

Afrikaner Identity: Dysfunction and Grief by Yves Vanderhaeghen
(University of KwaZulu-Natal Press)

The author, who is a seasoned journalist (and editor of the KZN-based daily *Witness*), bases his survey of Afrikaner identity on a close analysis of the Afrikaans daily *Beeld*. His findings are revealing, though perhaps not surprising: given the paper's generally well-to-do Afrikaans readership, *Beeld* concentrates overwhelmingly on issues close to the concerns of Afrikaans middle-class people.

Vanderhaeghen sees Afrikaners as 'self-othering', that is, casting themselves as victims of the new dispensation, in defensive reaction against being cast by others as the perpetrators of Apartheid. He uses the concept of 'grievability', which he defines as a matter of 'trying to claim a position of legitimacy ... through establishing an equivalence of suffering. Othered by dominant social discourse as racists and right-wingers, Afrikaners flip the dynamic around: they are the new "other", ... appropriating the traditional position of minorities around the world. They offer up their dead and maimed to the world to bear witness to their grief ...'

To support these necessarily broad generalisations, the author analyses in exhaustive detail the reporting of *Beeld* from 1 November 2012 to 31 January 2013, that is, a total of 77 editions, in terms mainly of the news and opinion sections, from which 'were generated discursive categories of "grievable", which are then interpreted in terms of a prevailing discourse of dysfunction, informed primarily by the categories of crime and disorder.' Thus *Beeld*, according to the author, promotes a 'grievable' narrative of Afrikanerdom, in which the Afrikaner is the victim of a political dispensation whose dysfunctionality disproportionately disadvantages the white Afrikaners. He shows by numerical analysis how strong the emphasis is on whites as victims: 'In *Beeld*, the life of the Afrikaner subject is presented as vulnerable at every level, that is, "othered" in every aspect of public life.' He notes, possibly sardonically, that the fate of the rhino becomes, in *Beeld's* rendering,

metaphoric of the threatened position of the Afrikaner. In general, he finds that stories involving animals outnumber, by 199 to 110, stories 'in which a black person was the subject of the story'.

Interestingly, in the light of recent revelations, Vanderhaeghen refers several times to *Beeld*'s hagiographic obituary, alone among the local media, to General Magnus Malan. It is tempting to speculate whether *Beeld* was aware of the rumours circulating at the time regarding the General's paedophilic activities; if so, that would support Vanderhaeghen's contention that *Beeld* was intent on counteracting the Afrikaner-as-perpetrator image.

To summarise somewhat baldly a complex argument, Vanderhaeghen suggests that, judging by the editorial practices of *Beeld*, Afrikaners have retreated into a new laager, not of racial domination, but of self-othering, casting themselves as 'grievable' victims rather than perpetrators, rhinos rather than hunters. This is a challenging thesis, and will no doubt be challenged. It is certainly a thought-provoking one.