Afrikaner, nevertheless: Stigma, shame & the sociology of cultural trauma

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Acknowledgments

Writing this book, my wife taught me that your most important argument should be put at the top. So here it is: Thank you, my wonderful editor extraordinaire, my partner-for-life Nathalie Le Du, for sitting this one out for me. What a gift from you to me. It is an intimate gesture to dedicate a book to someone. Initially, I thought Nathalie would be happier that I dedicate my non-academic-life to her. But then I realized that the dedication in Dutch will contain the only sentence in this book that she did not improve with her wonderful mind and sharp pencil. I hope this sentence is perfect, just for you.

Finishing a PhD does not prove that you qualify as an independent researcher; it only proves that enough people lent a hand so that you could make it to the end. I experienced this support firsthand as many assisted, encouraged, and inspired me along the way. I hope the quality of this study stands as a testimony to all those involved. Only my name appears on the cover, but that is merely to say that someone should be held accountable, especially in academia.

This study would not have been possible if Isa Baud and Johan Post did not hire me at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Amsterdam. I am grateful that they gave me the opportunity to work at such a distinguished university for almost five years. The initial research project they envisioned never matured—but that is just another way of saying that they were always flexible with the development of my research, and as one of the last independently-funded PhD students, they fortunately could be.

In the first years of my PhD, I benefitted tremendously from the company of talented fellow-PhDs at the University of Amsterdam and the CERES Research School, especially: Inge van der Welle, Hebe Verrest, Perry Hoetjes, Robert Röling, Ellen Lammers, and Anna Laven. I have great memories of that rowdy but stimulating office we shared. I also want to shout out my fellow band members, Rogier van der Groep and Nadav Haran, for
the musical entertainment in 2007 (if only I had such a band at my PhD party). I benefited greatly by discussing my initial ideas with a reading group that emerged out of CERES that included Inge van der Welle, Tijo Son, and Jilles van Gastel, and, away in the bosveld of South Africa with Yves van Leynsele. I happily shared my last years in Amsterdam with my German colleague Sabine Meier, who helped develop my thinking on the sociology of emotions.

Dutch universities have a great modern tradition: they not only offer their PhDs a salary but they also encourage PhDs to teach. While at the University of Amsterdam, I was fortunate enough to teach and work with some talented students in the master program in development studies, to travel with them to Sarajevo and present at a conference, and to meet them “in the field” to discuss their own projects. My role as a teacher was enriched by Anika May, Saskia Naafs, Sarah Osman, Nadine Hendriks, Anika Altaf, Suzan van der Wilt, Sandra Duifhuizen, and Laura Eggens.

“Daily Supervisor” is simply a more concise way of saying academic coach, trainer, and champion. Mario Novelli is a great inspiration to me for his academic activism, his breadth of knowledge, and his ability to coherently and critically teach complicated ideas. Admittedly, he was a better teacher than I was a student, and he provided lessons that continue to impact me and will do so for many years to come.

There are no breakthroughs in sociological research, but if I can point to a pivotal moment, it is when Jan Willem Duyvendak had the audacity to accept the task of promotor. His reliable, prompt, and insightful feedback fueled me and my work. I want to thank him for his patience in seeing this project through to completion. One can learn so much from him, and yet he never comes across as if he is teaching. He brought out the best in me, and I will be forever grateful.

South Africa holds a number of remarkable and passionate scholars. During my first visit there, I was fortunate to speak to “Afrikaner specialists” Herman Wasserman, Crain Soudie, the late Gerrit Brand, Herman Giliomee, and Marlene van Niekerk. I also had the pleasure of working with Thomas Blaser, Kees van der Waal, and Christi Van Der Westhuizen on a conference on Afrikaners at Stellenbosch University, which resulted in a special issue of African Studies.

At the beginning of my PhD, Ellen Lammers and I interviewed American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. As this book can attest, Martha Nussbaum’s work remains an inspiration. At the end of my PhD, Tom Devriendt and I had the privilege of interviewing Jonathan Jansen, and I am grateful Professor Jansen was willing to sit on my committee and comment on my work.

In 2009, I studied at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York with Professor James M. Jasper thanks to a Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds scholarship. Since then, Jim has not only influenced my thinking about
sociology, but also offered critical and encouraging comments on my work. He has also been a knowledgeable guide in the American academic world, and I can’t thank him enough.

The American psychologist William James said, “Wherever you are, it is your friends that make your world.” There are a few friends that made this PhD possible. Noam Schimmel first suggested the challenge of studying Afrikaners in South Africa. Although this book turned out to be different than he or I could have imagined, I am still thankful for his suggestion. In contrast, during the final year of my PhD, Danelle van Zyl-Hermann tracked me down and nudged me to share my work with her. I am glad I did because she took the time and effort to provide quite helpful comments. In 2005 I had my first meeting with Tom Devriendt who drew a map of Cape Town on a napkin to explain its urban geography. It was Tom’s first generous effort to share his insights into South Africa, and there were many more to come. I am grateful we met and for the adventures we shared thereafter. Sjoerd Wiemer Sjoerdsma has been a great source of friendship and support. As our lives took place in different locales, he always created wonderful intersections where our friendship could continue to grow. Gozewijn Bergenhenegouwen has been a constant and valuable source of engaging discussion, reflection, and measured advice. We hashed out the original structure of this book on the back of some bierviltjes in a restaurant in Utrecht. It is thanks to Gozewijn that this book finally took shape. Finally, Charl Oberholzer of Afriforum Jeug gave permission to use the photo of their protest against affirmative action in higher education, and Lukas van de Vrande used his artistic eye and designer skills to turn the picture into a classy cover.

A penchant for academic questioning is nurtured long before you end up at a university, and I am blessed with a whole family of academics and book lovers. Who knew when my sisters tied me down at the age of six to teach me how to read that it would come to this? My sisters Wendelmoet and Beatrijs have supported this project to the very end with words of encouragements (and even some final edits). My parents like to profess that no matter what you teach your children, what comes of it is always a surprise. I like to believe that this book is proof of their theory. You can receive a lifetime of fatherly training in critical thinking and motherly advice about fulfilling your duties, and then go out into the world and use those skills in an entirely new way: on another continent, in an unknown country, and on a topic they never confronted. I hope that Afrikaner, Nevertheless pays tribute to my mother’s profound interest in people’s personal trajectories and my father’s insistence that there is always a moral lesson to be learned.