

# Identities in Extended Afrikaans Speech Communities

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the link between language and identity in a few enclaved Afrikaans speaking communities where ascribed identities, i.e. the role of 'self' as opposed to 'the other', is particularly salient. Given the role of both 'self-identification' and the perceptions and attitudes of 'others' in the construction of (ethnic) identity the aim of this study is to understand the processes of identity construction and negotiation that resulted in these communities either distancing themselves from their black heritage or viewing themselves as 'Black Afrikaners'.

Four such communities are investigated namely the Buys family, who represents a group that rejects their black heritage and the Van der Merwe family, the people of Thlabane and the black Afrikaners of Onverwacht who represent the latter grouping.

Neville Alexander's work is drawn upon in which he argues that identity politics in South Africa is often cladded in ornamental rainbow imagery leaving many communities in a crisis of identity.

**Keywords:**



## 1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a diverse society where more than 30 languages are spoken on a daily basis<sup>1</sup>. Its language diversity is supported by arguably one of the most inclusive constitutional language provisions on the African continent, i.e. its 'Language Clause', which is one of six 'founding provisions' of the Constitution that enshrines multilingualism and entrenches equal rights for 11 of the main languages used by the majority of South Africans (99% of the population). These languages are English and 10 indigenous languages, Afrikaans and the Bantu languages Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, siSwati, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and isiZulu. In addition, the language clause is supported by the Bill of Rights that recognises language as a basic human right: "Everyone has the right to use the language and participate in the cultural life of their choice" (section 32).

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the official languages, this figure includes indigenous languages such as Khoe and Nama languages, 'heritage' languages such as Dutch, French, Greek, Portuguese, Cantonese, Italian, Gujarati, Tamil and Telegu, as well as indigenous languages from neighbouring countries (e.g. Shona), according to Ethnologue (2014).

With the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, until the advent of democracy in 1994, official language status was limited to two languages only, the colonial languages English and Dutch. In 1925 the latter was replaced by Afrikaans<sup>2</sup>, which subsequently rapidly developed into a fully standardised, written language during the course of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Afrikaans language originated from a Dutch dialect with the colonisation by the Dutch of the southern tip of Africa in the mid-17th century. The indigenous status of Afrikaans is now widely accepted in view of its African roots and the significant influences from indigenous languages such as Khoekhoe (Nama), also European languages, and languages used by slaves who were brought to the Cape as cheap labour. Afrikaans is primarily spoken in South Africa (a population of 6 855 082 according to the 2011 Census), and its immediate neighbours, Namibia (89 000), Botswana (20 000) and, to a lesser extent, also in Swaziland (13 000) (Ethnologue, 2014).

In his book, *An Ordinary Country* (2002), Neville Alexander argues that “as far as identity politics is concerned, South Africa is at a historical crossroads” between the choice for “an ethnically defined, so-called rainbow society”, or a society where identity is defined primarily as a South African identity (Alexander 2002: 103). Alexander cautions that the politics of identity is volatile and dangerous and that South Africans should not find consolation in “the (cultural) software of identity politics”, i.e. the “unquestionable orthodoxy” of multiculturalism clad in “ornamental” rainbow imagery in terms of which the co-existence of separate racial groups are emphasised and reinforced in slogans such as “One Nation, Many Cultures” (Alexander 2002: 82).

On the one hand Alexander links the identity crises to the liberation movement’s neglect of racial prejudice over a period of decades, which he argues has now come to “haunt” South Africa’s liberal-democratic dispensation. On the other hand he draws on the ‘Who is an African?’ debate to argue his point that all South Africa’s “traditional communities (have been catapulted) into a crisis of identity” owing to “economic, political and social-cultural transformations” (2002: 83). He quotes at length from a newspaper article, ‘Screwed Back into my Box’, written by political commentator Max du Preez in 2000:

In my whole life I have never felt so white and Afrikaans as I do now ... I never thought that my pale skin and the fact that I come from Afrikaner stock were the factors that essentially defined me as a human being. (...) But throughout my adult life I believed that being a member of my broader society and a native of South Africa and Africa was what was really important – ‘white Afrikaner’ merely described my tribe ...

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<sup>2</sup> Some 10 300 000 people use Afrikaans as a second language in South Africa (Ethnologue, 2014). Afrikaans is also spoken in smaller pockets in countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, which boast significant South African expatriate populations. The Afrikaans population in all countries totals 7 096 810 (Ethnologue, 2014).

Almost two decades into the new South African democratic dispensation it would appear that race and ethnic consciousness remain pervasive despite efforts towards ‘making a new nation’ while casting off the shadows of the past racist apartheid regime. Insistence on collective, communal identities are seemingly still in tension with government’s vision of building a new South African nation. A 2006 study by the Office of the President concluded that “South Africans evince a strong sense of national identity ... However ... diversity ... in terms of race, class and nationality/language [remains] ... strong” (in Bekker, 2006: 1).

This study investigates the link between language and identity in a few enclaved Afrikaans speaking communities where ascribed ethnic, communal identities and solidarity are particularly salient against the backdrop of an emerging dominant national identity. During the heyday of the apartheid era in the 1980s the Afrikaans language became stigmatized as “the language of the oppressor”. In terms of its identity functions this language is arguably still negatively valued by some South Africans. Given the role of both 'self-identification' and the perceptions and attitudes of 'others' in the construction of (ethnic) identity the aim of this study is to understand the processes of identity construction and negotiation that resulted in these communities viewing themselves as a unique ‘coloured’ community, ‘Afrikaners’ or ‘Black Afrikaners’.

## 2. LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

The identity and language nexus has been the topic of a multitude of studies that argue that the two notions are inseparable. A well-known position is that of Fishman who argues that “if people group themselves into differently speaking collectives ... their languages become both symbolic of as well as a basis for that grouping” (in Alimoradian, 2014: 2). In this study we approach identity from the point of view that identities are “closely related to social representations and, as representations, they are not neutral independent reports on a pre-given reality” (Puttergill & Leildé, 2006: 14). According to this view identity construction involves both self-identification and other people’s perceptions and attitudes. ‘Self’ vs. ‘other’ play a part in delineating and constructing identity through recognition and affinity from ‘other’ prominent respected groups in society.

In our discussion of the selected Afrikaans communities that follows our focus is on the dilemma of their contested social and political identity (Willemsse 2014), in particular their enclaves of isolation by and lack of recognition and appreciation on the side of the broader Afrikaans speech community. In the words of Beswick (2007): “our perceptions regarding who we are as individuals focus largely upon the recognition and appreciation of our origins [...] and of what we share with the community as a whole” (in Kaufmann, 2012: 331). These minority groups’ dilemma should be viewed against the background of racial segregation that characterised the greater part of 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa:

Under successive pre-1994 governments, South Africa's population had been categorised statutorily into virtually *impermeable subnational identities*, conferring rights on a sliding scale of racial privilege ... between those classified 'European' or 'White', and those classified 'Native', 'Bantu' or 'Black'. The two strata represented the opposite ends of economic, educational, political and social power, privilege and opportunity. Ethnicities are not stable, but are 'reinvented, reinterpreted, and rewritten in each generation by each individual of each ethnicity' (Willemse, 2014: 232) (our emphasis).

### 3. AFRIKAANS IN ISOLATED ENCLAVES

In his review of the book *Halala Afrikaans* (2009) Christo van Rensburg mentions that the insert about the number of Afrikaans speakers (Van Rensburg, 2009: 123) has "passed up an excellent opportunity to say more about the extended Afrikaans language families, and also about the families that live or have lived in isolated enclaves, such as Buysdorp, or Thlabane" (our translation). The insert that he refers to shows that, according to the 2001 census, there were 6 million speakers in South Africa who spoke the language as their home language, of whom 42.2% were white, 53.4% coloured and 4.3% black. According to the most recent census survey, in 2011 there were 51 770 560 South Africans, of which 41 000 938 were black Africans and 1.5% (i.e. 602 166 people) used Afrikaans as their home language.

However, it has to be mentioned that Davey and Van Rensburg (1993: 29), referring to De Stadler (1988: 98), Dirven (1987: 155) and Ponelis (1987: 10), show that there were 80 000 black African home language speakers of Afrikaans according to the 1980 census. A comparison of twenty years' post-apartheid<sup>3</sup> census statistics as captured in Census 2001 and 2011 indicates a significant growth of 138% in black Africans claiming Afrikaans as their first language (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2012). All in all then there appears to have been an increase of 522 166 (or 652%) black African home language speakers of Afrikaans over the past 30 years.

There is, however, good reason to suspect that the numbers might be flawed due to possibilities such as earlier under-reporting, where it is conceivable that people distanced themselves from Afrikaans due to the political situation in the

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<sup>3</sup> In other words, after 1994.

country<sup>4</sup>; current over-reporting<sup>5</sup>; natural increase (i.e. a factor of the increase in the population); and Afrikaansification in the Cape (see Dyers, 2007).

The significant growth represented by these census statistics may arguably also be found in the fact that the Bantustans and homelands - established by the then apartheid regime - were not regarded as an integral part of South Africa and that numerous South Africans, and therefore also Afrikaans speakers, were not counted.

#### 4. THE BUYS FAMILY

Returning to Van Rensburg's reference to the families that live in isolated enclaves, the focus will first be on the Buys family.

A fair amount has been written on Coenraad de Buys and in lieu of *Buys. 'n Grensroman*, a recent novel by the Afrikaans award winning novelist Willem Anker, attention is once more drawn to this enigmatic character. Buysdorp, the town he established and that has been named after him and in particular his descendants that still live there, is one of the enclaved communities this study focusses on. Most of what follows is based on the work of De Jongh (2007), Ebersohn (2012) and Snyman (2012). De Jongh writes about the community from the perspective of identity and politics, while Ebersohn's interest is gender. Snyman emphasises the isolation of the community. Read together, these three sources provide a multi-faceted insight into the people of Buysdorp.

Buysdorp is located 65 km west of Louis Trichardt in the Limpopo province. The people of Buysdorp, the Buys family, are all descendants of Coenraad de Buys. De Buys was born in Montagu in the Cape in 1761 and was the great-grandchild of Jean de Buis, a French Huguenot who arrived in the Cape in 1688. He settled in the vicinity of the Boesmans River close to the Eastern Border of the Cape in about 1778 where there was constant conflict between the white farmers and the Xhosa people. De Buys got involved in the frays, but unlike the other farmers, he joined the ranks of the Xhosas. Over time, he married and lived with

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<sup>4</sup> In 1986 Jan Esterhuysen used Lukens' term *proximity linguistics* with its three stages of communicative distancing, namely the distance of carelessness, the distance of avoidance and the distance of discreditation to explain what happened to certain Afrikaans speaking communities under apartheid. He says: "The most drastic distancing is the distance of discreditation when an intense intercommunal struggle develops. The outsiders realise that the dominant group obtained a position of power in an illegal manner and search for a way to undo it. The conflict now enters the resistance phase. Language resistance becomes one of the powerful weapons of the oppressed. The absolute refusal by some people of colour to communicate in Afrikaans is a manifestation of the most absolute form of language distancing". (Translation ours)

<sup>5</sup> Pienaar and Lawrence (forthcoming) reports on an increasing demand for Afrikaans in primary schools in Soweto which is ascribed to the re-evaluation of Afrikaans as a valuable tool for gaining access to private school secondary education as well as its perceived economic advantage, i.e. the ability to speak Afrikaans can enhance one's chances of employment.

various women, among others, Maria van der Horst 'from the Cape', probably a Khoi woman, the mother of the young Xhosa chief Ngqika, a woman called Elizabeth and also the cousin of the Matabele King Mzilikazi (De Jongh, 2007: 3).

In the early 1800s (before the Great Trek<sup>6</sup>), De Buys trekked with his group of wives, children (including his three sons Gabriel, Michael and Doris) and supporters through the interior of what is now known as the Free State, the North West Province and Mpumalanga. The party eventually settled in the Soutpansberg Mountains. Here Elizabeth died of malaria. Coenraad, who was no longer a young man, undertook one last trip to Mozambique and asked his sons and their families to wait for him at the Limpopo River. He never returned (De Jongh, 2007: 3).

A couple of years after De Buys's disappearance, Louis Trichardt's trek arrived in the Soutpansberg Mountains. Coenraad's son, Michael, contacted Trichardt. The relationship between the Buys family and the Voortrekkers was amicable. The Buys family acted as guides to the Voortrekkers during hunting expeditions and they also attended church services with them (Snyman, 2011).

As time went by the Buys family adopted many of the habits of the surrounding communities, including polygamy, with only circumcision strictly opposed. The influence of the missionaries, however, led to the Buys family increasingly rejecting black/pagan practices. Increasingly, the Buys family started seeing themselves as superior and insisted on not being part of the mixed congregation, and tuition to be in Dutch and not in Sotho.

Michael Buys became progressively concerned about the future of his descendants and wanted to prevent Africanisation at all cost. He therefore deliberately made sure that marriages would only take place between members of the Buys group, since in his opinion, having a light skin was the best asset of the Buys family. According to De Jongh (2007: 4) there were at least two reasons for this attitude. Firstly, the constitution of the then Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek stipulated that no so-called person of colour was allowed citizenship. However, as a result of the services that the Buys family were providing to the government, they were given more rights than were normally given to black people, such as the right to carry a gun. Secondly, Makhado, the then Venda chief, refused that missionaries could minister to the spiritual needs of the people and he also refused to hand over guns that had been purchased from dealers. Michael Buys acted as facilitator between Makhado and the Boers/missionaries; however, the negotiations were not successful and the mission station was attacked and burnt to the ground. The Buys family sought refuge at the Voortrekker settlement, which convinced the Venda that they were on the side of the Boers.

With the British annexation of 1871, the Buys family lost many of their privileges as they were now seen as black African natives. This is most probably

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<sup>6</sup> The Great Trek took place between 1835 and 1846. It was a movement of Afrikaans or Dutch-speaking colonists who moved north into the interior of what is now known as South Africa in search of land where they could live independent of British rule.

the reason why they fought on the side of the Boers during the First and especially the Second South African War<sup>7</sup>.

In 1888 Pres. Paul Kruger<sup>8</sup> donated four farms to the Buys tribe, as they were then known, namely Buysdorp (*Buys Town*), Buyshoek (*Buys Corner*), Buysplaas (*Buys Farm*) and Mara. To this day the land is still managed by a committee appointed by the family. The land that extends over an area of 11 000 hectares has been divided into smaller units. When the owner of the land dies, the wife or the oldest child inherits it. Buys children who would like to obtain their own land, may apply for it. The land cannot be sold; it may only be made over to another Buys (Snyman, 2011).

De Jongh (2007: 89) hints out that the Buys family increasingly found themselves in a type of in-between world as a group on their own.

During the middle of the twentieth century, the Buys family was prohibited from attending church because of their skin colour. The marginalisation caused by apartheid is summarised in the words of Gideon Buys: “After 1994 our children were also allowed to attend one of the high schools in Louis Trichardt. During apartheid it was different. There was only a primary school here. If your child had to go to high school, he had to go far away. The closest high school from here allowing children of colour was at Middelburg, which is almost 300 km away from here. They could not go to the white school in Louis Trichardt or to the black school. We are coloured, see” (Snyman, 2011, his translation).

Currently the Buys still define themselves in terms of a number of aspects, namely locality, race, membership of the Dutch Reformed Church and Afrikaans. Buysdorp remains their perceived place of origin, irrespective of whether they live there or not. Their lineage is of paramount importance as is evident from the enthusiasm with which the Buys family is currently participating in a DNA genetic test project of the University of the Witwatersrand. Only the male lineage is being tested and De Jongh (2007: 14) attributes their eager participation to the need to confirm that they are descendants of Jean de Buis and Coenraad Buys, and that they are therefore unique. Their identity is based on the fact that they are not black. Ebersohn (2012: 50) relates how the Buys have historically sought to lighten the skin of the Buys through marriage to a person of a fairer complexion: “In addition, the community has exiled any person who is married, living with or in a romantic relationship with someone who is black”.

A third marker of identity in Buysdorp is membership to the Dutch Reformed Church and to this day the community adheres to Christian norms and members of the Buysdorp Committee are also members (and often elders) of the Buysdorp congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Apart from locality, race and membership of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Buys historically and presently are Afrikaans speaking. Ebersohn (2012: 19) states that during her field work in 2009, some of the members of the Buys

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<sup>7</sup> Also known as the Anglo Boer War.

<sup>8</sup> Stephanus Johannes Kruger (1825–1904) was elected President of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek in 1883.

Committee spoke no English and others yet were amused by her inability to speak Afrikaans. Both Snyman (2011: 2) and Ebersohn comment on the fact that the Afrikaans spoken by the Buys is the standard form of Afrikaans and not the varieties often associated with other coloured communities, especially in the Cape. In one of Ebersohn's interviews a man called Clint said: "I'm coloured but I don't speak like a Capetonian." (Ebersohn, 2012: 89). Afrikaans is an integral part of the way in which the Buys defines themselves and dates back to the era between 1795 and 1820 when Coenraad de Buys was twice banished from the Cape on account of his anti-British sentiments (Ebersohn, 2012: 23). The Buys's siding with the Boers in the Second South African War further marked their anti-British sentiment.

Ironically it is these precise markers of identity, namely locality, race, religion and language, which at first placed this community in a privileged position that was held against them under apartheid (a policy supported by the Dutch Reformed Church): these Afrikaans speaking people's children were denied access to the (Afrikaans) white schools in the area and consequently to secondary education.

In post-apartheid South Africa the children of this community have access to secondary education, but still remain isolated. They remain Afrikaans speaking. Their linguistic history is probably best captured by Gideon Buys when he says: "I am not upset with the Afrikaners, they only did what they did to survive. But sometimes I wonder: What is an Afrikaner? Are all of us that were born in Africa not Afrikaners? Is a black person not an Afrikaner too? Is a brown person not an Afrikaner too?" (Snyman, 2011: 2) (our translation).

## 5. BLACK AFRIKAANS SPEAKERS

At the outset, one should first agree about terminology. The term black Afrikaans speakers is used in contrast to *Black Afrikaans*, as *Black Afrikaans speakers* refer to mother-tongue speakers of Afrikaans who happen to have been classified as black under the apartheid system, whereas the designation *Black Afrikaans* is used to indicate a variety of Afrikaans spoken by black non-mother tongue speakers of Afrikaans and may be regarded as a learner variety (cf. De Wet, 2009: 153).

Two other groups of black Afrikaans speakers, viz. the Van der Merwe people and the people from Thlabane, will be discussed before turning to the Black Afrikaners of Onverwacht.

Hans du Plessis (1994: 127) says "there is another part of Afrikaans of which the contribution to Afrikaans has not been described comprehensively, and which will most probably remain 'undescribed' because the descendants of these groups are not as Afrikaans as their predecessors were. The groups that are referred to in this context are African language speakers (isiZulu and Setswana in the case of the Van der Merwes and Sestwana in the case of the people of Thlabane) who shifted to Afrikaans during the nineteenth century and acquired Afrikaans as their

mother tongue. They often refer to themselves as ‘Paul Kruger’s people’. One such a group is the Van der Merwe family” (our translation).

## 5.1 THE VAN DER MERWE FAMILY

Du Plessis (1994: 127 ff) mentions that, during the 1800s and especially after the Great Trek, for various reasons various black groups were absorbed into white communities. The Van der Merwe families who, according to their own testimony, were originally predominantly isiZulu speakers, with some Setswane speakers amongst them, trekked with the Dorsland Trekkers<sup>9</sup> from the then Transvaal across the northern parts of Namibia to Humpata in the south of Angola. They adopted the family names of the Dorsland Trekkers in whose service they originally were placed according to the<sup>10</sup> *inboekstelsel* or indenture system<sup>11</sup>; however, as a distinct group they are generally known as the Van der Merwe family. Historically and linguistically they are regarded as a group because they are all descendants of the so-called Makvolk<sup>12</sup> that participated in the Dorsland Trek.

In his article on the frontier society in Humpata, Clarence-Smith (p.46) discusses the relations the Boers had with their non-white servants and clients and comments on the servants who had come with them from the Transvaal. He notes that they had similar skills to those of the Boers and tended to enter into competition with their patrons on certain occasions. He also states that culturally they were in many ways closer to the Boers than any white group in Angola as the Makvolk was not only Afrikaans-speaking, but also members of the Dutch Reformed church. He further states that “the generalized use of Afrikaans by the whole of this group was indeed a source of irritation to the Portuguese authorities” (p. 46).

In spite of what Clarence-Smith calls “a certain minimal relaxation of the rigid ideological racism of the trekkers” towards the Makvolk, the Boers had expelled them from the settlement and church community of Humpata in 1884. As a result, the Makvolk moved to their own settlement, 8 kilometres away with their own

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<sup>9</sup> The Dorsland Treks (Thirst-land Treks) took place between 1874 and 1876. These groups travelled through the Kalahari towards what is now Namibia in search of better land for their people and their cattle. During the treks both men and cattle suffered severely for a lack of water.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Hans du Plessis, Emeritus Professor of Afrikaans at the Northwest University.

<sup>11</sup> Boeyens (1991: 31) notes the following: “According to this system which evolved out of the institution of slavery at the Cape and was condemned by some contemporary observers as slavery in disguise, African children could be bound to white settlers in the Transvaal as labourers until they had attained their majority”.

<sup>12</sup> The term Makvolk refers to workers (from isiZulu descent) who accompanied the colonists on their treks.

ministers and teachers. In 1928 the majority (350 of the 403) Boer families moved to Namibia, but the Van der Merwes remained in Humpata until 1944 when they trekked from Angola to Kaokoland and settled in the vicinity of the Ehombo Mountains at Ehombo.

In his book, *Variasietaalkunde*, Du Plessis (1988) discusses the syntax, morphology, phonology and lexical variations of Van der Merwe Afrikaans (VDMA). He comes to the conclusion that VDMA, in spite of aspects such as increased geographic mobility, education, centralisation, and urbanisation that generally counteract chronolects, has remained a preserved form of Afrikaans. He ascribes this to the fact that this group of Afrikaans speakers were geographically and socially completely separated from the rest of the Afrikaans speaking community since 1928/29; and even before that, together with the other Dorsland Trekkers, they were removed from the rest of the Afrikaans speech community. This led to a high degree of stagnation in their Afrikaans, which was “further augmented by the fact that as a language island between Portuguese and the African languages, they were prohibited to have mother tongue schools<sup>13</sup>, and because the function of the language they were using as mother tongue, was limited to religion as the higher function and interrelational speech as the lower function” (our translation) (Du Plessis, 1988: 124).

When Du Plessis did his research in the 1980s this stagnation was clear from the presence or absence of specific types of words in VDMA and also indicative of the linguistic and social isolation of the community. On the one hand, modern technology terminology was not used, such as television, computer, light, electricity and tap. On the other hand, archaic lexical items such as *katel* (*bed*), *kooi* (*bed*), *altemits* (*perhaps/maybe*), *oge* (*eyes*), *pennie* (*penny*), *vortgaan* (*go away*), *taggentag* (*eighty*), *maters* (*friends*), *pa(e)sede*, (*last*), *oolfant* (*elephant*), *arnoster* (*rhinoceros*), *sigwelwe* (*myself*), *bekwaald* (*ill*) and *gowwermint* (*government*) are commonly used. Also the use of archaic relationship terminology as forms of address could be included here, e.g. *moeder* (*mother*), *ouboet* (*older brother*), *boet* (*brother*), *neef* (*cousin/nephew*) and *oususter* (*oldest sister*) (Du Plessis, 1988: 127).

Nieuwoudt (1990: 40) concurs with the view of Du Plessis that the Afrikaans of the Van der Merwes should not be seen as a variety of standard Afrikaans but rather as chronolect thereof. More so, we are of the opinion that it should be seen as an atrophied form of Afrikaans as it is no longer spoken.

According to Du Plessis (2014) the further isolation of the Van der Merwes after 1944 occurred in the sense that the area in which they settled were dominated by the Ovahimba people who spoke Herero. Since then the Van der Merwes gradually intermarried with the Ovahimba and language shift has once more taken place with the younger generation of Van der Merwes now being Herero speaking.

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<sup>13</sup> After 1928 when the the Boers had left Humpata, the Portuguese government prohibited the education in Afrikaans. The remote area of Ehomba where the Van der Merwes moved to in 1944 had no schools either.

## 5.2 THE PEOPLE OF THLABANE

Thlabane is close to Rustenburg<sup>14</sup> and the current inhabitants' ancestors lived as labourers on the farms in the area towards the end of the 1800s. They were mostly Batswana; however, as time went by, they shifted from Setswana and adopted the Eastern Frontier Afrikaans used by the farm labourers which they spoke as mother tongue for generations (Du Plessis, 1994: 128). Michael le Cordeur (2011: 13) quotes one of the speakers: "generations have passed and the result was that because they were in the presence of the Voortrekkers themselves, they had to speak only one language, which was Afrikaans; their children were born in this milieu and played with the Afrikaner children and also started to learn Afrikaans and it became stronger and stronger. What happened after that is that everyone only used Afrikaans as the language and nothing else" (our translation)

Davey and Van Rensburg (1993: 28) undertook an extensive study in 1992 of the people of Thlabane to draw attention to what they called a neglected aspect of the history of Afrikaans. It was about providing data that could lead to the completion of the Afrikaans history writing and that would somewhat balance the one-sided emphasis of the achievements and highlights of Afrikaans. In their opinion, what happened in Thlabane serves as an example of one of the low points of Afrikaans. They say, "For the authors of this report, as members of the Afrikaans speech community, the insensitive and one-sided overemphasis of specific moments in the Afrikaans language history is as painful to experience as are the cases of the demise of a language by its mother tongue speakers". In short, the low point that Davey and Van Rensburg refer to amounts to the isolation and marginalisation of this part of the Afrikaans speech community. As a result of their skin colour, the churches (and specifically the Afrikaans churches) in Rustenburg were inaccessible to them. However, the Lutheran church, which was located just west of Rustenburg, took over the responsibility of ministering to the spiritual needs of the people who visited it once a year. This was referred to as *doopskool* (*baptism school*). According to Davey and Van Rensburg (1993: 30), this group of people started settling in the vicinity of the church over the course of time. As a result of the increase in the number of labourers on the farms, they were encouraged to leave the farms<sup>15</sup>. The economic conditions just after the Second Anglo-Boer war also contributed to this. According to the older people, Paul Kruger allowed them to stay in Rustenburg. A decision by the Transvaal House of Assembly in 1873 led to land being made available to the Hermannsburg Missionary Society on which wooden and clay houses with thatched roofs were built. Apart from the land that was given to the Missionary Society, a piece of agricultural land north of Thlabane was also given to them. However, this right

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<sup>14</sup> The town of Rustenburg is 115km west of Pretoria in what is now called the Northwest Province.

<sup>15</sup> According to Prof. Hans du Plessis it is common cause that this group also stems from the so-called 'inboekeling' (see footnote 12) and left the farms after they had completed their indentureships at the age of 21 for females and 25 for males.

expired long ago, as is the case as regards the original living arrangements. The residential area adjacent to the old church was declared a white area and a white school was allegedly built on the cemetery where the original settlers were buried.

However, it was not only the church and later the Group Areas Act that alienated this group. Afrikaans education, i.e. mother tongue teaching and learning, was not granted to them based on their skin colour, i.e. their classification by the apartheid regime as black Africans. Hence their children were compelled to attend Tswana-medium schools. This is a clear demonstration of how a group's self-identification as Afrikaans speaking was denied by the government of the time on the basis of ethnic identity and another ascribed to them. Or, to put it more crudely: if you were black, you could not be Afrikaans speaking.

This low point in the history of Afrikaans led to two significant developments, i.e. the marginalisation of selected Afrikaans-speaking groups, and language demise.

Davey and Van Rensburg (1993: 32) quote one of the speakers as follows: What I somewhat regret is the fact that ... we did not get any support from the Afrikaner. There are many (so I think), there are many Afrikaans speaking blacks that are seen as aliens by black people. We are pushed away by the other blacks because we speak Afrikaans. And then we are also rejected by the Afrikaners who speak Afrikaans. They cast us away. We are therefore in the middle. We don't belong to the Afrikaners. We don't belong to the blacks, but we use Afrikaans as a language, and I think if one has to talk about culture, all these Afrikaans speaking people are ninety per cent aware of the culture of the Afrikaner. They grew up in this culture. They know what to do with their meals, what they drink, their clothing, their faith ... everything. It belongs to Afrikaans, the Afrikaner ninety per cent. We are in the middle. Where to, I don't know. I think it is high time that the Afrikaner realises that there are people who use Afrikaans as a language and who has Afrikaans as mother tongue, that this Afrikaans is also their language, that the door should be opened for these people to be part of the Afrikaans speaking community (our translation).

Alienation, isolation and marginalisation have only one predictable outcome, namely the demise of a language. Davey and Van Rensburg (1993: 35) show that language loyalty and vanished privileges are strange bedfellows since it can generally be expected that language loyalty will go hand in hand with an expansion of rights. In particular, the case of the group of speakers above 50 years of age, their language loyalty lies indisputably with Afrikaans. These speakers feel that the Afrikaans way of life with its clear western orientation and culture of achievement has inspired them to successful careers, such as school principals, academics, commanding officers at police stations, politicians and community leaders. Also private initiatives, such as nursery schools and businesses, are

attributed to speaking Afrikaans and the concurrent advantages it held for its speakers.

The Afrikaans speaking children of these people, however, were not afforded the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the Afrikaans infrastructure and were doubly prejudiced in Tswana schools in that their Afrikaans was not developed and they could never get a proper grasp of Tswana. According to Davey and Van Rensburg (1993: 34), one can find the test for the demise of Afrikaans in Thlabane among the speakers of 35 years and younger: “The corpse of the once healthy language can be demonstrated among these speakers. The language does not exist for them anymore; it has died. Some speakers in this group are openly antagonistic towards Afrikaans (our translation).”

The Buys, the Van der Merwe and the Thlabane families have the following in common: At some stage of the history of their community they became enclaved and isolated. The isolation originated from the colour of their skin (not white) and their ascribed (ethnic) identity and their language, in other words, the fact that they were Afrikaans speaking.

The history of these three groups ties in with another group of black people who shifted to Afrikaans in the late 1800s and who call themselves Black Afrikaners, namely the people of Onverwacht. Like the Buys, the Afrikaans people in Onverwacht have retained their land and consequently some sort of autonomy. Unlike the Buys, they do not shun their black ancestry but are comfortable with the notion of being black. Like the Van der Merwe’s and the people of Thlabane, it is however becoming increasingly clear that they too, stem from the *inboekelinge*.

## 6. THE BLACK AFRIKANERS OF ONVERWACHT

Before the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the people of Onverwacht shifted to using Afrikaans through a process of acculturation. They henceforth identified themselves as ‘Swart Afrikaners’ (Black Afrikaners). This section will report on an on-going study of language and identity in the village of Onverwacht since 2010.<sup>16</sup> The aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes of identity construction that resulted in this community who, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, views themselves as ‘Swart Afrikaners’.

Onverwacht, a rural township about 40 km north-east of the capital city of Pretoria, has been home to a small Afrikaans-speaking community for some 150 years. The inhabitants of Onverwacht are the descendants primarily of freed

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<sup>16</sup> As far as could be established no systematic study of this Afrikaans-speaking community has as yet been undertaken. A project to understand and document the construction of (ethnic) identity through language in the community of Onverwacht was established by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Johannesburg in 2009, in collaboration with the Department of Afrikaans at the University of Johannesburg and the Department of Sociology at the University of Pretoria.

Malay slaves from the Cape of Good Hope and Africans who were employed as labourers and domestic servants or as *inboekelinge* by the Malan, Hamman and Prinsloo groups of Natrekkers (*those who trekked later*) who left the Cape in 1857 to escape British rule (Salzwedel 2012: 15). These Natrekkers, who spoke the Dutch-Afrikaans vernacular, crossed the interior and settled in the area now known as Onverwacht, Steynberg en Elison, which is part of the Nokeng tsa Taemane Local Municipality in the Metsweding District.

Upon settling in this area, the labourers and domestic servants of the Natrekkers remained in their employ and worked on their farms, but they also bought their own plots<sup>17</sup>. By 1886 a community of white and black Afrikaans speaking people came into being in the Onverwacht area. The black people from Onverwacht joined the Boer armed forces under Genl. Lafras Uys during the South African War to fight for their land. The British army removed the women and children from Onverwacht to a concentration camp in Marabastad, Pretoria (Van den Berg, n.d. 36). After the War and the defeat of the Boer forces the people of Onverwacht lost their land, but were ‘unexpectedly’ given the opportunity in 1905 to buy land at affordable prices from an Afrikaner farmer, Gert Erasmus, hence the name of the village, Onverwacht (lit: Unexpected) (Jacobson, 2005: 12; Salzwedel, 2012: 15). By 1913 most of the original inhabitants of Onverwacht had returned to the area where they again worked the land (Van den Berg n.d. 36). Some were also employed at the newly established Cullinan diamond mine and were subsequently in a position to purchase more land. Different groups of people lived in peace and harmony in the Afrikaans speaking community of Onverwacht with inter-racial marriages a common phenomenon. A distinguished community leader, Jan Monare’s sister, married a white man and Theresa Moloo (aka Ouma Moeloes) married an Indian man (Salzwedel 2012: 15).

Onverwacht became a prosperous agricultural community. In the words of Monare:

We ploughed our fields with oxen and grew mealies and other crops. We kept chickens and had cows in our kraals and horses in our stables. We had our own mills and made our own butter. We had ox-wagons and our children rode horses. We wanted for nothing (Jacobson, 2005: 12).

During the depression in the 1930s many of the Onverwacht residents and Afrikaner farmers who were in financial difficulties worked for the Cullinan diamond mine and transported wood. The community grew with more black and white people purchasing land (Prinsloo 2010). However, in 1965 the oppressive apartheid system’s racial zoning in terms of the Group Areas Act destroyed the heart of the Onverwacht community. So-called Black Spots (areas surrounded by white-owned land) were identified in rural areas and black people removed in an effort to effect residential racial segregation. Those residents of Onverwacht who were considered to be ‘Coloured’ based on their Afrikaans proficiency, or those

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<sup>17</sup> Once again Prof. Hans du Plessis suspects that some of these people were ‘inboekelinge’.

who had Afrikaans surnames, were allowed to remain in Onverwacht. Those who did not meet the criteria were forcibly removed to black townships such as Hammanskraal north of Pretoria, and also to the so-called Bantustans or black homelands of KwaNdebele, QwaQwa and Bophuthatswana, areas where they had never set foot (Salzwedel 2012: 16). Some 27 out of 65 families were removed, leaving behind their houses and livestock.

Poverty and unemployment set in and the community struggled to survive. Monare explains as follows (Jacobson 2005: 12):

We came here before apartheid and outlived it. The people who were removed to the homelands also suffered because they couldn't speak a black language. We had *Boere bloed* (Afrikaner blood) in our veins, and if our skin is dark it was because it was baked by the sun.

Apartheid came and the Group Areas Act was introduced. Many lost their homes and were removed to the homelands where they didn't belong either. Afrikaners said we were too black to be Afrikaans and if we wanted to speak Afrikaans and remain here we had to change our surnames at the registry office.

In this regard, Singh (1997 in Alexander 2002: 184) points to one of the profound backlashes of apartheid: "With all its contradiction, apartheid was a powerful allocator of identity". The people of Onverwacht lived in and survived the confines of the apartheid dispensation to evolve into an Afrikaans-speaking community. "Naming, categorizing and labelling (people) are political acts" (Weber & Horner 2012: 82); hence identity is socially constructed through processes of negotiation. Through self-identification the people of Onverwacht are firm about their identity. Monare confirms: "I am an Afrikaner" (Salzwedel, 2012: 19) and Sussie Hlabati says: "I am a black Afrikaner. Yes, we never used other languages in our home" (our translation) (Hlabati 2010).

Post-apartheid Onverwacht is now part of the Land Reform Programme and will possibly also become part of a mega tourism initiative, the Dinokeng project, planned and managed by the Gauteng Tourism Authority. However, the struggle to survive financially continues and the Onverwacht community remains impoverished. Former ANC councillor in the Nokeng tsa Taemane Local Municipality and neighbouring farmer, Hennie Prinsloo, alleges that mismanagement, factional infighting and council's lack of commitment towards the Onverwacht community is largely to blame for lack of funding and delivery (Prinsloo 2010). The post-apartheid era with government's insistence that language should not become a barrier to providing equal access to education resulted in the Anglicisation of the Onverwacht primary school which, since its establishment in 1947, had been an Afrikaans medium school. The original building was demolished after 1994 without consulting the community. Subsequently learners, who preferred English as their medium of learning and teaching, were bussed in from other neighbouring areas. Patricia Machobane, who was born and raised in Onverwacht, is now obliged to send her children at great

cost to Afrikaans-medium schools in Eersterust, a former 'Coloured' neighbourhood some 30 km away. She voices her resentment and argues that this situation was imposed upon the Afrikaans community: "We put a lot of effort into Afrikaans. Now we no longer have any say over our own (Afrikaans) school. We are treated as if we were new arrivals here in Onverwacht" (our translation) (Machobane 2010).

More than three-quarters of the Onverwacht community are currently unemployed and accuse local ANC politicians of allowing 'inkommers' (people from 'outside', i.e. migrants from countries to the north of South Africa) to build shacks illegally and settle on the Onverwacht communal grazing land (Jacobson, 2005; Salzwedel 2012). The people of Onverwacht are demanding that the 500 families in this informal settlement should be removed and that their land claims be settled so that the original 65 Onverwacht families may return to their land: "This is 'blood ground'. Our grandfathers and fathers fought for it in the war (the Anglo Boer War<sup>18</sup>)" (our translation) (Salzwedel 2012: 18). Prinsloo is committed to assisting the Onverwacht community with their land claims: "I assist because I am in a position to do so. It is an uphill battle if you are white and Afrikaans, and even more so if you are black and Afrikaans" (our translation) (Salzwedel, 2012: 19).

## 7. CONCLUSION

Following the apartheid regime's insistence on imposing particular social categories in terms of 'a system of external identity formation' (Willemsse, 2014: 243), these enclaved groups' acts of self-identification by transgressing sharply from such delineated social ethnic are significant. In the case of the Buys, the people of Thlabane, the Van der Merwes, as well as the community of Onverwacht, establishing and justifying their identity as a unique Afrikaans-speaking coloured community, or as black 'Afrikaners' by taking control of the discourse regarding their identity results in them invoking new social roles in changing circumstances. The black Afrikaners are breaking the barriers of their historical socio-political enclave. They demonstrate that identity is negotiable and malleable, and indeed not "like some irremovable skin", but something that could be changed as people "acquire new knowledge and interests" (Alexander, 2002: 107).

Alexander challenged the notion of rigid separate cultures in which one's primary identity is "the 'own' ethnic group (however this is described)" (Alexander 2002: 103). He argued that the relationship between unity and identity should be defined by the "confluence" of cultures evolving into a Gariiep nation which "find their origin in different catchment areas and which are constantly changing and being changed both by the formation of new tributaries and by the

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<sup>18</sup> Aka the South African War.

backwash effects from the mainstream, which flows majestically into the great ocean of humanity” (in Tayob, 1999: 86). Perhaps these groups of enclaved Afrikaans speakers, who are clearly challenging the institutionalised racially prejudiced discourse of the past, would be in a position to join the bigger Great Gariep current, to use Alexander’s metaphor, in order to become an integral part of “a multicultural society of a special kind”<sup>19</sup>, without discrete boundaries that cut people from one another, the kind of society that Alexander worked towards.

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<sup>19</sup> The Gariep River is South Africa’s longest river: it runs from east to west across the vast and varied landscape to the Atlantic ocean. Its name originates from the word ‘!gari-b’ (great river) in the Nama language, a Khoe language spoken by aboriginal people who lived at the southernmost tip of Africa for millennia.

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