took place. The Dingaansdag celebrations at Paardekraal were planned to be held every five years and during the first celebration in 1880 the vow was renewed during a *volksvergadering* and within the framework of the protest against the British annexation. According to Van Jaarsveld, it was Afrikaner nationalism flourishing in the Transvaal that, as a direct consequence of the Anglo Boer War, appended historical meaning to Dingaansdag:

“Afrikanernasionalisme wat die direkte gevolg van die 1877 -anneksasie en die Vryheidsoorlog was, het die historiese been van die gelofte tot aktualiteit verhef en dus ‘n historiese en nasionale dimensie daarby gevoeg.”¹⁸⁰

Throughout the years, December 16 evolved from a strictly religious day towards a commemorative day when Afrikaner glory was celebrated. The day became a day where Afrikaner identity was confirmed and it lost its strictly religious meaning.

The secularisation continued when the Boers declared the independence of the Republic on Dingaansdag 1880. During the following celebrations at Paardekraal, it was above all the victories during the first Anglo Boer War that were commemorated instead of the Battle of Blood River or the covenant with God. Dingaansdag had transcended its own meaning as for example the funeral of Paul Kruger, the foremost important Afrikaner, was on Dingaansdag in 1902.¹⁸¹ The first commemoration to be led by the government, was the 1881 celebration which was at the same time a commemoration of the Battle of Majuba.¹⁸² Furthermore there were plans to commemorate both ‘wars’ by a *staatsfees* – a national celebration - in Paardekraal: “Die bevryding van eene barbaarsche overheersching in 1838 en van die Engelse in 1880.”¹⁸³ Afrikaners were searching for their own identity and felt threatened by both blacks

¹⁷⁸ Leonard Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven 1985) 166.

¹⁷⁹ F A van Jaarsveld, 'Geloftedag in die ban van die tyd', 228. Translation: "the day is referred to as 'a day of Thanksgiving' and is devoted to God and to commemorate the immigrants that had set themselves free from Dingaan."

¹⁸⁰ F A van Jaarsveld, 'Die evolusie van apartheid en andere geskiedkundige opstelle', 49.

¹⁸¹ F J du T Spies, 'Onsekerheid in verbad met die Gelofte van 1838' in *Historia* 33 (1988) 61.

¹⁸² On Majuba Hill, the Boers had defeated the British during the Second Anglo Boer War which had led to their short victory. More on the Battle of Majuba: <http://rapidtp.com/milhist/vol052gr.html> (22.01.2009).

¹⁸³ F A Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Afrikaners se groot trek na die stede en ander opstelle', 306. This quote was pronounced during a speech at Paardekraal and linked the 1838 liberation of 'Barbarian domination' and

and British. However, commemorative days like Dingaansdag created the opportunity to distinguish themselves from the other ethnic groups living in the same country. The political and economic environment had created the right context for Afrikaner national consciousness to flourish and the existence of Afrikaners as one people conjoined with Afrikaner national consciousness. Secular aspects of entertainment and celebration were added to the commemoration to create a larger and more popular event, in an attempt to attract more young Afrikaners.

The meaning of the day was fluid and versatile: in 1838 the 'black man' was the enemy, and in the 1880s it was the 'Briton' that had to be defeated. After the Anglo-Boer War, the meaning of the commemoration was broadened and the memory of the Anglo-Boer war was included. For example the trauma of the concentration camps that existed during that war was from then on integrated into the Dingaansdag commemoration. . *Dingaansdag* had become a day of commemorating Afrikaner history and glory and contributed to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism.¹⁸⁴

The popularity Dingaansdag cannot be seen apart from the rise of Afrikanerdom as one people and their 'gradual psychological disengagement' with Europe.¹⁸⁵ Giliomee names administrative neglect, isolation and the economic policy of the 'mother country' as elements that fostered individualism and a sense of independence. Identification of Dutch settlers with the Netherlands weakened.¹⁸⁶ With the arrival of the British, the culture was being Anglicised, with some remaining Afrikaner leaders who were stressing Afrikaner ethnicity and nationality. To them language was an important constituent.¹⁸⁷ At the end of the nineteenth Century, a national consciousness existed, but national unity did not as the Afrikaners remained divided. One of the first expressions of unity came from Du Toit, minister of the Dutch Reformed Church who wrote the first Afrikaans history of South Africa *Die Geskiedenis van Ons Land in die Taal van Ons Volk - The History of our Land in the Language of our People* - in 1877. It illustrates a national mythology with the Trekboer as national heroes.¹⁸⁸ In the Transvaal, under the presidency of Paul Kruger, a more conservative policy was adopted. According to Kruger an Afrikaner was any white who spoke Dutch or Afrikaans.¹⁸⁹ As anti-British sentiments grew, so did the mobilisation of all Afrikaners on an ethnic basis.¹⁹⁰

how the covenant had freed them to the fighting against the British domination in 1880 and the attempts to regain independence. A continuity between past and present was produced

¹⁸⁴ F A van Jaarsveld, 'Geloftedag in die ban van die tyd', 231. During the Second Anglo Boer War many Boers (who were all of Afrikaner descent) were captured in concentration camps.

¹⁸⁵ Heribert Adam and Hermann Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town 1979). 96. The Dutch settlers referred to themselves as 'Afrikaner' for the first time in 1707 when Hendrik Bibault at Stellenbosch shouted: "I am an Afrikaner, (...) I will not be silent."

¹⁸⁶ Ibidem, 97.

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem, 98-99.

¹⁸⁸ L M Thompson, 'Afrikaner Nationalist Historiography and the Policy of Apartheid', in *The Journal of African History* 3 (1962) 126.

¹⁸⁹ Adam and Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power*,. 101-102.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem, 103.

4.2.2 Further Centralisation Of Dingaansdag: 1886-1938

After 1886, throughout the whole country, local committees were founded. For the first time a commemoration was held at the location of the Battle of Blood River. The Vrystaat or Orange Free State, acknowledged Dingaansdag as a public holiday in 1894, which meant a nation-wide recognition of the commemoration. Although it evolved from a strictly religious day to a secular, national day, the religious aspects were never abandoned. As explained earlier, collective memory, history and religion was intertwined with Afrikaner identity.¹⁹¹ After the annexation of the Boer Republic by the British in 1902, Majuba Day was abandoned, but Dingaansdag was kept as a national holiday.¹⁹²

There were attempts to have Dingaansdag added to the religious national calendar, and have it celebrated as a religious, sabbatical holiday and not only as a secular public holiday. Disregarding many attempts to add the sabbatical clause to the public holiday, it was only in 1952 that the Church finally accomplished to have Dingaansdag added to the religious calendar. All together, that year, the name was changed from Dingaansdag to Gelofte dag or Day of the Vow.¹⁹³

4.2.3 The Highlight Of Afrikaner Nationalism: 1938

The 1938 centenary of the Great Trek can be considered the most important commemoration. Two ox wagons left at the statue of Jan van Riebeeck in Cape Town and on its way more and more people joined in their enthusiasm for the festivities. The event proved to be more important than expected and more than 500 town centres in South Africa were visited. The euphoria was extraordinary as babies were baptised with Afrikaner heroes' names, young couples, sometimes dressed in Voortrekker traditional dress, married along the way. Still, many streets have names referring to Voortrekker heroes. On December 16, 1938, more than 200,000 Afrikaners gathered to listen to speeches celebrating the glory of the Voortrekkers. Most speeches had a religious, not political character but were proclaiming unity for the 'volk'.¹⁹⁴ In his description, Grundlingh quotes the view of an outsider of the events: “The Voortrekker celebrations evoked a degree of emotion throughout Afrikanerdom which was almost alarmous in its intensity (...) it resembled something akin to mass hysteria.”¹⁹⁵

Grundlingh and Sapire seek the explanation for its success in the urbanized group of Afrikaner

¹⁹¹ Grundlingh distinguishes three components in the process of Afrikaner nationalism: the promotion of a common language, the emphasis on a common past and religious unity. See: A M Grundlingh, 'Afrikaner nationalism and white politics' in B J Liebenberg, S B Spies, etc. *South Africa in the 20th century* (Pretoria 1993) 268.

¹⁹² F A Van Jaarsveld, *Die Afrikaners se groot trek na die stede en ander opstelle*,. 311.

¹⁹³ The English translation of 'Gelofte dag' has known two forms: Day of the Covenant or Day of the Vow.

¹⁹⁴ Albert Grundlingh and Hilary Sapire, 'From Feverish festival to repetitive Ritual? The changing Fortunes of Great trek mythology in an industrializing South Africa, 1938-1988' in *South African Historical Journal* 21 (1989) 20.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 20-21.

wage earners in the state railways. They claim that it was 'economic insecurity that made Afrikaners susceptible to the cultural and political blandishments of the 'second trek'. The twin forces of steadily increasing industrialisation and a depression which had hit farmers particularly hard, propelled large numbers of Afrikaners into the burgeoning cities and industrial centres.'¹⁹⁶

The *ossewatrek* was also a reaction to the political situation in the country, with the Smuts-Herzog United Party government dominating politics and Afrikaners often feeling suppressed. The middle class Afrikaner leadership had adopted a strategy of aggressive cultural assertion whereby alienation from their new environment caused the longing for traditional, religious culture. Grundlingh and Sappire argue that "many Afrikaners felt exploited by a British-rooted capitalism and alienated by the values of their new environment and it was precisely under such conditions that the bruises of poverty and rapid displacement could at least be soothed by the balm of 'traditional' culture."¹⁹⁷ The Battle of Blood River and the traditions of the Great Trek were hereby used as a tool to create Afrikaner identity and to ascertain a cultural and traditional Afrikaner past. Therefore traditions were being re-invented again and the present was linked with the past. In 1938, a new Great Trek was happening due to industrialisation and within an economical context.

4.2.4 Dingaansday Becomes Geloftedag: 1938-1952

The name Dingaansdag had become controversial and "Die naam Dingaansdag, wat ver uit die geskiedenis kom, beklemtoon dat die slag teen die bepaalde, wrede barbaarse en bloeddorstige regime van Dingaans gemik was."¹⁹⁸ There were members of parliament who wanted to change its name to 'Afrikanerdankdag' or 'Voortrekkerdag'.¹⁹⁹ As discussed in the third chapter, in 1948 a committee, put in charge by the national government, had examined and contemplated the national calendar and proposed to change Dingaansdag to Geloftedag or Day of the Covenant or Vow.²⁰⁰ The committee report mentions "an esteem for Dingaans" and "it raises the antipathy of the natives against the Europeans". The emphasis was on the covenant with God and not on the victory over King Dingaans and the Zulus. According to Van Jaarsveld, the name was changed in an attempt to expand the day's meaning and reduce its exclusivity. Not mentioning Dingaans anymore, attributed a less negative meaning to the day and was an attempt to offend blacks less and putting the stress on God's glory.²⁰¹ At the same time it became a sabbatical day

¹⁹⁶ Ibidem, 24-25.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem, 25.

¹⁹⁸ Prof B Spoelstra, *Kan Geloftedag oorlewe?* 12. Translation: The name Dingaansday refers to an old history and emphasises the cruel and barbarian rule of Dingane."

¹⁹⁹ Afrikanerdankdag means 'Thanksgiving Day'.

²⁰⁰ Union of South Africa, 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Public Holidays, Government Notice No 2377 of the 4th November 1949', published in the *Government Gazette of the Union of South Africa*, dated 4th November 1949. (1949) 12.

²⁰¹ F A van Jaarsveld, 'Geloftedag in die ban van die tyd', 228.

and as a consequence all people in South Africa were restricted in their activities that day, whether they were Christian or not.

Notwithstanding the sabbatical clause that was added to the commemorations, the festivities were dominated by the political body. The National Party (NP) used the day to boost Afrikaner identity and reinforce their own power. The politisation of December 16 might seem contradictory when we consider the new emphasis on the religious and divine aspects of the commemoration. However, Afrikaner culture, traditions and politics had always been intertwined with religion.

4.3 Conclusion

The historical background on the Great Trek provides us with the argument that the commemoration of December 16 was doomed to be controversial. Different ways of celebrating and different interpretations have been generated. Collective memory was reshaped several times due to political and socio-economic developments. It is irreversibly intertwined with Afrikaner identity. The commemoration of the Battle of Blood River, as main event of the Great Trek, confirms these arguments.

During the first commemorations, only the descendants of the Voortrekkers attributed meaning to the battle and the vow. The religious character of the covenant dominated. According to van Jaarsveld, the development of Afrikaner nationalism in the Transvaal was decisive for the establishment of December 16 as a historical commemorative day.

In the chapter on collective memory, I discussed Halbwachs theory on memory. He made the distinction between historical and autobiographical memory. In events like the centenary celebration of the Great Trek in 1838, both social memories converge. Through the re-enactment of the event, history is brought to life and re-experienced. The centenary itself had become a *Lieu de Mémoire*. Furthermore a new community was created because at first only descendants of the Voortrekkers identified with the memories of the Great Trek, since it were their forefathers that were involved. Nonetheless, with time and with the rise of Afrikaner national consciousness, more people familiarised with the collective history of the Voortrekkers. In addition, a link with another important event was created, as proved by the inclusion of the collective memory of the second Anglo-Boer war into the commemorations of December 16. These events are perceived as the main cause of the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism and the establishment of the Afrikaner community. Anderson would argue that it is an *imagined community* because it is envisaged to enhance a sense of unity and community in the mind of the people through ritualisation and formalisation expressed in the re-enactment of the Great Trek. The Afrikaner community was able to construct their identity counter to the Anglicised South African society as also Grundlingh and Sappire

"The Struggle to become South African"
National Identity and Collective Memory in South Africa: Reconciliation Day

argued. Traditional culture reinstated the Afrikaner a sense of belonging after they had been displaced by British dominance and had embraced Rutherford's conjecture it is within these polarities that identities were formed.

During the apartheid years, the commemorations were mainly nationalistic and exclusively Afrikaner. Only when the regime of apartheid was started to be questioned, nationalistic expressions of its policy were as well. Due to economical and political changes, a reinterpretation of history took place in the seventies and eighties.

Chapter Five: December 16: Geloftedag

The Re-interpretation Of The Past In The 1970s And 1980s

A re-interpretation of history usually takes place when political reality is changing. The same happened in South Africa. Thompson explains in his work on South African history how in the 1970s and 1980s the policy of apartheid was in crisis.

“The policy of the Botha administration was complex to adapt to changing circumstances without sacrificing Afrikaner power. It included efforts to neutralise South Africa’s neighbours, to scrap apartheid symbols and practices that were not essential to the maintenance of white supremacy, to draw English-speaking citizens into the party, to win the cooperation of big business, to intensify the ethnic and class cleavages among the subject peoples, and to suppress domestic dissidents.”²⁰²

As I explained in the introduction, the research I present now is based upon primary sources, and the fourth chapter mainly on secondary sources. The reason therefore is twofold. To start with, my intention is to focus on the re-interpretation that occurred in 1994 and how it has influenced and reshaped collective memory. It did not take long to realise that these changes were initiated in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century. I considered it valuable to include them in my research. Another, perhaps even better possibility would have been to examine the commemorations and its meaning from the 1838 onwards. This brings me to the second reason for my choice of primary research, namely the abundance of both source material and research on the perception of the Great Trek before and during apartheid that already exists. Furthermore, another interesting point of view and an angle that would contribute to the historical relevance, would be the African perception of the Great Trek throughout time. However, one has to make choices, and this would entail much more research and traveling as sources are scattered around South Africa.

As soon as I had made my choice, one problem arose: different discourses existed among mainly Afrikaner historians and I had to consider my sources as both primary and secondary. Some historians referred to and quoted in the previous chapters, for example Van Jaarsveld and Thompson, are now examined as primary source. This issue insisted on a critical approach and will also bring to attention questions about South African historiography and the role of the historian.

In the first paragraphs of this chapter, I will look into detail into the discourses that existed among different historians and how they started to question the traditional interpretation of the Day of the Vow. Then, I will briefly discuss what role the church has in the interpretation and the commemoration and at the end of the first part of the chapter, I will look into the Black historian's role.

In the second part, the public perception of both the commemoration and the debate about the reinterpretation of the past is examined and explained in terms of inclusion and exclusion.

²⁰² Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 224.

5.1 The Reinterpretation Of History

5.1.1 Reconsidering History: 'The Myth of the Covenant'

The debate of the re-interpretation of the past took place in mainly Afrikaner newspapers, political speeches and academic articles. The Great Trek was an important topic for most historians, and following the well-known Afrikaner Great Trek historian Muller, three different ethnic historiographies existed on the Great Trek: The Afrikaners considered the Great Trek as a heroic event and it served as basis for Afrikaner nationalism and was intertwined with Afrikaner identity. Secondly, the English-speaking historians considered the Great Trek a period of disaster and these historians mainly stressed the negative elements of the Trek. Thirdly the Bantu, or black historians described the Trek in terms of white domination over black.²⁰³ It is within this context that due to national and international economic, social and political changes, the view on South African history, dominated by Afrikaner nationalism, was considered for re-interpretation.

Deconstructing The 'Myth'

Liebenberg's doctorate thesis on Andries Pretorius, published in 1974 initiated the historians' change of perspective on Afrikaner history.²⁰⁴ Liebenberg noticed that many accounts on Andries Pretorius' life did not give a trustworthy image of the Voortrekkers' leader's life and important events in his life were reported inaccurately. There was no actual source on the exact content of the Covenant and the writings of historians on the Great Trek were beset with mythical and religious elements. The deconstruction of the Afrikaner past as constructed by many nationalist historians and sustained and supported by the system of apartheid, was initiated by Liebenberg as he dissented with the illustration of Pretorius as portretted by Afrikaner nationalist historians.²⁰⁵

Mainly historians of Afrikaner descent had written on the Battle of Blood River and the Covenant. Their interpretation of these events was reconsidered in the 1970s and 1980s by mainly other Afrikaner historians. The history of the battle was not only rewritten, but the interpretation of the past *an sich* and the historian's role was reconsidered and embedded in the debate about identity. Increasingly more South African historians in the seventies started to allude to the covenant as a historical 'myth'. The foremost important historians that were taking part in the debate, were Thompson, Van Jaarsveld and Liebenberg. By articles, conferences and lectures, they expressed their view on the Afrikaner past and towards the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, the historians' debate had been included in the public debate on the covenant in relation with Afrikaner identity and the inclusion or

²⁰³ S. Berg, 'Foreword' in *Historia* 33(1988) Special edition on the Great Trek.

²⁰⁴ Anton Ehlers, 'Desegregating History in South Africa: the Case of the Covenant and the Battle of Blood/Ncome River' University of Stellenbosch (Stellenbosch) 12-13 and B J Liebenberg, *Andries Pretorius in Natal* (1974).

²⁰⁵ B J Liebenberg, *Andries Pretorius in Natal* (1974) VII. Liebenberg mentioned Gustav Preller.

exclusion of ethnic entities.

I will first discuss how historians have deconstructed the history of the covenant, then their influence on the commemoration and interpretation of the day before dealing with the public opinion in the second part of this chapter. It is important to see what the content of the ‘myth’ was, before looking at the reinterpretation. Therefore a definition of ‘myth’ is essential. The term was mainly used by Leonard Thompson who in *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* discusses the origins of the Covenant and the commemorations of the battle and its influence on Afrikaner nationalism as constructed around several myths.²⁰⁶ He interpreted a myth as “a tale which is told to justify some aspect of social order or of human experience” and a “political myth” as “a tale told about the past to legitimise or discredit a regime”. According to him December 16 has “all the hallmarks of a classic political myth: its partial concordance with historical reality, its delayed codification followed by rapid development and fervent deployment for political purposes, and its adaptation to changing circumstances.”²⁰⁷ However, not all Afrikaner historians used the same definition of a ‘myth’. Liebenberg, for example, defines a myth simply as an untrue story. For my narrative of the re-interpretation of the past, I will use Thompson’s notion of myth.

Identifying The ‘Myth’

Liebenberg was the first to attempt to map the interpretation of the Battle of Blood/Ncome River. He identified three myths and schematically represented them as follows:

Myth On The Significance Of Blood River:

- i. Blood River saved the Great Trek²⁰⁸. It meant the end of a long search for Northern territory which was suitable for stock and crop farming.²⁰⁹
- ii. Blood River represented the birth of the Afrikaner nation (and the value of strong leadership expressed through the heroification of Andries Pretorius²¹⁰) It symbolised the victory of civilisation over barbarism whereby the Afrikaner represents ‘good’ and the Zulu ‘evil’.²¹¹
- iii. Blood River was a symbol of the victory of Christianity over heathendom and barbarism.

²⁰⁶ Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid* and B J Liebenberg, ‘Mites rondom Bloedrivier en die Gelofte’ in *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal* 20 (Pretoria 1988) 18.

²⁰⁷ Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid*, 146.

²⁰⁸ e.g. A.J.P. Opperman: “If the Voortrekkers had lost the Battle of Blood River the Great Trek would have been in vain, and it would have taken a long time for the white civilization to spread to the northern parts of South Africa.” A J P Opperman, *Die slag van Bloedrivier* (1982 Pretoria) 48. And cited in B J Liebenberg, ‘Mites rondom Bloedrivier en die Gelofte’, 19.

²⁰⁹ J Sithole, “Changing Images of Blood River/iNcome” in his speech delivered at the *Re-interpretation of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome: one day seminar held at 31 October 1998 at the University of Zululand*, (Kwa Dlawgezwa 1998).

²¹⁰ Opperman, *Die slag van Bloedrivier*, 49.

²¹¹ Sithole, “Changing Images of Blood River/iNcome”.

Myth On The Binding Of The Covenant:

All Afrikaners are irrevocably bound by the vow for all time. “Hierdie gelofte en die veldslag self, is so heg aan mekaar verbonde dat daar nouliks van die een sprake kan wees sonder verwysing na die ander.”²¹²

Myth On The Miracle Of Blood River:

- i. The victory was a miracle in the sense that divine intervention gave the Voortrekkers the victory.
- ii. God’s intervention at Blood River to save the Voortrekkers proved that He was on the side of the Afrikaner people and would not abandon the Afrikaner nation.
- iii. The Blood River victory was also proof that God had commissioned the Afrikaner people to keep South Africa white or that God desires white supremacy in South Africa.²¹³ Analogous to the Israelites, the Afrikaners were the 'chosen people' and ruling over and colonising South Africa was therefore justified.

This categorization of mythical aspects of the meaning of the covenant was incorporated by most other historians of that time deconstructing the Afrikaner past. It was especially the divine aspects that had been attributed to the myth that were refuted.

Uncovering The 'Myth'

After identifying and categorising the different aspects of the mythologisation of the Great Trek and the Battle, Liebenberg as well as other historians tried to uncover the myth by restudying the sources and by logical rationalisation.

Blood River Saved The Great Trek:

The argument that Blood River was decisive in the outcome of the Great Trek, is attributing too much importance to the Battle in South African history. (“is ‘n oorskating van die betekenis van die veldslag”).

Blood River Represented The Birth Of The Afrikaner Nation:

Liebenberg names three reasons that contradict this argument: to begin with, no *volk* whatsoever can be born out of a battle alone, it takes more than one victory to build a nation. Secondly he mentions the longer presence and thus history of the Afrikaners in South Africa and lastly he argues that the struggle for independence had been in the Afrikaners’ mind much longer and would have continued, with or without winning the battle. To conclude with, the battle has contributed to Afrikaner identity, but does not in any way indicate its birth.

²¹² Opperman, *Die slag van Bloedrivier*, 49. Translation: 'The vow and the battle are related and cannot be considered separately anymore.'

²¹³ Liebenberg, ‘Mites rondom Bloedrivier en die Gelofte’.

Blood River Was A Symbol Of The Victory Of Christianity Over Heathendom And Barbarism

In this context, the Great Trek has been compared to the medieval crusades. The crusades too had been interpreted as the Christian victory over paganism and as campaigns of Christianity. Liebenberg rejects the interpretation that the Great Trek was a Christian campaign and he further adds to the argument that among the Voortrekkers there was no intention to convert Zulu warriors to Christianity during the Great Trek. This is supported by the fact that no sources had been found where the Voortrekkers themselves interpreted theirs as a victory over barbarism. Furthermore, the next fifty years there were no attempts to convert blacks and because of internal disputes and the tough everyday-life circumstances, hardly any conversions were attempted by Voortrekkers. In fact, it were foreign missionaries who continued converting the blacks to Christianity.²¹⁴

Myth On The Binding Of The Covenant

All Afrikaners are irrevocably bound by the vow for all time: Mainly Van Jaarsveld had tried to refute this argument. He argued that when taking the vow on its word, only Afrikaners who were at that time present in Natal are bound to the vow. That means that only their offspring is required to honour it. Resistance against these arguments was intense but Liebenberg easily discarded it as an emotional reaction: “’n newel van emosie na hierdie sake kyk dat hulle eenvoudig nie kan helder dink nie.”²¹⁵ He made it clear that there was no actual prove of the binding character of the vow. Moreover, he questions the possibility of taking a vow for someone else without that person's permission. According to Liebenberg, the answer to the question who is bound by the vow is simple: 'Alleen hulle wat die Geloofte afgelê het'.²¹⁶ According to Thompson, the fact that there is no absolute trustworthy source available, raised questions about the covenant and the trustworthiness of the accounts of the events.²¹⁷ The victory was a miracle in the sense that divine intervention gave the Voortrekkers their victory: Liebenberg disagreed with the historians writing on the miraculous aspects of the Battle.

“Die slag van Bloedrivier was dus nie, soos prof Kotzé beweer, ‘n wonderwerk nie, maar ‘n gewoon veldslag. Daar is niks onbegryplik, onverstaanbaar, wonderbaarlik of bonatuurlik aan die Voortrekkers se oorwinning nie. Ons kan trouens met die inligting waaroor ons beskik, verklaar waarom die Voortrekkers gewen het.”²¹⁸

²¹⁴ P S de Jongh, “Perspektiefstelling oor omstrede aangeleenthede van die Groot Trek” in *Historia*, 33 (1988) 36.

²¹⁵ 'Their view was too emotional to think clearly' Liebenberg, ‘Mites rondom Bloedrivier en die Geloofte’, 25.

²¹⁶ 'Only those that have pledged the vow'. Liebenberg, ‘Mites rondom Bloedrivier en die Geloofte’, 25.

²¹⁷ Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid*, 156.

²¹⁸ 'The Battle of Blood River was not a miracle, as professor Kotzé argued, but it is only a battle. There is absolutely nothing miraculous about the Voortrekkers' victory. Furthermore, we have enough information available to contradict this miraculous interpretation.' After closely examining the weather charts of the region for December 1979, he concludes that “Die Voortrekker se kans op mooi weer was dus beter as op reen.” in B J Liebenberg, “Bloedrivier en Gods Hand” in *die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 12,

He revealed the power of the Voortrekkers' firearms against the Zulus whose weaponry consisted of spears - *assegaie*. Additionally the particular arrangement used by the Afrikaners, the laager combined with their superior weaponry had advanced the Afrikaners in their chances to win the battle instead of God's involvement.²¹⁹ After closely examining the weather charts of the region for December 1979, he concluded that the chances on good weather that day were bigger than chances on rain and he tried to prove that it is not 'abnormal' that it did not rain that day or that it was foggy.²²⁰ He used rational-logical arguments to prove the nationalist historians' wrong. If all people contribute their historical victory to divine intervention, a contradictory explanation for the victory would arise.²²¹

Liebenberg tried to provide answers to the question why people were anxious to attribute the Voortrekkers' victory to God. First he named the fact that it is easier to explain a victory in divine than in rational terms. Secondly, the Covenant that was made before the battle added an element of mysticism to the victory and lastly interpretation of a God in Afrikaner's side, triggered Afrikaner nationalism.²²² God's intervention at Blood River to save the Voortrekkers proved that God was on the side of the Afrikaner people and would not abandon the Afrikaner nation: As a contra-argument, Liebenberg emphasised the universality of God: "Die God van die Afrikaners is ook die God van die Engelse en die Duitsers en die Zoeloes."²²³ If we take the universality of God as central point, and look at God's so-called intervention in the battle, then the nationalistic discourse of exclusivity is impossible to uphold. If God is universal, there cannot be a *volksgod* solely for the Afrikaners people.

"Hier het ons dus drie mense – 'n Engelsman, 'n Amerikaner en 'n Afrikaner – wat elkeen meen dat sy volk die naaste aan volmaaktheid kom en dat god sy volk spesiaal, bo alle ander volke, begunstig. Wie moet ons nou glo? Die onsinnigheid van hierdie neiging – om jou eie subjektiewe gevoelens, opvattinge en standpunte aan God toe te skrywe – kom nog duideliker uit in gevalle waar een en dieselfde gebeurtenis deur sommige vertolk word as in ooreenstemming met die wil van God en deur ander as teen die wil van God."²²⁴

(1980), 3.

²¹⁹ The most well-known historians writing on the miraculous aspects of the Great Trek were Kotzé, Pelzer and Swart.

²²⁰ Liebenberg, "Bloedrivier en Gods Hand", 3.

²²¹ Ibidem.

²²² Ibidem, 11-12.

²²³ Liebenberg, 'Mites rondom Bloedrivier en die Gelofte', 31. Translation: 'The Afrikaners' God is also the God of the British, Germans and Zulus.'

²²⁴ Liebenberg, "Bloedrivier en Gods Hand" 8. Translation: 'Three people – British, Afrikaners and Americans – consider their people to be the most perfect. Who should we believe? These subjective emotions are even clearer when the same event is represented by one people as God's will, and by the other people as against the will of God.'

The Blood River victory as God's approval of white supremacy: The argument corresponds with the two previous ones. Religion is used as a tool to exclude others and to keep the segregation intact.

5.1.2 Afrikanerdom And History

The interpretation and reinterpretation of December 16 was irrevocably bound to Afrikaner nationalism and the Afrikaners' view on their history. As I said before, the issue of inclusion and exclusion was a central question in the debate: for whom was the vow meant for and who is bound by it? The Afrikaner historian Van Jaarsveld argued that Afrikaners had a disturbed image of their history. The cultural, political and religious claims that were made on December 16 were embedded in the context of that time.

Inclusion Versus Exclusion

Historical consciousness is always determined by the interpretation of the past and linked with collective memory. Accordingly, Van Jaarsveld argued that the past is interpreted through an expectation of the future. He explains that "their (here referring to the Afrikaners) historical consciousness reflects a time-structure of future expectation which determined the interpretation of the past and understanding of the present. Its functions were the legitimisation of Afrikaner existence, culture and policy, orientation in South Africa and the world, and supporting their identity as a people."²²⁵

Until 1970 the economic conditions had been flourishing in South Africa. However from 1970 until 1980 the country was in an economical impasse, which coincided with the economic sanctions in the eighties and the new challenges to the government when black uprisings were increasing. Collective memory of the Great Trek negotiated between the events of the past, namely the battle between Zulus and Voortrekkers and the social and political agenda of the seventies and eighties. Different agents referred to that past and different memories co-existed. The freedom and anti-apartheid struggle was linked to the Battle when the armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) was symbolically launched on December 16, 1961. A new analogy between the struggle between Zulus and Voortrekkers on the one hand and the 'new' struggle between black and white on the other hand was established.²²⁶

Grundlingh explains the reinterpretation of the Day of the Vow by its shift from being a strictly exclusive to a slightly inclusive commemorative day. While all neighbouring countries were in the late process of decolonisation, the white Afrikaner faced more difficulties retaining their power and opposing the increasing black resistance movement. The Afrikaner confidence had grown in the sixties but the economic malaise of the seventies caused Afrikaners to change their exclusive policy.²²⁷ Questions about

²²⁵ F A Van Jaarsveld, 'n Afrikanerperspektief op die Groot Trek: simbool en ritueel' in *Historia* 33(1988) 11.

²²⁶ Van Jaarsveld points out a similar argument in his article on apartheid. F A Van Jaarsveld, *Die evolusie van apartheid en andere geskiedkundige opstelle*, 73.

²²⁷ Albert Grundlingh, 'Politics, Principles and Problems of a Profession: Afrikaner Historians and their Discipline, c. 1920-c. 1965' in *Perspectives on Education*, 12 (1990) 13.

the effectiveness of the political system arose among Afrikaner businessmen and intellectuals. The role of the English-speaking whites and blacks in the commemorations was questioned, as well as the problem whether it was appropriate to celebrate a nationalistic exclusive day disregarding the surrounding political evolution in Africa.²²⁸ The Afrikaner higher class was in need of more support and called upon English-speaking whites and upper class Blacks for support. Therefore a more inclusive discourse was needed. Grundlingh explains: "Because of its need to reach these new audiences, it became no longer possible to beat the ethnic drum."²²⁹ A new approach would have to get rid of the exclusive religious factor of December 16, because its call was on Afrikaners only.

Van Jaarsveld argued that due to nationalistic stubbornness, the commemoration had lost its link with what was actually happening around South Africa. Since the seventies December 16 is referred to in terms of 'survival' and politicians and academic scholars link the white struggle for survival in the seventies with the one against the Zulus and the British in the 1830s. British imperialism was replaced by 'African imperialism'. Van Jaarsveld refers to this as a reversed historical process. "Dit is my mening dat die 'tekens van die tye' - die omgekeerde 'historiese proses' wat op kolonisasie en blanke baasskap gevolg het, naamlik dekolonisasie, nie betyds korrek gelees en verstaan is nie - die prys van 'n selfgesentreerde Afrikaner-Weltfremdheit."²³⁰ He links this *Weltfremdheit* with 'emotional Afrikaner nationalism.'²³¹ The remembrance and even survival of the Great Trek in the historical consciousness is dependent on the ability of white man to resist its isolation and its role in national and foreign developments. "Die relativering van die Afrikaner-volksidee tot onderdeel van die geheel van die bevolking, en die gesamentlike posisie teenoor die bedreiging van oor die grense, verklaar ten dele die huidige dialog oor en kritiek teen die aard en wyse van Geloftedagvieringe."²³²

Van Jaarsveld linked the historical consciousness with the national and international situation of the country and saw no future in the exclusive character of the commemoration. He did not plead for a change or neutralisation of the festival, but for a devastation of its political character. Throughout the seventies, the tone in Van Jaarsveld's publications on the Battle of Blood River and the history of apartheid, slightly changed. In his first articles on the Great Trek and on apartheid, his tone was careful and the word 'myth' was never mentioned. In the late eighties, his criticism on the former interpretation of Afrikaner history and the ritualisation of their past increased.²³³ Van Jaarsveld was considered one of the

²²⁸ Ibidem.

²²⁹ Grundlingh, 'From Feverish festival to repetitive Ritual?' 31.

²³⁰ 'In my opinion, the reversed historical process, that is a consequence of colonisation and white dominance, namely decolonisation, has not been interpreted correctly – the price of self-centred Afrikaner *Weltfremdheit*.' Van Jaarsveld, *Die evolusie van apartheid en andere geskiedkundige opstelle*, 74.

²³¹ Ibidem, 71.

²³² Ibidem, 83-84.

²³³ For example in his article entitled 'n Afrikanerperspektief op die groot trek: simbool en ritueel' published in the special edition on the Great Trek of *Historia*, 33, (1988), he analyses Day of the Vow as an expression of nationalism and an invented tradition and defines its link with historical and national consciousness.

most important Afrikaner historians, and many Afrikaners were uncomfortable with his change of tone and his more critical approach on the Afrikaner history.²³⁴

In 1979, Van Jaarsveld was the main speaker at the *Conference on the Interpretation of South African History* where he presented his article on the interpretation of Blood River. His performance had been controversial and nationalistic radicals had attempted to assault him. The public reactions to his speech are further referred to in the next chapter.

Disregarding the importance of the economical and political developments one cannot see the reconsideration of the history of the Great Trek by South African historians without taking into account the sociological and historical developments of that time.

The Role Of The Historian At Stake

A modernist view on nationalism, political mythology together with new theories on heritage and the role of traditions and customs influenced academics worldwide.²³⁵ Many Afrikaner historians had remained isolated from foreign influences and had a traditional, factual representation of history, often represented in very detailed narratives. While the debate on December 16 started in the seventies, it was only in the eighties that concepts as ‘political mythology’ were used. In the context of changing perspectives and historical theories, the human and natural sciences had been ‘invading’ the historical field in South Africa towards the end of the eighties and according to John Benyon “they show that human motive is often blended with impersonal aggregate forces which may be economic, ecological, climatological, sociological, demographic, anthropological, etc. Perhaps we have underplayed the importance of these disciplines to our own?” In 1988 a special edition of the historical magazine *Historia* on the Great Trek was published.²³⁶

The objectivity of history

By refuting the mythical and religious elements in the interpretation of the battle, historians such as Liebenberg questioned the reliability of the historian. He logically reasoned that as historians we cannot choose if and when God intervenes in history. Consequently, every event in history would have to be explained by the hand of God. That means that God was on the side of the Zulus as well. Furthermore, it raised the question whether a historian can actually discern the hand of God in history.²³⁷ Their view on historical theory was influenced by the German historian Leopold Ranke, who considered history as an

²³⁴ The headline in the *Afrikaner* of April 1979 was entitled “‘n Professor van 1971 en van 1979” *Die Afrikaner*, 12.04.1979.

²³⁵ Represented by the publishing of scholars like Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities” and Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger’s “Invention of Tradition”. These works were published in 1983 and 1985, when the deconstruction of Afrikaner nationalism was at its highest peak.

²³⁶ John Benyon, “The necessity for new perspectives in South African history with particular reference to the Great Trek” in *Historia* 33 (1988) 2.

²³⁷ Liebenberg, “Bloedrivier en Gods Hand” 1.

objective science.²³⁸ At first sight, interpreting history by the hand of God seems incompatible with objectivity, but Van Jaarsveld explains that according to Ranke God lived in all history. It is the historian's task to decipher the language of God because God is everywhere. Ranke considered the historian as God's instrument and religion was a key to history.

"Vir hom was godsdiens 'n sleutel tot die geskiedenis, want dit is 'n uitdrukking van Gods heilige intensie, 'n simfoniese geheel van Gods komposisie, wat uit besondere onderdele bestaan, maar tegelyk die spieël is van die universele, die algemene."²³⁹

South Africa was not the only nation where history was interpreted through the intervention of God, and Van Jaarsveld argued that not only Afrikaners considered God on their side of history, but every European people did, even Russia.²⁴⁰ Because of its isolated situation, the Rankean theory had a much longer history in the South Africa than European historiography. Many Afrikaans-speaking historians attained part of their education in Germany in the Thirties, but ever since apartheid, Afrikaner history had been isolated from the outside world and new developments in historical theory hardly reached South Africa, as most history students did not study abroad. Van Jaarsveld speaks of the huge distance between scientific knowledge and historical consciousness, between fact and history. It was the failing of Ranke's scientific objective history and the realisation that it had served a nationalistic and ethnic exclusive policy, that was integrated in the historical debate concerning December 16.²⁴¹

²³⁸ During the second half of the 19th century, Afrikaner historical consciousness emerged and led to anti-British imperialist work and the struggle between Boers and Britons became the master narrative. Key themes were the great Trek and the Second Anglo Boer War. The narratives of these events constructed the historical consciousness of the Afrikaner and contributed to the Afrikaner identity. History was not explained in terms of black versus white, but Afrikaners versus Blacks and British. Saunders explains that Afrikaners valued their history to underpin the struggle against the British, and afterwards their drive for domination. Meanwhile, English-speaking South Africans did not draw on history in a similar way, and referred to it less as a guide for the present and the future..Until the 1960s the central argument of Afrikaner nationalist historiography was directed against Britain and "negrophobia was woven into an Anglophobic pattern." Only in the 20th century, an academic component was added to the Afrikaner nationalistic history works. The foundation for this academic approach was laid at the University of Stellenbosch by two Dutch historians that were influenced by Leopold von Ranke's principles. The focus in this history works was on the political history and the rise of the Afrikaners. See also: Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past, Major historians on Race and Class* (Cape Town 1988) and Wessel Visser, 'Trends in South African Historiography and the present state of historical research', Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, 23 September 2004.

²³⁹ Ranke, quoted in Van Jaarsveld, *Die evolusie van apartheid en andere geskiedkundige opstelle*, 87. Translation: "According to Ranke, religion was a key to history because it is an expression of God's intention and composition that consists of different elements, but at the same time it is all part of one universality."

²⁴⁰ Van Jaarsveld, *Die evolusie van apartheid en andere geskiedkundige opstelle*, 87.

²⁴¹ Ibidem, 80.

The danger of Verstarring and Vervreemding

The position of the historian in the whole process of history writing was at stake. If the historian could not contemplate the absolute truth anymore, then who could and what would then be the importance of history if we cannot even assure it is trustworthy?

If we as historians, write about the past as if it is an objective and invariable entity, the danger arises of creating a 'one truth' that cannot be subject to change anymore. Van Jaarsveld warned for the *verstarring* of history which might lead to absolutist and extremist regimes. Not only did he warn for *verstarring*, also *vervreemding* from history is a risk. Knowing and understanding the past helps people dealing with present affairs:

"Ek is tegelyk behoudend en vooruistrewend en is dankbaar daarvoor omdat ek hierdie land kan help in sy ontwikkeling en nie 'n Rip van Winkel is nie. Ek het mense aangemoedig om geskiedenisboeke in hul huise te hou sodat hul kinders die verlede kan ken en ook weet hoe om in die hede op te tree, anders word die geskiedenis vir hulle vreemd soos die nasionaal-sosialisme van Hitler of die Italiaanse fascisme. As die geskiedenis verstar, word dit gevaarlik en sal 'n mens te doen kry met anti-Joodse en anti-Semitiese uitsprake wat nie alleen on-Afrikaans en on-Suid-Afrikaans is nie maar ook volksvreemd."²⁴²

This point of view critically approached the conservative view of the Battle and its interpretation and considered the way it was illustrated in history books as an 'opinion', a 'consciousness', instead of the representation of actual facts. Historians influenced by this new, modernist approach on history emphasised the idea that history is dependent on the present.

Van Jaarsveld warned for Afrikaner identity not to withdraw in extreme conservatism. The historical view was politically determined and Van Jaarsveld was aware that the political system as then existed, would not be eternal and he feared for a loss of Afrikaner identity in the future. Therefore he emphasised the importance of being open to change and re-interpretation. Otherwise, the interpretation of the past will be thought of as 'wrong', 'fault' and Afrikaners would be condemned for it which can lead to a disturbed self-image. He warns for the destruction – vernietiging - of the Afrikaners when they hold on to their projection of the past into the present.²⁴³

²⁴² "At the same time I am conservative and progressive and I am grateful that I can help this country develop to its full potential. I have encouraged people to have history books for their children to know their past and for them to know how to act in the present. If not, they are alienated from their past as happened during Hitler's nazism or Italian fascism. If history loses its dynamism, people will have to deal with anti semitism what is not only un-Afrikaans and un-South African but also unlike people." Van Jaarsveld in *Beeld*, 29.06.1979.

²⁴³ Van Jaarsveld, *Die Evolusie van Apartheid en ander geskiedkundige Opstelle*, 85.

5.1.3 The Role Of The Church

It is not my intention to elaborate on the role of the clergy in South African politics and public commemorations, but a short overview is useful, mainly because the Afrikaner press has always given prominence to religious matters and biblical references, editorials, etcetera are plentiful.

Upholding The 'Myth'

The secularization of December 16 was criticized by the Dutch Reformed Church. The role of the Church in upholding the ‘myth’ of the Covenant and apartheid in general is described by Thompson as having more serious political effects than the debate among historians and the dominant influence of the clergy in politics was still subsistent:

“Predikants made a vital contribution to the triumph of Afrikaner nationalism. They inspired resistance to the triumph of Afrikaner nationalism. They became deeply involved in the Broederbond; and (...) they fostered and propagated the myth of the covenant and played leading roles in the great ethnic festivals at the Voortrekker Monument .”²⁴⁴

The myth that Afrikaners were the chosen people, referring to the Israelis and the God-given mission that Afrikaners had to rule over South Africa, was preached by the Dutch Reformed Church or Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk and most *predikants* were closely connected to the NP.²⁴⁵ Most NGK and the vast majority of people employed by the government in various capacities and institutions - including the police and the military belonged to this Church.²⁴⁶ In their search for confirmation of identity and the strengthening the struggle against the ANC and the communists, the exclusively religious character of Day of the Vow was intensified among the members of the NGK:

“Ons vyande is baie magtiger, baie meer geslepe as die Zoeloes in 1838. Met assegaai en skildvel het hulle openlik op-die-man-af aangestorm, maar ons vyand kom vandag met ‘n subtiele oorlogsvoering, met sielkundige beplanning om ons hier in Suid-Afrika verward en vreesbevange te maak. (...) Hulle maak van die Christendom ‘n karikatuur asof ‘n Christen hom nie met die swaard mag verdedig nie. Die aanvalle van die ANC, die terroriste op ons grens - so het ons leiers al herhaaldelik vir ons gesê - wil ons moedelos maak, wil hê ons moet verraad pleeg, sodat Suid-Afrika soos ‘n ryp appel in die skoot van die Kommuniste kan val.”²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid*, 214. The Dutch Gereformeerde kerk was actively supporting apartheid. However, this does not mean that all Christian churches were. Thompson argues that as early as 1948, most other Christian churches were criticizing apartheid.

²⁴⁵ Ibidem, 214-215.

²⁴⁶ John de Gruchy quoted in Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid*, 215.

²⁴⁷ J H Coetzee and C J Malan, *Geloftedag: Gister, Vandag, Môre* (Potchefstroom 1983) 21. Sermon by C J

In religious magazines, for example *Woord en Daad*, the question of the sabbatical character of the day was discussed and indicated by headlines like: "Is Geloftedag 'n Sabbat?" and in the *Kerkblad*: "Geloftevolk of Godsvolk?"²⁴⁸ In his speech on December 16, delivered in 1983 at Potchefstroom, Professor Coetzee stressed the religious aspect of the commemoration and he believed that the Christian and qualitative aspects of the day should be shown. He was afraid that secularism would mean a decrease in the number of Afrikaners actively commemorating Day of the Vow.

Reconsidering The Myth

So far I have discussed the clergy who wished to keep the day completely exclusive and Afrikaner. However, in 1977, on the Day of the Vow, the divergence of the Afrikaner Nation Church - Kerk van die Afrikanernasie - was broadcasted on the radio.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, also among Reformed Church members, some doubts on the interpretation of the Day of the Vow occurred. Despite the emotional reaction to the reconsideration of the past and the re-investigation of certain primary sources concerning the content and the binding of the vow, some church members realised the importance to reconsider the past in a non-emotional manner. Piet Meiring of the NGK in Pretoria pleaded in the *Transvaler* for the involvement of other groups and races and for a national Day of Reconciliation.²⁵⁰

The intertwining of politics and religion started to disconcert some theologians, who considered the intrusion of a political element into the observance of the day as desecration.²⁵¹ However, three religious teachers of three different Afrikaanse *susterkerke* agreed that adaptations to the vow might have become necessary but inclusion is impossible. Ben Marais, professor of Theology at the University of South Africa, said that "die geskiedenis kan nie teruggedraai word om die gelofte te verander nie. Die gelofte word egter dikwels te eng en in 'n nasionalistiese opset opgeneem."²⁵²

Apart from the Reformed Church, the Anglican Church was pleading humanity and reconciliation, as shown by the example of Reverend Simeon Nkoane, the Anglican dean of Johannesburg. The political burden of the day was clear now and proved by the speeches delivered at the commemorations. Dean Nkoane mentioned not only the everyday chasm between black and white, but also the existing chasm between the black and white clergy. The stress in his speech is on the current

Malan delivered at the commemoration of December 1983 at Potchefstroom. Malan was a preacher at the Reformed Church.

²⁴⁸ B. Spoelstra, *Kan Geloftedag oorlewe?* 2. Spoelstra is professor at the Hammenkraalse Teologiese skool van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika. His article is a reaction to the article published by Van Jaarsveld in 1979, "Historiese spieël van Bloedrivier" in *Die evolusie van Apartheid en ander Opstelle*, 46-89.

²⁴⁹ *Die Burger*, 13.02.1978, 6.

²⁵⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 20.01.1978 p 11

²⁵¹ In the Afrikaner newspaper *Beeld* of January 1978 different clerical opinions were summarised and the general opinion was that "Geloftedag kan nie deur 'n nuwe gelofte vervang word nie - alle rassegroepe behoort egter betrek te word."

²⁵² "We cannot turn back time and change history and the vow. However, the covenant is often interpreted in a conservative way and explained nationalistically." *Beeld* 26.01.1978, 11.

policy of apartheid and the inferior position of the blacks.²⁵³

5.1.4 The 'Other Race': The Black Historians' View

Until now, I have been mainly discussing Afrikaner historians because most changes that occurred in the interpretation of December 16 took place among Afrikaners and they were in control of most political discourse in terms of their *volksgeskiedenis*. Nevertheless, among other ethnicities in South Africa, the symbolic event of December 16 has been subject to different interpretations. For my particular thesis, that researches the dominant discourse, I have not put a lot of emphasis on the black perspective of the day. In the following paragraphs, I would like to give a short overview of the black historiography and contextual embedding of The Great Trek and the Battle of Ncome/Blood River in particular.

Along with the emergence of black freedom movements, and its corresponding Marxist elements, black writers reversed the white approach into an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist world view. In its turn, Dingaan is recognised as a hero.²⁵⁴ According to Van Jaarsveld, this reflects the “hierdie teenstrydige vertolking van die Groot Trek lei na die probleem van die 'betekenis' van Bloedrivier.” In a plural society, history remains a complex issue.²⁵⁵

Black Historiography

Not much has been written on the black perspective in South African historiography. It was considered to be “unscientific and therefore irrelevant to the discussion of South African history writing in general.” However, black writers are trying to come to grip with their current situation and in order to do so, the past is interpreted from a present perspective. For many the Great Trek was a central event in South African history.²⁵⁶ Similar to general South African historiography, the Great Trek was first explained in terms of racism and ethnic exclusion and an attempt was made to base nationalism upon the interpretations of the Trek. The belief was that when the errors in the past would be unveiled, explained and understood, they would not happen again. However, reality proved differently and in the seventies and eighties, Marxist history was introduced in South Africa and the tendency to view the origins and the consequences of the Great Trek in terms of historical materialism increased. As Gebhard wrote in 1988:

“The changing Black perspectives on the Great Trek are related to the current political milieu in which the perspectives are founded. The historical facts themselves were not at dispute but the way they were interpreted and re-interpreted. Central remained the way Blacks perceived

²⁵³ *The Natal Witness*, 17.12.1977, 7.

²⁵⁴ Examples of black historians are Majeke and Mnguni, discussed in Van Jaarsveld, *Die evolusie van Apartheid en andere geskiedkundige opstelle*, 51.

²⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁶ W. R. L. Gebhard, “Changing Black Perspectives of the Great Trek”, in *Historia* 33(1988) 38-39.

themselves and the interpretation of the past served as enhancement of self identity.”

Different Perspectives On The Battle

King Dingaan As National Hero

Until the thirties two African views existed on the Battle. These views were closely connected to the political and social reality in the country and the image of king Dingaan throughout time. The first one held Dingaan in the highest esteem and contemplated on him as a freedom fighter against colonial invasion. The Battle was therefore a symbolic and significant event in the liberation struggle. The second group consisted of more conservative intellectuals, often associated with the ANC. Their opinion of Dingaan was less heroic, as they considered him to have sown the ‘seeds of racial conflict’. They blamed the Battle to have stimulated the history of race relations.²⁵⁷ As was discussed at the Seminar on the Reinterpretation of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome that was held in 1998, the first view was especially operational before 1920, and revived after 1961, while the second view subsisted in the 1920s and 1930s and was integrated in the larger framework of resistance against racial laws in South Africa. As Sithole explains, in the 1920 and 1930s, the stress was on promoting race relations between black and white people. Pursuing the African American case, where inter-racial committees had been formed, the Africans established Joint Councils to promote understanding of the races in South Africa. This formed their official policy of the ANC on the commemorations of December 16. One of the foremost important intellectuals was Selope Thema, who had been critically writing about Dingaansdag and who began to make pleas for South Africans to commemorate 16 December as a ‘Day of Reconciliation’.²⁵⁸

“The message of Dingaan’s Day to the people of South Africa, both black and White is avoid all that brings about conflict, misery and suffering. Work together in harmony for the good of your common country and for the civilization you have established on this southern end of the African continent.”²⁵⁹

By the end of the 1930s, two contesting traditions on the meanings and images of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome and King Dingaan prevailed amongst Africans. The conservative African elites viewed the battle negatively because of the racial conflict in South Africa and they portrayed Dingaan as a tyrant and a fool. More radical Africans continued to see him as a good leader and a hero who fought for freedom.²⁶⁰ A single standpoint and interpretation of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome did not exist within the African community. Ironically, the analogy with the difficulties in the changes in

²⁵⁷ Sithole, 'Changing Images of Blood River/iNcome', 30-31.

²⁵⁸ Ibidem,32.

²⁵⁹ Selope Thema as quoted in *Bantu World* in 1932, in ibidem, 30-31.

²⁶⁰ Interpretation of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome: one day seminar held at 31 October 1998 at the University of Zululand, (Kwa Dlawgezwa 1998) 33-34.

interpretation, meaning, understanding and image of the Battle that the Afrikaners had, is noticeable. In the 1960s, the remembrance of the battle became a reference point for most important anti-apartheid struggle, the one led by the ANC and the view on December 16 changed.

Picking Up The Spears Again: The ANC

The ANC launched its armed wing on 16 December 1961, a date that was not chosen randomly. Even more, there are abundant references to the battlefield: “a national army - Umkhonto we Sizwe - was born to resume the armed resistance of our fathers, this time against the modern oppressor and his allies.” Hereby the link with history is drawn which offers the MK a firmer foundation and turned the Battle of Ncome into a symbolic event for the struggle for liberation. The organisation put its claim on three periods in history, Oliver Tambo explains:

“The first, the period of wars of resistance waged by our forefathers against the white invaders of our country. This lasted for centuries. The next began with the formation of the African National Congress which meant the birth of a new united African nation in South Africa. The third is the emergence of Umkhonto we Sizwe itself. This signified the resumption of armed struggle under modern conditions for the restoration of our land to its rightful owners.”²⁶¹

Similarly, their banner, that consists of a black man with a spear, refers to the Zulu combatants in the nineteenth century. The ANC consistently referred to Dingaansday as Heroes Day and commemorated it from 1961 until late eighties. The battle between the Voortrekkers and Zulus was then used by the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) to legitimise their battle as just and moral.²⁶²

“It was not by accident that we launched MK on December 16. White South Africa observes that day as the triumph of its military might over our people. The violence that they celebrate is the violence of a minority aimed at subjugating the majority of the people of our country; the violence of white over black. In reality, it is a celebration of injustice and the inhumanity of man against man. We chose that day to show how different we were: to show that the path that had been forced upon us was in pursuit of the establishment of justice and humanity for all the people of our country - black and white. The racists celebrate December 16 in the name of a false god - a celebration of war in pursuit of an unjust cause. We celebrate December 16, our Heroes' Day, to underline our commitment that

²⁶¹ Oliver Tambo, 'Capture the Citadel', Broadcast to South Africa on the eighth anniversary of the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, 16.12.1969.

²⁶² Sithole, “Changing Images of Blood River/iNcome”, 34.

we are waging a just war in pursuit of freedom, democracy and peace.”²⁶³

The reference to December 16 creates a larger framework of resistance against the white coloniser and an attempt to create a historical consciousness disregarding ethnic or regional background.²⁶⁴ During the 1970s and 1980s, a more negative image of Dingaan emerged when Inkatha started to reveal King Shaka as their nationalistic hero.²⁶⁵ Because of tribalisation, there were many differences among Africans and the interpretation of the Battle was linked with the heroification of African leaders. Still now, images of Dingaan are changing due to political and social conditions.²⁶⁶

5.1.5 Conclusion

The urge for new perspectives on the South African past grew and in 1988, the *Journal Of The Historical Society of South Africa* attributed their issue to the Great Trek with contributions of Van Jaarsveld and du Toit Spies.²⁶⁷ The re-interpretation was necessary because of the limited perspective of the historian and their inability to satisfy Ranke’s ideal of objective history. Several factors had influenced the interpretation of December 16: the black resistance against the apartheid regime, the economic, political and cultural isolation of the Afrikaners due to national and international developments and the process of decolonisation in the other African countries. More Afrikaners were aware of the fact that in order to maintain their position, cooperation with and inclusion of English speaking whites and even the black upper class would be necessary. Therefore, the commemoration would have to change its tone. The necessity of a reinterpretation was further expressed by the *Conference on the Interpretation of History*, organised by the University of South Africa in 1979. These considerations brought about changes in the approach of the past and history itself. The role of the historian was being questioned and the ‘old’ historiography abandoned. The future of Afrikaner historiography was uncertain from then on:

“Dit kom neer op ‘n verwerping van tradisionele wit verledevoorstelling van die ou koloniale tyd van uitbreiding imperialisme. Sal dit tot twee geskiedenispersepsies en verledebeelde lei, ‘n konvensionele en ‘n alternatiewe, wat parallel langs mekaar bestaan soos dit die geval was tydens die stryd tussen Boer en Brit, of sal daar mettertyd ooreengekom word om, met die oog op geskiedenisonderrig, ook wat die Groot Trek betref, ‘n multidimensionele of multi-perspektiwistiese verledebeeld aan te bied?”²⁶⁸

²⁶³ Umkhonto we Sizwe - 'Born of the people' statement of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress on the 25th anniversary of the formation of Umkhonto We Sizwe 16.12.1986.

²⁶⁴ Sithole, “Changing Images of Blood River/iNcome”, 36.

²⁶⁵ Ibidem, 41.

²⁶⁶ Ibidem, 40.

²⁶⁷ *Historia* 33.

²⁶⁸ F A Van Jaarsveld, “‘n Afrikanerperspektief op die Groot Trek: simbol en ritueel” in *Historia* 33 (1988) 13.

5.2 The Public Perception Of The Reinterpretation Of History

In the first part of this chapter I was mainly concerned with the academic, and the clerical perception of the Day of the Vow and its reinterpretation. As discussed above the commemorations were interconnected with the political, economic and cultural body. To understand the implications of the debate that took place among historians, politicians and the public, the media had a crucial role. To research these, I have been studying newspaper articles and political speeches. In a repressive regime as apartheid was, the media was controlled by the government. There is a combined force of institutional and cultural pressure, together with the intrinsic structure of discourse which always exceeds the plans and desires of the institution or of those in power.²⁶⁹

When researching these articles, a critical approach is necessary and I found that Critical Discourse Analysis offered me the most comprehensive method. It considers discourse as a form of social practice and "it assumes a dialectical relationship between particular discursive events and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded: on the one hand, the situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect discourses. On the other hand, discourses influence social and political reality. In other words, discourse constitutes social practice and is at the same time constructed by it."²⁷⁰ Taking this as background, has given me a framework to critically analyse the newspaper articles. Because of the fact that language is often ideological, investigating interpretation, reception and social effects is necessary to offer a complete view on the debate on December 16. In addition we must keep in mind that there existed no freedom of press in South Africa during apartheid.

During apartheid, the Afrikaner media had close ties with the South African government. Additionally, the political discourse in the seventies and eighties was Afrikaans. As a consequence, most of the analysed newspapers that report on the reconsideration of the Great trek are in Afrikaans. I will identify the main agents in the public debate and the public reaction to the interpretation of history. The newspapers I researched are the main South African papers, and all white-owned. In those articles I looked for references to 'Geloftedag and Versoeningsdag', 'Van Jaarsveld' and searched through all publications from December 12, 1970 until December 20, 1988. However, this qualitative research serves as a background and its intention is mainly descriptive and in support of my main thesis.

***5.2.1 Different Opinions: 'Verlig' Versus 'Verkrampt'*²⁷¹**

The debate occurred particularly among Afrikaners and thus in Afrikaner newspapers and journals. And although the reconsideration of the meaning of Day of the Vow by historians and clergy was to some

²⁶⁹ Sarah Mills, *Discourse Analysis* (London 1997) 52.

²⁷⁰ Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The discursive construction of national identities" in *Discourse and Society* 10, 157

²⁷¹ 'Enlightened' versus 'conservative'

extent sensible to its political impact, the approach was predominantly academical. Thompson recognised the changing political situation and the public debate about the meaning of the Day of the Vow as one of the conditions for the reinterpretation by historians.

“The material changes that took place in South Africa after 1948, including changes in the Afrikaner class structure and Afrikaner political affiliations, precipitated intense disputes over the significance and the meaning of the covenant. The link between politics and the meaning and debate about the day of the covenant was tight. Professional historians began, somewhat cautiously to reappraise the events of 1838.”²⁷²

In general we can discard three opinions among the public in South Africa: The first one belonged to conservative groups upholding to Afrikaner nationalism or religious conservatism. The second group pleaded for an inclusive celebration while the last group reckoned the abandonment of the Day of the Vow necessary. In the Afrikaner discourse on the debate, the inclusive view is represented as “*verlig*”, which means enlightened, and the exclusive, conservative view as “*verkramp*”.

According to the conservative – *verkramp*- opinion, the Afrikaners should not share this day with anyone. In the seventies this view was represented by Connie Mulder, NP minister of the Interior who said at the 1977 Paardekraal celebrations that it would be 'wrong' to invite English-speakers and other communities to the celebrations. Proponents argued that they did not see a way for Afrikaners to include others to their celebrations. “Geloftdag is letterlik een volksfees” and “Ek denk nie iemand nou kan deelneem aan geloftefeestviering sonder dat sy verbondenheid aan ‘n volk daarin betrek word nie.”²⁷³ This comment triggered the debate from 1977 till 1978 in mainly Afrikaner newspapers and the information official of the Voortrekker Monument called the speaker, Van den Berg, a “bloody fool”.²⁷⁴ The view uttered in these quotes stressed the own identity of every *volk* and opposed the creation of a national South African identity.

A more *verlig* view allowed other language and race groups to attend – but the character of the commemoration had to stay genuinely Afrikaner. Hennie Smith, Minister of Coloured Affairs propagated an inclusive Day of the Covenant in 1977, in order to have Afrikaner culture accepted by other groups as inferior to Marxism. The view that the Afrikaner character of the celebration had to be maintained was supported by the FAK. Even though the day was open to all groups, Minister Smith argued that as a precondition other groups should fully associate with the Afrikaner responsibilities and conditions. “Daar is soveel op die spel met die behoud van Afrikaneridentiteit en geloftedag is so sentraal in die proses van die behoud daarvan dat om hier te begin verwater, vir die Afrikaner weinig minder as verraad sou

²⁷² Leonard Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid*,) 213.

²⁷³ “Day of the Vow is literally a celebration for the people” and “I think no one can participate without including their tie to a people.” Mossie van den Berg in *Die Transvaler*, 05.01.1978.

²⁷⁴ *Rand Daily Mail*, 20.01.1978, 11

beteken."²⁷⁵

A small group of people did not believe in the traditional meaning of the Day of the Vow and argued that it should be celebrated in such an inclusive way that every person in South Africa could participate. Some argued its name should be changed to Day of Reconciliation.²⁷⁶

I have briefly discussed black perception in the previous chapter. In short, in the seventies and eighties, it was mainly considered an exclusive Afrikaner celebration and as protest the ANC announced Heroes Day. My point here is that blacks were not really part of the debate, even though the question of inclusion and exclusion incorporated their involvement in the celebrations. This underlines the argument that the debate was part of the identity crisis of the Afrikaners due to the awareness of the failure of apartheid and the international, but also national, isolation of the Afrikaners as a people. In the seventies, the realisation that apartheid would not live forever launched the debate among whites, however, without including the opinions of non-whites into the debate.

In the next paragraph, I will explore the exclusive aspect of the debate more closely.

5.2.2 From Exclusion...

Every year in December the battle of Blood River started over again, as the debate re-opened. The question if and how December 16 should be celebrated inclusively or exclusively and religiously or not was debated again.

A Re-occurring Debate

“Mag on Geloftedag nog bind aan die toekoms, of is die feesdag net ‘n herinnering aan die verlede, ‘n museumstuk wat jaarliks afgestof en ter besigtiging uitgestal word terwyl beroepsgidse ou bekende en afgesaagde mededeling daarvoor doen? Hang daar bo die deur van hierdie museum ook ‘n bordjie: ‘Toegang verbode: slegs Afrikaners’, terwyl waarskynlik die dag lustig as ‘n vakansiedag deurbring, sonder ‘n enkele gedagte aan die oorsprong, betekenis en boodskap ervan?”²⁷⁷

Since 1977 it was clear that even with the governing NP there was no unanimous opinion on the dilemma. In December 1977 the debate intensified to such an extent that the newspaper ‘the Transvaler’ decided not to publish any more letters on the subject due to the lack of space.²⁷⁸ The public debate in its

²⁷⁵ "Afrikaner identity is at stake and Day of the Vow is central to this process. If we discard this issue, it would mean betrayal for the Afrikaner" *Die Transvaler*, 05.01.1978, 9. The article emphasises the two standpoints in the debate about Day of the Vow: "Berek ander saam met ons" and "Afrikaner moet apart bly vier"

²⁷⁶ *Sunday Tribune*, 22.01.1978, 22

²⁷⁷ J H Coetzee and C J Malan, *Geloftedag: Gister, Vandag, Môre* (Potchefstroom 1983) 8. Speech delivered by Coetzee at the 1983 commemoration in Potchefstroom.

²⁷⁸ *Sunday Tribune*, 22.01.1978, *Die Transvaler* 14.01.1978 "Die Transvaler het ‘n groot getal briewe eur

columns had been going on for almost a month and according to the Rand Daily Mail, prominent South Africans of all languages and background had been given enough forum to express their thoughts. Indeed, Afrikaners, coloureds and Asians were heard, but there was still no voice of blacks represented in the debate. When closing down the debate, the Transvaler had no choice but to take a standpoint in the debate and the editor - and brother of young National Party politician F W de Klerk - Wimpie de Klerk rounded it off by saying that they "believe the Day of the Covenant should be celebrated by all Christians in our beautiful country because all Christians will have to stand together to counter the danger of the anti-Christ, the communist." Importantly, he calls upon the FAK to respond to the public on the question of how the day should be celebrated and include other language groups into the celebrations.²⁷⁹ Van den Berg, secretary of the FAK argued that "the day will always be an expressed Afrikaner festival with Afrikaans as the only language used."²⁸⁰ The governing NP was facing a dilemma, even though mainly Afrikaner, support from other language groups in South Africa was necessary.

"How to change the exclusive Afrikaner basis of the day into a wider movement with a broader all-inclusive South Africanism that will reflect the recent electoral changes when large numbers of English-speaking South Africans voted for the government for the first time."

In addition the NP would have to create a wider front including all races with a common South African loyalty which supports the government against internal and external pressure and the threat of communism.²⁸¹

The Nationalistic Challenge

From 1977 onwards, the nationalistic approach was being challenged. While its theme remained nationalistic – "Material sacrifice for the sake of the freedom ideal" - officials were not on the same track anymore. *Die Vaderland* head lined "Anglo-Boerestryd is nou verby", implicating the need of including the English-speaking white population in the commemorations.²⁸² In January 1978, the *Rand Daily Mail* reported on the "Covenant Dilemma" and warned for its wider political implications.²⁸³ Minister of Interior Mulder was criticised by most Afrikaner politicians because of his nationalistic statements. In *Rapport*, the NP's Sunday newspaper, his opinions were attacked. According to the editor, Mulder contradicted himself, because his view on an exclusive commemoration of Day of the Vow did not

Geloftedagviering ontvang... en meer bepaald oer uitsprake van dr. Connie Mulder. Weens gebrek aan ruimte, en ook om ander lesers 'n kans te gee, kan die Transvaler ongelukkig nie meer briewe oor Geloftedagvierings plaas nie. However, due to the large amount of letters, four days later, the *Transvaler* published a summary of the readers' opinions. *Die Transvaler* 18.01.1978.

²⁷⁹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 20.01.1978 and *Die Transvaler* 18.01.1978.

²⁸⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 20.01.1978.

²⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁸² "The Anglo-Boer War is over now" in *Die Transvaler*, 21.12.1977.

²⁸³ *Rand Daily Mail*, 20.01.1978.

correspond with his latest speech where Mulder had announced that all South Africans must unite against foreign pressure. For the first time the NP had gained a lot of support from the English-speaking population in the past elections.

In 1978 *Die Transvaler* issued a special editorial on the Day of the Vow. In view of the threat of communism, it wondered whether an expansion of the covenant or a new vow would be appropriate or even necessary.²⁸⁴ *Die Vaderland* as well as *Die Transvaler* published both coloured and Afrikaner viewpoints:

“For the Afrikaner the day was a sort of inspiration; for the coloured it was a day of division between white, black and brown and it symbolised the beginning of everlasting white supremacy.”²⁸⁵

The article reckoned the Afrikaners' obsession with their own identity as the reason why other groups felt excluded. *Die Transvaler* summarised the different racial viewpoints: coloureds pleaded for a more inclusive commemoration, that would enhance understanding in the coloured community. The Indian opinion on December 16 was one in terms of reconciliation and nation-building. It consisted of the abandonment of the exclusively Afrikaner elements and the creation of a celebration that was directed towards a South African nation. The English-speaking whites and their opinion implicated that as long as *Geloftedag* stayed Afrikaans, the majority of the South Africans would not participate.²⁸⁶ The black perspective was still not mentioned. For black South Africans, the connection with the Afrikaner *volk* is too astute that they do not have the familiarity to be a part of it. According to the *Rand Daily Mail*, inclusion of blacks was far from reality: “Swartman ontuis op feesdag”.²⁸⁷

Politics Of Nation-Building And Religious Revival

Because of international pressure, the discourse of separation and exclusion was slightly becoming one of reconciliation. In December 1978 the *Cape Times* mentioned Reconciliation Day.²⁸⁸ The English newspaper *Cape Argus* commented in 1979 that a “far more acceptable” interpretation of Day of the Covenant was presented. This new approach was relying slightly more on the religious aspect of the day, so to stress ‘thanksgiving’ and reconciliation. According to *Cape Argus* “Reconciliation is a far more meaningful and constructive doctrine”²⁸⁹ The Prime Minister Botha, said in his speech at the Day of the Covenant celebrations in December 1979 that “the true meaning of Blood River was that prayer and the word of God triumphed which made a new future possible for us”. He tried to deny the accusations of Day of the Vow being a symbol of Afrikaner superiority or a triumph of white over black. He saw the

²⁸⁴ *Die Transvaler* 18.01.1978.

²⁸⁵ Ibidem.

²⁸⁶ Ibidem.

²⁸⁷ "Blacks not at home at public holiday", *Rand Daily Mail*, 20.01.1978, *Die Transvaler*, 09.01.1978 .

²⁸⁸ “Why not a national day of Reconciliation?” *Cape Times* 15.12.1979.

²⁸⁹ *Cape Argus*, 17.12.1979.

possibility of peace in South Africa only by accepting and respecting Christian values. Likewise other Afrikaner – and world – leaders, he considered Marxism as the biggest enemy:

“We in South Africa are today living in challenging and exciting times with one thing following the next in a bewildering way. Marxism, which god rejects, is through subversion, insurgency, military onslaughts, propaganda and psychological action making an onslaught on us.”

He called upon Christianity as a weapon against Marxism: “a nation who daily praises god and who fulfils daily responsibilities has a hope for the future.”²⁹⁰ Comments delivered in newspapers were accordingly: “this year’s speakers showed more awareness than usual of the need for wider loyalties , for unity in the face of the “total onslaught”, the *Natal Witness* published.²⁹¹ The present political situation is framed by a historical discourse and the expectations – and thus fears – for the future were reflected in its discourse. Minister Treurnicht of Public Works, Statistics and Tourism, mentioned a “historical dividing line’ in South Africa and he saw the co-existence of different nations and people within one country”.²⁹²

“Die slag van Bloedrivier moet die grondslag van versoening tussen wit en swart in Suid-Afrika en tussen al die bevolkingsgroepe in Suider-Afrika wees.”²⁹³ said the Minister of Development Koornhof. Other Afrikaner officials uttered similar arguments in their speeches. Re-occurring issues were the religious aspect of the Day of the Covenant and the importance of the Christian faith as a tool of reconciliation between black and white and in defence against the big enemy: the communists.²⁹⁴ De Klerk had argued that cooperation was necessary and that mutual recognition of identity is absolutely necessary in order to withstand the internal and external threats.²⁹⁵

5.2.3 ...And The Interpretation Of History...

The Conference On The Interpretation Of History In 1979

In response to these demands, the University of South Africa organised in 1979 a conference on “the Problems in the Interpretation of History with Possible Reference to Examples from South African History Such as the Battle of Blood River.” Van Jaarsveld was the most important speaker, but his more secular view on the covenant was not conceived without protest. Van Jaarsveld had presented his article on Blood River at this conference. To summarise, he argued that the sabbatical clause should be abandoned because 90% of South Africans do not respond to Day of the Vow. However, his new approach on the Great Trek and the battle was not appreciated by everyone as the following news report

²⁹⁰ *Eastern Province Herald*, 17.12.1979, *Die Transvaler*, 18.12.1979, *Beeld*, 18.12.1978, *The Star*, 18.12.1979.

²⁹¹ *The Natal Witness*, 18.12.1979.

²⁹² *Pretoria News*, 18.12.1979.

²⁹³ *Die Transvaler*, 18.12.1979. "The Battle of Blood River should be the base for reconciliation between black and white in South Africa and between all people in Southern Africa."

²⁹⁴ *Die Transvaler* 18.12.1979.

²⁹⁵ *Beeld* 18.12.1979.

explains:

“A gang of about 40 burly men burst into the hall, surrounded Professor Floors van Jaarsveld, emptied a tin of tar over him and plastered him with feathers. During the assault, a man who identified himself as Eugene Terreblanche, of the Afrikaanse Weerstandsbeweging (Afrikaner Resistance movement), seized the microphone and swung the tail of a sjambok through the air. Standing behind the vierkleur flag of the Boer Republic he said: ‘We as young Afrikaners are tired of seeing spiritual traditions and everything that is sacred to the Afrikaner, desecrated and degraded by liberal politicians, dissipated academics and false prophets who hide under the mantle of learning and a false faith – just as Prof van Jaarsveld now at this symposium attacks the sanctity of the Afrikaner in his deepest essence... this standpoint draws a line through the significance of the Afrikaner’s history and is blasphemous.’” Afterwards, van Jaarsveld, who at that time was completely stunned said about the incident: “It reminds me of the Nazi stormtroopers, when a select group meted out punishment to those who disobeyed orders, who deviated from traditions.”²⁹⁶

They were afraid that Day of the Vow would be abandoned and considered it a capitulation to the British, the coloured and the black South Africans and a threat for the existence of Afrikaners and their culture. As a reaction to the event, the debate became even more passionate. Most religious and political organs supported Van Jaarsveld, however there were some conservative Afrikaners who did not agree as an ‘Akademikus’ emotionally wrote in a letter published in *Die Afrikaner*:

“Betrokkenheid by die geskiedenis nog altyd van primêre belang om objektief te kan oordeel”(...)“Prof Van Jaarsveld maak hom hier skuldig aan dieselfde neiging wat ons by ons afrikaanssprekende of afrikaansskrywende digters en andere letterkundiges aantref: om eenkant te gaan staan, om nie een van hulle volk te wil wees nie, om afsydig te wees, van buite die volk vir die volk te skryf.”²⁹⁷

Van Jaarsveld was considered to be one of the foremost historians on Afrikaner history and culture and was nationwide recognised as such.

Newspaper and other media had presented him as the “super-vertolker van

²⁹⁶ “Albert Hertzog: It’s only the beginning” in *Sunday Times*, 01.04.1979.

²⁹⁷ 'Being involved with history is still most important to be able to judge objectively(...) Professor van Jaarsveld is responsible for what many Afrikaans speaking of writing poets and other literary performers do: not to part of their own people, but to be distinct and to write from outside the people.' *Die Afrikaner* 27.04.1979.

die Afrikaner en sy geskiedenis.”²⁹⁸ Controversy arose when he criticised the nationalistic interpretation of the Day of the Vow. But Van Jaarsveld defended himself against accusations of betrayal by mentioning the danger of *verstarring* of history.

The Commemoration Of Heroes' Day

The political need of a united South Africa emerged progressively throughout the eighties, and newspapers headlines like “Plan future with other races”²⁹⁹ and “Afrikaners ‘need to find allies’” were common. The 1980 commemoration speeches were dominated by the need for Afrikaners to “open their ranks and fund allies among all the people of South Africa.”³⁰⁰ Despite the government’s new rhetorics of reconciliation and co-operation, there was still a considerable group of conservative Afrikaners who clung to Afrikaner values and culture. In the township of Soweto there was a celebration of Heroes Day, with emphasis on “the war that was not over yet”.³⁰¹ Throughout the eighties, we notice that the blacks’ opinion was gradually taken into consideration and for the first time reports on Heroes' Day can be found. Heroes' Day was a celebration of the national heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle and honoured men like Nelson Mandela. According to a Heroes’ Day pamphlet, the purpose of the meetings is to “rededicate and commit ourselves to a democratic South Africa.”³⁰² Instead of creating a united South Africa, the different opinions on the Day of the Vow were dividing the South African nation even more. Right wing extremists were trying to organise conservative pro-apartheid meetings on the Day of the Vow and these festivities consisted of complete re-enactments and people wearing bonnets and other Voortrekker nostalgia. Meanwhile, black meetings took place honouring the ‘defeated’. The NP government tried to create peaceful commemorations or to forbid extremist conservative meetings because of fear for uprisings.

5.2.4 ... To Inclusion And Reconciliation

By 1983 the Afrikaner editors seemed convinced of the need of an inclusive celebration of Day of the Vow. *Beeld* of December 15, 1983 stated that “some interpretations of Geloftedag that were given in the past are simply not tenable.”(...)” Thus Geloftedag is more than an Afrikaner festival: it concerned the communal welfare of all peoples and groups in our land. We have often politised and ideologised the day. We have used it as an opportunity to talk about the black peril , 'swart gevaar' and the menace of ‘our enemies’ and we have often misperceived the appeal of the day: that we in this land must serve the kingdom of God for the good of all people.”³⁰³ Most performers of the speeches at the commemorations

²⁹⁸ *Die Afrikaner* 12.04.1978.

²⁹⁹ *Pretoria News*, 17.12.1980.

³⁰⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 17.12.1980.

³⁰¹ *Sunday Tribune* 20.12.1981.

³⁰² *Rand Daily Mail*, 15.12.1981.

³⁰³ *Beeld* 15.12.1983 and *Burger* 16.12.1983.

were abandoning the traditional view and linked Day of the Vow even more with politics. Minister of Interior Affairs, de Klerk said at the commemoration in Cape Town: "Soos in 1838 staan die blanke Suid-Afrikaner vandag weer voor 'n waarheidsmoment nie omdat 'n politieke leier dit opdring nie, maar omdat die feitelike omstandighede dit eis."³⁰⁴ The overall theme of the speech was how to affirm white power, not by exclusion but by sharing. The fear for more conflict dominated most of the speech: "A land of milk and honey could turn into one of blood and hatred" and he spoke of the "moment of truth".³⁰⁵

In 1983 at the Day of the Vow commemorations in Mosselbaai Prime Minister Botha denied the perspective of Afrikaners being 'the chosen people': "We dare not see ourselves as a chosen people. Those who do so within our ranks must be resisted. We are a called people, called to a particular task just as every nation is a called people."³⁰⁶ The government tried to assure that right wing Afrikaners would not hold meetings or attend any of the platforms. This led to a confrontation at the Voortrekker Monument where only five hundred invitees were allowed to the official ceremonies and access was denied for several hundreds of Afrikaners who were dressed in traditional Voortrekker gear. "Why must we stand outside the gate like blacks" was their reaction.³⁰⁷ Treurnicht had written an exclusive speech for the commemorations at Vegkop, but the newspapers mostly reported the government's official speeches. In general, the reports on the celebrations were limited because they were overshadowed by the bombings that took place that day for which the ANC claimed responsibility.

The ANC's militant wing, MK, had had their twenty second anniversary on December 16 that year. Afrikaner newspapers like *Beeld* en *Die Burger*, mainly supported by – and therefore supportive of – the NP, paid mainly attention to the bombings. The speeches delivered by government officials seemed to have lost their link with religious conservatism. Thompson wrote about Treurnicht's speech that it "constitutes a lucid exposition of the conservative Christian nationalist view of the Covenant and its relevance for the 1980s. It is the speech of a person steeped in Christian fundamentalism. Races and nations are ineluctable human categories. (...) He said not a word about the historic role of black people in the economy of the colonial and post colonial South Africa. (...) He praised the Voortrekkers as agents of civilization."³⁰⁸

One could say that the danger of loss of Afrikaner identity that Van Jaarsveld warned for, was already happening. Those that tried to resist it, resented in radicalism and racism. Small groups of Afrikaners explicitly held on to their own 'nation'. The Cape Times explained it in 1979 already as "going to the heart of the tensions within Nationalist Afrikanerdom and concerns the fundamental nature of nationalism and the National party" which was mainly concerned with "maintaining and preserving the

³⁰⁴ *Die Burger*, 17.12.1983, *The Citizen* 17.12.1983. "Again the white South African faces a moment of truth, not because of political leadership, but because of the actual circumstances."

³⁰⁵ *Die Burger* 17.12.1983 p 9. And *The Citizen* 17.12.1983 p 4.

³⁰⁶ *Daily Dispatch* 17.12.1983.

³⁰⁷ Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid*, 225.

³⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 227.

distinct identity and cultural heritage of Afrikanerdom.”³⁰⁹

“Vanuit sy minderheidsposisie in Suid-en Suider-Afrika sal die Afrikaner toenemend op sy eie kragte aangewese raak om sy kulturele en volksidentiteit te handhaaf. (...) In ons feitlik onbegrensde steun op ‘n goedgesinde regering sedert 1948 vir die beskerming van ons godsdiens, het die Afrikaner veel van sy selfaktiwiteit met betrekking tot die handhawing en uitbou prysgegee.”³¹⁰

The new interpretation of the sources on the Great Trek, and the recognition of the lack of trustworthiness of sources, was being rectified by some nationalistic Afrikaners claiming that every *volk* romanticises and heroifies its own history with heroic and reverend motives. “Dit is in die volkshart-en mond ‘n mengeling van werklikheid en verbeelding, van waarheid en fantasie. Dit is geen unieke kenmerk, of als u wil, ’n besondere sonde van die Afrikaner nie.”³¹¹

5.2.5 Conclusion

Throughout the debate we noticed the slight changes in the Afrikaners' opinion and perception of the racially divided society they are living in and the attempts people do to hold on to values and the role history and collective memory plays. Why did people, especially Afrikaners react so emotionally to the re-interpretation of the South African past? Many examples in history show that when a nation or a people feel threatened, nationalism flourishes.

All the different discourse on the Day of the Covenant, whether religious, political, educational or cultural, reflect the ambiguous feelings the South Africans were dealing with. The oppressive politics did not leave much space for differences in interpretation. Afrikaners, who had always been very interested and devoted to their history, as to look for justification for racial oppression, were having an ‘identity crisis’ when the system of apartheid started to lose its grip on the population. “The Afrikaner sees his history as a great national epic struggle in which his entire existence, all his ideals and institutions, were realised.”³¹² When looking at the debate surrounding the day, it is noticeable that especially the Afrikaner view was discussed, and that most of the debate took place in columns in the major Afrikaner newspaper, especially *Die Transvaler*. It is clear that everything whether it is culture, religion or economics was completely saturated with Afrikanerness or what Thompson called the myths formed an integral part of the ideology.³¹³ It was not so much the historians who influenced the common opinion on December 16, but merely the political body.

³⁰⁹ *The Cape Times* 15.12.1979.

³¹⁰ Coetzee and Malan, *Geloftedag: Gister, Vandag, Môre*, 13.

³¹¹ *Ibidem*, 2.

³¹² J M du Preez, quoted in Thompson, *The Political mythology of Apartheid*, 232-233. She analysed fifty-three textbooks used in education in 1980 and 1981.

³¹³ *Ibidem*, 233.

Chapter Six: December 16: Reconciliation Day

Post-Apartheid Commemorations 1994-2004

Positioned at the historic high tide of the process of the renewal of our society and the world, we, who are accustomed to act at the cutting point of change, must behave as the forward point of the spear of change, drawing courage from an eighty-five-year history which says to us that as much as we have never failed, so must it be that we organise ourselves for success.

Nelson Mandela, 1994

The year 1994 was a historical turning point for South Africa as it was the year the first democratic elections were held and Nelson Mandela became president. It meant the definite end of the apartheid system and the inauguration of the first black president. However, a ruptured country was left behind and in terms of national identity we could hardly speak of a coherent entity. As discussed earlier, the construction of national identity is built upon the use of history and memory and encompassed within political legitimacy. During and before apartheid different histories – or historical narratives – of South Africa existed: an Afrikaner history, which was heavily religious and nationalistic, a Zulu approach of history, a Xhosa, a coloured, different local or tribal identities, only to mention some of them. For years white, pre-dominantly Afrikaner history was the dominant one and it was imposed upon the whole population. Through biased education, unequal social standards and political dominance, the Afrikaner interpretation of history had been justified.

The new government was aware of this challenge to unify the country and a new political dispensation and constitutional law was created. Yet, it does not mean that the problems of the post-apartheid social transformation of the South African society were solved.³¹⁴ Mandela's successor as president, Thabo Mbeki, had a different policy. As Robins explains in his book on the post-apartheid state, the ANC government and Mbeki's policy of the African Renaissance "recognises the significance of African cultural institutions and practices, it remains wary of forms of Zulu and Afrikaner cultural nationalism that could contribute towards re-igniting the lethal 'ethnic' conflicts of the recent past."³¹⁵

Racist and xenophobic indications still exist in South Africa and the ethnic gap between white and black has transformed into a more economically funded gap. Still, a strong sense of identity among people and a sense of pride belonging to such a diverse country. The focus of my research will be the perception of public holidays like Reconciliation Day in this process, and the government's role in the heritage of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome, from 1994 until 2004. Within this timeframe, we can distinguish two periods: the era of Nelson Mandela's presidency and the era of Thabo Mbeki. Both

³¹⁴ More on this: Steven L. Robins, *Limits to Liberation after Apartheid. Citizenship, governance and culture* (Oxford 2005).

³¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 7.

represent a different approach of national citizenship and heritage policy.

The question why a new government should wish to help commemorate a war or battle that had been a white public reserve for the greater part of the century and consists of contesting images of that battle, is a fascinating point.³¹⁶ How was the Day of the Vow desegregated and assimilated into the service of nation-building in the new South Africa and how was it perceived by the South African population? Did the exclusive Day of the Vow, impermissible to the largest part of the nation’s population, become an inclusive Day of Reconciliation? Furthermore, what were the implications for the national debate on national identity and the reframing of collective memory? The sources I used were speeches, newspapers, school books and educational websites and some historical works in an attempt to map the post-apartheid interpretation of the day within the discourse of unity and reconciliation. The website of the ANC provided a large database of speeches, analogous to the new established website of South African history, funded by the Department of Arts and Culture. I will map the steps undertaken to transform the Day of the Vow into Reconciliation Day and discuss how the South African population inherited these changes in terms of national identity. A discourse of inclusion and exclusion will show to be the leading question in the national debate.

6.1 The National Question

The designers of national identity - the new South African government - aimed at “linking membership within the political nation-state and identification with a national culture so that culture and state can become identical.”³¹⁷ The new government was aware of the big economical discrepancy that still existed in South African society and the ANC addressed the issue by stating that

“It is important that we come to terms with the significance of ethnic and racial identities both in our movement and in the country as a whole. These identities are not necessarily divisive. They have progressive aspects that can certainly be harnessed as part of our nation-building project. As the

³¹⁶ In his article on the politics of the centenary commemoration of the South African war of 1899-1902, Grundlingh poses some hypotheses and risks which made the state decide to support the centenary: the risk of the commemorations having their own dynamics, corresponding the centenary celebrations of the Battle of Blood River of 1938. Another risk included the contradictory interpretations of the war that could emerge from the different provinces. Finally, the commemorations were adopted as a national legacy project, so the celebrations were more closely monitored by the DACTS. The name of the wars was changed too: from Anglo Boer War to South African wars. Grundlingh mentioned the influence of the civil society in the commemorations that was “allowed to a certain latitude”, but the state could not be bypassed. See: Albert Grundlingh, “Reframing Remembrance: The politics of the centenary commemoration of the South African War of 1899-1902” in Stolten, *History Making and Present Day Politics*, 197-198. The resemblance to the politics of the yearly commemoration of December 16, is substantial and deals with similar issues.

³¹⁷ De Cillia, “The discursive construction of national identities”, 155

ANC, we must seek to provide people with the space to express their multiple identities in ways that foster the evolution of a broader South Africanism as their primary identity.”³¹⁸

6.2 Mandela's Heritage: The Rainbow Nation

The Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu is generally considered the ‘father of the *rainbow nation*’, and he and Mandela have been associated with the notion of rainbowism. Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela promoted nation-building through reconciliation and justice. With the metaphor of the rainbow, they meant the possibility of a harmonious common identity even though its imagery signalled that such identity was constituted by different colours – or races, cultures or communities.

“The calm and tolerant atmosphere that prevailed during the elections depicts the type of South Africa we can build. It set the tone for the future. We might have our differences, but we are one people with a common destiny in our rich variety of culture, race and tradition.”³¹⁹

6.2.1 “Unity And Diversity”

The discourse of peace and inclusion was confirmed in Mandela's inaugural speech in 1994:

“The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us. (...) We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.”³²⁰

While making use of symbolic national events, for example sporting events like the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and the African Nations Cup in 1996, Mandela enhanced national identity. The world famous photograph of Mandela wearing the green rugby shirt of the national Springbok team after the country had won the Rugby World Cup became a symbol of reconciliation for the nation. Perhaps one of the most famous realisations of the Mandela government was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

³¹⁸ ANC's 50th National Conference Resolution on the National Question, (Mafeking 1997). For the full resolution, see: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pubs/umrabulo/8/umrabulo8d.html> (28.06.2009).

³¹⁹ Speech delivered by Nelson Mandela at the Carlton Hotel announcing the ANC election victory, 2.05.1994. <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/speeches/1994/sp940502.html> (22.06.2009).

³²⁰ Statement of the President of the ANC Nelson R. Mandela at his inauguration as President of the Democratic Republic of South Africa Union buildings. (Pretoria 1994). For the full statement: http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/special/%20projects/mandela/speeches/1990s/1994/1994_his_inauguration.htm (20.06.2009)

(TRC), with Desmond Tutu as the chairman. Its aim was to reconcile the South African nation with itself and its own past through admission of guilt and the grant of amnesty. It proposed a society of acceptance of the “Other” and a shared culture.

The concept of the “Rainbow Nation” was hailed internationally for its peaceful approach of a conflict sensitive issue and its possibility of amnesty. However, optimism faded quickly, and disappointment and anger strengthened the arguments of the Africanists. From 1997 onwards, the concept of Rainbow Nation was repudiated and was replaced by Africanism.³²¹ The Rainbow Nation was considered “problematic” if it included “whites who pay allegiance to Europe, Indians who pay allegiance to India and, Coloureds somewhere in the undefined middle of the rainbow,”³²²

The Star editorial on Reconciliation day explained that the country suffered from “the general overcastness of the aftermath of euphoria. We’ve had our miracle dance, the world has gasped with admiration, now it’s back to our default positions, each group eying the others quite critically and suspiciously from their respective corners.”³²³ The solution to the problem was not sought in racial issues or identities anymore, but in the socio-economic reality:

“Racial tensions will remain at least as long as there are economic inequalities. The path to lasting reconciliation is therefore defined in the first place by our reconstruction and development efforts. The severity of the turbulences can be limited only by the seriousness with which all South Africans pursue the great but difficult goal of economic egalitarianism.”³²⁴

6.2.2 The Interpretation Of The Battle Of Blood River/Ncome

Day of the Vow Becomes Day Of Reconciliation

In 1994 different organisations of civil society were consulted to map their sentiments on public holidays. The idea was that the Minister’s Committee who had installed a working group would present the outcomes to the Minister’s Cabinet. One of the principles for expressing the meaning of public holidays mentioned in the report was that “Public holidays should be named prudently so that they do not symbolise the divisive nature of the original events but the accomodation and reconciliation of their

³²¹ Africanism was mentioned in the ANC's 50th National Conference Resolution of 1997 on the National Question and recounted as “Increasingly we are beginning to use the term “*African*” in two senses in our movement. In the broad sense, “*African*” applies to all those who have a sense of identity with this country and the African continent and are committed to the advancement of the people of this country, especially the poor. However, the term “*African*” as historically used in our movement to refer to the most oppressed under apartheid is also endorsed. We reaffirm the ANC's continuing commitment to the national liberation of Blacks in general and Africans in particular.” This definition links Africanism to the African continent as I will explain more elaborately later on.

³²² ANC quoted in Colin Bundy, 'New nation, new history? Constructing the past in post-apartheid South Africa' in Stolten, *History Making and Present day politics*, 83.

³²³ 'Interpreting the clouds' in *The Star*, 16.12.1999.

³²⁴ Ibidem.

deeper meaning.”³²⁵ Therefore Day of the Vow became Day of Reconciliation. According to the Technical Working Group, there was hardly any dispute that this day should be excluded from the future calendar. In spite of this, its character would have to change to represent reconciliation and hope. The traditional Day of the Vow had lost most of its popularity already. While in 1993 there were “thousands of right wingers, many armed and uniformed, gathered to hear Terreblanche speak.”, two years later *the Herald* reported only about three hundred participants.³²⁶

In this era of hope and pluralism, the new meaning of Day of Reconciliation was integrated into Mandela's strategy of nation-building. The day had become a day where it was “time to reflect on our past, assess the present and look to the future.”³²⁷ Reconciliation Day had seized being a commemoration of an event that had occurred 160 years ago, but a symbol and reference point for reconciliation and common nationhood. Its success was interpreted in terms of the people's aptitude to an equal society and their interpretation of the past.

“Just how many reconciliation days we will commemorate before we can truly speak of a common nationhood, however, will depend on a range of variables. Primary among these are two critical factors – the speed with which we achieve economic and social equality and the sincerity with which we come to terms with our divided past.”³²⁸

A New Monument: A New Era?

In 1998, the Battle of Blood River/Ncome was chosen by the Department of Arts, Culture, Technology and Science (DACTS) as part of its legacy project.³²⁹ The legacy projects originated in the government's concern with political and economic development in the country all in the service of nation-building. The purpose of the legacy projects was “to fill the gaps in the South African cultural heritage scene, in which one finds an overrepresentation of colonial history and underrepresentation of especially the history of indigenous people.”³³⁰

The legacy project for the Battle of Blood River/Ncome functioned at two levels. First a physical level, namely the construction of an actual monument and an academic level represented by the panel re-interpreting the battle. The new monument that was to be constructed was also provided with a centre on Zulu cultural history. Plenty of money was involved in the project, and the opening festivities alone were budgeted one million Rand.³³¹ In the Sowetan, an article by minister Mtshali of the DACTS was

³²⁵ Report of the Technical Working Group on Public Holidays to the Minister's Committee, 4.

³²⁶ *The Herald*, 19.12.1995. Eugene Terreblanche is the founder of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging.

³²⁷ Kaizer Nyatumba, “South Africa's day of reconciliation” in *The Daily News*, 16.12.1999.

³²⁸ *Sowetan*, 16.12.1998.

³²⁹ The other legacy projects were the Samora Machel Memorial, the Nelson Mandela Museum, the Women's Memorial, the Khoisan project, the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Project and Freedom Park.

³³⁰ M. Xulu, 'Foreword', *The reinterpretation of the Battle of Ncome 'Blood River'*, 3.

³³¹ 'Govt plans R1m feast to mark Zulu battle' in *The Daily News*, 20.11.1998. One million Rand is

published where he pleaded for unity³³² and in his speech on the opening of the monument he declared that “the old monument was a symbol of Afrikaner domination and that the new monument was a response to the need for a move away from this one-sided representation of events’ and suggested a new name for the site - eKkhumelani umlotha which means 'place of reconciliation'.³³³ The monument “(...) will serve to illuminate and further crystalise our concept of nation-building through the re-interpretation and re-presentation of our entire history as a nation and a people.”³³⁴

Regarding the second – academical – level, a panel of Zulu, Afrikaner and English national historians was involved.³³⁵ They were appointed to work on a conceptual framework for the interpretation and a one-day seminar at the University of Zululand was held. Within the larger idea of “no more lies about Africa”, the records had to be set straight in this project of 'cultural reconstruction'.³³⁶ According to a member of the panel:

“A major challenge to the re-interpretation of the history of the Battle of Ncome/Blood River is to redress the humiliation that Zulus have suffered over the years, where not all kind of negative labels have been placed on individuals, but lies have been spread about their kings, and all of us, at times have been made to feel as if we’re not part of this South Africa.(...) We are now creating an opportunity for this unfortunate historical tradition to be redressed.”³³⁷

In the end, it was important that the different historians reconciled their views on the interpretation of the Battle and on the project. Cultural activities, for example a centre for Zulu heritage was built at the site, and the promotion of tourism, was envisaged to boost cultural and economic development. The legacy project involved an integrated approach of the memory of the Great Trek. The interpretation was not to be restricted by the Afrikaners' view. “Africans, like their Afrikaner counterparts, have never shared a simple and uniform understanding of the meaning, significance and image of the battle of Ncome.” In the report on the reinterpretation of the battle, Sithole analysed the shifts in the African perspective on the battle and discussed the complexity of reconciliation for Africans and the assumptions that are made by African nationalists who “readily present Africans as a monolithic group.”³³⁸

Plans for the monument included a foot bridge linking the existing monument to the new one

approximately 90.000 euros.

³³² “Battle now a symbol of unity”, *Sowetan*, 14.12.1998.

³³³ “Mbeki calls for united Blood River ceremony”. *The Star*, 17.12.1998.

³³⁴ Mtshall, “Address”, *The reinterpretation of the Battle of Ncome'Blood River*, 10.

³³⁵ The historians in the panel were inter alia: professors J S Maphalala, M Kunene, J Lanband, C A Hamilton and Dr. J E H Grobler.

³³⁶ Prof Dube in his welcome note at the seminar on the reinterpretation of the battle.

³³⁷ Mtshall, Address, *The reinterpretation of the Battle of Ncome/Blood River*, 8.

³³⁸ Sithole, *The reinterpretation of the Battle of Ncome/Blood River*, 41

and giving expression to the Reconciliation thought.³³⁹ The monument was eventually revealed on Reconciliation Day, 1998, the 160th anniversary of the Battle. The DACST recommended the unveiling to be attended by the highest leadership of the country and again a large budget was provided for the ceremony.³⁴⁰

Reconciliation Or Exclusion?

The opening ceremony on December 16, 1998 was attended by the foremost important politicians of that time: President Thabo Mbeki, Minister of Home Affairs and Inkatha Freedom Party leader Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, Minister of DACST. Lionel Mtshali, Freedom Front leader Constand Viljoen and executive director of the FAK Hennie de Wet.³⁴¹ That day at the site, there were two different commemorations: the Afrikaner event at one side of the river, and the Zulu one at the new monument. Both Buthelezi and Mbeki, speaking at the opening of the monument, expressed their concern on the issue. Buthelezi stated that “to have separate ceremonies was not in the spirit of reconciliation.”³⁴² *City Press* reported “portents that the day’s proceedings did not signal an unequivocal triumph for reconciliation and nation-building”³⁴³ The fact that there were hardly any Afrikaners at the opening of the monument was criticised in most newspapers.

Part of the commemoration at the monument was led by the Zulu King who took a spiritual and emotional journey to the battlefield of Ncome River. Zulu men and women were wearing traditional costume and sang traditional songs. However despite the call for reconciliation, there was hardly an inclusive Zulu and Afrikaner discourse. The king’s speech was emotional and referred to the site as the place “where the battle which preceded our suffering started, The war through which other nations disrespected us and humiliated us.”³⁴⁴ Nonetheless, effort was taken to express interest in the new monument as later in the celebrations, Constand Viljoen and Hennie de Wet symbolically crossed the bridge across the river and visited the opening ceremony.³⁴⁵

“We have come here because, as the blood of our nation once merged into the waters of this river, today we can announce that the dreams which once stood in armed conflict on this battlefield can now finally merge in the creation of a new nation under a new covenant of harmony in diversity. Let us consider this the day of a new covenant which binds us to the shared

³³⁹ Xulu, 'Conceptualised Monument', *The reinterpretation of the Battle of Ncome/Blood River*, 10.

³⁴⁰ Nsizwa Dlamini, “The battle of Ncome project: state memorialism, discomfoting spaces” in *Southern African Humanities* 13 (Pietermaritzburg 2001) 131.

³⁴¹ Ehlers, “Apartheid Mythology and Symbolism”, 17

³⁴² “Mbeki calls for united Blood River ceremony”, *The Star*, 17.12.1998.

³⁴³ Ajith Bridgraj, “Battle of Blood River Revisited”, *City Press*, 20.12.1998.

³⁴⁴ Mandulo Maphumulo, “The river that still divides Boer and Zulu” in *The Sunday Independent*, 20.12.1998.

³⁴⁵ “Afrikaner stay away from Blood River” in *Cape Argus*, 17.12.1998.

commitment of building a new country through a shared struggle against poverty, inequality, corruption, crime and lack of discipline at all levels.”³⁴⁶

The conservative Afrikaner newspaper *Die Afrikaner* opposed the heritage of the Zulu monument and called Viljoen’s cross-over of the bridge *merkwaardig*.³⁴⁷ Hennie de Wit, even though he expressed his support by visiting the opening ceremony, explained that “we are different and cannot commemorate this day together, the same way”. The effectiveness of reconciliation as an approach to nation-building was criticised by the public, as the *Saturday Star* remarked that “there does not seem to be a universal South African reality on which to lay a foundation for true reconciliation.”³⁴⁸ With headlines like “Still apart at Blood River”³⁴⁹, “Saam én apart by Bloedrivier”³⁵⁰, “The river that still divides Boer and Zulu”³⁵¹, “No unity on Day of Reconciliation”³⁵² the opening ceremony was perceived in terms of exclusion instead of reconciliation. Most media commented on the lack of Afrikaner interest for the celebrations. The commemorations brought forward many memories, and as a reporter for *Pretoria News* explained, a search for historical truth.

“Among Afrikaans speakers in the Apartheid era Blood River was synonymous with historical revenge, of dark vows to conquer vales and mountains and impress the white tribe’s will on the rest, and so justify the mass slaughters which have always driven our history. (...) Among Zulu speakers Blood River has always been a catastrophe to ignore, the first one where rival military units let each other be massacred, so weakening the united front which was needed to fight the European invasion progressing inexorably across the plains and hills of Southern Africa.”³⁵³

Many aspects of the re-interpretation were in favour of Zulu ethnic nationalism.³⁵⁴ Nsizwa Dlamini speaks in his heritage study of the monument of the ‘clash between the commonly acknowledged need of the state to eliminate forms of exclusion and the counter-struggle for revival of exclusivist identity, which spawns ethnic nationalism.’³⁵⁵

³⁴⁶ “Still apart at Blood River” in *Saturday Star*, 19.12.1998.

³⁴⁷ “Constand Viljoen loop weg van geloftefees om met Zoeloes fees te vier.” in *Die Afrikaner*, 14.01.1999.

³⁴⁸ “Still apart at Blood River” in *Saturday Star*, 19.12.1998.

³⁴⁹ Ibidem.

³⁵⁰ “Saam en apart by Bloedrivier” in *Beeld*, 17.12.1998.

³⁵¹ Mandulo Maphumulo, “The river that still divides Boer and Zulu” in *The Sunday Independent*, 20.12.1998

³⁵² “No unity in Day of Reconciliation” in *Mail and Guardian*, 10.12.1998.

³⁵³ Hans Pienaar, “Blood River was really a symbol of racial peace.” in *Pretoria News*, 12.12.1998.

³⁵⁴ Within this context, Dlamini speaks of ‘mythico-history’, and he explains that the new Ncome monument offers a ‘narrative which reinterprets history in fundamentally nationalistic or political terms.’ According to Dlamini, the re-interpretation of the battle and the new monuments was too much influenced by the Zulu nationalist historian, Maphalala, one of the members of the panel of historians.

³⁵⁵ Dlamini, “The battle of Ncome project”, 138.

6.2.3 Afrikanerdom And Reconciliation: Loss Of Identity?

In general, white Afrikaner identity was being renegotiated. The ANC addressed this issue already in 1997 at their yearly conference:

“During the past three years, elements among the former ruling group, especially among the Afrikaners, suffers from a sense of disempowerment and marginalisation from the centres of political power. (...) Put in other words, these elements find it difficult to redefine their role in the setting of a non-racial democracy. They continue to be imprisoned by notions of white supremacy and of supposed Afrikaner interests”³⁵⁶

The ambivalent role of the Afrikaner in post-apartheid society gave rise to the debate of Afrikaner identity. *Beeld* speaks of the Afrikaners as suffering from “‘gespletenheid’ oor hul toekomsvisie.”³⁵⁷ Pieter Mulder, the leader of the Freedom Front, explained in his statement on Reconciliation Day in December 1998: “This (referring to the negative publicity about Afrikaners) would permanently paralyse Afrikaners and prevent them from playing a constructive future role in South Africa.”³⁵⁸ Conservative commemorations where people dressed in Voortrekker costume, were still held on December 16 but the number attending these commemorations was relatively marginalised and small.³⁵⁹ Nevertheless, based upon statements in the country's most important newspapers and the report of the conference on the reinterpretation of the Battle, we can support the argument that “one is tempted to conclude that it would be easier for open-minded Afrikaners to agree with the Zulu than with ultra-conservative Afrikaners on the message of Blood River.”³⁶⁰ Additionally, the traditional religious discourse that characterised the Day of the Vow, could not serve to account for political and socio-economic dominance of Afrikaners anymore. The need to justify Afrikaner dominance along racial lines was not required anymore which gave rise to a stress on biblical love, acceptance and forgiveness.³⁶¹

6.2.4 The Perception Of The Day Of Reconciliation

Based on the discourse in newspapers and the small attendance of commemorations, we can conclude that generally the attitude towards the commemoration was one of negligence and carelessness. The newspaper the *Tribune* conducted a survey about the meaning of Day of Reconciliation. Reactions were mixed and “most dismissed it as another free shopping day, while for a few the concept of reconciliation was important.” A surveyed explained that the concept of reconciliation would never be successful due to

³⁵⁶ Nelson Mandela in Report by the President of the ANC.

³⁵⁷ Jan-Jan Joubert, “Afrikaner ly aan ‘gespletenheid’ oor hul toekomsvisie” in *Beeld*, 17.12.1998.

³⁵⁸ “Viljoen criticises ANC’s ‘race driven policies’” in *The Star*, 17.12.1998.

³⁵⁹ *The Pretoria News* reports on the celebration in Kleinfontein where about 1200 Afrikaners gathered. “For die-hards, the struggle goes on” in *Pretoria News* 17.12.1998.

³⁶⁰ L. Matenjwa, “Reconciliation: a binding commitment, yesterday, today and tomorrow” in *The reinterpretation of the Battle of Ncome/Blood River*, 50

³⁶¹ Nick Bezuidenhout, “Afrikaners moet hulle toespits op versoening” in *Beeld*, 19.12.1999.

the different cultural background. December 16 “is just another holiday that I might use to clean up my garden or perhaps do some shopping”, and even though “we might sit down in the same bar and drink a beer together, but that does not mean we are reconciled in terms of our past”³⁶² The celebrations at Afrikaner symbols, such as the Voortrekker Monument, continued, but were shed in a different light “Die uitdaging aan Afrikaners is om daardie ‘lig’ uit die geskiedenis te laat voorleef in die jaarlijkse herdenking van die Groot Trek. En om terselfdertyd nie die trekgeskiedenis te probeer ontken en begrawe nie. Die monument behoort aan alle Suid-Afrikaners.”³⁶³

6.3 Mbeki's Heritage: African Renaissance

6.3.1 “I Am An African”

“I am an African (..), I am born of the peoples of the continent of Africa. The pain of the violent conflict that the peoples of Liberia, Somalia, the Sudan, Burundi and Algeria is a pain I also bear.(...) This thing that we have done today, in this small corner of a great continent that has contributed so decisively to the evolution of humanity says that Africa reaffirms that she is continuing her rise from the ashes.”³⁶⁴

This quote from Thabo Mbeki’s famous speech on the instalment of the new constitution in 1996, starting with the words “I am an African”, has become significant for his future presidency and has ever since been linked to the concepts 'Black Renaissance' and 'Africanism'. I will first try to shed light on some meanings of Africanism and African Renaissance. The concept ‘African Renaissance’ put the stress on black empowerment, and within the South African context, was mainly represented by the second black president, Thabo Mbeki. After his speech as quoted above, “African Renaissance soon undertook a broader meaning.³⁶⁵ While Mandela emphasised nation-building through reconciliation, Mbeki regarded transformation, with capitalism as its device, as the way to a united South Africa and a nation that would provide a leading role in the continent. He described South Africa as a country where there were in fact two nations: one poor, black nation and a rich, white nation. He argued that as a result of the weak conditions of the black nation, for example the lack of education, health care, etcetera, the so-called equality of opportunity to whites was only theoretical.³⁶⁶ Mbeki interpreted Africanism within a

³⁶² “The Unfinished business of transformation” in *Sunday Tribune*, 19.12.1999

³⁶³ 'The challenge for Afrikaners is to resume the view of history in the yearly commemorations and at the same time not to deny and forget the history of the Great Trek. The monument belongs to all Afrikaners.' "versoening" in *Beeld*, 17.12.1999 :

³⁶⁴ http://www.soweto.co.za/html/i_jamafrican.htm (02.04.2009).

³⁶⁵ African Renaissance is a context that is difficult to define. Colin Bundy describes it as a “conflation of pan-Africanism with conventional desiderate of progress. (...) more often it operates as politically inflected metaphor, as a rallying cry for advancement, solidarity and Africanism.” in Colin Bundy, 'New nation, new history?', 81.

³⁶⁶ Sebetlela Petrus Mokhesi, *Nation-building in South Africa: Mandela and Mbeki compared*, Master Thesis (2003) 34.

economic situation of globalisation and Africa as one united entity with a common past – one of struggle, slavery and colonialism and a common goal – the renewal of the continent.³⁶⁷

Although it was recognised by all parties that it would be hard to reverse apartheid's legacy, there was a general feeling that – with Nelson Mandela at the helm – the country would pull through.³⁶⁸ The person of Mandela was a contributing factor to unity in South Africa. Redefining what it meant to be South African was the key element to the interpretation of the new Day of Reconciliation in terms of nation-building and the National Question. By 1999, the ‘Mandela factor’ wore off and according to the *Sowetan*, “a spirit of brotherhood that made us drunk when Mandela was inaugurated as president. The excitement has worn off and danger looms large on the horizon.”³⁶⁹ Criticism on Mbeki grew, and as the Dutch historian Gerrit Schute explains: “De arme Thabo heeft het natuurlijk moeilijk. Nelson Mandela is een heilige. Die kon en kan geen kwaad doen. Maar Mbeki mist diens charisma en status als icoon.”³⁷⁰

Two national discourses in South Africa interpreted the reconsideration of history slightly differently. Rainbowism emphasised a common, shared history with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as its highest achievement. It offered the opportunity to declare the truth about the past before laying the ‘beast to sleep’. The second discourse, Africanism addressed a more African representation of the past with a stress on African leadership of the national liberation struggle. Gary Baines explained: “This version of the past is exclusive and triumphist and is epitomised by President Mbeki’s ‘People’s History Project’ which seeks to construct an official history which would make the liberation struggle the master narrative of our national history.”³⁷¹ The American historian Eric Foner further explained that “many South Africans, without intending to do so, are now producing an ANC-centred history, constructing narratives that highlight the (perhaps exceptional) multi-ethnic and multiracial cooperation of the 1980s that overthrew apartheid.”

6.3.2 The 'Home For All' Campaign

The socio-political situation of the country wore off against Mbeki. The aggression in South Africa rose to such heights that in 2000, the months before the Day of Reconciliation had been full of racially motivated attacks against black people and the atmosphere in the country was tensed.³⁷²

In September 2000, the government had organised the National Conference on Racism held at

³⁶⁷ In his statement at the African Renaissance Conference held in Johannesburg in 1998, Mbeki emphasised the need of a stable and open economy in Africa and the importance of domestic and foreign investment and access to the markets of the developed world. His capitalist view on African Renaissance differs from the more Africanist interpretation of African Renaissance that focused more in the socio-cultural concept of Ubuntu: the idea of humanity through interaction with others. For Mbeki's speech: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1998/tm0928.htm> (09.06.2009)

³⁶⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7512700.stm> (18.07.2008)

³⁶⁹ “Good gesture, but we have a long way to go.” in *Sowetan Sunday World*, 17.12.2000.

³⁷⁰ Otto Terreblanche, “Rasseversoening is nie goedkoop in *Die Burger*, 20.10.2000.

³⁷¹ Gary Baines, ‘The Politics of History in Post Apartheid South Africa’ 4.

³⁷² Sonti Maseko, “A long walk to reconciliation” in *City Press*, 17.12.2000.

Johannesburg,. The conference, led by the newly elected president Mbeki, was criticised as being racially exclusive. *Die Burger* reported that:

“wanneer van die toesprake op die afgelope nasionale konferensie oor rasisme ontleed word, word ‘n mens met kommer gevul. Die gedagterigting wat soos ‘n goue draad deur die verrigtinge loop, is dat die Afrikaners of die witmense nog nie genoeg geboet het vir Apartheid nie. Die Afrikaners is deurgaans as aarsrassiste uitgebeeld.”³⁷³

The conference was compared to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but with “Afrikaners on the beschuldigenbank en the ANC as staatsaanklaer, jurie en die regter.”³⁷⁴ Afrikaner poet and journalist, Antjie Krog, had addressed the South Africans at the National Conference on Racism and asked for December 16 to become “‘n duidelike, presiese punt in die geskiedenis van wittes in Suid-Afrika... waarvan ons kan sê: van dié punt vorentoe het die debat oor swart en wit in die hand vir ewig ten goede verander.”³⁷⁵ She called upon whites, especially Afrikaners, to hold marches on December 16 throughout the country to support racial reconciliation.³⁷⁶ This became part of the *home for all campaign*, a result for of a series of meetings by ANC member Carl Niehaus, Mary Burton of the Black Sash, Wilhelm Verwoerd and of course Antjie Krog.³⁷⁷

“We believe that it is right and necessary to commit ourselves to redressing these wrongs. We pledge to use our skills, resources and energy (...) towards promoting a non-racial society whose resources are used to the benefit of all its people” the declaration states.³⁷⁸

Its Proponents ...

The initiative was supported by the Springbok team and was launched on Reconciliation Day 2000 to enable whites to contribute towards alleviating the plight of victims of racial discrimination and to emphasise white apology for apartheid. The newspaper *The Citizen* ironically called the campaign the ‘sorry fund’.³⁷⁹ In general, reactions were positive as expressed by Inkatha national spokesperson: “It is a commendable effort, which our country needs. It is genuine reconciliation, particularly if not forced upon by the government.” The government party, the ANC, embraced the initiative too.³⁸⁰ Distinctive about the Home for All Campaign and the attempt to have December 16 as a historical turning point is the fact that the campaign was initiated and implemented by Afrikaner civil society, and not top-down by a political

³⁷³ Terreblanche, “Rasseversoening is nie goedkoop”.

³⁷⁴ Ibidem.

³⁷⁵ “16 Desember, Van Kruger tot Krog” in *Beeld*, 11.12.2000.

³⁷⁶ “Whites need wake-up call” in *Sowetan Sunday World*, 17.12.2000.

³⁷⁷ “Bid for whites to make amends for past.” in *The Star*, 11.12.2000.

³⁷⁸ “Whites launch ‘sorry’ fund” in *The Citizen*, 16.12.2000.

³⁷⁹ Ibidem.

³⁸⁰ “Bid for whites to make amends for past.” .

organ or other institutions. The campaign called upon all whites, and not only Afrikaners. Most English speaking South Africans had never been forced to confront their acquiescence in apartheid. The authors of the document claimed it important that in order to advance to the next phase of reconciliation, an acceptance of collective guilt by whites is necessary.³⁸¹

And Opponents ...

Not everyone supported the campaign, for example, former president de Klerk, disapproved of the campaign because, “the declaration strengthened President Mbeki’s “two-nation” concept, because it only leads to greater racial polarisation and tension in South Africa.” This view was supported by the Democratic Alliance deputy leader. However they did not completely disagree with the content of the declaration, but they rejected its over-simplicity and its repetition of apologies.³⁸²

As Afrikaner national newspaper Rapport’s headline “Om te bely ... of nie te bely nie”³⁸³, the debate regarding the ‘sorry campaign’ was elaborate, especially among white South Africans who had different arguments for not signing the declaration: first of all, some opponents were wondering how much longer they had to apologise for apartheid, since many Afrikaners, including former president de Klerk, had already apologised in front of the TRC. Their argument was contradicted by Van Zyl Slabbert who explained in *The Citizen* that apologies had not been enough and moreover, the word apology was misused: “the word I found more appropriate than ‘apologise’ or ‘sorry’ was regret. I do deeply regret that as a ‘white’ I was the beneficiary of a system that, although I did not invent or support it, I was responsible for maintaining by the mere fact that I was ‘white’. That was the essence of its racism, its racial exclusion and inclusion.”³⁸⁴ Additionally, for some young whites apartheid had become a regime of their childhood and a past that they hardly remembered and that already had been, apologised for by their parents and grandparents. Why should they apologise? That argument, however, did not match reality because many young people signed the manifest. About one third was younger than thirty.³⁸⁵ That might be explained by the alienated feeling of many whites in South Africa and their attempt to understand their history and the past of apartheid. Dealing with and apologising for their past, may offer them a new perspective on a more inclusive future. Furthermore, it created for them a forum for sharing a collective memory by apologising for the faults of the past. It was a way to deal with their parents' and grandparents' guilt.

A third argument was of a more historical kind; it was not the first attempt to bridge the large gap between blacks and whites in South Africa by using December 16 as a symbol and it had never been very successful. The campaign was just another attempt and bound to fail again.

³⁸¹ Stephen Lauer, “Confronting SA’s past for a harmonious future” in *Business Day*, 15.12.2000.

³⁸² “De Klerk is chary” in *The Citizen*, 12.12.2000.

³⁸³ “Om te bely... of nie te bely nie” in *Rapport*, 17.12.2000.

³⁸⁴ Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, “Our goal should be to open u the future for all” in *The Citizen*, 18.12.2000.

³⁸⁵ “Call to SA whites to ‘atone’” in *Sunday Tribune*, 17.12.2000.

In its editorial, *Beeld* argued whether it is right - and possible - for a group of whites to claim responsibility for the past without claiming it for the future. “Al is dit hoe goed bedoel, is dit nie dalik paternalisties nie? Is dit nie tyd dat Suid-Afrikaners saam verantwoordelikheid vir die verlede en die toekoms aanvaar nie?”³⁸⁶ Although the Campaign claimed inclusion of whites and blacks as one of their aims, there was a chance that it would only lead to an even bigger divergence between the different racial entities. Other whites argued that the declaration is a “gesture of submission which runs counter to the non-racial society of equals the ANC has always stood for.” They made their case by the claim that collective guilt does not work.³⁸⁷ Other opponents disparaged the conception of deliberating about contrition, justification and apologies and, although they agree with the content of the manifest fear that it is again an initiative that looks good on paper, but fails to attend its own goals due to the lack of action. Max du Preez, journalist for *Beeld*, explained: “Mense moet nou moue oprol en vir die land werk (...) die tyd van praat en belydenisse is verby.”³⁸⁸

Lack Of Success

To recapitulate shortly, among blacks and whites three different opinions on the 'Home For All Campaign' existed: a first group suggested that whites should apologise to blacks and take responsibility for the apartheid regime that they supported or at least profited from. A second group believed that apologising was not required or not effectually contributing to reconciliation. The motives for their reservations varied from a black perspective that “white people should not even bother to apologise because they will be faking it” to some Afrikaners’ opinion that “we have apologised already. People have to learn and forget”³⁸⁹. The third opinion was of a more inclusive kind and plead for a general apology and stressed the aspect of reciprocal reconciliation. It was South Africa’s past and legacy that had to be dealt with and as long people divided themselves among racial or colour lines, reconciliation was hard to achieve. Eventually, the campaign was characterised by a lack of success and interest. At the December 16 celebrations in Cape Town, the opening ceremony for the Home for All Campaign would take place and among appearances would be Minister of Education Kader Asmal, ANC provincial leader Ebrahim Rasool and Antjie Krog. The stayaway of some important political figures like Peter Marais, the mayor of Cape Town, was a sign of its little success.³⁹⁰ *The Pretoria News* reported that the “celebrations were something of a flop” and “it seems most Capetonians had better things to do”.³⁹¹ There was a big stage and the area was strictly safe-patrolled.

³⁸⁶ 'Even though meant well, isn't this campaign paternalistic? Isn't it time that South Africans take responsibility for the past and accept the future?' Charles Naude, Versoeningsdag, Almal saam verantwoordelik” in *Beeld*, 14.12.2000.

³⁸⁷ Stephen Lauder, “Confronting SA’s past for a harmonious future.” in *Business Day*, 15.12.2000.

³⁸⁸ “Verdeeld op 16 Des.” in *Rapport*, 17.12.2000.

³⁸⁹ “Should whites apologise for apartheid?” in *Sunday Tribune* 17.12.2000.

³⁹⁰ “Stayaway row wrecks day of reconciliation” in *Cape Argus*, 18.12.2000.

³⁹¹ “Reconciliation wins the day in KZN” in *Pretoria News*, 18.12.2000.

Even though the lack of popularity, it was not the only initiative that was undertaken as a plead for reconciliation. Apart from the Home for All Campaign, a group of Afrikaans-speaking whites presented a memorandum to Thabo Mbeki’s office at the Union Buildings in Pretoria pledging their support for reconciliation on December 16. They were called the ‘Group of 63’ and its spokesman, Johann Rossouw referred to Reconciliation Day as “derived from our plurality in terms of language, religion, culture and tradition. (...) the continuous playing of the race card by senior government officials and leaders of opposition parties showed that they lacked the spirit of reconciliation.”³⁹²

6.3.3 ‘Unity In Diversity’

During the following years, the Afrikaner opinion on the meaning of Day of Reconciliation remained ambiguous, and some organisations, like the *Swartland Boereoorlog Herdenkingskomitee* persisted on the traditional meaning of Day of the Vow and saw no connection at all between reconciliation and the covenant.³⁹³ Furthermore, at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, celebrations remained pro-Afrikaner.³⁹⁴ In 2004, the *Sowetan* reported the commemoration at the monument at Blood River, which was ‘whites only’. Black policemen had been denied access to the celebration. “Blacks held their commemoration at Ncome East and whites at Ncome West.”, the *Sowetan* headlined.³⁹⁵ And when on Reconciliation Day 2002, the yearly national ANC congress was organised at the University of Stellenbosch, where many Afrikaner leaders during apartheid had graduated, controversy among Afrikaners was triggered.³⁹⁶

In accordance with the legacy projects that were initiated by the government, also the curriculum for history education was adapted. The history curriculum is a vast study on its own and does not fall under the scope of my research, but it is definitely relevant to mention. History education is now part of the larger cultural, political and philosophical debates in our societies.³⁹⁷ The history education in South Africa has been re-addressed the last couple of years and also the Battle of Blood River has been reconsidered. The education project –that is still being developed at the time of writing – has developed a set of books for schools called “Turning Points in History” which shows pupils very different perspectives on the same event.³⁹⁸ The books focus on the multi-perspective interpretation of history. The Battle of Blood River is not mentioned as fact an sich, but only its commemorations are discussed, in particular the centenary.³⁹⁹

³⁹² “White support for reconciliation” in *Sowetan*, 15.12.2000.

³⁹³ “die Gelofte, Moet Afrikaners dit hou deur gelofte dag of versoeningsdag?” in *Die Burger*, 07.12.2001.

³⁹⁴ “Voortrekkers’ covenant reaffirmed in Pta” in *The Citizen*, 17.12.2002.

³⁹⁵ “No Blacks allowed” in *Sowetan*, 17.12.2004.

³⁹⁶ Jan-jan Joubert “Verledes vloei ineen” in *Die Burger*, 14.12.2001.

³⁹⁷ Grever and Stuurman, *Beyond the Canon*, 9.

³⁹⁸ The school books have been developed by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. Apart from developing school books, an extensive website was installed.

³⁹⁹ Peter Seixas distinguishes three approaches to multiple narratives in history education: firstly the collective

Different authors, for example the historian Albert Grundlingh, have contributed to these publications. Education is also politics, as exemplified by the Dutch journalist Bram Vermeulen in his article on the “ver-ANC -isering van geschiedenis”. The ANC now controls the history curriculum, which had lead to a more superficial presentation of the nation's history and the heroification of ANC leaders and members.⁴⁰⁰ We could argue that we see a development towards a replacement of the old 'white history' with what Grever and Stuurman call 'counter-canons', however not implemented from below, but clearly a government imposed project in an attempt to control collective memory.⁴⁰¹ Maria Grever warns in *Beyond the Canon* for this more general development in the education of history, where more and more ideological canons have been or are being developed. She questions the fact whether it “helps if governments interfere with history teaching, proclaiming a top-down introduction, or rather reaffirmation, of canonised versions of the national past.”⁴⁰² It might be that the new South African history creates a new tension and lack multiplicity of perspectives and will not contribute to social cohesion.

The new state slogan had become “Unity in Diversity” and is thus different from a concept like ‘rainbow nation’. During Day of Reconciliation speeches, the stress is usually on issues like racism, poverty issues, violence and sexism. *Pretoria News* quotes on its front page Arts and Culture Minister Ben Ngubane who stated in his speech that “December 16 had evolved from an event gloated upon by some and resented by others into a day of Reconciliation.(...) We are a nation forged out of conflict but today we gather here to say that despite of this, we are one people.” Frits Kok, representing the AKTV, argued that “May we create unity of our diversity to build a nation that will be a shining beacon and an example for the rest of the world.”⁴⁰³ In his speech on Day of Reconciliation in 2004, Mbeki calls for united patriotism and a reconfirmation of the vow for blacks and whites to strive towards poverty reduction, a non-racial society and to reconcile themselves in a shared and united nation. The stress is on a shared future, instead of a shared past,⁴⁰⁴ A new notion of ‘South Africanism’ as opposed to racialism is propagated more intensively.⁴⁰⁵

memory approach, then the disciplinary approach, where competing accounts are presented in the classroom and lastly the postmodern approach that acknowledges not only the different narratives but also its service in function of different political and ideological purposes. In: Peter Seixas, “Who Needs a Canon” in Grever and Stuurman, *Beyond the Canon*, 19-30.

The new 'turning points' combines the three approaches. Different collective memories are presented, together with their competing accounts and their political and ideological purpose. Still, the selection of these 'turning points' was done with a political purpose and perspective and from the point of view of the ANC.

⁴⁰⁰ B. Vermeulen, ‘Geschiedenis van Goed en Kwaad. Historici in Zuid-Afrika hekelen ,ver-ANC-isering van de historie’ in *NRC-Handelsblad*, 25.03.2005.

⁴⁰¹ Grever and Stuurman, *Beyond the Canon*., 15.

⁴⁰² Grever, “Plurality, Narrative and the Historical Canon” 44.

⁴⁰³ “let’s build a country that belongs to all - Mbeki” in *Pretoria News*, 17.12.2003.

⁴⁰⁴ “Mbeki se ‘gelofte’ van versoening” in *Rapport*, 19.12.2004.

⁴⁰⁵ In both *The Herald* and *The Daily Dispatch*, Tony Leon pleads for South Africanism. Tony Leon, “Need to cultivate a South Africanism” in *The Herald*, 16.12.2004 and Tony Leon, “December 16, for a broader South Africanism.” in *Daily Dispatch*, 16.12.2004.

6.4 Conclusion

After Mandela's inauguration, hope existed among the South African population in terms of nation-building. His strong image as a politician and a peacekeeper represented the peaceful transformation of a non-democratic society to democracy, and he had the ability to represent the different ethnic entities of the country. Mandela and archbishop Tutu frequently used the image of the Rainbow Nation to refer to South Africa's politics of pluralism and difference.⁴⁰⁶ Different ethnicities existed within one state which meant that different collective memories co-existed and were about to be integrated into one curriculum.

Coming to terms with the past was an important part of nation's heritage policy. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Great Trek had already been subject to many reinterpretations, and the changing of meaning – coinciding with its many name changes – of its most important commemorative event is an indicator of the burden the South African past had become. In an interview with *Cape Argus*, Charles Villa-Vicencio – executive director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, explains the importance of Reconciliation Day: “The very change in the name from what was called Dingaansdag when I grew up to the Day of Reconciliation now, is in itself a very important symbolic statement of where we are as a nation. We are saying here is a event that into which we can read all sort of things, from the founding of MK to Blood River and the Voortrekkers oath, all sort of things.”⁴⁰⁷ The South African government had meanwhile created a heritage policy and funded legacy projects to create a more egalitarian policy and to reflect upon the diversity as well as to build a shared set of values to enhance nation building.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, a new monument, encapsulating the Zulu interpretation of the battle, for the commemoration was erased, all in the name of reconciliation. Perception of the new monument that opened on Reconciliation Day, was ambiguous. The celebrations at different sides of the river, one Zulu side and one Afrikaner side, together with the lack of interest of Afrikaners, caused the day to dissolve into several, relatively small commemorations that were basically politically inducted. During Mbeki's reign, the *Home for All Campaign* was an attempt to reconciliation and Reconciliation Day as its turning point, and of the few active campaigns arising from the South African civil society. Despite that, the campaign lacked success. Mbeki's presidency changed the approach on nation-building and more whites, English and Afrikaans speaking felt excluded.

Day of the Vow was for some South Africans a culmination of religious and ethnic nationalism. At the same time, it was a symbol of resistance against apartheid, and as such celebrated by for example the ANC. In addition, among Africans, different interpretations of the commemoration existed. It might have been easier to denounce the day. That was however, not the new government's policy. For the

⁴⁰⁶ More on this: Robins, *Limits to Liberation after Apartheid*, 26-27.

⁴⁰⁷ “A Day of looking back at the Road we've all travelled.” in *Cape Argus*, 16.12.2005.

mainly Afrikaner National Party, it was non-negotiable to exclude the day from the national calendar. Additionally, the new meaning of the day was one of inclusion, and this discourse of inclusion had already been initiated in the seventies and eighties. Another reason might be risk that if not state-controlled, the commemorations would have their own manifestations and not adhere to the notion of reconciliation but revolve in its exclusive, nationalistic expressions. It also had its practical implications. The creation of a new calendar offered the possibility to redistribute public holidays and December 16 showed enough prospects.

Chapter Seven: The Road To A New Future

“The government should openly support a movement away from one-sided and stereotypical representations of events in South African history, such as this battle. Instead the government should support and stimulate the viewpoint that conflicting interpretations are the life-blood of historical debate, and should neither be suppressed nor discarded in the practice of history. (...)”

Official Statement by the Department of Arts and Culture

Mandela's metaphors of “The Long Walk to Freedom” and “The Road to Reconciliation” already allude to the South African discourse of progress and the longing for advancement. Accordingly, I took the reader of this dissertation on a road to the South African complex reality. A road that is benchmarked by questions about national identity, collective memory and historical consciousness and characterised by different turning points, All of them within a context of exclusion and inclusion and the transformation of a colonial into a post colonial society. Identities were forged in between European heritage and the “forgotten continent” Africa.

Central Thesis

The abundance of theories on identity and memory on the one hand and the complexity of the South African society on the other hand, make it impossible to provide a comprehensive, detailed answer to the question what national identity in South Africa consists of and how collective memory was reshaped throughout time. The different theories only confirm South Africa's complexity. That explains why I decided to first address the theories of identity, nationalism and collective memory. I am convinced that a in-depth theoretical framework endows the reader with a more critical insight into the problems that I deal with in this dissertation. It has never been my aim to present one view, but rather point of perspective and an invitation of awareness for the complexity of the South African society. The way a nation represents itself can take many forms and narrative structures. By the research of collective memory and its link with national identity, I de-constructed one specific national narrative: the national calendar of public holidays. A national calendar represents a story, the story of a nation. South Africa's (hi)story is one of struggle and so is its calendar. December 16 the Battle of Blood River/Ncome took place as a battle between two communities, as a battle over land and over dominance. At present, it is still a battle, but one for unity and a common identity. Different actors have contested its meaning and contemplated its discourse. Dingaansdag, commemorated by the Voortrekker descendants and the Afrikaner Boers, clearly referred to the divinity of the Afrikaner nation as opposed to the British and the non-white population. The highlight of Afrikaner nationalism was the centenary celebration of 1938 that can be described as an invented tradition, in every sense of its 'Hobsbawmian' meaning. The apartheid

government changed its name into Gelofstedag, stressing the religious aspect of the day and the Afrikaners as chosen people which justifies their supremacy. The third reconsideration, the Day of Reconciliation, meant another interpretation of December 16, namely one of coherence and unity. This time its meaning was imposed by the new policy makers, the ANC. The same commemorative day had shifted from actors but also from structure and serves as an example of a past that has been reshaped with each political dispensation to influence the construction of national identity. Even among colour bar: from a white Afrikaner perspective to a public holiday celebrating Africanism by the black ANC government. The future serves as reference point within a discourse of exclusion and inclusion. History serves the present and the future. In order to have a new future, the past had to be reshaped.

Different Theories

To get to this point I have looked in the first two chapters at the theories of national identity and collective memory. The constructive theory on identity, as represented by Hall, Rutherford and Giddens, provided me with a framework to look at the construction of identity in South Africa. Rutherford had argued that identities were formed within polarities and context of domination and subordination. People do not only decide what or who they identify with, but also what and who they identify against. In South Africa's case, as in many other post-colonial societies, polarities were politically, economically and socially determined. These polarities gave rise to contested memories, especially when a shift in the dominant identities occurred and the balance in society shifted. In the dynamic interaction between structure and agency, in accordance with Giddens' Structuration theory, whereby the structure functions as both cause and consequence of identity is embodied has changed over time in South Africa.. Conflicting structural elements influence the human agents. Throughout time, the different groups have constructed their identities within the often competing and antagonistic discourses of the national framework.

The government under Nelson Mandela had always been keen on dealing with the past and those contested images. The Truth And Reconciliation Commission (TRC) serves as the best example.⁴⁰⁸ But South Africa's road to reconciliation contained more than only the TRC. If we look at the nation's public holidays, we see another attempt to come to terms with the past. When trying to include different contesting memories – and the corresponding identities - into one calendar, questions of how the nation should be imagined arose.

In the second chapter, I introduced collective memory and its link with national identity. This link is important when discussing commemorations. Control of the past (whereby the past is represented in collective memory) means control of the future (as represented in hegemony and nation building), and means control of who we are (and thus identity). The days of the national calendar correspond to the

⁴⁰⁸ Note that the TRC's activities started on December 16, 1995.

agents of power and the cultural, political and religious needs of the present, namely to create one (imagined) national identity. If we consider the calendar as a story, then we can conclude that the story was rewritten and a different narrative of the South African past constructed. The Day of Reconciliation is considered as a re-interpretation of the commemorative meaning of December 16, disregarding its contesting meanings in the past. It is a *lieu de memoire* that refers to its *memoire* itself. If we figure that the historical culture of a society includes multiple narratives and different focuses, all striving to impose themselves in social terms, the commemoration of December 16 offers a good example.⁴⁰⁹ It serves as an indicator of the debate that takes place in South Africa but also of how the community imagines itself in the present and the future.

In the last chapters of this thesis, I looked at the history of the commemoration through a theoretical window. Partly the third chapter on the history of the calendar had confirmed some of my expectations already, namely the different contested meanings of the public holidays, their reinterpretation from a political, present perspective and its chronological distribution of historical eventfulness. It had known three different narratives: a British one, an Afrikaner one and one imposed by the ANC. The case study on December 16 gives more insight into the complex history of South Africa and more specifically its importance for the meaning of identity and the use and misuse of the past. It is an example of how collective memory is imagined in societies.

From Dingaansdag To Day Of Reconciliation

Throughout the history of the commemoration of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome, different historical narratives were created. During the early commemorations of December 16, the continuity with the past was pursued due to the worsening economical and political situation of the Afrikaners in South Africa. The day was named Dingaansdag referring to the defeated Zulu King Dingaan. The commemoration had evolved from a small religious event to a public holiday. Identities were formed against the British domination and coincided with Afrikaner religious conservatism. This *imagined community* of Afrikaners was in desperate need to find a connection with the past to justify their existence and white identity. The connection with Europe faded even more, while at the same time the exclusion of non-whites increased. Identities were also formed against the British. If we look at the history of the public holidays, we notice the abolishment of days like Empire Day and the Queen's Birthday. The calendar was being 'Afrikanerised'. The highlight of Afrikaner nationalism was the centenary commemoration of the Battle of Blood River of 1938. Traditions were re-invented here. Afrikaner values and norms of behaviour were imposed on the people through ritualisation of the Voortrekker past and through symbolism. The analogy between the Great Trek and the Afrikaner trek to the cities in the beginning in the twentieth century provided the continuity with the past. The insecurity that the Afrikaners experienced because of

⁴⁰⁹ See also: <http://www.fhk.eur.nl/chc> (23.06.2009).

the changing industrial society and their low social status, had caused the need for a legitimatising historical discourse and a history to identify themselves with.

The religious aspect was intensified again when the apartheid government changed Dingaansdag into Geloftedag in 1952, as discussed in the fifth chapter. It had become a 'figure of memory' and fought its way into the historical consciousness of South Africans through various institutions. The contested meaning of December 16 was further exemplified by the fact that other groups – that were excluded from the Afrikaner festivities, adapted their image to their own historical experience, for example the ANC's celebration of Heroes' Day that took place on the same day and the launch of the MK on December 16, 1963. A mnemonic battle, as Zerubavel's theory of the mnemonic socialization of the past exemplifies, existed where different social and ethnic groups shaped their memories of the Battle differently. Not only Afrikaners held commemorations to enhance the social coordination of individual memories into collective memory. During the years of apartheid, within its context of domination and subordination the ethnic battle for the meaning of memories continued.

The mnemonic battle over collective memory continued in the 1970s and 1980s, and among academical Afrikaner ranks the need for a reconsideration of the national past was necessary. This reconsideration was influenced by political and economical South African reality, as apartheid had lost its high appeal and the country was suffering from national and international strains on their exclusive policy. Present and future identity of the Afrikaner was at stake and history was its battlefield. The battle of Blood River as a national 'myth' was deconstructed by Afrikaner historians Liebenberg, van Jaarsveld and Thompson. The reinterpretation was supported by the government as powerful agent that was in need of a more inclusive South African identity. This reconsideration triggered the public debate on its meaning and on the apartheid mythology in general and will eventually lead to the new meaning of December 16. *Vervreemding* from the past occurred and in line with Nora's theory, a crisis of memory causes a crisis of identity because of the rupture between history and memory. Afrikaner collective memory was politically used to create the Afrikaner nation, and later on to include all whites and higher class non-white population. I also deal with the question whether or not identities were embraced by the people. Afrikaners saw their history, which was their claim on the future and the reference point for their ideals and institutions, fall apart. Disregarding its new interpretation, Geloftedag or Day of the Vow remained exclusively Afrikaner.

In 1994, with the instalment of the new democratic elected government, a reinterpretation of the South African past was required to adapt to the political and cultural need of reconciliation and nation building. This meant that what Assman called the 'objectified culture', had to be reconsidered and new 'figures of memory' arose, for example the new monument at Ncome River as part of the legacy project. Collective memory was considered the key to reinforcing a sense of identity, but this appears to be more problematic in societies in transition. National identities can be contested effortlessly and collective

memory is more fluid in societies where there are and have always been contesting interpretations of what 'being South African' actually is. However, the South African government has not yet been able to create a new master narrative, disregarding its identity politics and disregarding its top-down influence on heritage and public history. Different meanings of the past contested and negotiated for a place within the new political and cultural dispensation. We see an emergence of more local and sub-national identities with their own memories and identities and histories. Since Mbeki's presidency the stress is on Africanism and identification with the other African nations and the African Union. The interaction between the different historical frameworks, namely the role of the nation state compared to the role of the continent, and thus the interaction between local, national and continental identities, will determine South Africa's nation building, and notwithstanding the policy makers' attempts to build a nation and canonise its history, the form that the commemorations take in collective memory, is influenced by the rupture that people experience with their past. It is important to remain critical towards the political role of history and its use for nation building. The tendency towards public history and the boom of heritage studies, is both positive and negative. Positive because it offers the possibility to enhance the general interest and knowledge of the past and to move people towards critically approaching their own, their nation's and their world's past. On the other hand, this tendency endangers the academical interpretation of history which can lead to a history represented from only one perspective.

If we consider the post apartheid commemoration of December 16 again, the memory of that day is one remembering the memory, as Gillis had argued. It is not remembering an event, but the struggle for interpretation that is the true meaning of the day. How to achieve reconciliation, is the most important issue for South Africa when dealing with the memories of the Battle of Blood River/Ncome. Education is one of the most important institutions to spread knowledge about the past, In the last chapter, I briefly looked at some school books - “Turning Points in History” - that were a part of the people's history project, initiated under Mbeki's governance.⁴¹⁰ The new approach of history education presents their students with different perspectives and in these books the centenary is discussed elaborately while the Battle of Blood River an sich is hardly mentioned. The new imposed meaning is one that reconciles the black struggle with Afrikaner nationalism. History is presented as a debate between conflicting perspectives. Is it the case, following Nora's argument that cultural reproductions have taken the place of real memory? It is a fact that the commemoration has been cut of its original reference. Is only the remembrance of the memory left and are South Africans cut of from the past? My view on the issue is that partly the same accounts for South Africa. Due to forces of globalisation and capitalism the search for collective memory and identity have shifted, partly to a very local level – the increase of several heritage projects focusing on ethnic groups being an example and partly to the global level, with the references to a broader African identity. We must acknowledge that Nora is a French historian writing

⁴¹⁰ Recommended website: www.sahistory.org.za

about the European nation-state and if we take Nora's three categories of the history of memory into account and apply them to South African identity, the stage of modern memory raises a complex issue in South African society. Whites – especially Afrikaners had a nation state to identify with. In contrast with Afrikaners, the other ethnic groups identified against the nation instead of with the nation. Counter memories and counter identities existed and had the nation state as reference point.

Struggle To Become South African

I have explained that before and during apartheid the Afrikaner community was imagined and their historical narrative provided continuity with the past. But when the segregational system was abolished, Afrikaner identity was problematised. At the same time other ethnic identities – not national identities existed in South Africa. The complexity of these identities – the different racial groups, as defined by the apartheid law in its exclusive policy – and the differences between and within these groups created a very complex society. For example among the black South Africans, different tribal and local identities exist, each referring to their past and to 'the Other' differently. Together with the new gained rights for example the ownership of land, and the Africanisation of the cultural heritage of South Africa, for example the renaming of places, the dynamics of identity are further explored. The policy makers are very much concerned with national identity and often forget to address the local identities among youngsters. In the townships that still surround every city, identity is formed through polarisation with rich. Perhaps - and I am speculating here, the rupture with the past and the disappearance of the repressive government has called into existence a new form of local 'gang' identity where violence and masculinity are reference points. Violence against whites has become violence against rich but can still be justified by referring to the apartheid past. One starts to wonder whether legacy projects like the Monument of Blood River/Ncome is the key to nation building and reconciliation. Addressing issues like gender, violence, crime and economically related issues are issues that every South African, no matter what colour, has to deal with.

People have become aware of the fact that the past is fragmented and that identity is a constructed notion.⁴¹¹ Is South Africa an imagined community? But then, are not most nation-states? I believe that the metaphor of the rainbow and the strong political personality of Mandela, in accordance with the belief in the future, were constructive elements in the creation of national identity and in building the nation. But perhaps a notion of reconciliation is not enough to connect a nation or enhance its social cohesion. A feeling of national belonging might not be inherited through a difficult past which directs me to the question: is South Africa a nation? Has the concept of a nation not become an anachronism? Do nations *de facto* exist? The Africanist approach represented by Mbeki and Zuma, identifies South Africa with the continent Africa. This provides South Africans with a stronger sense of

⁴¹¹ Kobena Mercer, 'Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics' in Jonathan Rutherford, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London 1990) 50.

identity, but it has an exclusive notion too. Africanism seemingly involves black Africanism. But how do white, coloured and Asian South Africans refer to Africa? They still might have references to other nations, for example most Afrikaners still have family that lives in the Netherlands. How to include coloureds, Asians, whites and other ethnicities will remain a challenge and according to the South African government a precondition for reconciliation and peace.

Sports might provide the answer. Through sport events, some South African problems are addressed now. Lots of people unconsciously identify themselves with sports. We can consider whole streets turning orange when the Dutch national team is playing as an excellent example.⁴¹² Through sports, people experience togetherness. In 2010 the Soccer World Cup takes place in South Africa and the whole world is watching the country. How the South African government, and more importantly the South African population will deal with the event, will attribute to the country's own representation and image. Identity is not only constructed within itself but also influenced from outside the country. The focus of the international media will not only be on sports, but also on South African society. In addressing the problems of crime, security, development and health, the government can enhance social and thus political unity.

*Reflections On The Study Of National Identity And Collective Memory In Non-Western Societies
Especially Focusing On Africa*

Research on national identity and collective memory has been mainly restricted to western societies. Of course, there are exceptions, but usually the theoretical framework that has been created is based upon western nation states. Nation states had been controlling the construction of collective memory and certain narratives were created. The western nation state had acted as the producer of these narratives and thus the memories. National identity is therefore closely related to historical consciousness. This was typified by the booming of traditions, monuments, etcetera. In South Africa we notice a similar evolution if we look at the Afrikaner nation, for example the Voortrekker monument and the centenary celebration of December 16. Afrikaner identity was built on this narrative. Towards 1994, this narrative was condemned and villified. Not only white identity was in crisis, black identity was as well. For years black identity had produced itself by its struggle against apartheid. Coloured and Asian identity was considered an 'in between identity'. There existed different producers of collective memories but only one nation state since 1994. There was hardly any common past to recall on, as was the case in western societies.

Therefore I consider it important that more in-depth research on national identity and collective memory in a historical perspective in African societies is done. There is a tendency towards heritage studies, but as I agree with Confino's comment on the abundance of studies of collective memories: we

⁴¹² Maria Grever also discussed the common experience of a football game in also western countries. However, she questions whether it actually can define social cohesion on the long run. See: Maria Grever, Kees Ribbens, "Geschiedenis, herinnering en identiteit" in *Nationale Identiteit en Meervoudig Verleden*

should not just pick a historical event or vehicle of memory and analyse its representation and perception in order to draw a conclusion over memory, but link it to historical questions and problems. The study of memory is of interest because it represents the historical mentality of people and how people refer to their past defines their future. What matters is not only how the past is represented but why it was received or rejected by the people. Why do people remember certain events and why do they forget others. However, we must be careful that we do not reduce memory to the political field. We should not forget to integrate the intermediaries of memory.⁴¹³

In South Africa, heritage studies are booming, but history departments shrink. In my humble opinion, both fields are connected. In non-western post-conflict societies, research on identity and collective memory is perhaps even more important. The notion of a nation-state is a relatively new concept and new identities are being formed everywhere. Ethnic borders are redrawn, and especially youngsters will be important in this process as more and more move to the city where their local identity is in desperate need for replacement. Across ethnicities, political borders exist and forces of globalisation have their impact. Even though the work of antropologists will remain important in addressing issues regarding ethnicities, a historical analysis is required. Let me take education as an example. In many societies, the curriculum is still developing and we all accept the importance of safeguarding the didactic intervention of governments. How a country's past is represented in its history education is of definitive influence on the people's collective memory and in case of many non-western societies, might conflict with the (oral) memories of the previous generation. I have briefly discussed the new South African curriculum in the previous chapter. In addition, in third world countries, there exist no such thing as a history curriculum and only an international curriculum, for example the one created by UNICEF – is the only one. How these are perceived and what its consequences can be, also dealing with problems such as gender and diversity will be a challenge that should not only include development workers, but also academic historians.

⁴¹³ Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method' in *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997) 1389. Alon Confino argues that memory studies are often too predictable and fragmented. Instead, he associates the study of memories with the history of mentalités which could "provide a comprehensive view of culture and society that is often missing in the history of memory."

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"The Struggle to become South African"
National Identity and Collective Memory in South Africa: Reconciliation Day

APPENDIX

Appendix Public Holidays South Africa

National Human Rights Day (March 21)

Human Rights Day was formerly known and commemorated as Sharpeville Day, and it was basically commemorated by anti-apartheid movements before it became part of the national calendar. From 1948 onwards, resistance against apartheid increased, amongst members of the English-speaking universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand, as well as amongst Christians and African authors.⁴¹⁴ At the Sharpeville Massacre on March 21, 1960, the police opened fire on a crowd that had gathered together to demonstrate against the ‘Pass laws’. The Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952 had extended the control of the Government over the homelands and introduced the ‘reference book’, a document that all Africans, over sixteen, male or female, were required to carry with them at all times.⁴¹⁵ In this book, the entrance to white-only areas was recorded, as well as the certification of the payment of taxes. If an African did not carry the book with him, he would be arrested. Early 1960 the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) introduced a campaign under the slogan of “No bail, no defence, no fine”, against the pass laws and especially in the Sharpeville area, a township in Witwatersrand, the campaigning was successful.⁴¹⁶ On March 21, 1960, a crowd went to the local police offices in peace but without a pass, to get arrested. At the Sharpeville police station, the police opened fire at the demonstration. Reports state that the demonstration was peaceful, but the police was tensed after the killing of nine policemen in Durban earlier that month.⁴¹⁷ Sixty-nine people were killed and one hundred and eighty were wounded, most of them shot in the back.⁴¹⁸ This day meant another breakpoint in the history of South Africa, because before 1960 the ANC had been a non-violent organisation. However, in their disappointment, they turned to armed struggle and started a range of bombings, and tried to win international support for a South African trade embargo.⁴¹⁹ In The History of South Africa, Leonard Thompson acknowledges the year 1960 to be a watershed in South African modern history, because of the end of non-violent resistance against apartheid. The ANC came to the conclusion that South Africa was different from India and passive resistance would not work

⁴¹⁴ Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven and London 1990) 205-206.

⁴¹⁵ <http://africanhistory.about.com/od/apartheid/a/WomensAntiPass.htm> (10.01.2009)

⁴¹⁶ http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/governance-projects/sharpeville/01_before.htm (10.01.2009)

⁴¹⁷ Hermann Giliomee and Bernard Mbenga, *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town 2007), 334. And <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa-SharpevilleMassacre-b.htm> (10.01.2009)

⁴¹⁸ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/general/1960s.html> and

<http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/holidays.htm#16june>

Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, 210-211.

⁴¹⁹ Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, 336-337.

because, in Mandala’s words the South African government “met our peaceful demands with force.”⁴²⁰

Ever since, Sharpeville Day was commemorated by the anti-apartheid forces but it was only recognised as an official public holiday in 1994. Similarly to Soweto Day, or Youth Day, a typical anti-apartheid commemoration had to be made inclusive for the people. Therefore, the Bill of Rights, as contained in the Constitution is brought forward as inclusive document and ‘cornerstone of democracy’.⁴²¹ Similar to the Day of Reconciliation, the different interpretations of Sharpeville Day gave rise to countless discussions about the use and misuse of this historic day and the choice of naming it Human Rights Day. In an international context, Human Rights Day is celebrated on December 10 and commemorates the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴²² However, regarding South Africa’s history and the fact that Sharpeville Day would be celebrated anyway, it was decided for South Africa to have a different Human Rights Day.

Good Friday (Friday before Easter Sunday)/Family Day (Easter Weekend)⁴²³

Although South Africa knows various different religions, the main religion is Christianity. According to a survey done by the HSRC in 1985, 77% of all South Africans indicated to be Christian.⁴²⁴ Therefore the Christian holidays were kept in the national calendar except for Ascension Day.

Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Sunday and it commemorates the execution of Jesus Christ at Golgotha. The death and resurrection of Jesus, who Christians believe to be the son of God, are in the Christian religion the most important events and are therefore commemorated. Jesus’ life and teachings are seen as the basis for Christianity. It is recorded in the Bible’s New Testament by four of the apostles, who were Jesus’ followers. Good Friday is part of what is called the ‘Holy Week’, the week leading up to Easter Sunday. Christians remember the last week of Jesus’ life and the week starts on Palm Sunday (the Sunday the week before Easter Sunday). Good Friday is considered a public or national Holiday in most countries with a strong Christian tradition. There are minor differences in the rites surrounding the celebrations in the different sub traditions of Christianity, but overall there is a ceremony in Church.

Then, on Sunday, Easter Sunday is commemorated. Easter is the most important Christian festival in the Christian year and it commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. After the crucifixion, his body was taken down from the cross and put in a cave where it was guarded by an enormous stone at the entrance. However, the Bible records that on Sunday the stone was moved and the cave was empty. That

⁴²⁰ Nelson Mandela quoted in Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, 211.

⁴²¹ <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/holidays.htm#21march>

⁴²² <http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/2007/>

⁴²³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/> (16.01.2009) and <http://www.savenues.com/events/south-africa-event-description.php?id=163> (16.01.2009)

⁴²⁴ André Wessels, ‘In search of acceptable national symbols for South Africa’ in *Joernaal vir Eietydse Geskiedenis*, 19(1994) 275.

day, and the following days, Jesus was seen by many people and his followers realised that Jesus had risen from the death and that it was time to spread his word and teachings. This event is celebrated in Christian countries worldwide by mass services, processes and other rites and customs. Easter is never on the same date, as it is always on a Sunday. Several other Christian days fix their dates according to Easter.

Family Day is always celebrated the day after Easter Sunday and is often referred to as Easter Monday. Together with Easter Friday it is called Easter Weekend. It is called Family Day because it offers the people the opportunity to go to their family for a long weekend after the Easter holidays. During the apartheid period a lot of black workers were working far from their family and it was the only opportunity for them to visit their family. The 1980 report on National Holidays states that “It would rob hundreds of thousands of migrant and contract labourers of their only opportunity of being united with their families in black states and other black areas during the year.”⁴²⁵

Freedom Day (April 27)

On Freedom Day, the first democratic elections held in South Africa on 27 April 1994 are commemorated.⁴²⁶

The run towards those first democratic elections was turbulent and although one could say that it started in the end of the Sixties and the Seventies, it was after 1989 that things really started to change and the NP’s standpoint towards the ANC shifted. When in 1990 Nelson Mandela was released, negotiations started. It is not my interest to discuss those negotiations, only to create a small framework for Freedom Day. The elections were held over three days, from 26 to 28 April with an extension of one day in six areas that had been affected by logistical problems. It was a fascinating and historical day, since the danger of violence was still haunting the country and two days before the elections, the Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging had killed some blacks in Johannesburg. Yet the first elections took place in a relatively peaceful climate.⁴²⁷ As the Department of Arts and Culture highlights: “*In South Africa, Freedom day is an inclusive celebration enabling South Africans from all corners of society to commemorate the pain of the past, and celebrate the victorious future of our country.*”⁴²⁸

According to the Committee’s report, there was a the need for a new public holiday to commemorate the commencement of a new, democratic dispensation in South Africa. The dates that were discussed were 27 April, 9 May (constitution of the new parliament) and 10 May (inauguration of the new president). Remarkably enough the Technical Working Group suggested 10 May as ‘South Africa

⁴²⁵ Report of the Technical Working Group on Public Holidays to the Ministers Committee (Cape Town 1980) 3.

⁴²⁶ <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/holidays.htm>

⁴²⁷ Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, 408.

⁴²⁸ http://www.dac.gov.za/events/freedom_day.htm

Day’.⁴²⁹

Still, special meaning is attached to Freedom Day, as it is the day when in 2004 Thabo Mbeki was inaugurated as new president after Mandela’s presidency.

Workers Day (May 1)

“This public holiday is a testimony to the hard battles that workers in this country and in other parts of the globe have waged for workers' rights and social justice over many decades.”⁴³⁰

May First is celebrated as Workers Day in many countries around the world to commemorate the ‘contribution by workers to society’ and it is closely linked to Mayday celebrations in other countries and to the labour movement. The holiday refers to the fight for work days of eight hours in the 1880’s in the United States.

In their fight for freedom, the trade unions have an important role in the history of South Africa and since the beginning of the Twentieth Century, trade unions had been active but it was in the seventies that the first independent trade unions were formed and more and more strikes were materializing in the country. In the eighties, their militancy decreased and more importantly became more politically involved instead of only dealing with industrial issues. Cosatu (the Congress of South African Trade Unions) is the foremost important and most influential one.⁴³¹ Therefore Workers Day does not only refer to the trade unions or the contribution of workers to society, as is mostly the case in other countries, it refers also to the anti apartheid struggle and the struggle for the possibility of commemorating May 1.

Youth Day (16 June)

“As we celebrate this Youth Day, we must repeat the message that the nation expects the youth of today to follow in the footsteps of the 1976 youth and become agents of change, this time in the continuing struggle to achieve the goal of a better life for all our people.”⁴³²

As the quote prevails, Youth Day, previously called Soweto Day, refers to the Soweto uprising of 1976, when 20 000 pupils from Soweto began a protest march on June 16. In 1975, protests had started in African schools after a directive from the previous Bantu Education Department that Afrikaans had to be used on an equal basis with English as a language of instruction in secondary schools. The issue however, was not so much the implementation of Afrikaans but also the whole system of Bantu education which was characterized by separate schools and universities, poor facilities, overcrowded classrooms and inadequately trained teachers. On 16 June 1976, in the wake of clashes with the police, and the violence

⁴²⁹ Report of the Technical Working Group on Public Holidays to the Minister’s Committee (1994) 7.

⁴³⁰ <http://www.sa-venues.com/events/south-africa-event-description.php?id=165> (17.01.2009)

⁴³¹ Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, 355.

⁴³² Thabo Mbeki, at the Youth Day celebrations, University of Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town.

that ensued during the next few weeks, approximately 700 hundred people, many of them youths, were killed and property destroyed.⁴³³ The student leaders were influenced by the ideas of 'black consciousness' and the South African Students Movement played an important part. ANC underground structures linked the student struggle to the struggle for national liberation as they called on the community to support the students by issuing pamphlets.⁴³⁴

While Afrikaans as language of instruction triggered the pupils in Soweto into the uprising, it was the live ammunition used by the police that turned it into a big rebellion.⁴³⁵ The Cillie Commission, that investigated the causes of the uprising, was given evidence to suspect that Afrikaans was the language of the oppressor.⁴³⁶ Especially in Soweto, with a population of over a million, the issue was sensitive because most jobs in Johannesburg required a command of English and young Sowetans did not want Afrikaans to be the lecturing languages.⁴³⁷ The department of Bantu Administration and Development ignored these results and imposed the new law upon the schools. Ironically, even most teachers had no knowledge of the Afrikaner language. Their objections were disregarded and gave rise to the explosive situation later on.⁴³⁸

Most students were inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement, with Steve Biko as their leader. He had warned for the increasing tensions in his speech in court one month before the Soweto uprising: "The masses of black people within the country will increasingly become defiant". The protesters attacked and burned down Administration Board buildings, beer halls, schools, clinics and libraries and organized several work stoppages.⁴³⁹ The impact of the protests was huge, as the Minister of Police and Prisons estimated, more than one fifth of the Soweto residents participated.⁴⁴⁰ The uprising spread throughout the whole country and aside from Soweto, Cape Town was the setting for violent protests. Here coloured and black students marched together against the white dominator. During 1977, the government banned SASO and several of its leaders were arrested. Steve Biko was arrested and killed by the police.⁴⁴¹

The Soweto uprisings were considered a real watershed in the black protests against the apartheid regime. As Butler explains in his book on South Africa, "the endgame of the fight against apartheid saw extended struggle between a militarized Afrikaner regime and a powerful mass protest movement – which included organized labour, students, schoolchildren, and community associations –

⁴³³ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/general/1960s.html> and <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/holidays.htm#16june>

⁴³⁴ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/general/1970s.html#75>

⁴³⁵ Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, 362-363.

⁴³⁶ Ibidem 363.

⁴³⁷ Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, 363.

⁴³⁸ Ibidem.

⁴³⁹ Ibidem, 364.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibidem, 365.

⁴⁴¹ Thompson, *History of South Africa*, 213.

that was able to exert continuous tactical pressure on the regime."⁴⁴² The National President of the Black People's Convention declares that riots have ushered in a new era of political consciousness.⁴⁴³ Furthermore, the uprising brought forward a new hero: Hector Peterson, who was the first one to be killed by the police. On the government's website, National Youth Day 2008 was illustrated as the day "when we remember and celebrate the efforts of the youth of our country, who waged the struggle for liberation and a better life for all. It is a day that our country honours their collective efforts and sacrifices in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid."⁴⁴⁴ Still, efforts are made to keep the commemoration of the Soweto uprisings alive, and included in the school curriculum not only as a political event but as a day with a special meaning to South Africa.⁴⁴⁵

National Women's Day (August 9)

On August 9, 1956, twenty thousand women from the cities and towns, reserves and villages, some with babies on their backs, took a petition addressed to the prime minister Strijdom, to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. He was not in. The petition demanded that the pass laws be abolished. The pass laws included that rural Africans were prohibited to enter the urban area for more than seventy-two hours without a special permit and they could be arrested if breaking this law.⁴⁴⁶ These pass laws caused the overpopulation of the Homelands (the areas around the city) and they expanded into the still existing townships around the major cities. While standing outside the Union Buildings, they were singing: "Strijdom, you have tempered with the women, you have struck a rock." Also in the Natal countryside, there were demonstrations and revolts led by women.⁴⁴⁷ In 2006, a reenactment of the event was staged because of its fiftieth anniversary. This day was chosen to honour those women and to stress the fact that women took part in the anti-apartheid struggle as well and cannot be left out when talking about reconciliation and the 'road to democracy'. Despite efforts made by the government to organize celebrations, there is not a lot of attention from the media for this day and it is mostly commemorated locally. Noteworthy is the fact that the most attention to women's day is paid by Afrikaner newspapers such as *die Burger en Beeld*. One could demand oneself if this means that these readers are more critical towards women rights and the inclusion of women in the political life of the country.

Heritage Day (September 24)

The conservation of South Africa's natural and cultural heritage is difficult in a country with such a diversity as South Africa.

⁴⁴² Anthony Butler, *Contemporary South Africa* (London 2004) 23.

⁴⁴³ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/general/1970s.html#75>

⁴⁴⁴ GCIS on 10.06.2008, <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2008/08061015151001.htm>

⁴⁴⁵ "The Age of Hope, Century of Struggle to Freedom 1906-2006", *The Department of Education* (2006) 73.

⁴⁴⁶ Thompson, *History of South Africa*, 193.

⁴⁴⁷ Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, 330.

"The day is one of our newly created public holidays and its significance rests in recognising aspects of South African culture which are both tangible and difficult to pin down: creative expression, our historical inheritance, language, the food we eat as well as the land in which we live. Within a broader social and political context, the day's events are a powerful agent for promulgating a South African identity, fostering reconciliation and promoting the notion that variety is a national asset as opposed to igniting conflict."

Heritage was defined as "that which is inherited and is the sum of wild life and scenic parks, sites of scientific or historical importance, national monuments, historic buildings, works of art, literature and music, oral traditions and museum collections together with their documentation."⁴⁴⁸ The ministry speaks of a cultural Renaissance.⁴⁴⁹ On the celebrations of Heritage Day in 1996, President Nelson Mandela explicitly linked heritage to national identity and nation-building:

"When our first democratically-elected government decided to make Heritage Day one of our national days, we did so because we knew that our rich and varied cultural heritage has a profound power to help build our new nation. We did so knowing that the struggles against the injustice and inequities of the past are part of our national identity; they are part of our culture. We knew that, if indeed our nation has to rise like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes of division and conflict, we had to acknowledge those whose selfless efforts and talents were dedicated to this goal of non-racial democracy."⁴⁵⁰

Education, history education specifically, is one of the main concerns that had to be dealt with after apartheid and a new curriculum had to be developed, and this is still an ongoing process. I will not go further into detail at this point, but it reflects the importance of heritage to the notion of the Rainbow Nation that was highly publicized and promoted throughout the republic.

This national holiday was a newly created one and was presented by the TWG as a *neutral* day, to which each community in South Africa can attach its own significance and which will foster a spirit of accommodation.⁴⁵¹ It is seen as an important date to which every year a new meaning can be attached to as every year has a different theme. South Africa's heritage policy is of course highly influenced by the political climate and this was especially noticeable when the country passed on its presidency from Nelson Mandela to Thabo Mbeki. Mandela's concept of Rainbow nation influenced the heritage policy and when Mbeki introduced his African Renaissance, it also meant a policy change towards heritage in the country.

The importance of heritage for the nation was further emphasized by the National Heritage Bill

⁴⁴⁸ Statement issued by the DACTS on 17.09.1996.

<http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/holidays.htm#24september>

⁴⁴⁹ White Paper on arts, Culture and Heritage, Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (Pretoria 1998) http://www.dac.gov.za/white_paper.htm#CHAP1

⁴⁵⁰ Nelson Mandela on <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/special>

http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/special%20projects/mandela/speeches/1990s/1996/1996_unveiling_monument_sontonga.htm

⁴⁵¹ Report of the Technical Working Group on Public Holidays to the Minister's Committee (1994) 7-8.

of 1998.⁴⁵² The past couple of years, in South Africa, the accent of political discussion was often drawn towards heritage and the political issues surrounding it, for instance the names of certain South areas, streets and even cities have been highly discussed. The country has eleven official languages and it remains difficult to unite all the diversity that exists in the country. Since 2008, Heritage Day is combined with National Braai Day, which was not a public holiday yet, but its festivities were extremely popular. It is now seen as one of the possible unifying elements for South African society, across demographical barriers. Patron of the day has become Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “This is something that can unite us. It is so proudly South African, so uniquely South African.”⁴⁵³

Day Of Reconciliation (December 16)

This commemoration is discussed in Part Two.

Christmas Day (December 25) and Day Of Goodwill (December 26)⁴⁵⁴

Christmas Day commemorates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, as recorded in the Bible in the gospel of Matthew and of Luke. Jesus Christ (or Jesus of Nazareth) is the central figure of the Christian faith and thought of as the son of God and the incarnation of God. He is not unknown in other religions. Islam considers him a prophet while Judaism does not see him as the foretold Messiah, while Christianity does. According to Matthew’s and Luke’s writings, Jesus was born in the city of Bethlemen and son of Mary and the Holy Ghost and helped by Mary’s husband, Joseph. According to the gospels, Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant. It is believed that Jesus’ birth is the fulfillment of prophecies proclaimed in the Old Testament (the oldest part of the biblical writings).

However, the celebration of Christmas is not completely new, as there existed many other forms of celebration around the same time and in the gospels no exact date for the birth of Jesus was revealed and it was pope Julius I in the fourth century who set December 25 as Christmas Day. The festivities and celebration of Christmas was not new, but has its roots in other religions and beliefs like Jewish Hanukkah, the belief in the old German god Odon and European folk customs. It is held in Winter, because the days are short, the weather cold and the work to be done on the field is limited.

However it is a Christian religious day, it has partly been secularised and commemorated by non-Christians too. For example during the middle Ages it was a mostly secular festival with some religious elements. These activities were being Christianised by the Church. In Great Britain, the puritans abandoned Christianity for some time, but during the Victorian era, Christmas returned, based upon the

⁴⁵² Republic of South Africa, *National heritage Bill*, in the National Assembly, section 76 Bill (Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology), B 139-98, 3.

⁴⁵³ <http://www.braai4heritage.co.za/> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6981326.stm> (17.01.2009)

⁴⁵⁴ <http://www.capetownmagazine.com/events/The-Day-of-Goodwill-Public-Holiday~609> ,
http://www.earthcalendar.net/_php/lookup.php?mode=date&m=12&d=26&y=2009 ,
<http://www.history.com> , <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religions/religions>. (18.01.2009).

nostalgic idea of the past. There was, however, an important influence from America and the tradition of Christmas cards, Christmas trees and the singing of carols originated in this era.

When Christianity spread, so did the celebration of Christmas and it was easily adopted in South Africa. The same accounts for the Day of Goodwill, which is known in most countries as Boxing Day and a public holiday in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and countries of the Commonwealth. In Britain, it used to be known as St. Stephen's Day and it remains unclear what the exact meaning or origin of the day is. But it was created in the eighteenth century and it was a day to hand out gifts to the poor. In most former British colonies, Boxing Day is still a public holiday.

In South Africa, it is called Day of Goodwill, and its meaning was changed after 1980 to include all South Africans and not to affiliate with the British colonial, past.