

*Piet Erasmus*

---

# Ethnic humour, identity, and the loss of Afrikaner hegemony

First submission: April 2003

Humour is multi-faceted, and this article demonstrates that one of these facets relates to the notion of ethnic identity. The ethnic humour of the Afrikaner is analysed and the conclusion is drawn that the Afrikaner has used ethnic humour as a hegemonic instrument for categorising “others” in predominantly negative ways. At present Afrikaners constitute a minority group in the country, no longer possessing constitutional power, and their cultural values and opinions are no longer dominant. The article maintains that, if Afrikaners find it possible to discard the idea of “identity-as-negative-otherness”, they should be able to carve out a positive and empowering identity within the South African discourse by using humour. Furthermore, this same sense of humour may be employed as a literature of protest or as a “minority literature” to oppose the “new” hegemonic order in the country.

## Etniese humor, identiteit en die verlies van Afrikaner-hegemonie

Humor is veelfasettig en in hierdie artikel word ’n verband met identiteit uitgelig. Die Afrikaner se etniese humor word ontleed en daar word tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat die Afrikaner etniese humor as ’n hegemoniese instrument aangewend het om “andere” oorwegend negatief te kategoriseer. Afrikaners is tans ’n minderheidsgroep in die land; hul beskik nie meer alleen oor die konstitusionele mag nie en hul kulturele waardes en beskouings is nie meer dominant nie. Aansluitend hierby, word betoog dat indien Afrikaners kan wegdoen met die idee van “identiteit-as-negatiewe-andersheid” hul humor, enersyds, aangewend kan word om ’n positiewe en bemagtigende identiteit in die Suid-Afrikaanse diskoers te onderhandel. Andersyds, kan dit as verset- of minderheidsliteratuur aangewend word om simbolies protes aan te teken en weerstand uit te druk teen ’n “nuwe” hegemoniese orde in die land.

*Prof P A Erasmus, Dept of Anthropology, University of the Free State, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300; E-mail: erasmus.p.hum@mail.uovs.ac.za*

In spite of significant social and political transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, racism remains part of the South African social fabric, according to De Wet (2002: 130).<sup>1</sup> Referring to the significance of what underlies public behaviour, Kottak (2000: 563) emphasises that although people may publicly appear to accept certain actions resignedly, they may seriously question or reject them within the private domain. Where political correctness largely determines what may be said in public, one way of determining what people really think is to analyse their humour.

Research confirms the multi-faceted nature of humour. It functions as a form of communication and draws people together by indicating a willingness to share. As sharing a laugh generates greater boldness, a generic conversational style develops within the “community of laughter” providing an escape-valve for the outlet of suppressed feelings. In this sense, humour is an empowering force and can be used to challenge restrictions, prejudice and stereotyping.<sup>2</sup> When people find it difficult or impossible to be critical of or change their attitudes towards certain forms of (unexpressed) prejudice or stereotyping, humour affords them the opportunity to consider these phenomena thoroughly, and thus to assess and reveal their effects (cf Apte 1985: 140-5; Chapman 1976: 176-80; Du Toit 1996: 54-5; MacHovec 1988: 67-75). Humour thus plays a liberating role in that it is able to transform unpleasant or sensitive situations, disarm hostile forces and render people more receptive to views that are contrary to their own (Du Toit 1996: 57).

In an investigation among scholars, Woods (1990: 191-5) points out that humour is the coping agent par excellence for dealing with

1 The masculine pronoun is used in this article to refer to the Afrikaner in general.

2 Apte (1985: 113-4) and Van der Merwe (1994: 1-3) state the following characteristics of stereotypes: they aim to make pronouncements about other people; they define the cultural and moral expectations of the group; they reflect and confirm ideological points of view and offer ideological guidelines for action towards others; they distinguish between that which is acceptable and that which is not acceptable; they are characterised by oversimplification; they are shared by a group and transmitted from one generation to the next, and they resist change.

Figure 1: Black metaphor



*Landbouweekblad* 24 May 2002<sup>3</sup>

deep-seated anxiety and the harshness of reality as it is a means of distancing oneself from unpleasant situations. Furthermore, it enables one to cope with discomfort and defeat, has the potential to heal emotional lesions, and can be used to discipline individuals and strengthen their sense of identity.

Since humour contains elements which can undermine values and enforce conformity, Kehily & Nayak (1997: 69-70) have found that it plays an important role in consolidating group membership and that it often determines, organises and regulates identity. Nelson (1994) and Jones & Liverpool (1976) are of the same opinion. Their research, conducted in Guatemala and Trinidad respectively, confirms a connection between humour and nationalism. Du Toit (1996: 58) emphasises that humour is able to reinforce ethnocentric attitudes

3 Au! Au! Au! I see a great whirlwind of change...  
Already making his mark

and humiliate people from an out-group by labelling them as ignorant or silly. Jokes about “stupid” outsiders may also be aimed at re-affirming in-group values such as rationality, efficiency or intellectual pursuits. Importantly, humour not only breaks down barriers, but has the potential to subjectively establish social buffer zones.

An underlying premise of the line of argument taken here is that humour lends itself to revealing, challenging, breaking down or making fun of: ambiguities; the fallibility of categorisations, generalisations and stereotyping; competitive values; uncertain boundaries; power structures, and the inferiorities associated with all of these. However, although humour may be applied to expose weakness or ideological myths, to uncover masks, to express resistance to unacceptable elements in the social structure or in a particular social situation, and to challenge cultural codes and practices, humour itself may be challenged and evaluated by these same codes of conduct. Another premise is that humour can promote the maintenance of group identity in the presence of sustained intercultural contact. Uncertainties regarding one’s own abilities are diminished; the threat of dominance is challenged, and behaviour is controlled and transformed by emphasising the need to conform (Apte 1985: 140-6; Nelson 1994; Schaeffer 1981: 28 & Wilson 1979: 85-6).

According to Wassermann (1999: 186), anthropological literature offers no methodological guidelines for researching humour.<sup>4</sup> Eriksen (1991: 131) emphasises that although humorous communication generally exhibits presupposed differences between culture and identity, such differences are often evasive, vague and difficult to measure. Apte (1985: 121-32), Boxer & Cortés-Conde (1997: 276) and Du

4 For this reason, she suggests the following guidelines: identify and document individuals, situations and events that are labelled as humorous by sources; identify and document comic non-verbal actions; document texts which sources find funny; identify humour-generating stimuli, and describe the nature and characteristics of reactions to humorous events (Wasserman 1999: 188). However, various contributions to the field of methodology have been published in psychology, language and literature, cf Chapman & Foot 1976; Leacock 1937; MacHovec 1988; Malherbe 1932; Schaeffer 1981; and Wilson 1979.

Figure 2: Crudeness



*Die Patriot* 13 January 1996<sup>6</sup>

Toit (1996: 57-8) point out that humour is often so culture-specific<sup>5</sup> that it is difficult to interpret without knowledge of the culture, sub-

5 “On joking relationship”, a study by the anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (1940), is cited by Apte (1985: 29-34) and Swart (1987: 16-8) as having made a unique contribution to the study of ethnic behaviour as it does pioneering work in revealing the significance of cultural influences. The way in which humour is expressed reproduces something of the values, points of view and concerns of the culture from which it originates, leading to the development of a relational identity between partners to a conversation. This creates a sense of group membership and consolidates solidarity and cohesion among participants.

6 Demanding an Afrikaner nation-state and sovereignty

- Amnesty for white prisoners
- Housing
- Equal rights
- Reinstatement of Afrikaans
- Reinstatement of Model C schools’ standard.

culture, social class or indeed the particular situation under scrutiny. In this article, given this state of affairs, a white Afrikaans-speaking anthropologist conducts an ethnographic study not of the traditional anthropological “other” but of “us”. “Ethnography of speaking” is one of the methodological starting-points for an anthropologist doing fieldwork in his or her own culture. This is based on the presupposition that a native anthropologist understands, and therefore deals in concepts, categories, and distinctions that are meaningful to the members of his/her culture and group. In other words, this study generates anthropological insights pertaining to a particular society and culture (that of the Afrikaner), and does not delve into cross-cultural and social comparisons (an ethnological study).

The purpose of this article is not to analyse and typify the humour of the Afrikaner in general, but to investigate the racial discourse contained within his ethnic humour as manifested in Afrikaans literature and in cartoons found in Afrikaans newspapers and magazines.

## 1. Humour

Apte (1985: 177), Boxer & Cortés-Conde (1997: 275), and Chapman (1976: 182) are of the opinion that humour is an essential part of our daily interaction and the ways in which we socialise with various people. Irony, playful twists, the ludicrous, the entertaining and the comical are various components of the humour we encounter in everyday banter and the telling of jokes. An important aspect of humour is the wide-ranging nature of its benevolence.<sup>7</sup> It can be good-natured, free of malice, tolerant, sympathetic, yet drolly amused in its understanding of the ups and downs, disharmonies, imperfections and contradictions of the human condition, values and circumstances (MacHovec 1988: 6-12 and Pretorius 1992: 170-1).

7 On the basis of research on chimpanzees in the Pavlov Primatological Centre in St Petersburg, the anthropologists Butovskaya & Kozintsev (1996: 716-7) suggest that quasi-aggressive behaviour may be the origin of humour. MacHovec (1988), Malherbe (1932), Pretorius (1992), Leveen (1996), Schaeffer (1981), Swart (1987) and Wasserman (1999) may be consulted for an exposition of theories on humour, its development and interpretation.

Figure 3: *Naïveté*

*Die Volksblad* 5 March 1999<sup>8</sup>

The act of joke-telling establishes a unique relationship between “text”, “author” and “actor”. The joke text may be true and/or fictitious and cannot usually be separated from the narrator’s experience of life, expectations and views. However, because joke-telling makes provision for a re-organisation of the joke text, it is ultimately the nature of the joke-telling which gives the “actor” his personality and identity. As such, the narration of a joke is simultaneously fact and fiction; it creates a space for variations on the past and the future; it offers an open personality/identity which affords meaning to the “actor’s” customs and actions, and it is meant for the self (the narra-

8 Africa-AIDS  
Zuma-power

tor) as well as for the other (the listeners) (Leveen 1996: 29-31 & Swart 1987: 30-3).

Irrespective of the nature of a joke,<sup>9</sup> the success with which it is actualised is based on a complex (de)coding process influenced by the narrator's emotions and experiences as well as by the manifold levels of interpretation through which the listener(s) afford(s) the story priority and significance (Besnier 1990: 420). In the case of humour, and of ethnic humour in particular, the listener's decoding of the joke is based on the fact that he must formulate an opinion of the narrator's attitudes and meanings in order to gain access to his cultural codes and understand the influence of these codes on the meaning to be drawn from the joke. At the same time, the narrator must take the personality and concerns of the potential listener(s) into account in order to determine whether a given joke-text should be shared or not (Leveen 1996: 35 & Swart 1987: 26-30).

In the relationship between joke-teller and listener, the teller is permitted to demonstrate subtlety as well as intellectual and social skills. In an attempt to draw the attention of (or have power over) the listener in order to impress, the teller runs the risk of being humiliated and rejected, rather than perceived as funny. The teller makes an ego investment in the success of the joke and relies on the approval (laughter) of the listener(s). Listeners, however, do not merely listen. The element of surprise operating in the structure of a joke implies that listeners may be vulnerable. However, they trust that the teller will not exploit or reveal this gullibility in a malicious way. The listener also makes an ego investment in the joke action and is an active participant in the transaction. If the joke succeeds, the listener is compensated by the humour derived from it, as well as by having been included in the group and thus being able to share in the enjoyment of the joke. This sense of inclusion in the "community of laughter" promotes mutual affection and positive relations among those sharing a laugh.

9 De Bruin (*De Kat* March 1989) distinguishes between three types of joke: those involving a conflict with an element of surprise; those originating from animosity towards other groups, and those dealing with the breaking of taboos.



Figure 4: Cunning



*Die Burger* 18 February 1999<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Ethnic humour and identity

The word “ethnic” is derived from the Greek *ethnos*, a term meaning “other” (Nanda & Warms 2002: 309; Seymour-Smith 1986: 101). This particular quality and/or shade of meaning has been preserved in the Afrikaans application of the term (Coertze & Coertze 1996: 76). In the context of humour it has become common practice to define the self in terms of the other, with the latter being cast in a contrastive and often negative light. Apte (1985: 148), for instance, describes humour as follows: it reflects negative attitudes and stereotypes, which

- 10 Give NOW ... before you have nothing left to give! (Once we’ve taken it all)  
 TRC Law: Reconciliation, not revenge  
 Afrikaans businessmen  
 Revenge  
 Knew he would get a dig in

Figure 5: A Janus head



*Die Patriot* 23 February 1996<sup>11</sup>

are based to a large extent on oversimplification. Wassermann (1999: 185) points out that ethnic humour mocks the behaviour, customs or any other characteristic (such as “excessive sexuality”, “uncleanness”, “inferiority”, “gluttony” or “stupidity and idiocy”) of a group or members of a group on the basis of their specific, accepted socio-cultural identity. As such, humour may be evaluated as lacking in taste, improper or provocative. MacHovec (1988: 116), Swart (1987: 97-9)

- 11 The ANC-SACP government promises it will take the land from the whites and give it to you, and we promise to combat crime with kid gloves so that you can redistribute the white man’s wealth for yourselves!  
Afrikaner leaders, do not instil fear of affirmative action and redistribution of wealth within your people, because it is in your own interests to be poor, to receive poor education, etc.!  
Hear! Hear! such a mouth deserves jam! [Idiom roughly translated – “That’s telling them!”]

and Wilson (1979: 85-6) confirm these as being characteristics of ethnic humour.

According to Leveen (1996: 34) four basic structural relationships of power are possible within ethnic humour: a group member telling a joke to another member; a group member telling a joke to a non-member; a non-member telling a joke to a member, and a non-member telling a joke to a non-member. These power relationships may be complicated by the inclusion of superior ethnic groups in the joke text: when there is doubt about the ethnic identity of the teller or the listener; when one person is unaware of the ethnic identity of the other, or when the audience comprises members of various ethnic backgrounds. In this last case, there is greater potential for misunderstanding and it is important that participants decode the joke message "correctly". The non-ethnic listener's sense of sympathy with the ethnic minority group is not in itself sufficient, and a degree of group interaction is necessary in order for the uninitiated outsider to understand the codes on which the joke is based (cf Wilson 1979: 140-1 in this regard).

Identity is not a one-dimensional, mono-directional or permanent phenomenon. Nor is it constant at all times. Fundamentally, it is a construction produced by the human ability to conceptualise and to introduce issues which do not represent an entity with a practical, concrete existence of its own.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the world is not made up of discrete, constant elements (Strauss 1999: 13) causes identities to be fluid and divisible: one can, for instance, distinguish between the individual self and the collective self, between the assimilated self and the ethnic self, or between the self as object and the self as subject.

A joke in which an ethnic speaker's group is the self-ridiculed object may be interpreted as an indication of the light in which he views his previous ethnic position/identity — that he is in the process of assimilation and freeing himself from his group. By pretending to reject group membership, the teller postulates the self-identity of an outsider. There is thus a risk involved in telling jokes about one's own group — they may be interpreted as revealing uncertainties about

12 Cf Collier 1998: 131; Dominguez 1994: 333; Martin 1995: 5; Peoples & Bailey 2000: 307-10, and Wolf 1994: 7.

Figure 6: Neatness



*Die Patriot* 22 June 1990<sup>13</sup>

one's own identity and may estrange the teller from his group. However, there is another side to the argument. It is not possible to see oneself as completely "other", or to be simultaneously self and other. The fluidity of identity does not imply that assimilation is a necessity in poly-ethnic/cultural situations.<sup>14</sup> Ethnic humour can be used to assist minorities in the problematic task of rendering themselves acceptable without rejecting their own identity. The Afrikaner's ethnic humour will now be investigated.

13 Primary school  
Afrikaans parents

14 As early as 1969, Frederik Barth showed that ethnic groups may remain in contact for generations without assimilating.

### 3. Afrikaner<sup>15</sup> hegemony

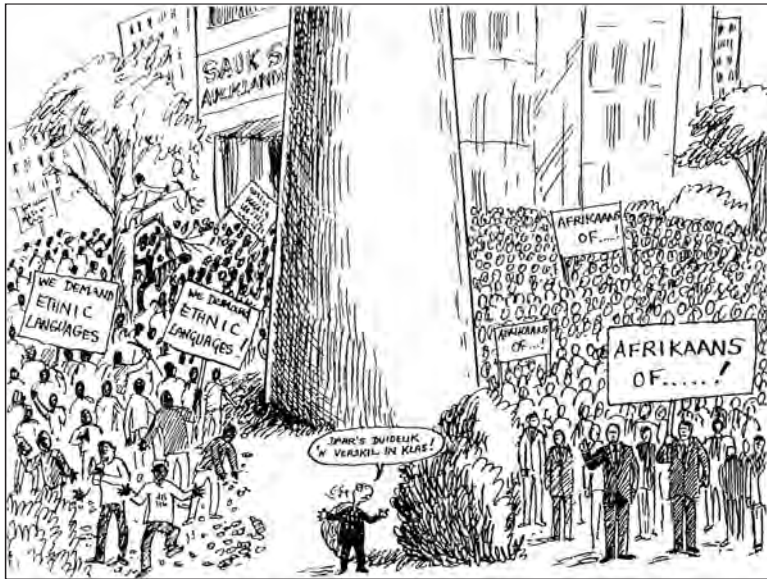
According to Pierre Bourdieu (Kottak 2000: 564; Tarifa 1997: 251), a ruling class possesses symbols for upholding whatever content it desires as its general significance, sense and meaning, and for presenting this (possibly including repression) as “natural”. Statements such as “the existing (repressive) order is in the interests of all” or promises such as “the future can only improve, provided we are patient” form part of the set-up. Antonio Gramsci develops the concept of “hegemony” to illustrate that subordinates in stratified societies comply with dominance by internalising the values of rulers and accepting the “naturalness” of dominance.<sup>16</sup> In this respect, Bourdieu (1977) and Foucault (1979) (according to Kottak 2000: 564) argue that it is easier and more effective to dominate people’s thoughts than to exercise physical control over them. In exercising dominance (whether economic, social, religious or political), gross forms of physical violence are usually replaced in industrial societies by more perfidious techniques of persuasion and control, as well as by controlling people’s opinions, activities and contacts.

During the apartheid years various possibilities for affording significance, sense and meaning to the South African ethnic and cultural reality were available to Afrikaner (governments) (Rhodie 1969; Tatz 1962). The conceptualisation of identity as a repressive social and political system conveying images of cultural differences constituted the “truth” used by Afrikaner (governments) for (re)producing South African society. In this process, symbols were fixed for South African society (nationality, whiteness, Christian-nationalism, etc); decisions were taken on acceptable attitudes, norms, values and worldviews (Coertze 1983: 40 warns, for instance, that the Afrikaner

15 The Afrikaner is usually defined as a white South African whose mother tongue is Afrikaans. For a full exposition of the problematic nature of defining Afrikaners in this way, as well as of the development of Afrikaner consciousness, cf Degenaar (1987), Du Toit & Giliomee (1983: xxv-xxx) and Giliomee & Adam (1981). According to these authors a single, dramatic quantum leap cannot be identified in the development of Afrikaner consciousness.

16 Cf Kottak 2000: 563-4; Nader 1997: 719-21; Nanda & Warms 2002: 283; Seymour-Smith 1986: 136.

Figure 7: Orderliness



*Die Patriot* 12 August 1994<sup>17</sup>

must “sorg dat ons nie in die riool van integrasie afdaal nie”,<sup>18</sup> and the political party and racial group played a role in the creation of authority and power (Soudien 1995: 27).

Racism is, according to De Wet (2002: 131), not something outside the individual or group, but an internalised frame of reference directing the individual’s or the group’s opinion of himself/itself, as well as of the “other”. Proceeding from this point of departure, Besnier (1990: 419) draws attention to the fact that, with respect to the content and context of a message, a writer or speaker’s feelings, state of mind, attitudes and groupings are conveyed by various linguistic

17 SABC

Afrikaans or ....!

Clearly a difference, in class

18 ensure that we do not descend into the cess-pit of integration.

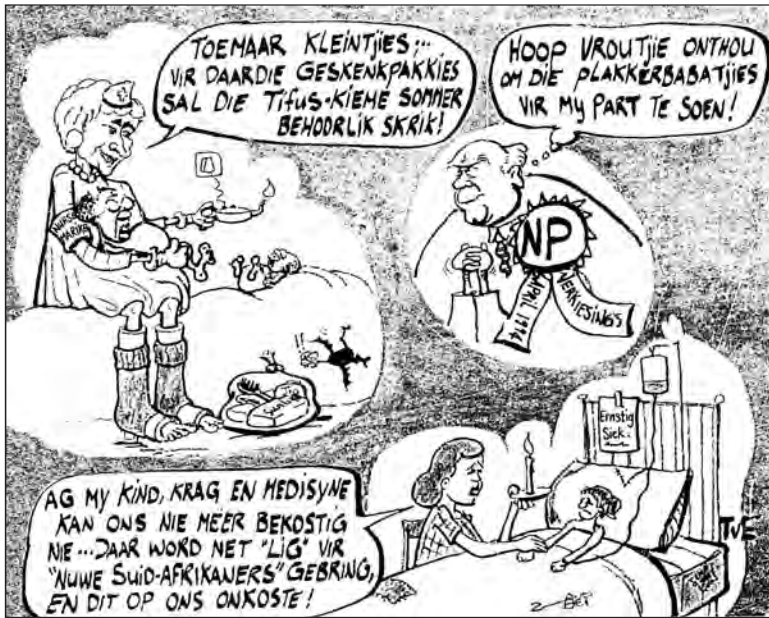
and communicative methods, one of which is humour. Kok (1947: 151) maintains that the Afrikaner has his own characteristic sense of humour. It is obvious from Malherbe's (1932) discussion of this humour in Afrikaans literature that negative stereotyping associated with racial and ethnic prejudices is one of its distinctive and central characteristics.<sup>19</sup> In her overview of twentieth-century Afrikaans prose, Roos (1998: 42) confirms that the "jolly Hotnot" image of comical rowdiness typifies an Afrikaans literary trend.

A second striking characteristic of Afrikaner ethnic humour is that most stories see the "other" depicted as homogeneous, grouped in a collective "they" (eg Bantu) and distilled into an iconic "he" (eg Gamat, Abdul) or "she" (eg Meraai, Felicity) (Rautenbach 1968: 23, 24, 43, 66, 71, 74, 89, 115, 137). This textually produced abstract "they" is expressed in a timeless present; the characteristics created for the "other" by the Afrikaner are thus presented as fixed and unchangeable. In his overview of Afrikaner humour, Malherbe (1932: 41) cites the following: "U sou ook as voorbeeld kan neem 'n Kaffer

19 The following excerpts from Malherbe's work on Afrikaner humour are used to illustrate the intrinsic relationship between the Afrikaner's feelings regarding race and the socio-cultural context of humour. However, it is not always clear where the humour lies.

- "In die stikdonker nag broei verraad tussen 'n Boer en gewapende Kaffers; maar toevallig is Freek en 'n jong Kaffertjie daarvan getuie" (In the pitch-dark night a treacherous plot is hatched between a Boer and armed Kaffirs, but Freek and a young Kaffir happen to witness the event). (Maré L, *Die Nuwejaarsfees op Palmietfontein* [1918], in Malherbe 1932: 213).
- "Dan kyk sy vol angs en skrik op, as die dronke uitgelatenheid van 'n aantal Kaffers op 'n 'tea meeting' tot hul deurdring" (Then she looks up in anxiety and fear as the drunken high spirits of several Kaffirs at a 'tea meeting' impinge upon them). (Van Bruggen J, *Op Veld en Rande* [1920], in Malherbe 1932: 222).
- "Ja, Flip, baar as 'n Vaalpenskaffer, vuil as 'n Koelie-meid; maar dis 'n witman, 'n Afrikaner-kind, en sy wil is goed" ... "Hy stoot die ruuste vloeke uit teen die Kaffertjie wat die beeste te langsaam aanja kraal toe" (Yes, Flip, green as a Vaalpens Kaffir, dirty as an Indian servant girl; but it's a white man, an Afrikaner child, and his intentions are good ... He swears most foully at the small Kaffir who is driving the cattle too slowly into the kraal). (Van Bruggen J, *Ampie. Die natuurkind* [1924], in Malherbe 1932: 239).

Figure 8: Disadvantage



*Die Afrikaer* 9 Desember 1993<sup>20</sup>

in Johannesburg, wat met al sy aanstellerigheid tog 'n dom lokasieswarte bly".<sup>21</sup>

A third characteristic which is said to be humorous is the use of broken Afrikaans. As early as 1912 we see this in Langenhoven's work (*Die wêreld die draai*, Malherbe 1932: 265) when Katoo the Kaffir servant says: "Oubase kwaai vanmôre. Oubase seg Hotnosse te

20 Never mind, little ones ... the typhoid germs will be scared stiff by those gift parcels!

Hope my wife remembers to kiss the squatter babies on my behalf

April 1994 elections

Alas, my child, we can no longer afford electricity or medicine ... "light" is only provided for "new South Africans" ... at our expense!

21 Take for example a Kaffir in Johannesburg, who despite his pretensions remains a stupid black from the location.



veel vlyse vrete”.<sup>22</sup> Rautenbach (1969: 39) uses the same technique in the recent past, whereas Malherbe (1932: 250) objects to Van Bruggen’s *Booia* (1931) on grounds of “die Kaffer se uitstekende Afrikaans”.<sup>23</sup>

Humour is not considered an essential ingredient of a cartoon. Cartoons which reflect current events but do not necessarily deal with the more neutral or positive topics of everyday life are powerful in ways that words often are not, and public opinion is depicted as well as shaped by these. In line with Foucault (1979: 14), who emphasises that labels have influential and serious consequences, an attempt has been made here to find such “labels” in cartoons published in Afrikaans newspapers and magazines since 1975. According to Schoonraad & Schoonraad (1989: 16) there is a startling correlation between the state of any nation and its newspaper cartoons. For example, media artists for the Afrikaans press, and particularly those of the last forty years, ridicule themselves and the political party supported by their newspapers more readily than their English counterparts do (Schoonraad & Schoonraad 1989: 31). According to De Wet (2002: 130), mass media in South Africa has played a fundamental role in reproducing and perpetuating racism. However, it must be taken into consideration that modern racial discourse seldom invokes the crude pseudo-scientific racism found in the nineteenth century. Today, reference to the biological basis of race is often cloaked in cultural and/or humorous arguments (De Wet 2002: 143).

Stereotypical labels conveying and confirming racial and ethnic prejudice have been identified in Afrikaans cartoons. The following types have been distinguished:

- Black metaphor (*Landbouweekblad* 24 May 2002, Figure 1)

This specific illustration is not centred on “white versus black”. Yet goods and customs from black culture, with the ever-present broken Afrikaans, are used negatively to illustrate a specific situation. This can be regarded as a form of cultural racism, because it reveals the view that members of another racial group have a culture of lesser value or no culture at all.

22 The boss is bad-tempered this morning. The boss says that the Hottentots eat too much meat.

23 the Kaffir’s excellent Afrikaans.

Figure 9: A faceless mass



*Die Transvaler* 19 February 1990<sup>24</sup>

- The black stereotype

Crudeness (*Die Patriot* 13 January 1996, Figure 2), *naïveté* (*Die Volksblad* 5 March 1999, Figure 3), cunning (*Die Burger* 18 February 1999, Figure 4) and double-dealing/the Janus figure (*Die Patriot* 23 February 1996, figure 5) are proffered as traits of the black man. This is a form of individual racism as it reveals the personal view that members of one racial group are inferior and display unacceptable traits in comparison with members of another racial group on the basis of physical differences.

- The white/black contrast

A Euro- versus Afro-centric frame of reference is a predominant paradigm in the two Afrikaner supremacist newspapers, *Die Patriot* and *Die*

<sup>24</sup> We must speak with one voice!

*Afrikaner*. White people are represented as neat (*Die Patriot* 22 June 1990, Figure 6), orderly (*Die Patriot* 12 August 1984, Figure 7) and disadvantaged (*Die Afrikaner* 9 December 1993, Figure 8). Accordingly, the above-mentioned publications present blacks as stone-throwers and arsonists, disorderly and privileged. It is clear that while the “other” is invariably negatively perceived, the “self” is positively presented.

- Something good out of Africa?

Although Africa is not ethnically, culturally or racially “black”, it is constantly characterised as a “black” continent by depictions of a faceless mass (*Die Transvaler* 19 February 1990, Figure 9), conflict (*Beeld* 27 August 1998, Figure 10), AIDS (*Die Volksblad* 31 December 1992, Figure 11) and backwardness (*Die Transvaler* 28 August 1990, figure 12). Of course these images have not fallen from the sky. They are the products of discernable socio-cultural factors firmly located in South African history.

Figure 10: Conflict



*Beeld* 27 August 1998

Figure 11: AIDS



*Die Volksblad* 31 December 1992<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Discussion

Perceptions of right and wrong and of the morally defensible are heavily influenced by the authority of the ruling group (Soudien 1995: 54). Furthermore, there is a deep-rooted association between authority/power and “truth”, and language is a powerful instrument for establishing, maintaining or combating inequalities in power. Afrikaans created an Afrikaner *communitas*, was embedded in the dominant cultural norms of the day and was supported by the ruling class. It is self-evident why Afrikaner ethnic humour has become a powerful tool for creating and influencing social categories, ideological constructions and preconceived stereotypes, as well as for mobilising identity and patriotism.

25 This is my home turf!

The present analysis has shown that Afrikaner ethnic humour has colonial undertones and is charged with unnecessarily hurtful and degrading elements reminiscent of the apartheid era. Furthermore, it has hardly any gentle qualities, runs down the “other” and is not used by the Afrikaner for defining himself positively or for “marketing” himself in the eyes of the “other”. In considering the damage that has been done to the Afrikaner’s image in the outside world through his use of ethnic humour, one realises that exercising this humour has not been worth its “pleasure”.

Given the contemporary rearrangement of political, social and cultural powers in the country, the Afrikaner forms a minority group with cultural values and views that are no longer necessarily important or dominant. The nation no longer has sole constitutional power and the sustained negative use of ethnic humour will not help it to achieve any of the following objectives:

- Processing the painful effects of its (practical) exclusion from dominant discourse and from the power structures which regulate such discourse while, on the one hand, searching for new meanings within this discourse and, on the other, challenging these meanings.
- Finding within the complex poly-ethnic South African society an identity for the self within its own minority group and, at the same time, an overall identity within the heterogeneity of South African society.
- Addressing its concern about issues such as an identity of its own, assimilation, discrimination and degrading stereotypes.
- Developing a context of experience within which it can settle ethnic issues peacefully, and with which outsiders’ perceptions and stereotypes of the Afrikaner can be confronted and challenged.

With reference to Mexican Americans and American Indians, respectively, writers such as Besnier (1990: 426) and Pratt (1998: 77) confirm that ethnic and cultural identities are communicated and advanced through the positive use of humour. A similar view is taken here with respect to the Afrikaner’s use of ethnic humour, emphasising certain aspects. First, those making categorisations and contrasts by means of ethnic humour should refrain from doing so in a nega-

Figure 12: Backwardness



*Die Transvaler* 28 August 1990<sup>26</sup>

tive way. Because humour is generally acceptable (it is not dramatic, and it is natural and spontaneous) and because it has many possible applications (in literature, advertisements, narratives and the media), sharing a laugh is valuable as it grants the Afrikaner an opportunity to carve out a positive and empowering identity for himself within the South African discourse. Secondly, insofar as current power structures deprive the Afrikaner of the opportunity to communicate and facilitate his identity,<sup>27</sup> humour can and should be used as a literature of protest or a “minority literature” for expressing and illustrating symbolic protest and opposition against repressive institutions, groups and symbols.

26 Probably one of the African airlines

27 Cf Bekker 1993: 24-8; De Beer 1998: 38, and Slabbert 1999: 61-2 on political correctness in the “new” South Africa.

## Bibliography

- APTE M L  
1985. *Humor and laughter. An anthropological approach*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- BARTH F  
1969. *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of cultural difference*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- BEKKER S  
1993. *Ethnicity in focus. The South African case*. Pietermaritzburg: Indicator.
- BESNIER N  
1990. Language and affect. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 419-51.
- BOURDIEU P  
1977. *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BOXER D & F CORTÉS-CONDE  
1997. From bonding to biting: conversational joking and identity display. *Journal of Pragmatics* 27: 275-94.
- BUTOVSKAYA M L & A G KOZINTSCV  
1996. A neglected form of quasi-aggression in apes: possible relevance for the origins of humor. *Current Anthropology* 37(4): 716-7.
- CHAPMAN A J  
1976. Social aspects of humorous laughter. Chapman & Foot (eds) 1976: 155-86.
- CHAPMAN A J & H C FOOT (eds)  
1976. *Humour and laughter: theory, research and applications*. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- CLOETE T T (red)  
1992. *Literêre terme en teorieë*. Pretoria: HAUM.
- COERTZE P J  
1983. *Die Afrikanervolk en die Kleurlinge*. Pretoria: HAUM.
- COERTZE P J & R D COERTZE  
1996. *Verklarende vakwoordeboek vir Antropologie en Argeologie*. Pretoria: Coertze & Coertze.
- COLLIER M J  
1998. Researching cultural identity. Reconciling interpretive and postcolonial perspectives. Tanno & González (eds) 1998: 122-47.
- DE BEER F C  
1998. Ethnicity in nation-states with reference to South Africa. *South African Journal of Ethnology* 21(1): 32-40.
- DE BRUIN W  
1989. Die geleentheid maak die dief. *De Kat* 4(8): 60-2.
- DEGENAAR J J  
1987. Afrikaner nasionalisme. Esterhuysen *et al* (eds) 1987: 231-60.
- DE WET C  
2002. Racial violence in South African schools: a media analysis. *Acta Academica* 34(3): 129-53.

DOMINGUEZ V R

1994. A taste for "the Other". Intellectual complicity in racializing practices. *Current Anthropology* 35(4): 333-48.

DU TOIT K

1996. Humour and play in counselling and therapy. *Acta Academica* 28(1): 48-61.

DU TOIT A & H GILIOMEE

1983. *Afrikaner political thought: analysis & documents*. Cape Town: David Philip.

ERIKSEN T H

1991. The cultural contexts of ethnic differences. *Man* 26(1): 127-44.

ESTERHUYSE W P, P V D P DU TOIT & A A VAN NIEKERK (reds)

1987. *Moderne politieke ideologieë*. Johannesburg: Southern Boekuitgewers.

FOUCAULT M

1979. *Discipline and punish: the birth of prison*. New York: Pantheon.

GILIOMEE H & H ADAM

1981. *Afrikanermag: opkoms en toekoms*. Stellenbosch: Universiteitsuitgewers en -boekhandelaars.

JONES J M & H V LIVERPOOL

1976. Calypso humour in Trinidad. Chapman & Foot (eds) 1976: 259-86.

KEHILY M J & A NAYAK

1997. 'Lads and laughter': humor and the production of heterosexual hierarchies. *Gender & Education* 9(1): 69-88.

KOK B

1947. Die sendingskrag van Afrikaners. Van den Heever & De V Pienaar (reds) 1947: 139-63.

KOTTAK C P

2000. *Anthropology: the exploration of human diversity*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

LEACOCK S

1937. *Humor and humanity*. London: Thornton Butterworth.

LEVEEN L

1996. Only when I laugh: textual dynamics of ethnic humor. *Melus* 21(4): 29-55.

MACHOVEC F J

1988. *Humor: theory, history, applications*. Springfield: Charles C Thomas.

MALHERBE F E J

1932. *Humor in die algemeen en sy uiting in die Afrikaanse letterkunde*. Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger.

MARTIN D-C

1995. The choices of identity. *Social Identities* 1(1): 5-20.

NANDA S & R L WARMS

2002. *Cultural anthropology*. Belmont: Wadsworth.



- NADER L  
 1997. Controlling processes: tracing the dynamic components of power. *Current Anthropology* 38(5): 711-37.
- NELSON D M  
 1994. Gendering the ethnic-national question. Rigoberta Menchú jokes and the out-skirts of fashioning identity. *Anthropology Today* 10(6): 3-7.
- PEOPLES J & G BAILEY  
 2000. *Humanity. An introduction to cultural anthropology*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- PFEFFER G & D K BEHERA  
 1997. *Contemporary society. Tribal studies*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
- PRATT S B  
 1998. Ritualized uses of humor as a form of identification among American Indians. Tanno & González (eds) 1998: 56-79.
- PRETORIUS R  
 1992. Humor. Cloete (red) 1992: 170-1.
- RADCLIFFE-BROWN A R  
 1940. On joking relationships. *Africa* 13(3): 195-210.
- RAUTENBACH F  
 1968. *Fanus se grapboek*. Pretoria: J P van der Walt & Seun.  
 1969. *My voet in 'n visblik*. Pretoria: J P van der Walt & Seun.
- RHOODIE N J  
 1969. *Apartheid and racial partnership in Southern Africa*. Pretoria: Academica.
- ROOS H  
 1998. Perspektief op die Afrikaanse prosa van die twintigste eeu. Van Coller (red) 1998: 21-117.
- SCHAEFFER N  
 1981. *The art of laughter*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- SCHOONRAAD M & E SCHOONRAAD  
 1989. *Companion to South African cartoonists*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker
- SEYMOUR-SMITH C  
 1986. *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- SLABBERT F VAN ZYL  
 1999. *Afrikaner Afrikaan - anekdotes en analise*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg.
- SOUDIEN C  
 1995. Violence and the discourse of apartheid in education. *Acta Academica* 27(1): 35-58.
- STRAUSS D F M  
 1999. Volk en staat op die kruispad van differensiasie en ontsluiting. *Acta Varia*, C R Swart-geudenklesing 32. Bloemfontein: Universiteit van die Vrystaat.

SWART S M J

1987. Die Afrikaanse vertelgrappie: Linguistiese aspekte van die grappesprek. Ongepubl MA-verhandeling. Bloemfontein: Universiteit van die Vrystaat.

TANNO D V & A GONZALEZ (eds)

1998. *Communication and identity across cultures*. London: SAGE.

TARIFA F

1997. The language paradigm in contemporary social theory: Marx, Habermas, and Bourdieu: a comparative perspective. *Journal of Social Sciences* 1(4): 245-53.

TATZ C M

1962. *Shadow and substance in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal.

VAN COLLER H P (red)

1998. *Perspektief en profiel. 'n Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

VAN DEN HEEVER C M & P DE V

PIENAAR

1947. *Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers.

VAN DER MERWE C N

1994. *Breaking barriers: stereotypes and the changing of values in Afrikaans writing 1875-1990*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

WASSERMANN I

1999. Humor: 'n onderontginde antropologiese navorsingsterrein. *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Etnologie* 22(4): 182-92.

WILSON C P

1979. *Jokes: form, content, use and function*. London: Academic Press.

WOLF E R

1994. Perilous ideas: race, culture, people. *Current Anthropology* 35(1): 1-12.

WOODS P

1990. *The happiest days? How pupils cope with school*. Lewes: Falmer Press.