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

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PART 2: Afrikaner Men at Work
5. Responding to Racial Redress

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Part 2, I compare how upper- and lower-middle-class Afrikaner men respond to the emergence of racial redress programs and how this relates to questions of class, masculinity, and ethnic identity. I do this on two levels. The first level is that of organizational discourses. I compare the cultural discourses of the former Afrikaans chamber of commerce, Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, with those of Solidarity, the former Mine Workers’ Union (MWU). The second level I analyze is that of individuals. I compare the culture discourses and emotional lives of entrepreneurs against those of Afrikaner men employed at former state companies Eskom and Telkom. In this theoretical introduction, I shortly summarize the general trends in the transition of the political economy of South Africa after apartheid and the effects on the economic place of whites after the transition.

I show that most political economists depict 1994 as an elite transition from apartheid to neoliberalism, during which Afrikaners continued their economic dominance. But these scholars hardly consider changes at the level of the experience of work. The literature on the white community’s response to racial redress is also silent on this question, in part because it is survey based. Experiences of real people are not even central among scholars interested in questions of race and identity in relationship to the political economy, as they prefer to analyze policy discourses. I argue that the neoliberal economy, together with racial redress programs, have created a radically different context at work for racial integration and identity construction for upper- and lower-middle-class Afrikaner men. Building on the sociological literature that relates work and identity more closely, I present a nuanced approach to the influence of work on issues of class, race, and gender, and how the experience of work shapes how people see and experience the world and themselves.
5.2 THE NEOLIBERAL TRANSITION AND RACIAL REDRESS

More than a decade after the transition to democracy, there is a consensus in the political economy literature that during the transition, the ANC government was persuaded to give up its communist and socialist roots and adopt neoliberal economic policies that largely benefitted the affluent white minority. Indeed, the brokered economic agreements between the ANC and the National Party firmly ingrained a set of capitalist principles like private property rights in the constitution. Furthermore, the ANC adopted a pro-growth strategy named GEAR (Growth, Employment, and Redistribution), which are a limited set of social policies, including stable interest rates, tight control of government expenses, an independent national reserve bank, and the privatization of various public companies. Consequently, the transition to democracy is dubbed an “elite transition,” which denotes that white business and political elites struck a class compromise with the ANC (Bond, 2000, 2003; Gumede, 2007; MacDonald, 2006; Marais, 1999, 2011).¹

Proponents of this elite transition theory emphasize that the economic policies of the ANC have generally served whites and a small black elite well, while doing very little for the poor black masses. This conclusion is certainly true for whites on an aggregate level; as a racial group, they profited from strong growth in income and held low unemployment when compared with the other racial groups (Bhorat, 2004; Leibbrandt, 2010).² However, income disparity has risen within every racial group and declined between racial groups since 1975 (although inequality between groups is still very high) (Bhorat, 2004; Leibbrandt, 2010).³ Indeed, rising inequality within the white racial group and the overall rise of unemployment should qualify statements that all whites have done well since the transition.⁴ However, the tale of the elite transition is only half the story of the political economy’s transformation; the other half deals with racial redress.

BLACK ECONOMIC EMPowerMENT AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

From the inception of the ANC, black economic empowerment was a cornerstone of their strategy to deracialize the economy. However, during the transition, the ANC’s central challenge was to balance the demands of the international financial markets and those of democracy (MacDonald, 2006). When the ANC took over from the Government of National Unity in 1996, the new government installed more sweeping forms of racial reparation. Initially, racial redress policies relied on an approach of persuasion and targeted large state-owned companies and companies that relied on the state for orders, like mining companies. The national telephone company, Telkom, for instance, introduced racial redress policies in 1994. Yet, the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Act (No. 53 of 2003) and the BEE Codes of Good Practice (also known as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, B-BBEE) in 2007 transformed the program into an
inclusive and assertive effort. It now envelops a broad section of the economy, including medium and many smaller enterprises. Enterprises are rated based on various scorecards to see how their ownership, management, and employees represent the South African racial demographic. The law stipulates certain percentages to be granted government projects.

Racial redress is also pursued at the level of the individual through affirmative action policies. Affirmative action originated in the United States after the civil rights movement and aimed to compensate disadvantaged minorities. In South Africa, however, it is currently used to address a disadvantaged majority (Kennedy-Dubourdieu, 2006; Sowell, 2004). The program was meant to serve multiple purposes, including overcoming resistance to racial integration by a civil service dominated by whites, increasing response to the needs of the black community, and a more participatory form of public service delivery, also in which the black community had a say (Ndletyana, 2008). Affirmative action officially came into law under the auspices of the Employment Equity Act (EEA) (No. 55 of 1998) and is now pursued more rigorously through yearly reports and targets, which are based on demographic representation.

The response of the white community has been much more welcoming to BEE than to affirmative action programs. Indeed, there is little evidence that the white business community ever openly protested BEE. Little resistance was also found among large white-owned corporations to broaden the recruitment pool by including qualified blacks and women (Adam, 1997). Some large BEE deals have been a great source of scorn in the (white-dominated) media, but overall BEE has been met with cooperation. Whether the inclusion of medium and small business has changed this cooperative spirit remains to be seen. By contrast, survey research indicates that a large majority of whites are unwilling to support either general redistribution measures or further racial redress, and their opposition had been consistent over time (IJR, 2003a, 2005, 2011; Roberts, 2006). An HSRC survey found that 78 percent of white Afrikaners and 77 percent of other white people disagree with the statement “People from previously disadvantaged groups should be given preference by employers when they hire and promote workers” (1999 HSRC survey, quoted in Rule, 2000). The picture of broad opposition to affirmative action is further underlined by the critiques of a variety of former (white) politicians.

5.3 RACE, CLASS, AND MASCULINITY AT WORK

In the United States, where affirmative action became law in the early 1960s, there has been a long debate about white resistance to affirmative action and its relationship to racism. However, survey research has been inconclusive on the question whether resistance was rooted in racism, traditional values of egalitarianism or in something else (Bobo, 1998; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo,
RESPONDING TO RACIAL REDRESS

Historic sociological research on whites’ opposition to the civil rights movement and affirmative action suggests that class plays a large role in shaping resistance, as the (perceived) burden of integration and affirmative action is felt earlier and stronger by the white lower middle class (Bartley, 1999; Kruse, 2005; Lassiter, 2007; Sokol, 2007). The studies show the emergence of white working-class grassroots resistance movements that use a new language of protest. The rhetoric is no longer rooted in racism but is against “government intervention” and “race-based politics,” and instead encourages self-reliance and color-blindness.

In South Africa, the origin, motivation, and strategy of white resistance to racial redress has not been subject to research. Surveys on resistance to racial redress have left the relationship between race, class, and redress largely unexamined (Erasmus, 2008). Evidence suggests, both anecdotal and academic, that white opposition is no longer predominantly shaped by racism. Today, whites in the media speak of the “erosion of rights” of whites, coloured and Indian citizens, and the fear of “white flight” and an “exodus of skills” from the country (Habib, 2008a). In the media, debates on affirmative action are dominated by public intellectuals rather than researchers. Influential anti-apartheid activist Neville Alexander fears that the discourse of affirmative action legislation in South Africa perpetuates and reinscribes racial identities through the social practices and intergroup dynamics these policies give rise to (N. Alexander, 2007; Iheduru, 2004). He is concerned that their racial identities will be strengthened rather than weakened because of affirmative action, as it will give rise to opposition and resistance. By contrast, South African Constitutional Judge Albi Sachs argues that it is likely that some members of the “advantaged group” (read: the white community) may be called upon to bear a larger proportion of the burden of transformation than others (Mangcu et al., 2007). Both arguments likely have some truth to them but ask for empirical research.

The work of scholars such as MacDonald and Davies provide an interesting starting point for the analysis of race and class on Afrikaner identity formation. They show how racial redress has a diverging impact on the Afrikaner upper- and lower-middle class (R. Davies, 2009; MacDonald, 2006). Michael MacDonald, in his nuanced analysis of the political economy of identity politics, shows how BEE offered the white business community a chance to detach wealth from its association with whiteness. BEE legitimatized South Africa’s political economy and acquitted whites of the responsibility for ongoing economic inequality (MacDonald, 2006). Even if only a small, elite group of black Africans are becoming rich, economic inequality would not be perceived anymore as a racial problem. Similarly, Rebecca Davies Gramscian’s analysis of “contemporary manifestations of Afrikaner identity” provides a sharp analysis of how Afrikaner business and cultural elites are flourishing after apartheid. She also gives interesting
snapshots of Afrikaner identity politics among the lower middle class within the Solidarity labor union and the Afrikaner music scene, and through the “festivalization of Afrikanerdom” (the popularity of Afrikaner cultural festivals largely sponsored by former Afrikaner companies).

The problem with studies like MacDonald and Davis is that what is absent is an analysis of the everyday politics of race and class within institutions. Nevertheless, it is only at this level where we can study how culture and identity interact, and how racial interactions differ among Afrikaner upper and lower middle class. Specifically, I am interested how affirmative action might exacerbate existing class differences in retaining dignity and respect at work. Dignity and respect are important payoffs, particularly for men, to obtain from paid work. This is not just an identity issue, but also an emotional issue. In modern, class-based societies like South Africa, the rise of meritocratic ideologies (the idea that one’s structural position in life should be based on one’s talents) means that dignity and respect are no longer a birthright. Dignity has to be “earned” through work. A meritocratic ideology puts particular pressures on the lower-middle and working-class people, pressures that economic successful, upper-class (white) people will hardly feel (Cobb, 1977; Luckmann, 1967). For the lower middle class, paid employment is often a constant source of insecurity, as contracts are flexible and redundancy common. Affirmative action, which might particularly influence the job opportunities and career trajectories of lower middle class man, exacerbates insecurity.

For lower-middle-class men, identity work mediates the insecurity about worth and dignity (Burchell, 1999; Willmott, 1990). As individuals, they feel compelled to validate their identity in comparison with others. As a consequence, the construction of a dignified self creates emotional tensions and becomes a preoccupation. Lamont shows how the upper- and lower-middle classes have different access to cultural repertoires and therefore use different cultural boundaries (Lamont, 2001). For instance, she cites how groups in a position of dependency (lacking access to power and money), like the lower middle class, often value morality in order to mark boundaries around them. Lamont’s work on cultural boundaries among different classes of men was critiqued because there was no “serious attempt at understanding how the term “men” … in the lives of her subjects functions to shape the very identities and social processes she sets out to study” (Raissiguier & Williams, 2002).

Indeed, gender and particularly masculinity should be factored into an analysis of men and working life. The search for power and identity in the workplace frequently takes highly masculine forms (Kerfoot & Knights, 1998). Men in particular are preoccupied with maintaining a masculine identity through boundary work: the conceptual distinctions they make to categorize people, objects, practices, and even spaces (Craib, 1988; Hodgson, 2003).
Emotions play a large role in the maintenance of masculine identities. Identity construction is an ongoing project, as people negotiate their social worlds, characterized by ambiguity, tension, and contradiction. Self-absorption with securing defined and coherent gender identities may reinforce, rather than resolve, insecurity. For instance, Barrett’s study on male U.S. Navy officers identified various masculine strategies, including emphasis of autonomy, risk-taking, perseverance, endurance, and technical expertise (Barrett, 1996). In general, dominant masculine identities value physical toughness, endurance, aggressiveness, a rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic, and stoicism. In men’s views, women often function as differentiated others (to project and display a gendered identity), while men focus on outperforming, discounting and negating others. In sum, studies of class, race, and gender show the possible richness of detailed research of the interaction between work and identity.

5.4 A COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK AND QUESTIONS

In the next two chapters, I focus on two groups of white Afrikaans men: upper-class entrepreneurs and those of the lower-middle-class. I compare how the experience of work and class shapes their Afrikaans identities, understanding of race, and broader outlook on the trajectory of change in South Africa. I compare these groups of Afrikaner men in two ways—at the organizational level and the individual level.

I have chosen the Afrikaner business organization Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut (AHI) and the labor union Solidarity as representative organizations for the upper and lower middle class. Through these organizations, I analyze how the institutional field of work has transformed and reshaped Afrikaner cultural discourses after 1994. The AHI was and still is the main organization of Afrikaner business. As one of the few Afrikaner organizations, the AHI made a submission to the TRC. It was not the only business organization to do so, but its contribution is often portrayed very positively.13 For instance, Nattrass writes that “the only business input which reflected critically on business support for the ideology of apartheid was the frank submission from the Afrikaner Handelsinstituut (AHI) the main organization of Afrikaner business” (Nattrass, 1999, p. 385). By contrast, the trade union Solidarity supported apartheid until after the democratic transition of 1994. Nevertheless, the organization transitioned and continues its work in post-apartheid South Africa (Visser, 2006). In the media, it prominently represents Afrikaners—in particular, lower-middle-class Afrikaners.

Although the organizations have different administrative structures and functions, comparing their different outlook and discourses after 1994 is illuminating. After 1994, many exclusive Afrikaner organizations faced a complicated dilemma: how to remain of importance in the new democratic
South Africa, and how to legitimize their continuation as an Afrikaner civil organization. This was a dilemma both for cultural, religious, economic, and political organizations and, as it turned out, a dilemma that few successfully solved. The majority of Afrikaner organizations that drove the nationalist project have not survived 15 years of democracy, and even less still have a significant membership. The AHI managed to remain a prominent Afrikaner business organization. The Mine Workers’ Union (MWU), currently called Solidarity, is one of the few organizations that can claim a similar success. The AHI is composed of mostly large, formerly Afrikaans corporate employers and individual entrepreneurs with a white Afrikaans background. Solidarity is a mostly white, Afrikaner labor union with roots in the mining industry. The two organizations were selected because each represents a different end of the economic spectrum; each actively engages with an Afrikaner identity; and each has been able to, at least formally, successfully adapt to democratic post-apartheid South Africa. The aim of the comparison is to see how the two organizations reposition Afrikaners in South Africa after apartheid and how they rearticulate the goals and work of the organization.

However, the relationship between work and identity is most illuminated at the level of the individual. In the second half of each chapter, I compare the different experiences and discourses of lower-middle-class Afrikaners with that of individual entrepreneurs. The first group of men consists of Solidarity members that are employed by the formerly state-owned parastatals. Historically, a great majority of lower-middle-class Afrikaners were employed by these companies, and in 1998, the 18 parastatals still employed over 100,000 people, including thousands of Afrikaners (H. Giliomee, 2008) (CEE), 1999). Southall argued that it would be particularly interesting to look at the effects of affirmative action in the former parastatals, because of economic restructuring and the early implementation of affirmative action there (Southall, 2005). Indeed, the electricity and telecommunication companies, Eskom and Telkom, both lost employees because of restructuring, and lost white employees because of affirmative action (Bhorat, 2004). The second group of men consists of independent entrepreneurs who have generally done very well financially after 1994. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are a sector of the economy that is dominated by white ownership, and it is a sector that has experienced strong growth. In 1995, 44 percent were employed by SMEs in the private sector and in 2002, the numbers had grown to 68 percent (Sanchez, 2008). Today, however, they are also challenged by BEE as SMEs are since forced to also participate in BEE programs, a shift in policy that has large consequences for such small firms.

The aim of both comparisons—between the two organizations and the group of men—is to expose how the broader changes in the economy and at
work affect the identity discourses of upper- and lower-middle-class Afrikaner men; in particular, in relation to white opposition to BEE and affirmative action. In the groups of individuals, I study their talk, experiences, and feelings. I then analyze the discourses they use to construct their identity, how they create boundaries between themselves and other races, and how they relate to their Afrikaner identity, the apartheid past, and their future in South Africa. The three leading questions of these chapters are: 1. How does work as an institution and racial redress, shape the changing discourses of Afrikaner men on identity, race, and ethnicity? 2. Do organizational discourses influence or shape individual discourses, and how do they do so? And 3. How do race, class and gender influence the process of identity formation in specific organizations and working environments, and what is the role of emotions therein?
6. Pride in Transition

6.1 THE HISTORY OF THE AHI

The Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut (AHI) was originally erected in 1939 for the economic empowerment of Afrikaners. During apartheid, economic organizations like the AHI had a paradoxical position in the Afrikaner nationalist project of the 20th century. On the one hand, they always closely worked with the National Party and profited substantially from the politics of apartheid. But on the other hand, from the 1970s onwards, they were often more liberal than cultural and religious organizations, pushing for political reforms as economic circumstances seemed to demand, until at the very end of apartheid, when they pushed for negotiations. Finally, they also played an important, albeit controversial, role in facilitating the transition to democracy.

ORIGINS OF THE AHI

From its inception in 1939, the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut has been closely aligned with the nationalist project of the Afrikaners, in particular with the component of the economic empowerment efforts by nationalists, under the slogan “n Volk help homself” (A people rescues itself). In 1938, after the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek, the mythical history of the migration of the Afrikaners to the north of South Africa, there was a spur for the raising of capital in the Afrikaner community. For a long time, the white English dominated the South African economy, particularly mining and other large industries, with white Afrikaners only being dominant in farming and agriculture. In the late 1930s, with the South African economy experiencing new growth after the depression, a coalition emerged of the nationalist Broederbond and Sanlam, the big insurance company from Cape Town. The cooperation resulted in the Eerste Ekonomiese Volkskongres, or the first Economic Congress of the People, in 1939. The Volkskongres created three
institutions: a finance house, an organization to assist in a “rescue action” for the Afrikaner poor, and an Afrikaner chamber of commerce, the AHI. The goal of the conference at which AHI was born was not only to attract Afrikaner savings for investment in promising enterprises, but also to “save” the Afrikaner poor by employing them. The Afrikaners were to become “autonomous economically” by introducing a form of volkskapitalisme, or capitalism of the people. In the wake of the conference, the newly erected AHI soon established Afrikaner business chambers across the country.

In the war economy from 1940 onwards, many Afrikaner businessmen further gravitated toward the National Party. As Afrikaans historian Herman Giliomee notes: “The small-scale Afrikaner traders and manufacturers were up against established, large scale English companies that received governmental preference in the system of war rationing. Their business problems became ethnic grievances.” Together with Afrikaner farmers, the AHI resisted attempts by government and large-scale enterprises to drive down agricultural prices. Instead, the AHI told farmers to invest their money in the “right places.” At its origins, the AHI was thus set up for the empowerment of Afrikaners. Afrikaner business, including the AHI, from the beginning also supported the developing apartheid program and in particular the demand that African urban labor be kept without labor rights.

In 1948, the National Party came to power and an age of economic ascendance arrived for Afrikaners, not only because of a growing Afrikaner private sector but also through rapidly expanding state-owned companies. From 1948 to 1976, the share of public corporations, which mainly employed white Afrikaners, nearly doubled in the South African economy. It was a time when affirmative action by the state was solidly white and Afrikaans. It was also a time when the private sector had direct access to the government. Organizations like AHI relied on the National Party to execute what was best for (Afrikaans) business and most cabinet ministers, as one member at the time put it, were “one call away.”

The End of Apartheid and the Transition to Democracy

Business interests were not always in accordance with those of the National Party, and at times business organizations pushed for political reforms to accommodate economic tensions. The first time this came to the forefront was after the police massacre in Sharpeville in 1968, when business proposed less restrictions on the travel of non-white people. By the end of the 1970s, the private sector became increasingly worried by the poor management of the state and pressured the government for reform. Although President Botha at the time managed to appease the Afrikaner business community, economic troubles would only increase during the 1980s: central government expenditure, inflation, and unemployment kept rising through the early 1980s.

By 1986, as Giliomee notes, most business leaders felt the cost of apartheid had become too high, and hence they pushed to open the door to
negotiations. Although not a political organization, the AHI became involved with political talks early on. To many business leaders, it was evident that if South Africa were to move beyond apartheid, the ANC would be a dominant political force. In 1987, the AHI send a mission of 25 members to start talks with the ANC. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the leadership of AHI also became involved in the CODESA negotiations that ultimately settled South Africa’s transition to democracy, and the setup of the new economic forum, which would later evolve into Nedlec, the economic advisory board to the government. Internally, however, the structures of AHI had hardly changed throughout apartheid. In 1994 it had the same structure as it had during its inception in the late 1930s. Only Afrikaans speaking white businessmen could be members, and on its board there were only members from Afrikaans businesses.

With the transition to democracy, the AHI faced a burning question: How to adapt to democracy? This dilemma was the main challenge facing the new executive head of the AHI, Jacob de Villiers, a popular former minister from the De Klerk government that was appointed by the executive council of the AHI in 1995. From the start, De Villiers thought that AHI needed to rethink its goals in the new South Africa. Could the organization become a legitimate partner for the new government, without losing its membership base: white Afrikaans speaking businessmen? The organization needed a new mission statement but also a new strategy, which together could symbolize that the organization was no longer exclusive to Afrikaners and wanted to work together with the new government.

Cooperation Versus Belonging

De Villiers proposed to adopt a new slogan, “Saam skep ons welvaart,” or “Together we create prosperity,” and change the goal of the organization into delivering “successful and high-quality services to our members and the country.” But most of all, AHI pursued cooperation because it faced a crisis in legitimacy; cooperation agreements would be the easiest way to restructure an organization without drastic changes, while they would quickly increase the legitimacy of the organization as a partner for the government. De Villiers brokered a collaborative agreement with one of the large black business organizations, Nefcock, to show the AHI had not just changed its slogan but also its attitude toward “black” business. At the same time, such changes could undermine AHI’s legitimacy and the goal to stay an independent organization. In the media at the time, government officials and various black organizations tried to pressure the AHI to merge with black organizations. De Villiers carefully steered away from a merger. He stressed that the AHI has “an historic duty to cooperate” and that he wanted to work together with black business organizations to offer them “our knowledge and to provide them access.
It is doubtful black business needed the AHI for access to the government or that these goals could not be better achieved through a merger. Rather, preventing a merger seemed an issue of self-preservation; the AHI board members were concerned about alienating its members. Many thought (and still think) that the organization would not survive such a move toward a racially integrated organization with blacks and white Afrikaners. The issue of a possible merger is a sensitive topic among AHI members and preferably circumvented. Former AHI president André Lambrecht says:

At AHI we have a great energy and a feeling of bonding and community. That is what makes people relate to each other. The goal is the language. There is something like community bonding; it is a pleasant type of people I find there.

Lambrecht says that it is simply nice to talk Afrikaans. Another former AHI president, Van Wijck, thinks that a merger would ultimately have not been accepted by the Afrikaner businessmen because they would have “no longer felt at home. It would be a monster in which they would not be heard; it would alienate them and create room for other organizations that would not be so liberal as the AHI.

The tension in the organization, on one hand signifying to the outside world the willingness to cooperate and on the other hand defending its existence as an autonomous cultural organization as to not alienate its members, results in a balancing act. One way in which this act is performed is through the promotion of a “discourse of cooperation.” It is remarkable how AHI members speak in similar ways about the goals of the organization and its method of operating; they say the AHI has its own “special strategy” in which it does not “criticize in newspapers” or “make a lot of noise” to “confront” the new government openly. The AHI does not work for the “pride of the organization” but instead to change “the system for the larger lot.” The organization likes to “cooperate” and “move ahead together.” This, they say, has made the AHI a “valued partner” of the ANC government. Maybe the real test case for the AHI to bridge the tension was the invitation to admit a statement to the TRC in 1997.

6.2 REFRAMING THE PAST AND THE FUTURE
The TRC was never set up to do economic analysis or particularly focus on economic crimes. The hearings of the business community, including AHI, were only a small part of the process. Of course, the crimes of the business community were of a very different character and category than the human rights violations that were at the core of the committee’s work. In general, the crimes were more subtle and indirect, but with serious consequences for the non-white population of South Africa. Nevertheless, the TRC did have “business hearings” and the AHI was part of it. In fact, the AHI was one of the few organizations that made a submission to the committee. While today
this is heralded as a courageous act of cooperation, it is the content of the document that is more revealing how the AHI reframed the organization in the new South Africa.

**The Submission to the TRC**

In the letter to the AHI, the TRC describes the goals of these hearings as “to examine the role of business and labor with specific reference to the circumstances and context in which human rights violations occurred.” They further write that the three broad themes of the hearings to be dealt with have a goal to reveal the causes and circumstances of the conflict, namely (1) the relationship between apartheid and the economy; (2) business, government and the trade unions; (3) the total onslaught, total strategy, and reform. The AHI in its submission deals with the following themes: the AHI as a business organization; the AHI’s historical development; omissions and commissions; and thoughts on reconciliation. Theo van Wijck led the team to prepare a submission, as outgoing president he had taken the initiative to write a statement and he was also an experienced lawyer. He says:

> We were not going to ask for amnesty; we were going to submit because we felt it is right to say certain things, we have to make a statement, and we want to play a constructive role in South Africa.

Van Wijck saw the TRC as an opportunity to play a more constructive role in the future. The document would not emerge without struggle. Objectors argued that the AHI should not get involved with the TRC as it represented only the ANC, although with a “different hat.” They argued that the AHI had done nothing wrong—most businesses had actually created work in difficult times; they had educated people and treated them well; and they had actually done good. Before the final draft was submitted, several members on the board of the AHI resigned out of protest. Together with Van Wijck, De Villiers saw the moral need and necessity to claim a new legitimacy: “I thought, this is necessary, what happened was wrong. We are going to work together in the new South Africa and play a constructive role.” The submission is a curious document for its evasive tone and halfhearted admission, but its argumentation reveals most of all the future-oriented goals of the documents. Although the TRC hearings were focused on the past, the AHI used their submission effectively to recast its role for the future.

The opening clause of the submission reads: “With this submission we intend to highlight some lessons that may be learnt from our experience in order to contribute to reconciliation and economic growth. … The AHI’s submission is therefore an effort to assist in the process of understanding and healing.” It further states: “The submission naturally does not deal with incidents involving gross human rights violations but focuses on the institutional part of our recent history.” It is not surprising that the AHI mimics the language of the TRC on understanding and healing, but what are
the lessons to be learned from their experience, as the AHI phrases the question? Indeed, the AHI uses the document to immediately present itself in a different light. Under the header “Vision, Mission and Objectives,” the AHI prominently states its (new) vision slogan: “Together we create prosperity”—as if to say it has changed already. In the section “Membership and Structure,” the organization defines itself as follows: the AHI is “a voluntary association that spans the entire business spectrum and cannot easily be classified in terms of language or cultural groups.” This is certainly a bold statement. Given that it was issued in 1997, none of its leadership had been anything other than Afrikaans. Almost all of its members were white and Afrikaans. Nevertheless, the AHI is daring enough to present itself as an inclusive organization that is open for everybody.

Rewriting History

Much of the document is taken up by a summary of the history of AHI. In this history, the Afrikaner is presented as a party that lost a war, as powerless and apolitical, as a group of people that needed to be empowered, as victims, say, rather than victors. The document starts with the assertion that “Afrikaners among others were impoverished by the Anglo-Boer War and the depression of the thirties...” and that in the early days of the organization, “economic issues consistently received precedence over political questions” and the focus was on “the economic upliftment of the impoverished Afrikaner.” The history of the AHI and Afrikaners is thus firmly established in the narrative of Afrikaner economic empowerment from the 1930s to the 1980s. With the advent of apartheid and separate development (the years 1960-1976) the narrative of victims is no longer sustainable and the history of the AHI becomes more problematic. Here, the AHI has to deal upfront with the endorsement of specific apartheid policies. In reference to the support of AHI for the policy of “separate development,” it reads:

At the time the AHI focused on economic issues from a market-oriented point of view and on promoting the economic interests of its members. However, the AHI also made pronouncements on the social policies of the time. The AHI specifically endorsed separate development. Without in any way detracting from the AHI’s willingness to accept responsibility for such pronouncements, it must be noted that support for separate development was part and parcel of the majority of the white community’s thinking at the time. The white Afrikaans churches, newspapers, cultural organizations, and the wider community broadly subscribed to the notion that the separate development of South African population groups was seen as the best guarantee for overall justice and peace in the country. The AHI was part of that collective thinking.10

The overall strategy of this type of history writing by now is clear: if possible, the AHI presents itself as the exception to the rule and therefore not guilty of apartheid. But when such a representational strategy seems implausible (for
instance when the AHI openly endorsed apartheid policies) it pursues an alternative strategy. They stress they were part of “collective thinking.” Moreover, the AHI suggests apartheid’s social policies had little to do with economic policy. It reads:

It should be noted that the main focus of AHI activities was not concerned with the promotion of a particular social policy; it was the promotion of the business/economic interests of its members. The AHI promoted the principles of free enterprise amongst its members. Because the AHI never endorsed any “social policy” (implied are the apartheid laws) but only “business/economic interests,” it would not be responsible for apartheid. In part, the reasoning of the AHI mirrors the focus of the TRC on severe transgressions of the regime, and not on the working of the economic system. But it is still remarkable how the AHI suggests that because it had only economic interest, it was not supporting an exploitive economic system.11

In 1984, the document states, the AHI experienced “a change of heart” and this led to the amendment of the constitution of the AHI. The amendment “effectively drew a line through the previous exclusivity of membership and members of other language and population groups subsequently joined the AHI.” In the same period, the AHI portrays itself as a “very active” agent of change in the political process and the CODESA I and II negotiations. It also helped set up the National Economic Forum (Nedlec). In summary, it says:

The AHI helped pave the way for and contributed to the preparations for the eventual transition. The political initiatives of 1990 were greatly facilitated by the AHI who helped to secure support for them countrywide among business people.

The AHI thus presents itself as a major force in facilitation of the transition. One senses, in the language, this conclusion is drawn with a certain pride, a pride that seems at odds with the overall purpose of the TRC submission. Since 1995, the document further states, the AHI is committed to and involved in “economic growth, which benefits all sectors of the population” and opposed to “emigration in body, mind and attitude.”

**Business Profits During Apartheid?**

How, then, did business benefit from apartheid, according to the AHI? The answer at first seems one of unapologetic denial: “We are aware of perceptions that business, in particular Afrikaans business, benefited from apartheid. In as much as individual businesses benefited from apartheid, the AHI’s structures were not used for this purpose and neither was it AHI policy to promote individual favouring.” Instead of admitting to any “organizational responsibility,” the AHI opts in the document for a general statement that “the policy of apartheid” has made South Africa much poorer
then “the country and its people” could have been. Any suggestion that business would have profited from apartheid seems to be rejected: “A poorer society simply means less business and fewer opportunities. Business did not benefit from this. In fact, business could have created significantly more wealth had apartheid not been in force, assuming a peaceful transition” and “the notion that apartheid benefited business in general is a fallacy.”

The above statement is extraordinary both in its boldness and in its efforts to shift guilt completely on the shoulders of the government. It is rewriting the history of the economy of apartheid.

What AHI does admit is that apartheid disadvantaged black business. But even this admission is strangely contrasted with the economic success of the Afrikaner community. A success that is contributed solely to the investment rate: “the mobilisation of the savings of the white Afrikaans community to float businesses from among their own ranks produced remarkable results in terms of economic growth and empowerment of the white Afrikaans-speaking community.” It is a rather odd move, to first argue that apartheid did not benefit business and then to boast about Afrikaner economic success. But to dislodge the economic achievement of the Afrikaners from the oppression of apartheid seems a broader goal of the AHI: how else can the organization distribute a document today about what the ANC can learn from the empowerment of the Afrikaner?

In the section “Omissions and Commissions,” the AHI admits the “major mistakes” of endorsing separate development, lodging no moral or economic objections against apartheid, and failing to produce a proper labor relations law. For these acts, the AHI writes, it accepts moral responsibility, admits that fellow South Africans were gravely wronged, and wishes to express sincere regret and apologies to those affected. Finally, in the two last sections, “lessons learnt” and “reparation,” the AHI argues that the organization has learnt the ability to be critical of itself and its history. It further suggests that socio-economic development of the total populace is vital and that “pride, self-reliance, and self-motivation are the keys to the future.” Nevertheless, the AHI is cautious about the endorsement of affirmative action and black economic empowerment. It reads:

Affirmative action and black economic empowerment play a prominent part in many current policy initiatives. The ultimate objective of these measures should be to help each person to unlock his/her full potential so as to be able to compete sustainably on merit in a very competitive world. Special efforts are warranted in respect of those who were disadvantaged. However, care should be taken to prevent such measures from evolving into a new form of harmful race discrimination.

Although carefully worded, the AHI seems to be saying that affirmative action can also be seen as race discrimination. The document concludes with a firm statement that South Africa “now competes in a global market”
and that “robust economic growth” is a necessity, which is only possible through being “internationally competitive.” Here, of course, the AHI makes a political statement against economic policies for redistribution or other economic policies that might harm business interest.

The TRC challenged the AHI to say it was sorry for its past and to show how it had changed its ways. However, the content of the document reads not so much as an apology for the past but more as a strategic document for the future. AHI positions itself as an inclusive organization, with a proud history of economic empowerment and transition credentials. In the end, the AHI was one of the few organizations that wrote a submission to the TRC.14 Simply, its submission and engagement with the TRC became a political statement because so many other organizations did not participate in the process, including the majority of churches and white Afrikaner labor unions. What was originally seen as a great challenge is today loudly praised by its members. They stress over and over again that the AHI worked with the TRC. It was as if to say we cooperated, we got the stamp of approval, we made it through. Next was the desire to change its public face.

6.3 A CHANGE OF FACE

In the last decade, roughly from 1998 until 2010, there has been a radical transition in the people that has led the AHI. Crucial to the initiation of this change of public face has been the former head of Business South Africa (BSA) Andre Lambrecht, a businessman with rich experience in the new negotiation structures leading up to the transition to democracy.15 Lambrecht foresaw that with the absence of any serious opposition, the commercial sector would become an important “conflict area.” In the 1980s, Lambrecht had been involved in negotiations from the business side in which “recognition agreements” were signed between the new black labor unions like Cosatu and large corporations like Barlo Rand. He had helped to set up the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSA). The goal of these new institutions had been to educate black and commercial leaders on both sides of the divide in transitional democratic processes. These structures evolved into the National Peace Accords, the Economic, Housing and Education Forums, and Nedlac.

A COLOURED PRESIDENT

Business organizations, according to Lambrecht, have played a crucial role in the democratic transition in South Africa. When asked in 1998 to join the AHI and become president, Lambrecht knew the AHI had been involved in CODESA negotiations in the early 1990s and in the Business Consultancy Movement. It was the continuation of this role that Lambrecht foresaw for the AHI. During his presidency, one goal of Lambrecht was to push for new business organizations consisting of both white and black businessmen; new organizations that would have less of a hint of being interest vehicles for
racial or ethnic groups. Another more important goal was to change the face of the organization. Lambrecht suggested Franklin Sonn to become president, a well-respected man, Afrikaans speaking, and former ambassador to the United States during the Mandela government. In 2000, Sonn became the first non-white president of AHI. With his national stature, he brought both prestige and government contacts to the organization.

In his presidential address, Sonn spoke of the African Renaissance ideas from President Mbeki, and his efforts to be a new kind of African leader who could perform in foreign country with “calm and ease.” The many problems of South Africa should be seen not as negatives but as “challenges and new possibilities.” Sonn argued that Africa mainly has an image problem and a need to market itself. Africa was not always poor, he claims; centuries ago Africa excelled and prospered. Through goodwill and practical actions, unity can again be created out of diversity. He argues that South African companies are conquering the world. South Africans, Sonn says, have historically always picked up the challenge, and turned roadblocks into building blocks. Sonn connected this upbeat message with the AHI. The “uncomfortable” past is still important, he argued, but “South Africans are future-people, like all good businessmen.” The AHI consist of “today- and tomorrow-people” and this makes him proud to be at the AHI. He depicts its members as opportunity seekers and creators, who reach out to government and are able to change poverty into prosperity. But he also argues the organization is truly sensitive and worried about poverty. He quoted Anton Rupert’s warning that “a person will sleep restless next to a hungry person” and said we need a “total onslaught on poverty.”

Three years later, in 2003, Anton Botha, a white, Afrikaans-speaking president, no longer talks about economic globalization or how South African companies conquer the world. Instead, Botha reiterates the necessity for the creation of new inclusive collective business bodies. He stresses the need for “cooperation, effective representation and functionality,” which are all continuously under threat in an ANC-dominated business climate. The AHI has helped to set up new inclusive business organizations, such as BUSA (Business South Africa). Only through business unity, Botha argues, the AHI can keep its current level of access to the government and effectively influence its business policies. But he has to admit that AHI is not able to lead such organizations, given historical realities. Instead it should focus on strengthening its own organization. The power of the organization, Botha says, is its members. He is straightforward in what AHI provides to its members: “We come together to improve and extend our network and to spend time together. As a voluntary organization we do so because we feel at home in AHI. Within the organization, we can practice our language and our culture and do business with like-minded people. South Africa would be a poorer country if we did not do this job well.” Members feel at home with
the AHI, because they can speak their language and have the same culture. While the concerns of the AHI thus shift over time, what remains is the tension between cooperation and belonging and the concerns about the legitimacy of the organization.

Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) hardly improves matters for AHI. Botha argues that BEE is “politically and socially necessary” to get people involved in profitable economic activity, who were before excluded through racial discrimination. He says that the AHI has accepted the cost and necessity of BEE as it contributes to “social stability” and “hope for previous disadvantages.” To AHI members, Botha defends the policy for “its possibilities and challenges” and its necessity in the overall goal of enlarging the middle-income group in South Africa. In AHI circles, enlarging the black middle class is often presented as the most effective way of pursuing responsive governance. This new class would demand an effective government, service delivery, and a stable economic climate. The AHI thus never actively challenges BEE. Japie Steenkamp, who was the president two years after Botha, in 2005, is still upbeat about the prospects of the new South Africa. He is “excited” about the future and thinks that the country has a lot of “potential,” and that with the “right policy decisions” it has a bright future. He is proud that South Africa devised a democratic system, where war was another possibility. “If we can make that work,” he says, “we can make everything work. Business people are not emotional creatures but pragmatic people; we want to solve the problem. If during apartheid I am excluded from the world market because of all the boycotts, then I have a problem. I have to solve it. So what is the solution?”

A Black President

In its most transformational shift, the AHI in 2006 asks ANC stalwart Nakedi Mathews Phosa to become president. Phosa is an ANC politician who had been in exile during the struggle and after 1994 was the first black premier of Mpumalanga. After his first stint as politician, Phosa became a successful businessman and sits on the board of various large corporations, often together with AHI board members. Before Mathews Phosa accepts the request, he first consults with former president Mandela. Mandela tells him it is a great opportunity for Phosa to sell BEE to the (local) Afrikaans businesses community. And so, when Phosa becomes president in 2006, he goes on a grand tour through South Africa to sell the benefits of BEE to the local AHI chambers. In his speech to the yearly meeting of the AHI, he stresses the “transparency” of the organization, the effort both on the national and local level to “work together,” the “intelligence” and “intellectual force” of the organization, and how much he has “learned” from Afrikaans businessmen. Phosa argues that the country needs the AHI and that he has found that the government, on various levels, has very high expectations of
the contribution to be made by the AHI through “insight, knowledge and willingness.”

But Phosa also inserts a new language on change. He argues that this is a “time of transformation,” echoing the newly popular transformation discourse within the ANC. However, Phosa is aware of the sensitivities of his white Afrikaans audience. He stresses the unintended consequences of the efforts to undo the unequal playing field and underdevelopment; the poor and slow implementation of well-intended programs; the unnecessary layoffs of experienced bureaucrats and the inability to make use of older people’s skills and experience. The AHI needs to lead, Phosa says; leadership is about pointing the way, even if this means you have to define your “environment” in an unfavorable way. The AHI has been able to expand its membership “across borders” and is now a leader who entrepreneurs look up to for direction. Phosa thus talks of transformation but is at the same time reconciliatory: “We should not punish ourselves for the past but we should use our expertise to create possibilities for other people. We live in a place of forgiveness and, more importantly, of possibilities. It is our role as the AHI to responsibly open up these opportunities for our members.”

Forgiveness and transformation—for Phosa they go hand in hand.

In 2008, Eltie Links, a former ambassador for the old National Party government, becomes president of the AHI. Links is coloured but he knows the Afrikaans elite at the AHI well. He served under the apartheid government as a representative to the World Bank from 1986 until 1990 during President Botha. He was the first black man who was a representative in Washington. Links is sensitive to arguments that he was co-opted by the organization, but he is used to the accusation. He says:

Look, in my life I have already done many things for which people here in South Africa can accuse me, what we call here, in South Africa, being a “sellout.” Someone who is too early, too quickly to accept change and who is not sure that it is genuine. I am used to jumping early. My philosophy is, there must be someone who stands on both sides and says: enough is enough. If I would just be a professor … you can’t do anything, you have no voice. If you have such a post, and you have the IMF and World Bank to support you, you say to your government: The World Bank wants A, B, C, and D. And you have said to the World Bank what they should say, because you know your country. From the inside, you have an incredible strong position to prescribe what change should take place.

Links argues that as an insider in organizations such as the World Bank, but also the AHI, you have a much stronger position to change things than being outside them. He is weary of accusations that he moves too quickly or sells out. Originally, Links was asked by the first coloured president of AHI, Franklin Sonn. He is outspoken about the position of people like Sonn and himself. He says:
We have a role to play. Sonn recognized that here (AHI) is a place where I can influence people’s ‘mindset’ for the positive. That he as a brown person can help the organization to include more brown people. He felt he could reconcile himself with the boundaries of the acceptable within the organization. He gives the organization credibility, he makes the organization more useful and he gets himself his own reward. … The fact that Franklin Sonn, Mathews Phosa, and I have been heads of the organization has helped many companies decide to become a member of the AHI. They would not have been members otherwise. The usefulness of opposition and the “perceptual payoff” for the organization, if you appoint leaders that represent an inclusive approach that is what makes it for everybody better. … I was the third president (of color). I am just a perpetuation, a changing mindset in philosophy in the way the Afrikaners thinks about the future. And it is not Afrikaners anymore, it is Afrikaans speaking. My mission is the verengelsen, or the admittance and promotion of English, to create awareness and acceptance for the use of other language. As long as the person can understand Afrikaans but speaks English, there is no problem. AHI becomes more relaxed, more inclusive.

Links likes to think of himself as an ambassador of change and sees himself as representing the “changing mindset” of the Afrikaners. He presents his appointment as a win-win situation: the organization becomes more respectable and he lands an interesting position. In 2009, AHI got its first female president, a coloured woman by the name of Venita Klein, a director at the ABSA bank. The bank has long-standing ties with AHI and asked Klein to represent the bank on the board. Klein herself feels she has been brought in by AHI because of her expertise gained in and outside of ABSA in the management of transformation. She sees for herself a transformative task for which she is happily co-opted.

During Klein’s tenure, AHI welcomes three more women on its board of directors. The organization shifts its attention to the crisis of local government and local economic development in South Africa, a pertinent issue for many small companies that are member of the local chambers of commerce. In her presidential addresses, Klein is concerned with the “further transformation” of the AHI, specifically in terms of “language” and “brand.” Nevertheless, it is evident the organization has come a long way when she—as the first female and coloured president—underlines how important it is to her “to protect at all costs the image of the organization with her rich history and that its flawless reputation will be carried into the future.”

6.4 THE PRODUCTION OF PRIDE

Although not without conflict, within a period of 10 years the AHI has been able to change its public face in a dramatic way and represent an image to the outside world of an organization that has become open, multicultural, and
thus transformed. It is an achievement in which most AHI board members take great pride. The AHI provides its members a discourse about the transformation of the organization and its role in South Africa. Most importantly, this discourse provides various anchor points for the members to feel pride in the organization and its achievements; a pride that is actively cultivated by the organization. What are the different elements of this positive self-presentation that allow these members of the economic elite to feel pride about the organization, themselves, and their achievements?

First of all, AHI by its mere survival and continuation as an organization gives its members a sense of pride. Many Afrikaner organizations are either withering away or have simply disappeared. Instead, the AHI still has a strong position and relevance, not only for its members but also (as the board members like to stress) to the country and the black majority. In part, this is reflected in regular meetings with the government, the reserve bank, the ANC speakers at the AHI yearly conference, and the position of the members of the AHI itself.

Second, the members take pride in the “record of transformation” that the AHI has obtained. The submission to the TRC plays a central role here. Theo van Wijck argues that it was the TRC submission that saved the organization. He says:

If we had not made a submission, it would have been a great mistake. Look at the legitimacy the AHI still has. How many organizations are there still? The National Party has died … All the other things have just disappeared. But the Afrikaanse Handels Instituut … Although we call ourselves now by our abbreviation AHI something I do not really understand … I am unashamed Afrikaans.

The AHI is still relevant and many agree with Van Wijck because of the TRC submission. Ironically, precisely because the AHI made a submission while many others did not, its submission plays such a valuable role. Few remember, however, what was actually stated in the submission, which is an ambiguous document. Van Wijck also refers to a recent “name change” or rather the new habit to just refer to the abbreviation of the organization instead of the full name. Note how Van Wijck stresses in this regard that he is “unashamed” Afrikaans.

But pride in the transformational record is not limited to members with the traditional background. New members equally remark on their pride in the fact that the AHI is a transformed organization, and they are of course their own embodiment of that pride. The Afrikaans language plays an important unifying role. Although the organization is now officially bilingual and distributes its documents in both English and Afrikaans, the organization is still proudly Afrikaans. Many white members express that at the AHI they find a “sense of community” and “brotherhood.” André Lambrecht says that speaking the language of Afrikaans is one of the purposes of the organization.
But such a sentiment, of pride in Afrikaans and the history of Afrikaans, is also present in the new members. The AHI has been remarkably successful in recruiting coloured members who are sympathetic to the importance of Afrikaans as a “common heritage”—as it is presented now. Venita Klein says:

I see myself as a new economy leader. Certainly, my team (at ABSA bank) is completely transformed between white-black-male-female. For me, there is only one thing that counts and that is performance. I think based on a track record that I have built up, I was invited to serve on the board of the AHI. I joined three years ago and I was pleasantly surprised by the transformation that had already taken place. For me, it is about getting the job done. I was approached by the then-president Matthew Phosa. But I didn’t know the organization. And my first reaction was: why? Why do I want to do this? Because based on my own ignorance and not recognizing the level of transformation that had taken place, I thought: this has taken me backwards, not forwards. I was pleasantly surprised when I got there, of the transformation that had already taken place. I was certainly not the first person of color to get into a leadership position. Before me it was Franklin Sonn, Mathew Phosa, Eltie Links and myself, so I was fourth in line. I was the first woman in the 66th year history. … The AHI is predominantly Afrikaans. I do speak Afrikaans but it is not my first language. One thing I realized is that we all have pride in our heritage. Afrikaans, the language, is still very much part of the pride of our country and it is not a white thing only. Which is something we get wrong as South Africans, we wanted to get rid of Afrikaans because in the apartheid regime people were forced to speak the language who did not want to. But we are past that. For the last 14 years we had a choice of what we speak, and a lot of people still speak Afrikaans—white, black, and coloureds. However, people who do not speak Afrikaans should also feel welcome. To prove the point we have just opened up a chamber in Soweto; we will be affiliated with an organization in Soweto.28

Klein positions herself as a “new economy leader” that is all about “performance” and “getting the job done.” She stresses that the team she manages at ABSA is completely transformed. In other words, she clearly posits herself as a new type of transformational leader. But she places herself in the history of the organization, as to say: I represent how much the organization has changed, and I am proud and happy about that. She argues that the AHI has transformed and that we all should have pride in our heritage. In her presidential address, she explicitly states that it is her goal “to protect the image of the organization with her rich history at all cost and that its flawless reputation will be carried into the future.”

Third, the history of Afrikaners’ economic empowerment is used to build a sense of common pride between the AHI and the new black business elite. Afrikaners’ economic empowerment is presented as a successful example for blacks to follow, even though the AHI presents it also as an alternative model
to current BEE efforts. In *The Economic Empowerment of The Afrikaners, a Modern Interpretation*, a paper written by researchers for the AHI, the AHI suggests that Afrikaner empowerment never depended on large-scale forced transfers of English speakers’ assets to Afrikaners—an obvious reference to BEE programs of wealth transfer to black South Africans. Instead, the writers stress the importance of “culture and values” for economic development; thrift, industriousness, patience, and a willingness to make sacrifices would have made the difference for Afrikaners. Given the power of the state during the reign of the National Party, the role of the government is surprisingly critically addressed. The document warns for the negative side effects of “government intervention” in the economy, and stresses the role of “individuals and groups” in economic development.\(^\text{29}\) In a sign of the AHI’s ambivalence toward the ANC’s goals of redistribution, it notes that “socio-economic functions such as education, health services, and housing and welfare services redistribute wealth, but can also make citizens dependent on the state.”

Fourth, the members argue that the organization also plays a proud transformational role in the business sector. It leads the way, they say, and this is reason for pride. Many members argue that the AHI is a “reliable partner” for the government and praised for its “expertise” and “cooperative spirit.” Such self-praise and sense of pride is professed by the traditional, white Afrikaans members as well as the new members. In October 2006, Matthew Phosa speaks as the outgoing AHI president at the yearly conference of the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut.\(^\text{30}\) As a well-respected member of the anti-apartheid struggle, he takes a remarkable position toward the AHI. He says:

> Because of the leadership of people within the AHI, we have been able to become a player within the restructuring process in the business sector, to which other entrepreneurs look for direction. I can say this with pride and not to boast. This proves again, that we should not punish ourselves for the past, but that we have to use our skills to create opportunities for others. We live in an environment of forgiveness and, more importantly, of opportunities. It is our job as AHI to unlock these opportunities for our members.

Phosa preaches a forward-looking spirit and praises the AHI for its positive role in the business sector. Moreover, this pride functions for Phosa as a legitimation to stop feeling guilty about the past and instead cooperate and work together for the future.

Finally, the above-mentioned points add up and are projected back into the past. The AHI then obtains a crucial role in the transition to democracy. This, of course, is the strongest evidence that AHI provides to its members a sense of pride about the positive role of the AHI in the recent history of
South Africa’s transformation to democracy. Former AHI president Steenkamp says:

The chamber of commerce was one of the transition agents. In a way they realized that the system of apartheid did not work. The exclusion of the blacks from the economy could not work. Our members, the AHI people, were one of the first from the side of business who negotiated with the ANC. The chamber of commerce is not a political organization; we are a business organization that looks at the business side of things. But if along the way we encounter something that obstructs the growth and prosperity of the country, we act. The AHI was strongly criticized by its members for doing so, when they initially said they would get involved in the transformation process. But the AHI switched gears without any trauma, because they saw the problem of apartheid, they saw the problem of excluding people from the economy. Of course there were people who said ‘you are selling us out’ and ‘this is not going to work.’ But the AHI has seen the bigger picture.

According to Steenkamp, the AHI was a key player in the transition from apartheid to democracy. The AHI recognized that apartheid and the exclusion of black people was wrong and saw they needed to change—and they did. Change for the organization was a “smooth process” and “nothing dramatic.” It was all “without any trauma.”
“WE WERE EXCITED ABOUT 1994”

Entrepreneurs were excited about the transition to democracy in 1994. They were excited about the radical changes happening in South Africa: the end of apartheid; the release of Nelson Mandela; the negotiations with the ANC; the first democratic election. That is what the men tell you today. They came of age at the time Mandela was released in 1990. Some still served in the army and the policy force, a mandatory civic duty for young, white Afrikaner men until 1993. The men follow the recounting of their hopes of 1994 with another story; a story that begins with “But today ….” Today, the men are disillusioned about what the change has brought. The question is why.

THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE

Many men became politically conscious for the first time at the university. Marius Korf, today a successful accountant with his own firm, studied at Pretoria University in the late 1980s. On campus, political battles were fought on a daily basis. Even for students who were not political active, like Korf, it was hard to not get excited about politics and the signs of the times. Change was needed, he thought. He recalls:

When I arrived at the university, there was a strong presence of the National Party. These were the years where many started to ask questions about apartheid. Our Law faculty at the university had invited Lekota from the ANC at that time. And that was something terrible … this was in 1988 … I started to talk about it with my father. This caused many conflicts. So, after a time I completely avoided the topic but more and more I started to converse with my fellow students and such. My whole political awareness started at the university.

Korf’s story of becoming aware of the political situation in South Africa during his student years is exemplary for his generation, as is the clash this provoked with the older generation. Few men were politically active in their student days. Rather, they were swept up by the political developments. As a fourth-year law student, Korf was asked to join the team of Minister Roelf Meyer as an intern to prepare the CODESA negotiations between the ANC and the National Party. He recalls:

I was really impressed by the fact that this was a good thing that was going on. It is a miracle that we negotiated in a peaceful way. My dad kept saying all the time, ‘We are selling the country, we’re making a big mistake, Africa is going to take us over.’ We just thought this is a unique event that is unfolding. And it is a miraculous thing. I was part of the people who said, ‘Yes, let’s do it. But then ….

Korf was impressed by the events in his country. He identifies himself with the young generation of Afrikaners who said “yes” to the transition.
However, the phase during which the men felt that things “worked out” did not last long. Note the final lament Korf makes: ‘But then ….’ His excitement about change did not endure.

Other men tell a less heroic tale about their travails during the transition. Carl Kleynhans had just become a dentist with his own practice. As the breadwinner of a young family, he was concerned about the future and unsure what to expect from the transition. He flew to London to get registered as a dentist. He recalls:

Initially it seemed to turn out well. I just went with the flow to see what was going to happen. Your attitude was to realize that they can run the country. Although it is not as good as it was, I think. But, they can do it. But then there was a surprise when Mandela went out. Things changed again. And I think that was the basic fear we all had, that they will feel nothing for the white person. And that’s exactly what’s happening today. They don’t feel anything for the whites …. I think that’s why a lot of people are leaving the country.

Kleynhans mixes his recollection of the past with his assessment of the present. In just a few sentences he moves from the duty to accept that blacks could run the country, to the fear that he would have to leave the country. It is a dramatic narrative arc—what starts with hope in a good future and a willingness to change ends with fear and distrust. Nevertheless, it is a story line the majority of men tell: first, they felt the excitement of being part of history; they accepted the need to change and they welcome transition to democracy.¹ As if to say they are the generation of change, they are the ones who realized apartheid was wrong. Then their hopes are crushed—the change did not materialize in the way they imagined; things went the wrong way. The story starts with hope but ends with disillusionment. After the excitement there is always disappointment.

What makes these successful entrepreneurs, who have benefitted significantly from the advantages of the new open economy, so dissatisfied with the present? It is a story line the men tell to put their generation in a positive light, and demarcates their generation as different from the older generation of Afrikaner racists.

Confronting Black Economic Empowerment

One explanation is the introduction of broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). Many white businesses were affected by the introduction of BEE at the end of the 1990s. The execution of BEE is a topic of great concern for most entrepreneurs. The men express frustration about the process and dismiss BEE as “just politics” that has “nothing to do” with business. They complain that, while they “want to help” and “do business,” the government and black businessmen are no longer interested in the quality of your business and services but only in their BEE status. The
small-business owners feel BEE forces them to give away for free what they have built with “their own hands.” Jan Heerden, who has a very successful security software company, says:

I still don’t have BEE. That is needed and they force you. But I am really negative about it. The problem is: who do you take? Do you take someone who can play a role, someone with political clout or influence? They will look for money but won’t contribute anything. Or you get someone who meets all the criteria, but then you find out he is being prosecuted for forgery and … It is a hopeless sport. It is very difficult. Or you get a group that is interested but they want to buy your shares with your money. You worked your ass off to develop something, to put something together that is well structured, organized, and financially viable. That is not just a question of giving it away. I am not going to do that. But without BEE, you can’t sign big contracts. You cannot do business with the government.

Heerden stresses the “sweat and tears” he puts into his company. BEE feels like giving his company away. What he presents as a practical question (who should be my partner?) slips into a lament about how his hard work is not appreciated.

The men are rarely positive about BEE. Nevertheless, they phrase their opposition to BEE ambiguously. In the first instance, they seem to endorse the policy. For instance, disagreement starts with a disclaimer like “I think empowerment is necessary but ….” Only then their opposition to the policy will be clearly stated and they will say, carefully, that they disagree with the policy. Opposition to BEE is expressed, using various arguments. First, the men argue that BEE is not necessarily wrong, but that it is implemented in the wrong way. This is the most common way to express opposition. Andre Lessing says:

My view on this matter is, if you are serious about it, if you truly respect people, then you should be more at ease to empower people. That is a natural process, about what you do to truly empower people so that they truly can make it happen on their own. I know of ways to educate and possibilities for learning on the job—all those things need to be encouraged and supported. The financial transaction is a useful part of this process, but you can’t put a few people together at a table and drink a glass of wine and just do a deal. That is not empowerment in the end—it excludes people. There is some space for this, but the best thing to do is to cooperate all together to achieve a true foundation for a community, to really experience liberation—economic liberation and social liberation. That is the road we should take.

Lessing’s use of the language of liberation is a reference to ANC’s own language of liberation. He protests the wealth transference aspect of BEE in a subtle way by arguing that the focus should be on education. Lessing limits his critique to the implementation process.
A variation of this argument is to say that many blacks also disagree with the way the policy is implemented. Martin Mostert says:

If it is rightly implemented then I do not think it is wrong. But it is my personal opinion that it is applied wrongly. I am not the only one who says so. I also have a number of black clients who feel the same way. Even today I had this black contractor at my office who said very straightforwardly: ‘BEE is black empowerment.’ In other words, he feels the state should support him financially so he can do the work, so he can be taught how to do it himself the next time.

As Mostert shows, invoking a “black” opinion for your own argument is a confusing matter. The black contractor said that BEE helps blacks. Mostert suggests that the policy should benefit everybody. The black entrepreneur differs with Mostert about the purpose of the policy, not about implementation. Mostert argues that it is unfair blacks “get the money” while whites “do the work.” Companies should form partnerships, he argues, which help “to educate” blacks. Men like Mostert suggest not an equal partnership but a relationship of apprenticeship—as if they are oblivious to the colonial echoes such relationships invoke.

A second argument is to say that one agrees with BEE but that it should end soon. The problem is, the argument goes that there is no end in sight for the current situation. The men who use this argument call for a nonracial South Africa—a country where being black or white no longer matters. In other words, a country where whites will no longer have to sacrifice for their responsibility for apartheid. Again, blacks are often invoked who would “agree” with this argument, because BEE would not even benefit blacks. The argument is never that BEE is disadvantageous for whites. It is a way of protesting BEE while never openly saying one disagrees with the intent of the policy.

A third argument the men use against BEE is that the policy demands a big sacrifice. Nicole Lange, a successful senior civil engineer who works for a large construction firm, says:

BEE is coupled with great sacrifice. If you look at black empowerment in this country, it is not that we kick against it, but this is a big price we pay. If I look at our own business, our own progress, I can honestly say that we Afrikaners do our side of the matter. We make a tremendous effort to make this work, and if I just look at my work every day, is the amount of effort we put in, to transfer skills, to help them to increase their skills … a huge price to pay? We have many frustrations with work that needs to be done. In many cases, there is just this arrogance on the other side, from them. They do not work together; they do not care about it. Not always though, but this is a stressful effort. … Our black empowerment people who work together with us as a team, we help them as much as we can, but we cannot do everything, because we do not get money for this. And then the contractor
will file against us because we were late with the information—so there are those kinds of frustrations. So this is not totally emotional, but this is stressful, this empties you out. . . . They maybe have a different culture, but a business is a business, and you have to adhere to certain principles or standards.

BEE signifies the loss of power for “white” business, but each businessman is also confronted with adjustment. The adjustment causes stress, frustration, and agony among white entrepreneurs. Even if BEE is perceived as a justified sacrifice, as Lange sees it, it is bound to come with frustration.

Some entrepreneurs see BEE as a justified necessity and a necessary sacrifice. However, the different lines of argumentation suggest that few Afrikaner businessmen endorse the policy or are able to present a rationale that legitimizes BEE convincingly.² No wonder, then, that BEE affects the men more than their initial endorsements suggest. The question is whether BEE also affects their identities.

6.6 IDENTITY TALK
On the personal level, most Afrikaner entrepreneurs still hail the opportunities for business in South Africa. Their talk reflects positive entrepreneurial identities. Being an entrepreneur is seen as exciting and challenging, especially in South Africa. The men are positive about their work and the opportunities they have. They entered the economy at a time when the South African economy opened up to the world. Post-apartheid South Africa had promise and opportunities for them. The men enjoy that they are “their own man” and they feel that for business, “the sky is the limit.” Marius Korf says:

I think this is really exciting. There are few places on earth where you can be so entrepreneurial as in South Africa. And I prosper in such conditions, where there is a continuous generating of new ideas. So that is why I love my work. I am not morbid or down.

Being an entrepreneur is exciting for Korf, but the way the men present their entrepreneurial identities is also telling, particularly the contrasts they draw with occupations that were dominant among Afrikaners in the past. For instance, the opportunities for entrepreneurs are contrasted against the limited chances in the traditional employment sectors for Afrikaner men, like government and former state companies like Eskom and Telkom. Men employed in the old sectors are looked down upon as “stuck” and “narrow minded.” They would not be able to “free themselves” of the “handouts” of the state. By contrast, being entrepreneurial is depicted as “creative” and “open minded,” as being able to think in new ways about opportunities in South Africa. Being an entrepreneur is tied up for these men with being men. Martin Mostert says:
I think a man should not work in government. Who wants to go there? There is no money to make. The money is in business. This is why I say there are many opportunities. This is one of the positive results of the change that has happened. In the past, you would work for Telkom or Eskom, or wherever, if you could not find a job. That is no longer possible. So this is the lesson: it teaches the young Afrikaner to think different, a little broader than, ‘My dad used to work for the city council, now I will also work there.

Mostert interprets the new economic opportunities as a positive change. Like most men, he sees himself as part of an entrepreneurial generation that stands in contrast to the old guard, who relied on the state for economic empowerment during apartheid. Nevertheless, as business opportunities grew, the landscape to do business became more complex for Afrikaner businessmen. White entrepreneurs were challenged by new programs of the ANC run government.

6.7 RACE TALK

The entrepreneurs argue that business provides a “common language” for black and white businessmen; a standard for talk and behavior that everybody has to adhere to. Doing business does not differ between cultures. Businessmen say that their contacts with fellow black workers are good. Nevertheless, there are some complications with this view. The BEE policy intensifies race relationships in business. Today, the majority of entrepreneurs either works together on a daily basis with blacks or is part of a partnership with people from a different racial and ethnic background. However, the BEE policy also alters them, as it changes the balance of power of race relationships. Entrepreneurs are still employers, but they are also forced to work together in partnerships with black, coloured, or Indian people. Entrepreneurs now occupy an in-between position.

SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

BEE and affirmative action lead to new racial prejudices, as discontent about these policies has a strong impact on how potential black partners are viewed. In relation to BEE, blacks are often portrayed as incompetent, worthless, and profiteers. Malan Maartens, a staunch opponent of current BEE programs, says:

I don’t believe in BEE … I have to bring in a BEE partner to receive contracts from the state. But I don’t believe I should bring in a black guy who can just sit there and does not know what he has to do. I have a black director but no shareholders. He knows what he has to do. … I prefer to take a woman who works for me, like this woman I know. She was a toilet cleaner in 1998 when she started working for me and now she is my financial director. That is empowerment. I believe you take a person—I can’t employ everybody—but take a person who is nothing, look at what
kind of skills the person has, and develop those skills. And one day if they can manage, they can receive shares. Then you can say, now I have a BEE partner that can do the job. That is why BEE crashed in South Africa.

Maartens argues that there must be alternatives as he thinks it is “not right” to bring in black people who “do not know what to do.” He does not consider the possibility that there are blacks who have knowledge and expertise. Moreover, he prefers to remain the benevolent white employer, who chooses his black employees and educates them. Men like Maartens refuse to incorporate blacks as business partners on the basis of equality.

When entrepreneurs do have positive race relationships with blacks, mainly with blacks of a similar class, the positive perceptions are regularly contrasted with negative perceptions of blacks outside of work. Praise for educated blacks is juxtaposed with deriding remarks about poor blacks. Carl Kleynhans says:

Yes, you get the more educated ones and the less educated ones. I think the educated one wants to improve on his quality of life and wants to do something positive about the country. The uneducated lives from day to day. They don’t understand the bigger picture. For instance, they would have trouble with transport and trains and then the easiest way is to burn things down. But that was not the problem. Everything becomes worse if they think that way. If they just show their aggression for satisfaction …

Educated blacks are compared to whites; uneducated blacks are everything whites are not: irrational and aggressive. Whereas an educated black man is depicted as “knowledgeable,” “punctual,” and “friendly,” the “uneducated” black man is described as “lazy” and “always late.” The old boundaries of race are substituted by new boundaries that mix race and class.

Entrepreneurs argue that BEE and affirmative action policies do not honor merit and this distorts racial relationships. The policies would in the end harm both whites and blacks. Marius Korf says:

The normal principle of merit does not apply. So the black person who gets the position knows he is wrong. The person who gets appointed knows he does not have the qualifications. And he knows he will not be respected for the work he does. The person who should actually get the position, he will be resentful in his heart. Because he knows he deserved the merit. So this should never happen. But instead … imagine you have a black person that, as exception, is appointed based on merit. And now he has a problem too, because he has to prove himself twice, because he knows, everybody thinks he is appointed because of his skin color.

De Korf argues that whites often do not receive what they deserve but black employees also suffer, because they receive benefits for which they are unsure whether they deserve them or not. Even blacks who are employed based on merit experience negative consequences. Of course, it is not a given that a person appointed based on other criteria than merit will not enjoy his or hers
new position. Korf aims to present his objections to affirmative action most favorable. The supposed negative impact of affirmative action on blacks is used to legitimize his opposition to the policy.

Entrepreneurs seem almost relieved when they are able to appoint a non-white employee based on merit. Marius Korf continues:

I employ a girl who is coloured, Vanessa, and she is smart, smart, smart. I cannot tell you how nice it is to work together. We are on the same page, the same wicket. And she is dark, I mean, she has a dark-toned skin color, and it is not a problem for me at the moment. This is actually good for me. If I enter a meeting with her and she is so competent, I say: here is a person who works together with me because of merit. This is what I really want to happen to the country. I do not worry about what the skin color is. … She knows I do not think she is there because of her skin color. My personnel feel protected and content with me. … In my heart I feel happy because I know she is there based on merit. So I don’t have to excuse myself to any of my Afrikaner people. I can say truthfully and proudly that I am not ashamed. And that I have taken the right decision based on my principles. In any case, I could not have appointed a better white person.

Korf feels he has to defend and legitimize his non-white appointments to his fellow Afrikaners. He has to convince them that he hires people of color for who there is no better white employee available. His masculine paternalism shows in his suggestion that his (female, coloured) employees “feel protected and content.” Men like Korf are troubled that merit no longer is the only criteria for employment, but they do not ask themselves why this might be justified.

Today, entrepreneurs are hostile toward government intervention in economic activities. Before 1994, Afrikaners depended heavily on the state and its resources. State intervention in economic affairs was part and parcel of Afrikaner nationalism. Now that the government supports BEE and affirmative action, they are radically against any state intervention. Moreover, they argue that blacks rely far too much on the state. Piet Westhuizen says:

This is one of the biggest things today for people. This is not discrimination. But a black person who has finished school in the post-apartheid period, he is still resentful. He works, but only because work is work. He believes that the state will take care of him: ‘One day I will get a house for nothing. And Father Christmas will come hang out with us.’ This is the stuff that was promised in 1994 but never delivered. There are people who got their house for free. But again, more than 50 percent of those houses that were designated for the poor have come to nothing because of corruption. They have not been distributed in a just way. … You can move up from the squatter camp— this won’t be easy—but if you really want to, you can because of hard work. But the problem is the people are promised stuff that the state cannot deliver. In other words, a person will say, ‘Why do I have to
Anti-state attitudes spurn new racial prejudices. Blacks are “unwilling to work,” “too dependent on the state,” and only “hold up their hand” to the government. Note the disclaimer Westhuizen makes to mask his prejudices: “This is not discrimination.” Afrikaner entrepreneurs like to suggest they are self-made men and have always been self-sufficient and valued independence. However, for Afrikaners to fault blacks for using state support is more than hypocritical after decades of state rule by Afrikaners. It is a masculine display of invented history, masking historical amnesia.

6.8 CULTURE TALK
How does the present affect their views of the past? How do entrepreneurs deal with their Afrikaner heritage? To talk about being Afrikaans means to talk about apartheid. This topic never comes easy to the men. To admit guilt for apartheid is difficult for these men, even though they like to present themselves as the generation of change. They still emphasize that they take pride in their heritage. Most entrepreneurs are remarkably engaged with their ancestral history. They do not want to relinquish this pride. Instead, they try to disconnect their Afrikaner heritage from the guilt of the apartheid past.

Apartheid Wasn’t So Bad
Talk of apartheid is littered with evasions and denials. The argumentation is often confusing: justifications of apartheid seamlessly mingle with admissions of guilt and praise for the new situation; honest confessions that politics were of little concern in the past are followed by the suggestion that apartheid is reversed in post-apartheid South Africa; admissions of the wrongs of apartheid go hand in hand with denial, and the suggestion that the past was not all that bad. Nevertheless, there is a constant pattern in the men’s talk of trying to lift the weight of the past of their shoulders. The men do follow specific strategies, and the first strategy is to say that apartheid also brought good things. Carl Kleynhans says:

See, people had no real rights, no ownership. They could not own something. And if you can’t own anything you can’t feel anything for it. I think that was a big thing and the fact that they called it apartheid. They should have developed it naturally. I think it is inhuman to tell somebody their money is good enough to buy a bottle of beer, but they can’t walk into the same entrance to buy the beer. That’s very wrong. Money is good enough but mmm … the person is not good enough. It used to be like that. I don’t know where and how but we had separate toilets, separate everything. Even benches in the park were for whites only. That is very basic but I think that is a big thing. Before that, obviously the guys did—when we were young—establish a very good infrastructure. What you see today is what Afrikaners established. They achieved a lot … because they were
reliable. Corruption was less an issue. I don’t feel responsible for apartheid because I personally have not done anything wrong. … I still treated them as human beings. It was not always easy. … There is an old expression: ‘fjy kan iemand uit die bos uit vat maar jy kan nie die bos uit iemand vat nie.’ (You can take somebody out of the bush but you can’t take the bush out of somebody.)

Talking about apartheid makes Carl Kleynhans uncomfortable. He mixes admissions of the faults of apartheid with justifications and legitimizations of the same system. On one hand he argues that it was wrong that blacks could not own property or were not allowed to enter a store, but on the other hand he argues that it was a mistake to give apartheid a “word” and that apartheid did contribute to a good infrastructure and less corruption in the country.

The second strategy the men apply is to diminish the crimes of the past by comparison to other countries or colonies. They deny that apartheid was any exception to the general rule of colonialism. They say that all European countries, and even the United States, practiced apartheid in one way or another. The third strategy is to argue that they were too young to experience apartheid. Indeed the men today are around 40 and were 20 around the time of apartheid. Marais Mostert explains:

If you look at who is now depicted as the father of apartheid and stuff … this is the Afrikaner. But this should not be. … We get the feeling that this is a type of brandmerk which is stamped upon you. This is why I said from the beginning, my generation is from after 1994. And we feel we have had nothing to do with it all. But we are still being branded as the fathers of apartheid and for what our forefathers have done. And I think this is one of the reasons why I say we are against affirmative action and those measures, because we are from a time when everybody is now equal. Now, how come this person receives a better treatment than I do? And this is why I say: this is where we come from; we feel like the bad guys as if we would still oppress. This is a general feeling of people from my age in this country. … You know, my generation had not much to do with it. We just experienced the aftermath of it. We were only part of … how can I say … this makes me always angry. We weren’t the oppressors and now us people after all that time are being hit over the head for something that your forefathers have done. Just like that … I have in 1994. … We were one of the first people of my generation who could vote. So, we didn’t have those things before 1994. We did receive the good education and such but that was all. When I was in matriek there weren’t any people of other races in the specific school which I attended. So with 1994 we had nothing to do with it.

Mostert denies any responsibility for the past. Instead, he clearly feels stigmatized as being the bad guy. He feels he is being held responsible for the crimes he did not commit. He was not responsible for apartheid and instead only suffers the negative consequences. He voted for the first time in 1994 and he does not understand why he is held accountable for the past.
Most men still claim pride in their heritage. Even men who admit apartheid was wrong, Paul Jonker says:

I am proud about my heritage and of my forefathers for what they did. Like many pioneers all over the world, they also arrived in a wild world and they made the best of what they could do. And know … we were a very, let me say, determined group of people. With their ox wagons they traveled over the mountains and they achieved a lot in their days. So, about my language I am very proud, about the youngest language in the world. And I don’t feel ashamed to be an Afrikaner or to speak Afrikaans. And I believe a person should not be ashamed to be an Afrikaner in South Africa with the history of apartheid and to live together with this history. This was and is still the biggest problem—politically, economically, and socially—this country has had. But we can’t be blamed about that for the rest of our lives. Just like the Germans cannot be blamed about World War II for the rest of their lives. … Certainly, there will be many people who will feel bad for the rest of their lives, who will feel guilty. This was a political system where many people did not have anything to say over. But happily this has changed and has lead to much better prospects.

Men like Jonker express their admiration for the rugged pioneers among their forefathers and claim that they cannot possibly feel guilty the rest of their lives. They say they are still proud of the “hard-nosed” pioneers who ended up in a “wild world” and “made the best of it.” Being proud of your own people has of course a long history in Afrikaner nationalist thought; and being proud of the Voortrekkers is of course a staple of the book. But today most men work hard to rearticulate the history of Afrikaners to retain (or reclaim) a new legitimacy for their people. For instance, where in the past Afrikaners would be depicted as the exception, now many men compare Afrikaner history to other colonial histories, as they try to diminish the exceptionality of the crime of apartheid. At other times, they depict the period of apartheid as a limited period in a much longer history, as to play down the longer colonial history.

The first way to rewrite history is to present Afrikaans as the language of an anticolonial movement, a language of liberation, and not a language of perpetrators. Men who argue this for instance say that Afrikaans was originally a language of slaves and mobilized forces against the English oppressors. Andre Lessing says:

That a political group has been able to connect to Afrikaans—which in reality is a liberation language—such a political stereotype for such a long time … I am really happy for the coming into existence of Afrikaans. … In its origins it was a language that was also used by slaves. So this is an injustice that has been done to the language by being so closely associated with an unacceptable political ideology. But apparently a language is much stronger than this. … If you look at what the reason was for the war with the
British Empire then it was every time the oppression. The conflict with the British Empire, the so-called Boer War, was to keep their independence from a political oppressor from another country. And if you want to see it from this perspective … And it was also an effort to be your own people, to speak your own language, to at least have the space to practice your own language.

Lessing has difficulty making his argument in a coherent fashion. But what he tries to do is evident. Men like Lambrecht try to reposition Afrikaans, and Afrikaans-speaking people, from a position of domination and victors to the position of victims and liberators. They try to say Afrikaners are not dissimilar to the current regime. In fact, they say, Afrikaners were historically a similar liberation movement as the ANC.

A second method to rearticulate the past is to stress particular achievements of Afrikaners during apartheid; for instance, infrastructure. Often there are echoes of the old colonial discourse that Afrikaners choose a country that had “nothing” and they have “built it up.” The emphasis of the men on infrastructure is not accidental. Infrastructure can be easily depicted as an achievement that is morally neutral (good infrastructure benefits everybody). Moreover, the condition of the infrastructure during apartheid provides a positive contrast to their perception of the situation after apartheid: as rapidly decaying. What the men leave out is how the infrastructure built during apartheid was mostly for white people. The quality of the infrastructure in the homelands and townships during apartheid is of course a different story.

This selective emphasis of achievements in the past becomes fully evident in the third and final rearticulation of history. The pride the men say they have in the idea that the Afrikaner performed an economic miracle through the economic empowerment of the Afrikaner Volk. Nicole Lange says:

Well, I think if you look at what Afrikaners have done, including all the mistakes they have made, you know, how they started at the top of the Cape to build the foundation of Afrikanerdom and to create the infrastructure of the country and set up an economy like Iskor and Eskom and the like … in mining they have done a little less—but in all the other industries, developed nuclear power, enriched uranium. Really, there is so much technology developed by Afrikaners, that I really think we can look back with pride. Many of these things are now in disrepair. I feel like if we could always keep a core group of Afrikaners in the country, I will always be positive.

Lange gives a long summary of Afrikaners’ achievements that makes him feel proud. The contrast with the present for him is evident: everything is now “in disrepair” and the Afrikaner works hard “to stay positive.” He even connects this to belonging: if Afrikaners stay in the country, these achievements will not go to waste.
Nevertheless, that the past is deftly rearticulated by the men cannot prevent the feeling that they feel their legacy and history is threatened. Expressing pride seems a first line of defense against the perceived threat to “Afrikaner culture”: to the language and to the people. A discourse of threat is usually pre-empted by remarks about being proud. Afrikaans as a language is never in decline, or being used less; no, it is simply dying. Martin Mostert says:

If I will not protect my culture, in 20, 30, or 40 years from now … a complete generation and a large piece of the history of this country will be gone. This is how I feel it. And this is why I feel so strong about it. And I will do much to protect this. Because I still have a place in this new South Africa—even if I am a white Afrikaner. I still have a role to play in this country, a goal, and I have a place in this country. I don’t desire to emigrate to another country or something. Because this is my country and certain changes one has to accept. But when it concerns my culture, I will not give up. … I don’t have the feeling this will happen just yet. But still in the back of your head you are scared this will happen. Because if one looks at the last five years for example, at the corporative structure we have, everything is becoming more and more English. Correspondence is in English … and that is why a person gets angry because you want to protect your language. And still, you realize English is the corporate language. But I still want to do my things in the way I like to do it. Like I say, that is just the barregat, or cocky mentality of us Boers.

Mostert feels his culture might be lost in the near future. He demands a place in the new South Africa that includes his culture and language. Here, we see that even most entrepreneurs as they realize how business has become more and more English, struggle with the loss of Afrikaans culture and language.

The pervasiveness of pride in the men’s discourse suggests that even when people admit apartheid was wrong (and explain how bad it was) they continue to find ways to cherish their heritage and ethnicity. Well-educated men have many resources to rewrite their history in a more positive light. Is it, maybe, not possible to be Afrikaans and not feel pride about your history? Are their alternative options? A few men explicitly state they have questioned their Afrikaans identity, and what they tell could best be qualified as a narrative of conversion. These narratives go considerably beyond the stories of resistance, denial, and rearticulation we have told above. Instead, such men speak of an extensive period of questioning, of their ethnic identity, their Afrikaner heritage, and the crime of apartheid.

Nicole Lange says he questioned every aspect of his culture: his faith, his upbringing, and his education. He speaks of a “burden” he felt before. But now he says this burden has been lifted off his shoulders through this process of questioning. In the end, he got “forgiveness” from his parents. Indeed, various men recall a similar period in their life where suddenly much of what they had believed in seemed to have been false or a lie. A period in their lives
they thought the ground beneath their feet shifted and their identity had to be re-established. But what is remarkable is how the outcome of such a process is the same every time. What starts as a period of questioning ends with a story about confession and forgiveness, and a renewed sense of pride in their history and ethnic identity. Such a narrative of conversion ends with a reaffirmation of what was before: the same pride in one’s ethnicity and culture. One reason for this could have to do with men and their management of their emotions.

“Men Stay Strong”
Talk of the men is full of alarming notions of loss and decay. Nevertheless, they always end their narratives by affirming that they have to stay positive; they feel they “have a duty” to keep positive. They feel no alternative. As Martin Mostert puts it, “It doesn’t help if you complain, because then you are not part of the solution—you are part of the problem.” One wonders whether the demand of being always upbeat, of always staying positive and looking strong is something men have to do and whether it comes with their self-ascribed role of head of the household; whether it is the masculine way of handling the emotional demands of life in post-apartheid South Africa. It is a remarkable consistent pattern among the men. Maartens says:

I see South Africa to be a great thing, in respect to many things. But we have much work that awaits all of us. So I am positive, but I need to be positive. I see South Africa as a good country and it can be made much better. … I have to be positive because if I sit down and start to think ‘this guy is a racist or that guy is …’ then it won’t work. I have to stay positive and say ‘Let’s support them … come, we’ll make things right, come we will help each other, change each other, talk with each other. Then things will get better and we do things for the right reasons, not because of colour.’ … In South Africa today, many decisions are made based on experiences of the past. And many decisions are made based on emotions because people say: ‘I was in apartheid, I was hit and thrown in jail, and I am black.’ This has to be written out of the books. Colour does not exist. The past is gone—we can learn from it and let’s move on. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Come, we move on. … I think every human being has emotions, every person has another opinion. My white people are being murdered, the black has stayed in the township, even though this is his culture. So if you make decisions based on emotions, and on the demographic numbers of South Africa, you will make the wrong decisions. You have to see, we are a miraculous nation with so many people, different colors. Come, we won’t do things based on color, but for South Africa, and that includes me, white, black, Indian. Come on, we forget about it, come we move on. But I think there are too many memories of the past people hold on to. They won’t let go, and this is white and black, all colors.
Note how Maartens’s initial argument is about the need to stay positive about the future of the country and to work together. But his argumentation takes a twist, as he accuses blacks as the ones who keep bringing up the past. They are depicted as “emotional” and “unable to move on.” These new prejudices partly build on much older stereotypes. In colonial discourse, emotions have for a long time been attributed to blacks. They were emasculated by being depicted as more emotional, more easily losing their bearing, and acting less rational. In post-apartheid South Africa, this old discourse and dichotomy simply seems to receive a new twist by Afrikaners.

But many times, the anxiety about the future breaks through these norms about staying positive. There is a final irony here. Recall how the men liked to say they were the generation of change, while their parents were presented as fearful of the future. Today, the men seem as disillusioned as their parents’ generation. Why? Is it democracy that has failed them, as they like to say? Korf says:

> Around the world there was a movement toward democracy. But then they started using democracy to say we have the numbers and the other people have to go. The civilization will go, nothing will be left; within 10 or 20 years nothing will be left, and we want to protect it. And now I understand; I feel it: what if my dad was right? They have fought for the country. They have suffered greatly under the English. My grandmother stayed in a concentration camp. So we resented the English. And just when we had it, then the black people come in and grab it back from us. This is how it feels. And we have built it up. We have laid down the entire infrastructure in the country. We have built everything.

Korf alludes to the programs of BEE and affirmative action, in which the ANC uses demographic numbers to justify changes in employment. But his disillusionment is culturally framed—it clearly does not only stem from his lost hope about change or the failed promise of democracy. He is disillusioned about the much bigger project of Afrikaners to shape the land in their image. He refers the epic battles the Afrikaners have fought with the English; he refers what the Afrikaners have achieved—against all odds—in the country; and he refers the good infrastructure. The disillusionment is palpable: everything was useless. And now he is anxious. “Everything” feels on the verge of being taken away from him.

6.9 CONCLUSION

The survival of the AHI in post-apartheid South Africa is a little odd. How did a group of Afrikaans-speaking businessmen prevent the dismantling of their organizations, whereas their former powerful political patrons, the NP, spectacularly failed? Like the NP, the AHI stood at the heart of the Afrikaner nationalist project. Throughout the mid-20th century, the organization closely collaborated with the apartheid government to further the economic interests
of Afrikaner corporations, such as insurance company Sanlam and investment company Rembrandt. The AHI leadership contributes the survival of the organization to two causes: the participation in the TRC and the “constructive role” of the organization toward the ANC government. Particularly, the submission to the TRC is promoted as a crucial rite of passage to have remained influential in post-apartheid South Africa. Given the sobering number of Afrikaner organizations that took part in the TRC, the submission of AHI to the TRC was remarkable.

However, the AHI’s actual submission to the TRC neither revolves around admitting guilt for apartheid nor for the need for transformation. Instead, the document aims to reposition the AHI in the new post-apartheid political landscape as an organization that promotes diversity and economic development. What is more, none of the new non-white presidents actually challenged the image of the AHI as an organization that is a natural home for white, Afrikaans-speaking businessmen. The shift at the top is hardly mirrored in the overall membership, which is still overwhelmingly white and Afrikaans. The new profile of the AHI provides members a new identity as “transformation agents”—an identity that contrasts with their image as the perpetrators of apartheid. Participation in the AHI allows its members specific resources to embrace the new South Africa: an easy way out of the guilt question through superficial remorse; a new discourse about change; a certain pride in the transition; a sense of hope for the future; and finally a sense of belonging to the organization and its goals. The AHI even promotes the economic empowerment of Afrikaners in the 20th century as an inspirational model for the ANC government—and with considerable success—as if their economic success was not built on the exploitation of non-white South Africans.

Entrepreneurs present themselves as the generation of change—albeit in a slightly different way than the AHI leadership. They portray themselves as the generation that said “yes” to democracy and that “ended” apartheid. They argue that they made the transition possible and were the generation that “voted for change.” They claim ownership of the transition. The memories of their positive outlook in 1994 reflect their class position at the time: a well-connected and educated elite that was in a good position to benefit from the transition to democracy and the opening up of the South African economy to the world. Nevertheless, they say they feel disillusioned about the results of change. Without exception, the men disapprove of the developments in post-apartheid South Africa. It is tempting to believe the entrepreneurs on their word and to analyze the causes of their disillusionment. But this would be too simple.

The question is not why the men are disillusioned, but how their stories of disillusionment function as a trope in their identity narratives. The problem for any Afrikaner after apartheid is how to express discontentment
about the post-apartheid situation (like BEE) without being seen as a racist Afrikaner who wants to return to apartheid. The entrepreneurs’ self-identification as the generation of change aims to legitimize and justify their discontentment with the present. Because they “approved” the democratic transition, they cannot be the racists of the past. Intentionally or not, the upper-class entrepreneurs appropriate the transition to obtain the moral high ground. Not by making a submission to the TRC, like the AHI, but by presenting themselves as the “generation of change.” This also frees them of the burden of apartheid: How can they be blamed for apartheid if their generation actually was the one to end it?

Entrepreneurs express little direct racial animosity, which reflects their relative insulation from the process of racial integration and the policy of affirmative action. Their class position allows for a privileged work environment. Nevertheless, racial boundaries and racial prejudices are reinscribed as a consequence of the men’s interpretation of BEE. The men argue that BEE does not reward manly values such as independence or hard work. A masculine paternalism characterizes their complaints about the policy, together with a distorted view of the past. They see BEE as aggressively state driven and accuse blacks of being overdependent on the state—as if Afrikaners never relied on the state for support and employment during apartheid. What’s more, the men reinterpret the apartheid past to further lift the burden of apartheid. They do so in three ways: First, they focus on the period before apartheid, when Afrikaners were part of a liberation movement against the British Empire; second, they stress that during apartheid some things were good, like infrastructure; third, they argue that the economic empowerment of Afrikaners during the apartheid period is an achievement that deserves praise. The three arguments reflect the sophisticated distortion of the apartheid past by upper-class entrepreneurs, as well as the masculine desire of men to retain some measure of pride in their Afrikaner heritage.
7. Between Recognition and Resentment

7.1 THE HISTORY OF THE MINE WORKERS’ UNION

For much of the 20th century, Solidarity went by the name of the Mine Workers’ Union (MWU). The union’s history goes back to the time before Afrikaner nationalism with the birth of the diamond and gold mines of current day Kimberley and Johannesburg in the late 19th century. The Mine Workers’ Union was originally formed in 1902 by English and Australian mine workers to voice collective concerns about labor wages in the mines. Historically, white working-class Afrikaners occupied a tenuous position between the mine capitalists (dominated by the English) and the large black labor contingent. As the English members were losing their influence in the MWU, the union began openly supporting the Afrikaner nationalist movement that promised protection and empowerment. When the National Party came to power in 1948, the MWU had already been a stable partner and would remain so until the late 1970s. The apartheid government secured the support of the white working class by extending the state apparatus and setting up various state-owned companies related to transportation, electricity, telecommunication and the steel industry. Apart from jobs, white workers obtained pension rights and health care in exchange for their electoral support for and acquiescence to NP policies. It was only when black protest became more effective, and business demanded a larger and better skilled black labor force, that unions again would play an important role and intervene in political and policy debates.

The first cracks in the alliance between the National Party and the white trade unions, like the MWU, appeared in the late 1970s, when the Wiehahn Commission suggested that the colour bar be lifted for various positions in the labor market including the mine industry (Visser, 2006). Although many regulations remained intact in practice until 1987, the proposals at the end of the 1970s were interpreted by the union as a “betrayal” of the white mine workers and uncertainty increased among the members. Growing black
resistance to apartheid was followed by increased state repression. In 1982,
the first black union, the Congress of South African Trade Unions
(COSATU) was born. In the same year, the Afrikaner Conservative Party
separated from the National Party, an ideological split, based on
disagreements over the reform of the apartheid system and its consequences
for the white working class. When the National Party made the first steps in
the early 1990s toward the abolishment of apartheid, the MWU defiantly
called on the other white unions to form a “white super union” to protect the
white working class. It blamed the National Party for the unrest and chaos in
the country and it took an uncompromising stand on the need to maintain all
policies that enforced apartheid.

It took the MWU a few years to realize the rules had changed in
democratic South Africa. As the National Party moved to hand power over to
the ANC, the prospects of the MWU as a prospering or even viable union
seemed dim. The MWU had become isolated because of its obstructive
politics and racist rhetoric. Racial integration had been objected to because
whites wanted the right to have “their own (white) identity.” The union had
stressed the threat to blankedom, or whiteness and the Afrikanervolk (the
Afrikaner people). They had demanded group rights. They had asked for
protection for the white workers in the corporate industry. But all these
political positions had proved untenable. Most dramatically, while the MWU
was supposedly creating a “white super union,” the actual union membership
rapidly declined in the early 1990s. Many had started to doubt whether
unilateral obstruction should not be replaced by some conditional
cooperation.

The uncompromising rhetoric of threat and self-defense obscured to an
extent the emergence of a new discourse and tactics in the run-up to
democracy. In the early 1990s the MWU started to speak of a process of
verontretting, or the taking away of rights that needed to be protested and
stopped. The leadership called for a new “protest culture” and
“communication strategy.” White poverty re-emerged as a theme as the
working class increasing felt ignored. Pragmatically, the union saw the need to
expand its membership beyond the mining industry. It started to explore
collaboration with black trade unions like SAKU (Suid Afrikaanse Kommunkasie
Unie) and COSATU. Hesitantly, new cultural activities were employed to
draw media attention and expand the reach of the union. Slowly, the union
found a new language and new tactics to further its cause. Nevertheless, when
Flip Buys started as the CEO in 1997, the organization was in a poor
condition. The membership had dropped below 30,000 and the union was all
but financially bankrupt. Perhaps most importantly, the public profile of the
union was tarnished by years of supporting and defending apartheid. It had to
officially break away from right-wing politics.
7.2 FROM MINE WORKERS’ UNION TO SOLIDARITY

In 2001, in a grand orchestrated show in the Pretoria City Theatre, the MWU adopted a new name, Solidarity, after the famous Polish labor movement led by the late president Lech Walesa. The new name symbolized the transformation from a small, right-wing, reactionary union into a modern trade union that today is one of the most prominent voices in the political debate on Afrikaner issues. The union now represents more than three times the workers it did in 1994. Solidarity today claims to represent 120,000 members but its impact on public opinion seems to go well beyond that. What happened?

Maybe the most important event was that in 1998, the ANC government officially introduced the Wet van Gelyke Indiensneming, or the Employment Equity Act, which included Regstellende Aksie, or affirmative action programs amongst its policies. It is probably the single most important factor in MWU/Solidarity’s consolidation and growth. Although affirmative action had been pursued on a voluntarily basis since the early 1990s, its official enactment changed the dynamic. Since then, Solidarity has assisted countless white workers who felt these programs affected their position unlawfully. In 1998, the union adopted its own “official” position on affirmative action. Instead of choosing for direct opposition, as it had done in the past, the union supported affirmative action because it was a “necessity.” However, it argued that its execution should be “balanced” and not create “new inequalities.” The union posited that affirmative action should not “hurt” whites and coloureds and should not lead to “deterioration of public services.” The new slogan of Solidarity, Ons beskerm ons mense, or “We protect our people,” resonates with the threat that affirmative action poses to white employees, particularly at the lower levels in organizations and companies where union membership is still strong.

Part of the recent recognition of Solidarity can also be contributed to the new type of symbolic politics the union practices, which is related to the mediatisation of identity politics after apartheid. Symbolic politics can be defined, loosely, as a set of actions and strategies that revolve around themes that have more mythical and symbolic than practical value. Solidarity is involved in a wide range of campaigns and public discussions, including a campaign against the demise of the Afrikaans language in public life and educational institutions. There is also a “come home” campaign: a call to all (white) South Africans overseas to return home and to participate in post-apartheid South Africa. Its longest running campaign is against violence. In January 2010, Solidarity delivered 23,000 protest letters to President Jacob Zuma’s Cape office, Tuynhuys, to protest against crime. Solidarity speaks of a permanent veldtog, or campaign against crime that the organization has waged for more than a decade. In the media, Solidarity’s proposals are propagated by the wildly popular artist Steve Hofmeyer. The strategies are part of the
explicit goal of the union to be identified more as a movement than as a union. Therefore, the interests of the “Volk” are increasingly broadly defined and include issues of education, language, emigration, personal freedom, minority rights, culture, and security.

Another issue is the arme blankes, or poor whites cause. Echoing the discourse of the 1930s and 1940s, poor whites are central to Solidarity’s strategy to change the image of the Afrikaners as only privileged. Solidarity has set up its own charity arm, Helpende Hand, or Helping Hand, that focuses exclusively on charity work among poor whites. Solidarity scored a huge success when it managed in 2008 to arrange a visit of then-ANC president Jacob Zuma to one of the informal poor white settlements where 200 poor whites lived. The public campaign about poor whites aims to undercut the ANC’s argument that all whites are rich and privileged. It also reinforces fears that without political power and assistance by the state, Afrikaners might again become impoverished and needy.

The cornerstone to all these efforts is the reimagining of Afrikaners as a minority that deserves civil rights protection. In the liberal democratic structure of post-apartheid South Africa, this framework proved particularly powerful to both reorganize and rearticulate ethnic politics based on race, ethnicity, and rights. In 2006, Solidarity set up a new platform to coordinate its campaign around civic and constitutional rights, AfriForum. The organization campaigns for “the protection and consolidation of civil rights” and gives the Afrikaner community “a voice in a society where minorities are increasingly being ignored.” It works together with Solidarity’s new center on constitutional rights.

7.3 A NEW POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

Solidarity has adopted a new language of rights and belonging for its politics of recognition. In a constitutional democracy like South Africa, it might not be surprising that the ANC’s opposition phrases its arguments in a discourse of rights. In the constitution, minority rights to language and education have an important place. The trope of belonging was a central tenant of Afrikaner nationalism. Belonging to Africa was not only essential to the differentiation from the English, a sentiment that found symbolic enactment in South Africa leaving the British Commonwealth and becoming an independent republic in 1961. After apartheid, belonging justifies more broadly the political claims of a small white minority in a postcolonial state. With a few examples I show what the tropes of rights and belonging allow Solidarity to do: they help obscure the privileged past of whites and mask the racial interests at stake in their claims. I will first analyze the trope of rights and then the trope of belonging.

Solidarity’s trope of rights functions through a series of three oppositions: the domination of (black) majority rule is posited against (white, Afrikaans)
minority rights; the gain of blacks’ rights comes at the cost of whites’ rights; and racial integration threatens the right to be Afrikaans.

In the first juxtaposition, the majority rule of the ANC is presented as infringing upon the rights of minorities, specifically Afrikaners. Flip Buys says:

Look, South Africa is integrated. So, the problem we have had is that the majority accepts many things as self-evident, for which the minority has to fight. You accept as self-evident that your child goes to school where he understands the language. The majority accepts as self-evident that the school supports your values. The school is an extension of the bringing up in the house of the parents. The majority accepts as self-evident that you can turn on the television and see a show in your own language that you understand. A majority accepts as self-evident that you can decide over the taxes you pay. A majority accepts as self-evident that in the village you stay, you have a say in how the village was governed. And a majority accepts as self-evident that you have a say in the governing of a country. And a minority does not have those things, those rights. ... The majority governs the country and its institutions. The majority does so in a way that excludes us. We are not defined in the first place by ourselves but through the majority. The Afrikaners, while still in the majority, said: ‘Come, we give the new South Africa a chance, come we integrate in all areas, we now have a constitution, we have individual rights and this will work out.’ The Afrikaners have integrated. Solidarity was worried that these easy solutions would not work.

First, Buys’ central complaint is that that the majority fails to understand the difficult position of minorities and their lack of rights; he argues not only that the minority is excluded but that the majority is unaware and indifferent that this is happening because they accept certain privileges as “self-evident.” He also suggests that Afrikaners were naïve to think that their individual, constitutional rights would protect them. Purportedly, it follows that Afrikaners have to fight hard for their rights and recognition, and to prevent their group from being defined incorrectly by the majority.

Of course, during much of South Africa’s history there was nothing “self-evident” for the black majority in South Africa about having education in their own language or having the right to vote. But Buys’ language of the majority versus the minority tries to give that impression as it echoes claims of minorities around the world, who really experienced that their rights were infringed upon. Buys also suggest that in the past Afrikaners were the “majority,” but they of course never were. They were in power and oppressing the black majority. Depicting them as the majority strengthens his argument for the benevolence of Afrikaners to give the “new South Africa” and “integration” a chance. The minority status is effectively used to reframe the historical image of the Afrikaners from a powerful, privileged, and
between recognition and resentment:

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affluent group to a small and (ostensibly) powerless group in the new South Africa that needs to be defended.

This brings us to the second point: Buys argues that the majority is gaining its rights in practice at the expense of the minority, as if it is a zero sum game. Buys suggests that only one group at a time can have the right to have their own schools, television programs, or political agency. What such a framing obscures is how in the past the minority had infinitely more “rights” than the majority. During apartheid, Afrikaners had their own schools and in 1976 even tried to make Afrikaans mandatory in all public schools. The language of Afrikaans was also dominant in the media. Indeed, just like there is historically nothing self-evident about the rights of the black majority, minorities in the new South Africa have not necessarily lost their rights. They have only lost some exclusive privileges, not rights. But Buys never talks of shared, universal rights. In his view there are only haves and have-nots when it comes to rights. Solidarity constantly lays an emphasis on the possibility of loss. The language of rights thus allows it to present the white minority as threatened. It emphasizes that the whites/Afrikaners are only a small minority in the new South Africa and that minorities deserve protection.²

Third, the political goals of racial integration and transformation are contrasted to the right to be Afrikaans. Solidarity argues that the Mandela era is now over and that the hopeful days of the inauguration of democracy, reconciliation and the birth of the constitution are gone. In fact, the state has moved from being a “constitutional state” to a “transformation state.” And this state threatens the Afrikaans identity. Kallie Kriel says:

Everything is governed by the state. And anything that has an Afrikaner character is being viewed as ‘untransformed.’ If a majority of the rugby team is Afrikaners then rugby needs to be ‘transformed.’ If the Hoërskool Ermelo has an Afrikaner character then its language policy has to change. I think in this country we have swung the pendulum, where apartheid placed great stress on identity, now it has swung to the other side, where the state is actually unable to tolerate any form of identity, particularly the identity of the Afrikaner. And I think in European countries and elsewhere, it isn’t strange to have a school that teaches in a minority’s language. ... For me it is ... really the most important project to make sure that Afrikaners can participate as first class citizens in this country with self-confidence and self-respect. Because we have since 1994 until now—this is almost 14 years—gone through a phase of complete withdrawal. We withdrew in such a way that we actually left the country, physically, to Australia, New Zealand, the USA, England, Great Britain, and Canada.

Kallie Kriel presents the ANC discourse of transformation as a loss of Afrikaner identity. Desegregation of schools and integration in sport is depicted as the complete lack of recognition for identity and in particular Afrikaner identity. What had value before, identity, and in particular white
Afrikaans identity, is completely devalued, he feels. In fact, in post-apartheid South Africa the value of diversity has replaced white as valuable. Kriel argues that if the whole society has to be transformed, nothing that is Afrikaans would remain. He can’t see what has come in the place of Afrikaner identity. Diversity is equated to a lack of identity. In his view, the opposite of white is nothingness. However, the strong opposition between white identity and nothingness allows him to demand for unequivocal respect for Afrikaner identity and to deny any calls for transformation of that same identity. The union argues that any adjustment, change or effort to integrate comes down to an infringement of the rights of the people it represents. The perceived threat to their identity is translated into the right to be themselves.

The other thread running through Solidarity’s rhetoric is belonging. Marked by their postcolonial condition, the union is strongly concerned with ideas of home and rootedness in South Africa. The trope of belonging is not so much organized around a series of opposites as well as contrasts: the right of white Afrikaners to belong to South Africa is undisputed while the English South Africans are hardly committed to the continent. Solidarity knows Afrikaners must fight for the right to belong while the old National Party naïvely believed the constitution would protect them, and Solidarity only accepts conditional integration because otherwise Afrikaners have to leave the country.

First, Solidarity argues that white Afrikaners, in contrast to white English South Africans, belong in Africa because of their history. Most of their historic claims are straight out of the book of Afrikaner nationalism; for instance that Afrikaners have named themselves and their language after the continent. Afrikaner nationalism produced a rich mythology about past events such as Die Groot Trek, or the Great Relocation of Afrikaners to the heart of South Africa and Die Slag van Bloedrivier, or the Battle of Blood River with the Zulus. Some of these claims still serve their purpose today—it expresses a direct commitment to the country. They emphasize the historic bonds between Afrikaners and South Africa and their strong identification with the continent. Only today the Afrikaners are portrayed as the “first freedom fighters” of the continent in battles with the British Empire. Afrikaners fought “freedom wars” and were waging a “colonial struggle.” The emphasis of Solidarity on the heroic battles with the English also helps to obscure Afrikaners’ apartheid history that followed.

Second, in the trope of belonging battles of historic reinterpretation are not only waged over the apartheid past but also over the more recent history of the transition to democracy. Fifteen years after the democratic transition, the events between 1990 and 1994 are used by Solidarity to contrast their approach to rights and belonging to that of the National Party (NP). The union portrays the NP as naïve, weak, and being a party of traitors. The NP had a misplaced trust in the new constitution and constitutional rights and it
misled Afrikaners about what life was like in a liberal democracy. In a characteristic passage in one of his newspaper columns Buys writes that “it is not the constitution that governs” and that Afrikaners were naïve to think that “just a document” would protect their rights. In Buys’ eyes, the NP failed to defend the Afrikaners’ right of self-determination. Solidarity has therefore taken up the fight for the Afrikaners’ right to belong. It is a logic that both justifies the union’s resistance and the span of programs they undertake.

Third, the trope of belonging is used to counter the ANC’s promotion of racial integration. Afrikaners would no longer feel at home if all sectors of life would be racially integrated. Dirk Hermann says:

Democracy will eat you if it is a pure majority democracy and does not have protection for minorities. So, if you ask me: Is the church integrated? Is the union integrated? Are your social events completely integrated? Then I will say to you: no, this is not the case. But remember what integration means for us. This means, it will be an organization that by no means will reflect my character, in which I won’t feel at home. And if you say to me everything has to be integrated completely in South Africa, where I will have a small 5 percent influence as a South African, then I will say to you, well, then I guess there is no place for me in South Africa as a South African. If that is the prerequisite to stay in South Africa, then I will emigrate. Then I won’t be welcome here, and then Africa must be Africa. Because then I am unhappy, because then there is no place for a white tribe in Africa. Nobody expects from the Zulus and the Zulu culture in KwaZulu Natal to be completely integrated.

Hermann’s thinking has a binary logic: belonging is an all-or-nothing game; democracy is either pure or impure; and integration happens either completely or not at all. There are no shades of grey in his views. Hermann repositions Afrikaners as a “tribe” with limited means to support its culture, a fact that, given their dominant economic position, could not be further from the truth. In a dramatic hyperbole, the threat of integration is countered by the threat of emigration. This is a common strategy—emigration is posited as the only alternative. Afrikaners would rather be first-class citizens in a strange land than second-class citizens in their own country. But this also comes with a twist, as Buys mentions that “emigration is a solution for individuals, it is not for a community.” Of course, the Afrikaner does have more choices: to be more inclusive and participatory.

7.4 A POLITICS OF RESENTMENT
The powerless depend on the powerful for recognition. Solidarity is not powerless, nor is the Afrikaner minority, but the trade union depends on the government and black labor unions. This presents challenges. While longing to be recognized, Solidarity fantasizes about not needing recognition.
Publicly, Solidarity works hard for recognition and its political strategy is successful.

But their politics of recognition waver on ambivalence. The union’s angry claims to be recognized as Afrikaners, and to receive rights and to belong are equally accompanied by calls for self-sufficiency and total independence. What best explains this discursive pattern is a politics of resentment and shame—emotions that result in part from Solidarity’s own political strategy, as well as from stigmatization because of Afrikaners’ apartheid past.

Strategically, Solidarity determined that apologies and guilt about apartheid are unproductive to its cause. Therefore, it accuses the ANC for abusing guilty feelings. Most members say that guilt is politically immobilizing; to admit guilt or to apologize (too) many times would keep people from getting involved in fighting black poverty. Kallie Kriel says:

I think a certain resentment has developed with people. [They think:] ‘I would like to help to solve poverty and everything and to play a constructive role, to help people whose dignity has been violated.…’ All of that stuff. But at a certain point, if you feel the demand for verskoning, or apology, this isn’t real anymore. When the demand to apologize is used by the oppressor to keep the symbolism of oppression in place, then you develop resentment.

Kriel suggests there is a tension between the guilt people feel and their willingness to participate in South African society. Too many demands for apologies breed resentment. Note how Kriel labels the ANC as oppressors while speaking about apartheid as the “symbolism of oppression.” He obfuscates the role of Afrikaners as the historical oppressor of the oppressed black majority, to deny Afrikaners’ responsibility for the past.

Solidarity’s leadership believes there is no moral imperative to change for Afrikaners. They experience change and loss after apartheid through a narrow lens. When they talk about 1994 as the “total transformation” and the complete “political order change” they do so only in reference to the collapse of Afrikaner nationalism and its organizations. They present themselves as victim. It is as if the experience of loss—the feeling that social conditions changed so rapidly—prevents Solidarity’s leadership from self-examination or a more empathetic view. These feelings preclude them from believing they have or had a responsibility to change. Dirk Hermann says:

This isn’t a question of we cannot change or we do not want to change. We have radically changed. The changes around us were radical. Right at this moment, we have to go through an incredible process of change with ourselves, just to assure survival. We don’t have a government. You know the national government is gone, the party is gone. All the Afrikaner organizations are gone. There is nothing. The Afrikaner community has nothing like that. Now we have to survive in Africa without any institution within which we can live. We have to rediscover, to establish anew, and to
Hermann suggests that it is not a question of ability to change or desire to change. Indeed, he argues that Afrikaners do not have to change in regards to their history of racism or nationalism. Change for Hermann happened to them (not by them) in the political landscape. Other kinds of change, like introspective change or a rethinking of Afrikaners’ racism is not explored. Note the hyperboles that Afrikaners “don’t have a government” and “no organizations.” Hermann refers to the fact that the NP is no longer in government and that many of its affiliated organizations have collapsed. Of course, many Afrikaner organizations simply disappeared because they lacked legitimacy or were not able to sustain any significant membership. However, Hermann’s switch from the question of change to the language of loss shifts the focus from Afrikaners’ moral imperative to transform to a demand for compassion about Afrikaners’ ordeal.

Although many of the political changes were forced upon Afrikaners, Hermann wants to take credit for their ability to adjust. Perhaps most remarkably is how change is articulated without any reference to the black struggle. Like a force of nature, change has fallen upon the Afrikaners, and thus they are the main victims in the post-apartheid narrative.

Hermann argues that the biggest problem for Solidarity is that Afrikaners are seen as a gediskrediteerde minderheid, or a discredited minority. The stigma Solidarity carries from the history of apartheid is a shameful burden and constant frustration. It bursts to the surface in angry bouts from the union’s leadership. A common subject in such an outburst is the supposed victimization of innocent Afrikaans children. Buys says:

Why is it that everybody in the world talks their own language but we cannot speak our language? Why is it that we cannot protect our language? Why is it that our children cannot … is there something wrong with our children? Are our children lepers? That we cannot take care of our children at school and make sure they get food, if nobody else gives it to them? Why is it that the whole world is concerned about black children—they are right in their concerns about Africa—but I cannot be concerned about hunger among white children? Because they talk Afrikaans, because their grandfathers brought apartheid, now they have to starve from hunger? What rubbish is this?

Buys believes that society says he is not allowed to care for his language or Afrikaans children, or anything Afrikaans really. He feels wronged and aggrieved. He is angry that people argue that the next generation has to take some responsibility for their historical privilege. He manipulates caring for his culture and people to be at odds with a certain responsibility to change. The trope of young children is not innocent here. Few people in South Africa...
argue that Afrikaans children should die. Buys’ goal, therefore, is to suggest that the history of apartheid does not and should not matter anymore.

It is the fantasy of the powerless minority to be independent of the majority’s approval. To not rely on the other to be accepted and respected but to escape the shame by declaring one independent of outside approval and recognition. Hermann says that Afrikaners have to take responsibility and become self-sufficient. He says: “We should not revel in a guilt and shame culture, and say that we are the victims. We should not underestimate our own powers to be independent and self-sufficient.” This is necessary, he says, because, “We are a sheep among the wolves.” Such language of independence and threat leaves little to the imagination. During a course that Hermann instructs for the new Solidarity members, he says:

Today we are a minority in a majority situation and we do not know yet how to handle this. How to survive in Africa? We want to be here, we want to be from Africa. But we are in a powerless situation, because we have no political influence. All over the world minorities are protected but we are a discriminated minority. This is a moment in which you and I must fight. What is the answer? ... One time, I was at the congress of the South African Communist Party (SACP), when Blade Nzimande, the leader of the SACP, said in his speech, ‘But white workers you are on your own.’ And we are ‘on our own.’ This is the first thing we must understand as Afrikaners, and many Afrikaners still do not understand this. ... We are alone; we should not have any illusions. But every one of you who sits here today is a part of the answer. The word is ‘protection’; I protect my people.

There is little reason to disbelieve that Nzimande actually said what he said. But it is Hermann who interprets the statement through the distorted lens of shame, where everything is interpreted as a threat. The only solution, therefore, is protection. Underlying the oblique call to arms is the danger that they cannot and must not depend on the recognition of others. In response, he celebrates independence and responsibility for one’s own destiny. Hence he sketches an ambitious and surreal fantasy of the future of the union: a picture that involves rebuilding the complete infrastructure of Afrikaner nationalism with all its institutions and organizations. Stigma and shame leads Solidarity’s leadership to resentment and rejection, and ultimately to self-alienating fantasies of the re-emergence of Afrikaner nationalism.
“THE FAMILY STORY HAS ENDED”

When lower-middle-class men talk about how they experience work today, the past is never far away. In their perception of the present, stories about the past play an important role. They contrast their position and experiences in the present. As the men portray it, Eskom and Telkom during apartheid were like a family. The old companies were organizations where “everybody” worked, everybody “wanted” to work, and, most importantly, “everything” worked. Flip Meyer recalls:

It was like you were part of a family, the whole thing felt like a family. It was totally different. Then, you were all from the same culture. That was one of the biggest changes thereafter. ... We used to play cricket together, the men. The women used to play netball. The women knew each other, they would arrange social activities, go to concerts. ... We made friends and we were friends. ... This has totally changed. That cultures now differ plays a big role. ... It is not the same anymore. The family story has ended.

Sometimes, the company for these men was literally a family company, as many had parents or siblings working at the same company. The social spirit and relationships of the past are deeply cherished and they feel this culture has been lost. Henk Niekerk, another employee of Eskom, straightforwardly admits that he lived a fine life during apartheid. Everything has gone down since then, he believes, particularly at Eskom. During apartheid, he says, everything worked well. Eskom had enough people, the salaries were good, and cooperation between black and white was smooth. Rhetorically, he asks: “What has improved since then?” The men feel that the work pressure has increased but that the company is not as good as it was in the past. As Jady Schalkwyk recalls:

It was good. This was still under the old regime at Telkom. These were the years when people said ‘we work great’ but this is not so anymore. Then, we had it good at work. You would braai on free days, you had social activities. Those things do not happen anymore.

Schalkwyk’s image of the past is one of strong bonds with co-workers and a deep commitment to the company. The meaning of work has radically changed for these white Afrikaans men. The past is a time when everything was “calm” and you did the work “the way you wanted.” The men are nostalgic about the feeling of community at work. In the past, work always meant more to them than earning a living. It was about belonging, being part of a community, and feeling at home at work. What, then, changed for the men after 1994?
**Confronting Affirmative Action**

The men always anticipated—and feared—what they would lose when the ANC would govern the country. Many recall the scary stories that circulated in the early 1990s, when it became evident that the ANC would take power and Nelson Mandela would become the first black president. The stories were apocalyptic and hyperbolic. Whites would be “chased into the sea” and would be “repressed.” Such horror stories never materialized, but work did change rapidly and unexpectedly after 1994. According to the men, the transition from a protected position as a white employee to the introduction of affirmative action was fast, total, and full of conflict. Henk Sadie recalls:

Things very rapidly changed. Affirmative action was happening for over 10 years. This started very early. The ‘affirming’ was quick. And yes, in the beginning this caused great conflict. Because the people who were appointed were of course incompetent. Useless, in comparison to what we were used to. You really had to be good to move up in Telkom. The competition was strong. Then they brought these people in from the street, and they just had to swim. And this caused even more conflicts. This was very traumatic. Like I said, we were used to a good team of directors, people who could make decisions for the benefit the company. And then you got people who had no knowledge whatsoever and who made decisions that were really poor for the company. And of course this put many people’s work under pressure. You cannot explain everything because of this. Of course there were changes in technology that went fast too; that also had a big impact.

Sadie draws a stark contrast between past and present—and implies that the new people (blacks) were destroying the company. His description of the personnel change as “traumatic” highlights the impact of racial integration on the men. Although Sadie never mentions race, his derision for the new black workers (“people from the street”), and the process of affirmative action, is evident. Major changes in technology are added as an afterthought. For Sadie, all things modern turned into difficulties.

Before 1994, the men felt they had job security. This, they know, has permanently changed. Today they must compete with all other workers for the fewer jobs that are still available. The former safety of a job has now been replaced by a constant fear of possible retrenchment and job loss. Chris Rensburg, who lost his job at Eskom in 2004, says:

Everybody knows … All white men know … still know this can happen to him any time. Like a car accident. You can drive safely, and you should not have an accident. But I think all white men in South Africa experience that they can be fired tomorrow. ... And yes, of course this hurts a person. This affects you, because you as the breadwinner don’t have work anymore. And there is nothing you did at work that got you sacked. It is not like you got fired. You did nobody anything wrong; you did not hurt anybody; you did not drink at your job. So, it is pure this political correctness that is enacted
by society. Anybody would experience some consequences if you would lose your job as a consequence of affirmative action. … It is like the world around you collapses. What now?

Rensburg holds deep distrust about what the future holds. This is symbolized by his emphasis on the words “any time” and “tomorrow,” and his question “what now?” While the other men in this chapter still have their jobs, the constant fear of being laid off Rensburg describes is not exceptional. Anxiety about employment increases because it threatens their masculine identities as “breadwinners.” Rensburg feels a strong, almost indignant sense of injustice about losing his job. He stresses that he did nothing wrong. He feels powerless in his inability to prevent his layoff. He feels personally punished, while he feels he always did his work correctly. Rensburg does not connect his position with the historic advantages he received in the past.

Indeed, the men try to challenge the perception that they were privileged by apartheid. They do so by presenting themselves as victims of the apartheid regime. They say they suffered the consequences in their personal life. And yet, now when they finally have normal work, they feel they are being victimized again. Johan Faurie recalls:

I was also disadvantaged. I was two years gone from my family when I tried to protect the country. I have returned and now they tell me I cannot get a promotion because I am a white man and already have been advantaged. Where was I advantaged? Such things get stuck in your chest—you cannot set this aside in the way you take your clothing off. And this makes a person unhappy, and today still with affirmative action … This is the heartache from affirmative action. First you have the black woman, then the black man, then all those people and more, and now the South African government tells me Chinese are also included in that group? Now there are so many people ahead of you, where does the white man go? He has nothing.

Faurie problematizes and even denies his privileged status. Privilege is a relative term, he argues. He has served in the army and he feels he has paid a high price for the “privileges of apartheid.” He suffered a breakdown and long period of alcoholism after he returned from military service. Faurie says that he has sympathy for the people who were disadvantaged but he denies getting any advantages, and therefore affirmative action is not justified. He says:

Everything we had, had been for us. We did give them something, but we gave them poorer services. And this was wrong, because they are also people. I would say that is wrong and should not have happened. But still I just feel, like I said, that I did not reap the benefits. Here I am, today, I am just an ordinary breadwinner, equal to anybody else. I did not reap the benefits. Why should I be second now?
Faurie is fully aware blacks were worse off during apartheid, and that Afrikaners are mainly to blame. It is an injustice that he contributes to Afrikaners’ failure to acknowledge that blacks are human beings too, not necessarily to Afrikaners’ political dominance or economic greed. Actually, he feels that he is not the one who has benefitted from that history. Faurie is unable to see that being an “ordinary breadwinner” (a lower-middle-class Afrikaner man with job security who can provide for his family) is the privilege in this scenario. As a consequence, his acknowledgement of the culpability of Afrikaners for apartheid just stands next to his self-portrayal as victim. For men like Faurie, the major frustration is that the personal pasts don’t logically add up to the present situation. The men search in vain for personal reasons why they must pay the price for apartheid.

Maybe most surprisingly, the negative effects of affirmative action are even emphasized by those who say that racial relations have normalized. Roche Gerlach says:

Where you used to have an office in which of the 10 people, 9 were white and 1 black. The opposite started to happen after 1994. Where there would just be one white and nine blacks. People were promoted just because a promotion is a promotion. So they were put in positions, just because the new government started to push the affirmative action program. They said the demography has to be right. In many cases, this has knocked the company a few notches back in terms of effectiveness, where you had people who did not know how to do the work. But, yes … luckily this was a process we all had to go through, and the people learned, and this has become better. So, at the moment you will find many places where the same concept is tried, but in harmony. Everybody is happy to work together, whether you are black or white. I think 99 percent of the people who work here do not see color any more.

Gerlach is an exception in his positive assessment of current race relations. But what his comments show is that affirmative action is judged negatively even when it isn’t necessarily based on racial prejudices. One can still hold the view that affirmative action negatively affected the company without disputing the positive effect on racial relationships. In fact, almost no worker completely denies there is a justification for affirmative action programs. Rather, the common response is that the programs are “not well executed.” This line of reasoning has two strands. For one, the men argue that affirmative action programs should benefit everybody. Today, they say, affirmative action only benefits blacks (men and women) and white women.1 Secondly, the men argue that affirmative action makes the company worse, affecting black and white workers negatively alike. The company also loses “white skills” when workers are laid off. These perceptions expose how white workers feel unrecognized for their skill, which is a theme that emerges also
out of their identity talk as well. Moreover, if they feel no longer proud of their companies, how do they then relate to their work?

7.6 IDENTITY TALK

The men are aware that their romantic picture of the past, their misgivings about affirmative action, and the broader trajectory of the companies produce a fundamental tension: how can they still feel good about their work at companies like Eskom and Telkom? The impression could easily arise that white workers are no longer willing to do their work, that they only complain and whine and are no longer proud to do their work. This tension is not lost on the men. Johan Faurie says:

You have to remember that still for a white man it is about that he does the work that he does well, and that he gives his best. So you are still always willing to do your work well. If there is work, you will do it well. Although you might feel uneasy about your supervisor, because this is a non-white person who is young or a woman, and you know that if he or she will get other work tomorrow, they will go. And they are appointed as superiors to you. There is not a similar option in the company for you, but you have pride in yourself, and a mission to make it happen. This is the thing.

Faurie stresses that even amidst all the change and seemingly unfair promotion opportunities, the white worker still does his work “as good as possible” and he always “gives his best.” The white worker, while facing adverse conditions, is defined by his pride in his work.

Nonetheless, affirmative action programs challenge the self-image of the men as proud workers. The men feel unrecognized for their senior status and for their expertise and skills that they developed over the years. Many men have worked for more than two decades at Eskom and feel they are entitled to a certain respect for their accumulated knowledge and skills. In the past, they say, knowledge and skills were valued. Respect used to increase with age—this was true across racial lines. Henk Niekerk says:

My parents have taught me that if a person is older, say, 10 years, then you call him ‘Oom,’ or uncle. If a black man was older than me, I would have always respected him. I was still willing to learn from him at work. At work I would have respected him, or I still respect him.

The men attribute the lack of elder respect to a reward system (meriete stelsel) that no longer functions properly. They feel workers do not receive the proper recognition for their work, as Henk Sadie says: “Jy soek daai pat op die back,” or “You’re looking for those pads on your back.” The men are looking for recognition for their contributions to the company. As Andre Durandt says:

The expertise and knowledge a man had, a man easily shared, passed on and educated new people. I have been at Eskom for 20 years. So I know the
company from where the power is made, until where the costumers are serviced by our people. I know all of the company. So, a man could easily share these things with others. But, the person with whom you shared your knowledge is gone. They have moved up in Eskom. And this man stays where he has always been.

For all the expertise and knowledge Durandt built up over the years, and still shares with his new black co-workers, little recognition is provided in return. Instead, men like him see black workers move up the ranks of Eskom through affirmative action. The men feel left behind, and they struggle to keep up their identities as dignified working men. Work has radically changed for the men and shifting race relationships are central to this change. The changed racial hierarchy affects their experiences on a daily base. As a consequence, race, culture, and identity are rarely separate topics in the men’s talk.

7.7 RACE TALK
The men’s preoccupation with pride and dignity is connected to the new power relations between the races and the impact of affirmative action. They are disgruntled about their devalued status and this strongly affects their race talk. Overall, the progress of blacks in the workplace is interpreted as a threat to the value of the men’s work. There are two specific ways in which race relationships are shaped anew, and in its wake an image of the new black co-worker. The first way has to do with symbolic boundaries; the second with a shift in social norms. How symbolic boundaries are drawn (morally, generationally, and through gender) tells us not only something about the threat the men experience to their pride, but also about how they construct their identities. The changed social norm about race talk shows how the new racial hierarchy affects the experiences of the men on a daily base.

SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES
Firstly, the men argue that Afrikaner working men have a different work ethic then their fellow black workers. Whereas Afrikaners take pride in their work, the black man does not. Moreover, they argue that blacks often cannot do the work, no matter how well educated they are. Chris Rensburg says:

They (blacks) do well at university and at the training centers. I mean academically they do well. When he comes back to you in the workplace, then he cannot do the work. This is what we experienced as white technicians. In general they have often obtained higher scores than the white person, they easily have gotten 80 percent and we got 60 percent for the exam. But then it comes to the practical application of technical matters, then we experience they cannot cope. And then you have to carry them, the whole path down.
Chris Rensburg asserts that even when blacks have a better education, the white man has to “carry them.” The working men draw such simple examples to show how cultural differences manifest themselves in the workplace. Pride, one man says, makes the Afrikaner white man finish his work on time. He will finish all his work before lunch, while a black man might more easily go for lunch regardless. The men have various stories to make the similar point. Every time, the symbolic boundary that is drawn is a moral one: it is the proud work ethic that separates the white worker from the black worker.

Secondly, the men draw a strong boundary between new and older black workers. Again, dignity is of concern when the workers judge the new generation of blacks coming into the companies. The men say they prefer the older black workers to what they see as the new generation of “arrogant” and “educated” blacks. The older generation, they say, has learned to respect whites—they know how to say baas and meneer, or boss and sir, while the young generation “wants” everything and is difficult to “get a grip on.” Johan Naude argues that young black men do not lack education, but they lack the moral education of paying respect to other people. He says: “(These are) young people who still believe it is better if all white people are pushed out of the country. They still exist. And these are all … all extremists.” Young black men are seen as snobbish and think highly of themselves. Johan Faurie says:

This man does not even have a child; he does not know how other people think. He does not have any emotional steadfastness inside him. In other words, this man will jump around from job to job, because this is about money. And that is why the turnaround of blacks in companies at the moment very high, while at the same time white skills are being lost. Because that black guy, who is two months in his position, then goes on to another position … he has taken up another white guy’s position, and this white man has left the company as a consequence of this. And then the black guy leaves anyway. So what did the company win? Just nothing. On the contrary, the company has lost.

Faurie sees the young black employee as undeserving of his new position within the company. While Faurie’s reasoning focuses on the overall loss for the company, it is the negative image of the young black worker that is striking for its racism. He is depicted as an adolescent, irresponsible as not understanding, and lacking emotional stability. It is the new, young black employee who does not do his work and damages the company. Some men also suggest that these quick promotions are not beneficial for the young black employees. Young black men suffer the consequences if they are insufficiently prepared to function in a higher position.

Thirdly, the men argue that black workers are not interested in doing the work. They often just pretend to work hard. Andre Durandt says:

When the boss is there they say: ‘we did this and we did that.’ But if he turns his back again, then they just chitchat and all that kind of stuff. And this also
happens in a group—all the show and puff, the glamour, and that kind of stuff. If it comes to the work, then this is done by whites. ... You know, for all people of the call center—we are with almost 80 people—if you look at the work, there is always this showing off of clothing they wear and the car they drive. But if it comes down to the work, it is just whites. If you put a team together, and you take five months to give them training, within a month they want to do something else again. They cannot handle the pressure. It is glamorous for them to be at work ... they just want the money, but if it comes to getting some work done, they don’t want to do anything.

Durandt argues that black workers work only for the “glamour” and do not actually do the work. He highlights the “show and puff” that black workers put up when the boss is around. He argues that their sense of glamour, clothing style, and showy behavior masks that they do not do their work, and that they only want to drive a company car to show off. In the end, coming full circle, he asserts that it is only whites who do the work.

Concerns about the dignity of work are also related to masculinity. Durandt singles out (black) female workers who would only be interested in money and consumption. The focus on black women betrays that the men not only feel that their white identity is threatened, but also their masculine identity. Before 1994, many of the technical positions in the company were reserved for men. This has changed. Durandt says:

This is another thing that bugs me. It is that they appoint people on technical posts even with the technical service, because that is where I saw it. They appoint (black) women who cannot do the work. It is not suitable for women to do that kind of work, because they often do not have the physical strength to do the work. But because we have a gender policy, they are appointed. Nevermind the man who has to carry them on the ground—the man who has to do his own work and also her work to make the whole process run smoothly.

Durandt asserts that women who are newly appointed cannot do the work, and because of that, men have to do double work. But what resonates in his comments is how the new gender policies deprive the men of yet another source of pride, namely their physical strength. For lower-middle-class men who do hard physical labor, this is never just a burden but also a source of pride and distinction. But now they can no longer bolster their masculine identities with exclusive claims to “tough work.”

Race talk among the men is never a one-sided affair. The men tell many positive stories of black workers who do “good work.” Some men argue that the company has gone through a difficult process, but that it is now doing much better. Henk Sadie recalls:

When integration started, this was an interesting time. Because now you had these (black) guys here, which you came to see as friends, who would sit
next to you, and you talk with him about his culture. ... There wasn’t a total wall between black and white, but you didn’t know them in his professional role, as colleagues. ... To see their approach and their solutions for certain problems; how they would talk with other people on the phone; their politeness forms while using the phone.

Sadie expresses wonder and surprise while getting to know black co-workers. There is clearly a sense of joy in the new intimate contact with blacks at work, as well as a curiosity and appreciation for the new variety of cultures on the work floor. However, the line between curiosity and contempt remains thin. Sadie argues that blacks have become “good copy cats” of whites and recalls that “it was humorous to see a black who was trying to act grand, to see him eat with knife and fork.” His distorted view of blacks as imitating whites betrays his own superiority thinking.

**SHIFTING SOCIAL NORMS**

The men complain about a shift in what they are able to say or talk about at work. A change that is related to the new social norms at work: what used to be normal conversation is now seen as racism. Social norms related to racial relationships do not shift overnight. Old norms based on ideas of white superiority or the civilizing of the natives do not disappear easily or completely. The men’s language betrays the old perspective of white privilege and superiority in which the white man is still the boss at work and black workers are compelled to ask whites for approval. Johan Naude, who for 20 years has been a leader of a team that fixes telephone cables, says: “If he greets me decently, it is fine. If he asks me nicely, it is fine. If he does his work, it is fine. The people I have worked with, I bended them to a certain extent to fit my own rules.” Naude assumes that blacks aren’t normally hard working or responsible, but that he has to civilize them. There is little reason to think such racism will disappear soon, but social norms are shifting. This change is evident in two common complaints the men make: first, the complaint that race relationships today are “forced,” and second, that they are no longer able to say “what they want.”

The men feel the new racial relationships are forced upon them. They stress the obligatory character of collaborating with other races at work, and they feel that they “have to feel good” about it. Chris Rensburg, for instance, says that today there is only “political correctness” and that he cannot even “look at them (blacks) with a smile,” because such smiles are interpreted as racism by the management. Jady Schalkwyk says that racial friendships are “forced” and it is “expected of you” to act socially. But this, he claims, comes rarely “from the heart.” Schalkwyk says:

> In the past they had much more respect, and … things completely changed. Not that we wanted them to say ‘boss’ to you, but he had respect for you.
‘Yes boss.’ He had always seen you higher than he had seen himself. And I am sure, you always treated him with respect, and you were good to him.

Schalkwyk believes that whites and blacks were closer during apartheid and collaborated better. The “forced” racial relationships of today are contrasted against an idyllic past, when race relationships were still “spontaneous” and blacks had “respect” for whites. However, men like Schalkwyk fail to see that these “good” racial relationships were based on the clear but unequal roles of master and underling. Ultimately, good relationships were dependent on the benevolence of whites as the dominant race. What Schalkwyk interprets as the respect of blacks for whites in the past is actually blacks knowing their status and acting their place. Men like Schalkwyk fail to see that not only their old position of privilege is no longer legitimate, but that they have no choice but to develop a new attitude toward racial relationships. The men say they prefer to “stick to their own kind” at work, as they do at home. But they have to adjust to the practices and habits of the black majority in the company, as their career success is in part dependent on good interracial relationships. They have to learn to be sensitive to the new norms and demands, but this is not easy, as their second complaint shows.

The second complaint is that the men feel they cannot say what they want, or talk about the topics they are interested in anymore. For instance, what the men see as an innocent joke to socialize with their black co-workers can now result in the loss of their job. The racism in the old jokes is casually justified by saying that these are tough men who do “men’s work.” Racist jokes are seen as a masculine act. The implication of such a justification is: you can take a rough joke if you are a real man. A wide variety of stories circulate about men who have been fired for racism or sexism or other improper behavior. They feel the new regulations are used by black workers to solve personal vendettas with white people, as it gives both blacks and women tools to retaliate. The men lament the loss of a time when they could talk freely and socialize with their fellow black workers without restraint. One man complains, “It feels like we have to put a lock on our mouth.” Many topics, like politics and religion, have as a consequence become perilous territory for the men at work. Some topics are completely avoided, while others are treated with trepidation and reluctance. The men say they have to be constantly careful about what they talk about during work hours. Johan Faurie says:

I can sit down with these (black) people, and we can drink a soda, and we will work. The common goal is still to make electricity. But we stay away from topics like politics. You know you don’t talk about politics with other people. You don’t talk about religion. You know what to talk about and what not to talk about. These men also have a house and children, so that is what you talk about. You have to choose your topics, because you know what to talk about.
Faurie says that certain topics only bring division at work and create tensions with their black fellow workers, while other topics are more manageable, like sports, houses, or cars. The men contribute this “loss” of freedom of speech to the fact that blacks now have gotten “many rights.”

Furthermore, the shifting social norms are also evident in the way the men self-censor or hedge their comments. Weary of being seen as racist, they talk about race with hesitation. When they do talk about race, they carefully craft their words and monitor their language for old racial prejudices. Men precede judgments about a race by statements that characterize their judgments as a “feeling,” “perception,” or something they “just see.” They are quick to say that such feelings and perceptions can also be wrong. When Chris Rensburg explains the difference between black and white people, he argues that blacks just have a “different think pattern.” This, he stresses, has nothing to do with “intelligence” and it is not necessarily “wrong,” yet he admits this difference is a great source of frustration to him.

Any explanation of race or cultural difference is thus approached with hesitation. The men continuously tiptoe along the fine line between the differences they experience, and the possible implications that public admission of these differences might have for them, socially and economically, given the changed social norms.

The men experience a crisis of belonging, which has its roots in changed race relationships, but also male socialization. Social ties have severed because of the problem of intelligibility; Afrikaner men are not able to read the cultural codes of blacks and adjust their practices of name-calling and jokes. They do not seem to understand blacks.

7.8 CULTURE TALK

The shift in social norms at work has altered racial relationships, but how have these changes in the present affect their talk about Afrikaner history, and particularly the period of apartheid? How does their current view shape their thinking on the past and the present? Talking about apartheid presents the men with a problem. How to talk about it without suggesting that they are responsible for what happened? One strategy is to deny their involvement in the past and the responsibility for what happened. Another strategy of the men is to say the past was not so bad. Sometimes, however, nostalgia and fantasy start to dominate the men’s picture of the past, as well as anxieties about the continuity of a strong masculine identity after apartheid.

DENIAL

The first argument the men make when they reflect on apartheid is that they did not have any knowledge of apartheid. They were not “interested in politics” or simply “too young.” They say they grew up in “transitions.” They say they did not know “what apartheid was.” They simply deny knowledge of the crimes, and therefore any personal responsibility. A second argument they
make is that although they lived through the period, they are still not accountable for what happened politically. According to this line of argument, they “did not make the laws of apartheid” and personally did not do “anything bad” because they simply did “what they were told to do.” Both arguments dismiss any personal involvement with the political project of apartheid. For all the variety of these statements, it is evident that their purpose is always the same: the denial of responsibility.

There is another strategy too, which does not revolve around the denial of personal involvement but equally functions to diminish responsibility. That is to deny the severity and uniqueness of the crime of apartheid. Routinely, the men say that apartheid was “a system of solutions” and that the homelands for blacks were “the best pieces of land.” Apartheid, they say, had its “good sides” and “good days.” Because of the “flexibility of the system” blacks could create “their own schools and churches.” The men say that blacks always had “the money” and “the education” and that they never had to “serve in the army.” The uniqueness of apartheid is also denied. They say that Afrikaners had a “word” for apartheid and this made it “ugly and bad.” They say that South Africa has the same history as most other countries, and wasn’t an exception. They refer to various other countries that were colonized or where racial systems were in place, like the United States. Because apartheid’s crime is not unique, the men seem to argue, there is also no special responsibility for Afrikaners to feel guilty or support reparations. The richness and variety of the arguments to deflect and deny any responsibility of the past suggest how deeply invested the men are in playing down the crimes of apartheid. The point of the arguments is always the same: the men are not to be held accountable for crimes of the past associated with apartheid.

**Nostalgia**

When the men talk about the times before 1994, sometimes fantasy and nostalgia takes over: racial relations were the “best” during apartheid. Blacks and whites had a “natural” and “spontaneous” friendship. They say that people “relaxed” together and “sat around the fire” and “ate pap,” or porridge together. They say blacks and whites entered each other’s houses; they “stayed over” and “children played with each other.” Interracial friendships in the past were “spontaneous, authentic, and honest” because most people had respect for one another. The black man in particular had respect for “his place, his country, and for what he felt.” Schalkwyk acknowledges that some blacks might have it better today but in general he thinks that blacks had it better during apartheid. “Few slept with hunger,” he says, because “the Boer took care of them and a Boer would offer food and a place to sleep.” Schalkwyk argues that today the few blacks who moved up through the ranks do not care about the blacks who are left behind. Afrikaners had good paternalism in the past; today’s blacks have simply no paternalistic figure.
Sometimes, blacks are also invoked to give this historic argument more authority and legitimacy. Johan Naude says:

This is what he says to me—I do not know what he says if he is at home—but to me he says, ‘for me it was better during apartheid.’ They had more employment. Even though at the time they did not have the houses they have now. But they had more employment. He will also reckon there was less corruption in the government. He also says that schools and stuff were better for him. He feels like I just told you—in the way he talks to me—he feels apartheid was better for him. During the apartheid days they went to school in their own schools. They could practice their culture, they could talk their language, they had teachers who had their own culture and taught them well, and that was good for them. And just as I do not want to mingle with him, he does not want to mix with me.

Naude forcefully ends his argument by the assertion that both groups do not want to mix. But note how he switches from the first to the third person and how Naude co-opts an anonymous black voice to affirm his own view. He ends his argument with a rhetoric question: “Do we know how many more bad things happened after apartheid?” In yet another way, Naude tries to redirect the focus from apartheid’s crimes to his feelings of victimhood today.

Lost Pride

When the men are introspective and talk about what went wrong during apartheid and after, surprising explanations come out. Faurie, for instance, argues that affirmative action is the fault of the Afrikaners themselves. “The men have become weak,” he says. He feels that Afrikaners have relied for too long on their skin color to be assured of employment. Faurie says:

In a way, we cut our own throats. When we had to, we did not. Because we thought, our skin will always protect us. But that did not turn out to be true. This has started to work against you. ... We are a small group of people at the tip of Southern Africa, but we could protect ourselves against such a mighty country as England. And this has given us Afrikaners a sense of pride. And this pride has disappeared, because we did not follow our history anymore.

Faurie faults his own people for their failure. Not only for relying on their white privilege but also for having lost pride and for not “following their own history.” He feels that in the past, Afrikaners were brave and could therefore be proud of their history. He continues:

But now we have this singer Bok van Blerk and he writes a song, the whole of South Africa runs after him, and screams ‘General De La Rey! General De La Rey!’ This tells me that this country still has this pride. That is why I am proud to say I am a white Boer. Because I am proud about what we did in this country and where we are going, even though we have to do that now together with blacks.
De La Rey was a very popular song among Afrikaners in 2007 about the Boer General Koos De La Rey in the Second Boer War, who fought the British Colonial Army and inflicted significant damage to them. For Faurie, the song “De La Rey” affirms Afrikaners still have pride in themselves. The figure of De La Rey as a masculine symbol of strength and courage speaks to him because it allows him to reclaim Afrikaner history and to draw a boundary between himself and blacks. Indeed, although Faurie acknowledges Afrikaners have to work together with blacks, he is concerned for its consequences. He says:

Look, the blacks, the Rastas, they pull their pants half down, and feel good and mellow. This is a slapgat, or lazy, attitude. And you do not see a Boer with a lazy attitude. But our children are starting to follow that way. But then we have the story of De La Rey again, and everybody is again [excited about] De La Rey. … So the nation starts again, the things that were beautiful and right for us, the focus has shifted toward De La Rey, in that direction.

Faurie calls for strong men to stand firm and not be “mellow.” He thinks that blacks are emotionally weak. He discusses why it’s difficult to organize Afrikaners for protests: “We sukkel, or struggle, to organize mass demonstrations,” he says. “Why? Because we are not emotionally dependent on other people. I think they (blacks) are very easily influenced.” Faurie argues that blacks tend to quickly experience mass hysteria while Afrikaners, instead, are emotionally independent, in control, and hard to influence.

Faurie’s connections show how songs like “De La Rey” tap into specific, masculine, working-class dissatisfaction, and appeal to Afrikaners’ botched sense of pride. The song fits into the men’s cultural narrative that is marked not by reflection on the crimes of apartheid but by a masculine concerns with weakness and pride. A narrative that is marked by racism for its concern with not being lazy like the blacks. And a narrative driven by concerns over the survival of the Afrikaner people, as the next generation might be too weak and needs to be corrected in time.

7.9 WOMEN AT WORK

The above suggests there is something quintessentially masculine about the experience and interpretation of change at work, for the crisis of belonging is caused by male socialization and a failure to be more empathetic to their black co-workers. Do women’s stories about change significantly differ? They equally need to adjust to new circumstances—their work surroundings used to be just as white as their white male co-workers. Of course, affirmative action does not affect women as much as men, as they are included as a group that was also previously disadvantaged. Nevertheless, their work environment has also changed rapidly and radically. How do they experience change? To what extent are the women concerned with pride and dignity—or very different emotions?
Lack of Care, Loss of Pride

Like the men, the women present a very positive image of the past. They describe a feeling of community and cohesion at work during apartheid. They also had various family members working at Telkom and Eskom, and they viewed the company as one big family. Today, the women feel things are not this way anymore. In the past, people were “easy going” and you could “work like you wanted to.” People worked together and according to rules and standards. Everybody worked so hard for most of the week that on Friday there was time “to socialize and barbecue.”

Women are concerned about the deterioration of social relationships at work. Specifically, the women note how the change of language affects socializing in the work environment. They feel forced to speak English, a language they master but not as well as their native tongue Afrikaans. In the past, they say, the company was “very Afrikaans” and they had many friends at work. They feel that this switch in language impedes social communication.

But it seems that where white men today are preoccupied with their dignity and pride, the women express their discontent more in a language of care. Marine Nell says:

The atmosphere at work has changed. It changed, as if people don’t care anymore. If in my division, a client for instance would ask me to do something, and I am not in the office, I would do it immediately when I return. But they don’t longer care about customer service. What I can’t do today is a problem for tomorrow. I didn’t grow up that way. I am not like that.

Nell argues that the new workers do not care about the company and their work, while she still has a “passion” for her work. She contributes their lack of motivation to the absence of pride in the company. It has also become more challenging to have pride in the company they once loved. Rita Schoeman says:

From 1995 ‘til today it has only become worse. Nobody is doing their part. The people who have worked for Telkom for many years will receive the same salary as the people who have just been appointed. But the people who are newly appointed don’t do anything. They see how little they can do and get away with it, and they do get away with it. So, I think the whole Telkom is completely unmotivated; there is no motivation to work for Telkom. And that is bad. There are a few that try, but I think the biggest problem is that people lack a sense of pride. You have to force people to work because they don’t have pride anymore in what they do. My whole heart tells me they have no pride in what they do. They don’t help the clients. If a client calls, they look around and think ‘who can I give it to because I don’t want to do it.’ There are so few people who just help out a customer and that is bad, very bad. We are working toward our own downfall in Telkom. That feels terrible for me. That is really the worst situation.
The emphasis for women is thus different. Where the men emphasize the lack of respect, the women focus on the lack of care. Where the men feel they should be shown more respect for their seniority and position, the women feel others should engage more. Nevertheless, the concerns of the men and women seem very similar. The different wording cannot obscure that both men and women feel their company, once a source of pride and community, has become a source of embarrassment and shame. Rita Schoeman continues:

In 1995, I was more proud to work at Telkom than I am now. Now, I feel a little like … you are really embarrassed to say you work for Telkom because the service we provide is horrible. The fact that they want to give the company a new image is pathetic.

Nevertheless, the women report less animosity between the races. They say that in general, women of different ethnic groups respect each other and get along. They mention that the various activities do not demand any specific cultural traits or qualifications. Sonja Hattingh says:

I love all of them. I have nothing against any of them. I believe that if you are at work, you forget all the personal stuff. My colleagues at my work, we work together. We have a reasonably good relationship. I think we respect each other for who we are and not because of who you seem to be. … Telkom has many processes that you have to do accurately. It does not matter who or what you are but whether you work in a certain way.

There are few hints in assertions like Hattingh that only white Afrikaners are doing the work. They distance themselves less from their black co-workers, and there are few concerns about pride and dignity. This does not mean the women do not feel that social norms about race and racial language have changed. It is maybe here where the women most clearly articulate a different voice about the experience of change.

**CHANGE IN A DIFFERENT VOICE**

Women describe working in a multicultural surrounding as difficult and stressful; there are always differences and misunderstandings that cause insecurity and uncertainty on how to work with the various groups. Lana Gouws says:

In the past, you weren’t scared to say something, or do or look at something, or feel unsure about the way you did things. Today that is totally different. But even when I am the boss, I have to think: am I not being offensive? Because now we have many cultures at our office, so now … You can say something wrong and then you are in trouble. So you think all the time, you want to be sure … this is a stressful world, a lot of stress. I wish many times I could go back to that time. But yes, the balance has shifted. … Well, the people have different colors and different cultures and certain people will feel—I can’t tell you straight how they feel—but they will feel offended. It is fine. But that causes trouble. And they like disciplinary action, because now,
you were offensive to them. You have to get to know them as people, before you can speak up about it. So, if, at a certain moment, I feel angry, I first have to cool off. And then I can talk to them. So I had to learn that through the years.

Gouws longs for the past where they “just worked hard” and did not care about being offensive, whereas now she stressfully self-monitors. But note how she describes the emotional upheavals these adjustments cause her, and the consequently emotional management. What is most remarkable about the women’s stories is their ability to articulate the transformation and its emotional challenges; how the experience of change is shot through with moments of intense despair, insecurity, and self-doubt.

Take Rania Scholtz, who has worked for 19 years at Eskom. Shortly after 1994, she had to change to a division were there were hardly any whites working. She now is in the unusual position of working with many black men. She says:

When I started working with them, I really started to become aware—this is a different world. This is a completely different world to work together with them, then to be together outside. ... You did not know what to expect, because I just worked with a group of white people. ... It was difficult. It was a tremendous adjustment for me. I did not know how to approach them. I did not know how to talk to them. If they would talk their language, I would think they talk bad of me. I was terribly uncertain in the beginning, until I found something out: there was a black woman who cleaned the kitchen and she told me that people could see I was a good woman, a good human being. And stuff like that. And then, I thought I first have to prove myself in their world so I could win their respect. Or at least give them the opportunity to talk to me. This is where things started. I had to prove myself for them, and say to them: ‘Don’t worry, I am OK. I do not want to hurt you.’ I was frightened in the beginning, but in time it turned out alright. And this made it much easier for me in the future. You are scared as a woman, because you do not know what they are going to do. So this opened doors in my life, to work together with them. And this has become easier all the time. People become almost like family at work. Everybody understands everybody. You learn to know each other. You learn their moods, you learn about their needs. And you start to learn their personalities.

Scholtz narrates the path from her initiation in “the new world” from being uncertain, fearful, and suspicious if blacks talked in another language, to being understanding, trusting, and learning their “moods” and “needs.” Note how the new situation is described as a “new world”—not necessarily a threat, although her initial fear is evident. Note also how the family metaphor is still applied to the situation: working with black people still means you get to know them like family.

Indeed, it is a narrative of change. The way women like Rania Scholtz are able to articulate how they feel and how things changed at work is remarkably
different from the narratives of the men. Where men emphasize loss, women emphasize adjustment. Where men have trouble articulating what they have lost which leads to frustration, women narrate the various changes they have gone through.

7.10 SOLIDARITY MEMBERSHIP

How, then, do the men, and also the women, relate to Solidarity as a labor union? Traditionally, most white workers at Eskom have union memberships. At Telkom, however, Solidarity only started in 1991. After 1994, the union took on a new meaning with the introduction of affirmative action programs. As one man says, “Dit het n ou kwaad gemaak,” or this made a man angry. Before affirmative action, the men note, the unions were “just there” and hardly played a role. Today, many call Solidarity a nonpolitical movement for the Afrikaans minority that protects their rights and culture. The men feel rights are not a given but “have to be demanded.” Andre Durandt says:

I don’t have a problem with them (blacks). It is just … a man has to start with a union. A man has to fight for his rights now. A man sees that Eskom is changing, and a man tries to get back the old Eskom, especially when this comes to safety.

Durandt strings his concerns about the union, racism, rights, and Eskom together. He is aware that Solidarity is sometimes accused of racism. But he argues that whites have rights too. He does not like how Eskom has changed and wants to fight to get the “old” Eskom back. His comment about safety makes it clear that he doesn’t only want to return to a white Eskom, but also a company that holds its standards. For the men, Solidarity provides guidance, a way to understand their situation in a new discourse. Roche Gerlach says:

They were for me the people who did the best things and the most for us, as Afrikaners and South Africans. And the passion they had for the work, and the work they did at that time, that was for me … it provided me with a lot of guidance. This was a place where I felt home. This was my movement. ... I have a right to be who I am as a human being. They can’t force principles and concepts onto me. I have a right to be Roche, not someone else. ... This has been my upbringing from when I was young that made me into who I am. They told me I had to stand for my rights.

In Gerlach’s argument, concerns with identity stand out as well as the language of rights in which he frames it. He argues that he has a right to be himself (Afrikaans and South African) and that nobody should tell him to be someone else. Solidarity obviously appeals to his identity, as the union made him feel at home. Nevertheless, the men are aware that Solidarity is not a panacea for everything. Henk Sadie says:
Look, I had some possibilities in the past (to leave the country). I still have high hopes for Solidarity. Things just happen too slowly. That is my only concern. If you ask me whether I would tell another member to go to another country, if he has better prospects there, then I will tell you, ‘No, I won’t discourage him.’ Do I discourage another person to go to another country if his wife is being murdered in his house, even behind the devil’s bars and locks? Who is to blame? You know what I say? I’ll be honest—I have much hope for Solidarity. That is why I argue with so much passion. I believe there is a place for the whites in this country. But I don’t believe it is ideal to stay.

The men are hopeful and realistic about Solidarity’s possibilities, but pessimistic about their future in the country. Nevertheless, they still believe they deserve a place in South Africa.

7.11 CONCLUSION

Solidarity, as a phenomenon, is the product of the post-apartheid South African political landscape, the neoliberal economic transformation, and the rubble and ashes of Afrikaner nationalism. The union represents a white, postcolonial, ethnic movement that mixes unique politics of recognition with class struggle. Solidarity’s success, defined by its prominence in media and politics, signifies new turns in race and identity politics in South Africa that cannot be disconnected from the ANC government’s drive for racial redress. Affirmative action policies have been most consequential in the public administration and in former public companies—sectors that are also strongly affected by neoliberal policies of economic restructuring. The trade union’s discourse of opposition is a peculiar example of a new global vernacular of whiteness; a language of protest that no longer builds on the ideology of white supremacy but reappropriates the idiom of the civil rights and the anti-apartheid movements for its own ends. Solidarity’s politics of recognition also echo international discourses about minority rights and cultural rights, but actually distorts it. It co-opts the language of rights enshrined in the South African constitution to perpetuate the inequalities of the past.

The trade union’s brand of post-nationalism is composed of a subtle new rhetoric of rights and belonging, with echoes of the old myths of Afrikaner nationalism. The trope of rights effectively reframes Afrikaners as a minority that is victimized, threatened, and in need of protection. The language of rights has supplanted the racist language of the past. The union no longer presents itself as a white supremacy group that longs back to the days of apartheid (Indeed, it is hard to imagine how old nationalistic claims of racial or cultural exclusivity could receive any legitimacy today). However, Solidarity’s talk of rights does not just replace the language of the past; it also actively tries to rewrite the past. The emphasis on rights helps to underplay the privileged position of Afrikaners in the past and enables the defence of privilege in the present. Nevertheless, Solidarity’s politics cannot solely be
interpreted as the defence of white privilege—class matters too. Solidarity’s discourse is deeply affected by class-based shame. Only this emotion can explain the paradox why Solidarity undercuts its politics of recognition by an ambivalent politics of resentment: politics in which the blunt denial of guilt for apartheid is matched by an equally strong renunciation of the need for Afrikaners to change. Because the union’s leadership is unable to admit guilt, they cannot make a productive separation between Solidarity’s mission and the history of Afrikaners. It is shame about who they are that leads to bursts of anger, self-pity, and fantasies about the unlikely re-emergence of Afrikaner nationalism.

The Afrikaner lower middle class—Solidarity’s predominant members’ base—benefitted least from white privilege. Nevertheless, after apartheid, this group has seen their workplaces most rapidly change. Former public companies like Telkom and Eskom have been completely transformed by neoliberal policies of economic restructuring and affirmative action. Moreover, the lower middle class gets stigmatized the most, not only because of racial integration in their workplace but also because they often openly protest the consequences of affirmative action. Solidarity’s discourse resonates with the Afrikaner lower middle class because it offers protection, belonging, and a masculine defiant stand against the dominance of the ANC.

The Afrikaner men, who used to dominate the companies, today narrate a story of loss and resentment. The older generation has lost their privileged position; they feel their experience and expertise is no longer valued because of affirmative action. They no longer feel proud of their companies, which perform poorly in the post-apartheid economy. They feel stigmatized. By contrast, their companies’ histories are viewed through a nostalgic lens. Before 1994 the companies were experienced as one strong community: homogenous, harmonious, familial, and proud. Today, work feels more regulated, professionalized, and competitive. Work is always more to men than a source for income; work is about masculinity and male bonding. Both are under pressure today. Work no longer provides a stable anchoring point for their white, Afrikaner, masculine identities.

Although the poor performance of their companies is at least partly rooted in neoliberal policies, the men blame the new racial order at work. Racial explanations dominate the men’s struggle to make sense of their new position and lower status. Pride in their work is the most important racial boundary they draw between their black co-workers and themselves. The pride that is obsessively reaffirmed—as if declarations of pride can hide the shame of their lower status, loss of dominance, and stigma associated with being seen as racists. Lower-middle-class Afrikaner workers no longer dominate the company’s culture, an experience that sets them apart from upper-class Afrikaners. They no longer dictate the norms and rules of racial interactions in the workplace. The black majority endorses “new” social
norms of anti-racism both formally and informally, and this forces the Afrikaner men to adapt. They have to self-censor the potentially racist content of the jokes they make, the stories they tell, and the topics they discuss. The men’s frustration about the difficulty of this task is compounded by their obliviousness about the racist content of their talk. They are frustrated about “black rights” and the “loss of freedom of speech.” While they experience a painful loss of camaraderie and male bonding at work, often expressed in the language of alienation, their own everyday racism is lost on them. Few men are able to look inward for the need to change. The women’s intimate and emphatic account of the need of change and adjustment suggests this is a particular masculine response. It’s most likely related to how men avert their gaze from their inner world.

Finally, talking about apartheid is straining and extremely difficult for the men. They feel accused and held personally responsible. Their stories about apartheid are marked by denial and distortions, and sometimes fantasy pictures of positive race relationships during apartheid. Their narratives about apartheid represent an extremely white-centered point of view. There is little empathy for the consequences of apartheid on blacks. The men do not see apartheid as a hideous political system that justifiably was ended. Instead, the men prefer to fault themselves for the weakness of their generation to live up to their ideals of Afrikaner masculinity. If they only had been tougher and stronger, the end of apartheid would have never happened.