

Afrikaners en geskiedenis in die 21e eeu

Daar bestaan wye konsensus dat die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing sedert 1994 'n ongekende proses van omvangryke verandering ondergaan het. Die oorskakeling na 'n veelrassige demokratiese bestel het op alle vlakke van die samelewing 'n daadwerklike effek gehad. Die impak van politieke omskakeling het veral Afrikaners geraak.

Die geestelike trauma wat deur die verlies van mag meegebring is, het 'n geestesgesteldheid, veral onder blanke Afrikaanssprekende Suid-Afrikaners, tot gevolg gehad waarin daar na die wese van dinge gevra is. Polities is daar sedertdien aanpassings gemaak en wegbeweg van kuddedenke. Op die sosio-kulturele vlak het Afrikaners ook vir hulself begin dink. Daar is minder staat gemaak op die voorskriftelikheid en meer binne die raamwerk van selfstandige denke gefunksioneer. Selfs op die ekonomiese terrein het Afrikaanssprekendes begin om vir hulself 'n nuwe toekoms en materiële heil uit te werk as ondernemers in 'n milieu waarin inligtingstegnologie en globalisering faktore van deurslaggewende belang geword het.

Die Afrikaanse identiteit het ook die gestalte van 'n betekenisvolle diaspora by gekry. Sedert die opheffing van die politieke isolasie van die tagtigerjare, het Afrikaners hulself in alle wêrelddele gevestig. Hulle het ook steeds skakeling met die mense tuis in stand hou.

Hierdie dinamiese kultuuromgewing is sedert die wending van die nuwe millennium gestimuleer deur gesprekvoering tussen akademici, taalaktiviste, joernaliste, kultuurleiers en politici. Reeds vir 'n geruime tyd word daar by gewilde kunstfeeste, modieuze bymekaarkomplekke en in die teater gesprek gevoer.

Telkens kom die vraag oor die geskiedenis – en in die besonder die Afrikaners se verlede – ter sprake. Dit is bemoedigend om daarvan kennis te neem dat die segmentele vlug, weg van die geskiedenis, ten minste vir die huidige gestuit is. Die debat oor Afrikanerskuld, 'n Afrikaanse historiese bewussyn en die verbreding van historiese perspektief het maar pas begin.

In hierdie uitgawe van *Historia* verskyn 'n bydrae deur prof. Hermann Giliomee, buitengewone professor in geskiedenis aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch. Hy onderneem 'n voëlvlug van 'n Afrikaanse geskiedenis oor 'n tydperk van 350 jaar.

Die artikel is daarop gerig om lesers bedag te maak op enkele aspekte van die gesprek wat tans aan die orde van die dag is. Die aksent is hoofsaaklik op 'n historiese perspektief en kan moontlik die terrein vir meer besinning voorberei.

Geskiedenis op skool

Die nasionale departement van onderwys is sedert die tweede helfte van 2000 besig met 'n ondersoek na geskiedenis as skoolvak. Onlangs is

kennis gegee dat ‘n kommissie van ondersoek oor die saak aangestel gaan word.

‘n Belangrike motivering is dat geskiedenis gebruik kan word om weer eens ‘n sin vir moraliteit te vestig in die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing. Geskiedenis word beskou as ‘n dissipline wat daartoe kan meewerk om hierdie uitkoms te laat verwesentlik.

Vir historici in Suid-Afrika is dit ‘n bemoedigende boodskap. Universiteitsklaslokale wat enkele jare gelede feitlik leeg geloop het, is nou weer eens besig om stadig maar seker weer vol te word. Die lewende diskloers oor die verlede kan dus weer vertroetel en bevorder word.

Die onderwysowerhede sal die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing ‘n diens bewys deur so spoedig moontlik daadwerklike stappe te doen wat tot die herlewing van geskiedenis as ‘n fundamentele en vormende geesteswetenskaplike dissipline op skool kan aanleiding gee.

Kuberargiewe

Dit is ‘n bekende feit dat die historiese dokument in die IT-era ‘n nuwe betekenis gekry het. Die volgende inligting gee die historikus heelwat rede tot nadenke. In ‘n onlangse uitgawe van *The New York Times* berig Susan Stellin dat sowat 650 miljoen boodskappe van die inligtingsnetwerk Deja.com, tussen die jare 1979-95 van eienaar verwissel het.¹

Baie rekenaarwetenskaplikes wat in teoretiese gesprekke op die groep betrokke was, het sedertdien tot die boonste sport gevorder. Name wat genoem word, is byvoorbeeld dié van Marc Andreessen van Netscape-faam en MacKenzie Bezos, die vrou van Amazon.com se grootbaas.

In IT-kringe heers daar nou kommer oor die probleem van privaatheid en inligting in die openbare sfeer.

Die boodskappe wissel glo in inhoud van gevorderde rekenaartaal tot doodgewone boodskappe wat mense vir mekaar gestuur het. Tans word al hierdie inligting gehuisves in ‘n argief wat beskryf word as net so groot soos “‘n hoop papier wat 110 myl hoog is”.

Vir historici is hierdie inligting ietwat sorgwekkend. Dink net aan die tyd wat dit sou neem om deur te werk as daar geen “soek”- en “vind”-knoppies op die rekenaar was nie. ‘n Meer deurlopende gedagte is egter die vraag na die soort geskiedenis wat uit bronne van hierdie aard in die toekoms geskryf gaan word.

Indien dit so is dat e-posse die bronne van die geskiedenis moet wees ... hou aan skryf!

1. S. STELLIN, “New Economy: Privacy Concerns for Google Archive” *New York Times* 2001.05.07. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/07/technology>

Editorial comment

Afrikaners and history in the 21st century

There is general consensus that South African society since 1994 experienced a process of unsurpassed change. The transition to a multi-racial democratic dispensation had an impact on all levels of society. The impact of political transition was perhaps most marked amongst Afrikaans speaking South Africans.

The spiritual trauma, brought about by the loss of political power, especially amongst white Afrikaans speaking South Africans, had the effect that the being of things were questioned. In the political realm there have subsequently been indications that adjustments were made – in particular to move away from group thinking. On the socio-cultural level Afrikaners also started thinking for themselves. They no longer summarily rely on proscribed trends. On the economic front Afrikaners have started securing for themselves material salvation as entrepreneurs in a milieu where information technology and globalisation have become factors of considerable significance.

The Afrikaner identity has also acquired its own diaspora. Many Afrikaners, have settled overseas since the lifting of the political boycott of isolation. These people have now started re-establishing contact with the folk at home.

This dynamic cultural environment has been stimulated since the turn of the new millennium by the discussions of academics, language activists, journalists, cultural leaders and politicians. For some time the popular arts festival, the fashionable gatherings, as well as the theatre have been the venues of discussion.

Frequently the question of history – and in particular the past of the Afrikaners – is considered. It is encouraging to take note that the segmental flight from the past has, at least for the present, been halted. The debate on Afrikaner guilt, and Afrikaner historical consciousness, as well as the broadening of historical perspectives, has only just begun.

In this edition of *Historia* there is a contribution by a leading commentator Prof. Hermann Giliomee. He gives a bird's eye-view of 350 years of Afrikaner history.

The article is aimed at making readers aware of certain aspects relating to the current debate. The accent is however primarily on an historical perspective and may pave the way for more thought on the matter.

History at school

Since the second half of 2000 the national department of education has been busy with an investigation into history as a school subject. Recently notice was given of a commission to investigate the matter.

An important motivation is that history may be used to restore a sense of morality in South African society. History is considered as a suitable discipline for realising this outcome.

For historians in South Africa this is a heartening message. There was a time when university classrooms had virtually no students. Indications are that they are now gradually filling up again. The living discourse on the past can thus once again be cherished and promoted.

The educational authorities will do South African society a great service by taking steps that would, as soon as possible, lead to the restoration of history as a fundamental and formative humanities discipline at school.

Cyber archives

The nature of historical document has gained a new significance in the IT era. Bearing this in mind it may be worth considering the following information. In a recent *New York Times* article Susan Stellin reported on the sales deal of a discussion list with some 650 million messages of the info site Deja.com, dating back to the period 1979-95.¹

Many computer scientists who participated in theoretical discussions on the list have subsequently become leaders in the industry. In their number are people such as Marc Andreessen of Netscape fame, and MacKenzie Bezos, the wife of Amazon.com's founder.

In IT circles the concern is now primarily with the issue of privacy and information in the public sphere.

The messages on the list vary between advanced computer speak and mundane every day human information in an archive which is described as similar in size to "a stack of papers 110 miles high".

For historians this information is somewhat disconcerting. Imagine the time it would take if we did not have access to the "search" and "find" buttons on our PC's!

What remains a pervasive thought is, what type of history will be to write from sources of this nature.

If emails be the source of history ... write on!

1. S. STELLIN, "New Economy: Privacy Concerns for Google Archive" *New York Times* 2001.05.07. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/07/technology>