Link to Conference programme

History, Mentality and Nationbuilding in South Africa and Denmark.

By Hans Erik Stolten, the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden.

Introduction

In the Nordic countries, until recently, we have not very often used the term ethnicity in connection with our feelings for our own national unity or affiliation to a certain group.

In contrast, for a long time, different outspoken assumptions of "race" and "ethnicity" have been important for the way in which the people of Southern Africa have organised their social environment.

After the Second World War, right up until 1994, South Africa was practically unique, in building ethnic difference and racial hierarchy on legal and constitutional principles. Moreover, in South Africa ethnic differences corresponded with immense contrasts of wealth and power, and ethnic differences apparently formed focal points of violent conflicts.

To understand ethnicity is therefore still central to the task of building South Africa as a democratic society, a task which must include the obtaining of societal cohesion, achieving of a more just social distribution, and providing cultural tolerance and solidarity. (Glaser)

In this paper therefore, I will discuss some of the sources of ethnicity in South African history and social science.

Communicating ethnicity in South Africa.

The fact that racial and ethnic discourse have had a high profile in South Africa is not surprising given the historical diversity of African, European and Asian ancestries and the country's many different languages.

But this discussion is not only about "difference". The hierarchical ranking of the ethnic groups means that it is also about the criticism of power. There still is a wealth and

income hierarchy which has Anglophone whites at the top and below them, in descending order, White Afrikaners, Indians, Coloureds and, at the bottom, Africans.

Before 1994 these ethnic hierarchies were maintained by force, but to some degree also by discourses of ethnicity propagated by dominant groups and forces.

For the Europeans, explicit theories of the ranking of ethnic groups were required to legitimate social inequalities between groups and nations. This legitimisation could be found for example in religion and in White nationalism. Often with the help of the authority of "expertise" emanating from university disciplines like anthropology, social psychology – and, of course, history. (Dubow, Ashforth).

From the beginning of colonisation, Europeans controlled political power and the uneven distribution of riches in the conquered areas and they felt themselves both different and superior to slaves and African people. Non-Europeans were increasingly marginalised in colonial society even when they were freed from slavery, Christianised or educated. Race became more important than other ethnic divisions: Europeans usually stood together against blacks despite their own internal differences in language and interests and Africans, Coloureds and Indians too to some degree came to recognise common identities across language lines.

Despite this growing race consciousness, and despite the influence of European so-called scientific racism, racial domination in South Africa did not depend heavily upon a clearly articulated biological race theory. In the nineteenth century the official intention of both White missionaries, liberals and the Christianised Black elite was to assimilate blacks into the civilised society. This belief was competing with the view of Afrikaners and racist English for instance in Eastern Cape and Natal that blacks could not, or ought not to be, adapted into White society. Different kinds of biological race thinking were expressed in twentieth century political and intellectual discourse, especially in Afrikaner nationalist circles in the 1930s and 1940s, for example in the university discipline of physical anthropology and in criminology. (Geoff Cronjé, Dubow). However, both English and Afrikaner elites mostly expressed different versions of a culturally fundamentalism rather than openly racist position (Dubow). In the segregation period before 1948, differences of language, belief and way of life rather than biological distinctions between people were emphasised, with the help of "expert" authority especially from cultural anthropologists to rationalise racial segregation and later apartheid. Segregation was justified by both whites and some

Africans as an alternative to the destructive clash of cultures and to the social breakdown of traditional societies. Africans were, as the segregationist postulated, associated with a distinctive culture which needed space to develop separately under European supervision (Dubow).

In reality, ethnicity often came to serve in White discourse as a substitute for biological race rather than as an alternative to it.

During apartheid all whites were assigned a single state, despite their diversity of language, religion and origin, which disproves that White Nationalists gave priority to cultural ethnicity over race. The National Party was notorious for its efforts to codify racial boundaries in law. The doctrine of a postulated non-hierarchical ethnic pluralism, even if sincerely believed in by some Afrikaner intellectuals, was simply used to justify White power and privilege and the binding of Africans to artificial ethnic "homelands".

It is also part of the picture that blacks in South Africa did not totally refuse racial and ethnic categorisation. The divisions between Coloured, Indian and African were accepted to some degree and remain actually rather widely accepted now; discourses of inter- or sub-African ethnicity also have been promoted from time to time especially among African traditionalists, migrants and newly urbanised.

This popular authoring and internalisation of ethnic boundaries undoubtedly contributed to the stabilisation of White rule by dividing its opponents and legitimating some of the actions of the White state.

On the other hand, the unifying power of ethnicity could, where directed against the dominant, rather than against ethnically different fellow subordinates, provide a resource of opposition to White power.

(Beinart, Beinart and Bundy, Delius, Moodie, Harries, Keegan).

Defining race and ethnicity

How have race groups, and how have ethnic groups been defined then?

Members of a certain "race" are typically assumed to share biological characteristics, whereas members of an "ethnic group" are assumed to share non-biological attributes such as language, religion and culture.

In South Africa whites, Africans Coloureds and Indians, has been thought of as "races" whereas Zulus, Xhosas, Sotho, Tswana and Afrikaners are considered ethnic groups.

As a matter of form, it has to be said that it is not possible to find satisfactory biological definitions of racially labelled groups. Earlier efforts to distinguish races and trace their movements through time by way of a variety of disciplines from linguistics to craniology have proven rather impossible (Dubow). The evidence of contemporary genetics suggests that groups referred to as "races" are both formed and their boundaries in turn blurred by complex patterns of extensive genetic mixing over time, facilitated by cultural and economic contact and land conquest. There are no pure or bounded races. (Giliomee). In centuries past Bantuspeaking mixed farmers genetically assimilated Khoisan (Hall, Crais). The Coloured category itself is far too ancestrally diverse to constitute a coherent biological race group by any yardstick.

The effort to define races legally has proved just as difficult as describing them as biological entities. The Population Registration Act of 1950, which provided the racial classification system used in the apartheid era, was forced to rely on openly subjective and the Act had to be amended several times to solve definitional problems and the government had to use a different system of racial classification for the Group Areas Act in the urban areas. It actually made it possible to belong to more than one statutory race simultaneously. And moreover the law permitted the State President to create new "ethnic, linguistic, cultural or other" groups by proclamation (West).

On the other hand, it can not be said that race is just fiction without reference to the real world. There are of course patterns of genetic heritage more likely to predominate in some racially labelled groups than others. There are differences of physical appearance between different groups of human beings. And race is still important for identity creation in South Africa.

Nevertheless, race is first and foremost a social construction. The allocation of people to race groups is decided through the subjective recognition of individuals as belonging to certain group and it is somehow the given society that confer significance on some physical peculiarities rather than others.

In South African history, the distinction between Europeans and others was developed because it served both material and psychological purposes for the White population which had the power to force through its racial definitions.

In many cases, race and ethnicity are used interchangeably or overlapping. The term "ethnic group" also typically indicates a population that shares not only cultural forms, as for example religion, but also a common history.

The distinction between racial and other kinds of ethnicity is properly impossible just to ignore in South African history and politics, and the best approach might be to understand race as a form of ethnicity and to use the term ethnicity to encircle both racial and cultural ethnicity (Bekker, Bickford-Smith, Ashforth and Norval).

One distinction, found necessary by Glaser, is between large and small ethnicities, where racial ethnicities are usually found amongst large ethnicities, which are considered unifying compared to smaller ethnicities.

The apartheid ideologues tried to split and dissolve the larger ethnicities of Black and African but were more reluctant in the question of whether whites too were divided into (two) smaller ethnicities.

By contrast, opponents of apartheid struggled to forge larger ethnicities and the largest of them seems still very necessary during nationbuilding, that is the non-racial one: "South African".

The formation of ethnicities

Where do racial and ethnic identities come from? Is ethnic-national identification a modern product developed by the demand for unified markets for labour and products in the industrial era helped by the spread of literacy and printed matter about national self-determination? Or is it just remains of a shared religious, linguistic and territorial history?

In the literature on the subject, some tend to emphasise the impressionable, situational and political character of ethnicity, whereas the so-called primordialists stress its flexibility and durability.

In South Africa, many White nationalists and actually many liberals too have supported a primordial version of Afrikaner nationalism and a timeless and static view of African cultures.

Radical historians, and for the last decades also many liberals, have tried to prove the relatively late articulation of both Afrikaner and Coloured identification and African political mobilisation.

From a historical point of view, it seems rather obvious that many of South Africa's ethnic identities could not be very old. The White settlers of the Company period lost their sentimental ties to Europe very early, and on the other hand, Afrikaner nationalism was only articulated after the take over by British imperialism. Indians only arrived in the 1860s. Khoi and San languages, are very old, but almost disappeared under the impact of White conquest and cultural assimilation, the same happened with the slaves collected from different countries. Even the conflict between Europeans and Khoisan goes back no further than the later seventeenth century and for the Bantu-speaking peoples to the eighteenth century.

The only surviving ethnic identities which might have stretched back into a very distant past are those associated with sub-African ethnicity. That is with the various regional, linguistic and customary subdivisions of the Bantu-speaking peoples, but even here it is hard to see that modern Black politics has much to do with original indigenous traditions.

The Afrikaner nationalist ideology has traced Afrikaner identity to events as distant as the Slachters Nek Rebellion of 1815 or even back to rebellions against the Dutch governors. Also English-speaking historians have taken the story of White identity back to the isolated South African frontier of the eighteenth century where Afrikaners derived a sense of being a "chosen people". However, recent research has shown that the forms of Calvinism associated with Afrikaner nationalism were products of the later nineteenth century, and that Afrikaans only displaced Dutch as a culture language as a result of the language movements political struggles which stretched long into the twentieth century. (Du Toit) (Hofmeyr).

Even after it had clearly emerged, Afrikaner nationalism was divided in many different ways. Between those remaining in Cape and those in Transvaal, class divisions between export farmers and poor subsistence farmers, on the question of co-operation or rebellions against the British.

O'Meara may have been rather simplistic, when he located the material origins of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s, but he did prove that at least it had to be reinvented on a new ground and sustained against pressures of fragmentation.

Ethnic identification amongst other White groups for instance British, Portuguese, Jewish could actually be said to be more "primordial" than that of Afrikaners because it kept some ties to older European cultures. However, it these ties were much looser and less politicised.

British South Africanism was seldom articulated as a coherent and sustained ethnicity. It was fractured by class divisions for example between mine owners and skilled workers long into the twentieth century.

Only in Natal something like a British patriotism developed, but these sentimental loyalties fated away when Britain began to decolonise and the Commonwealth transformed into a forum distinguish by independent ex-colonies aversion against apartheid.

Other European immigrants to South Africa for example from Eastern and Southern Europe have for periods maintained local organisations and links with their countries, but they have usually kept a rather low ethnic profile.

Coloured identity was also consolidated during the later nineteenth century, even if this happened after earlier rather chaotic developments, including the dissolution of the original Khoisan and slave cultures, sexual interaction between all groups, Cape Coloureds religious conversions to Islam and Christianity, their participation in the forging of the Afrikaans language, and the shared circumstances of poverty as "free" more or less forced labour after the abolition of slavery.

White dominance in economic and status contributed to a sense of shared Coloured exclusion. Increasing contact with African peoples with different languages and job positions contributed in the later nineteenth century also to a sense of the distinctiveness of "Cape Coloureds" from Africans. (Goldin, Bickford-Smith).

The Indians in South Africa were from the beginning socially, regionally and linguistically divided between the mass Hindu indentured labourers from Southern India and the predominantly Muslim merchants who arrived later. (Swan). Cultural aspects brought from India endured in the form family patterns and some not politicised awareness of caste.

"Indian" or "Asian" identity was mobilised politically from late ninetieth century, by organisations such as the Natal Indian Congress which stressed Indian unity.

All Indians were denied the vote until 1984, and Indians were collectively identified by White society from the late nineteenth century, and until 1960, as an alien element whose fate was properly to be repatriated like the Chinese. The Indians retained to some degree an identification with India, which came to their defence in diplomatic arenas. (Freund) Indians continue to enjoy Indian film and music. Newer the lees they have absorbed many elements of the dominant English culture.

The strongest argument for primordialism in South Africa is the one that can be made for the different African ethnic groups. These groups speak a range of Bantu languages with have traceable roots many hundreds of years back, and the same goes for many of their traditions, such as distinctive marriage rules, settlement patterns and aesthetic arts and skills. (Maylam, Hall).
Even if it could be unpleasant to admit, I guess that both amongst White observers and amongst Africans themselves, many are thinking of African ethnic groups as "tribes" with long established and relatively changeless traditions, deeply rooted in African mentality. Many unsatisfactory ethnic explanations can be traced back to that kind of thinking right from "faction fights" on the mines to the conflicts between ANC and Inkatha followers.

It still seems easy to forget that it has long ago been convincingly proved (Eldredge, Bundy) that the boundaries between African linguistic and cultural groups were both graded, flexible and moveable. African societies sought and absorbed followers from other groups.
The Southern Sotho under Moshoeshoe in the nineteenth century actually generated a composite nation from ethnically disparate refugees, while the Zulus integrated other groups into their nation by conquest. (Delius) The nineteenth-century Ndebele chiefdom was an amalgam of Sotho and Nguni elements. Some of the boundaries between African ethnic groupings of today were fixed by missionaries, transcribers, ethnologists and administrators issuing from White society (Vail) while others were generated and deepened in the course of resistance to the colonialists dispossession of the land (Keegan, Delius). Segregation and apartheid sought to preserve some of these ethnic cultures in the reserves and homelands, but the versions they kept going

or revived were redesigned to suit the purposes of White conquerors (Welsh, Dubow, Mamdani).

Even if, as Beinart seems to think, the ethnic so-called states which was established under apartheid had some territorial and institutional continuity with pre-conquest African chiefdoms, the outline of their boundaries and the suppression and exploitation of their subjects also supplied new kinds of ethnic consciousness and tension (Dubow, Streek, Murray, Mamdani).

African ethnicity, too, therefore are marked by the modern processes.

The pull of ethnicity

Even if, ethnic identity in South Africa is not static, it is for sure widely and deeply embedded in the consciousness of many South Africans and has often been a basis for their collective action. How can the fascination of ethnic identity be explained? Radical historians in the 1970s and 1980s tried to give a materialist answer to this question. They argued that ethnic mobilisation often succeeded, because it served material or directly economic interests of social groupings and their ethnic profiled leaders. The Radicals showed that, where this was not the case, ethnic solidarity would often fail to develop or it would eventually break down.

In my opinion, the radical historians were quite right. There is a powerful case to be made for the economic-material basis of ethnic consciousness in South Africa.

On the whole it made god economic sense for less well-off whites in South African history to identify with better-off whites and to distinguish themselves from blacks and it mostly made sense for most of the better-off whites to repay this racial togetherness.

Many of the White settlers who arrived in South Africa wanted to become economically independent farmers and by identifying corporately with those similar to themselves, against those different, they achieved a kind of coherent, White civil society which could maintain internal order and fight for access to land and water against external others.

By drawing an ethnic boundary around themselves, the whites could also limit the number of people with whom they would have to share these scarce resources with, and at the same time maximise the numbers of those Black outsiders, who could be defined as their labourers.

By using an us/them distinction they could dehumanise and demonise Black people sufficiently to justify exploiting and oppressing them.

And finally, by identifying with European imperial power they could place themselves on the winning side in battles for land and labour.

When South Africa developed into an urban industrial society and a large section of the White population was more or less forced into the working class, it made sense for White workers to show solidarity with their racial own.

By doing so, they could hope to create a self-contained labour market insulated from competition of cheap Black labour.

They could define a community small enough for its privileges to be affordable to pay for employers and for the state, and for some time, they could even retain some degree of independence by monopolising positions of authority within the wider work force.

For White owners of means of production, this protection of White workers imposed an economic cost, but it helped stabilise capitalist society as such and it secured agents of control in the working class and an effective division of the workers. They therefore supported a parliamentarian system, which limited the privilege of vote to whites.

Material-economic interests can usually be found relatively easy when "others" tries to demarcate themselves ethnically. When "Cape Coloureds" found their fate linked to that of other blacks after the Boer War and later, they had strong material interests to claim their separateness from Africans. Africans were from the beginning subject to greater state oppression, and it cant be denied that Coloureds had preferential treatment compared to Africans (Goldin).

Cheap African labour undercut Coloured labour (Lewis), and the state offered Coloureds some protection from African competition by treating them as so-called "civilised labour" in the inter-war years, and, from 1955 until 1984, apartheid governments attempted to limit African employment in the western Cape (Goldin, Humphries). While the oppression grow harder on Coloureds especially after 1948, apartheid provided an incentive for Coloureds to identify "downward" with Africans, as especially the frustrated middle class did, while the Coloured working class in the

immediate situation may have had more to lose than to gain from African political and economic advance.

For more than fifty years African real wages stagnated and when they began to raise in the 1970s and 1980s, the National Party presided over an even more substantial improvement in Coloured living standards (Giliomee, Mattes et al.).

If the tricameral political system, which again gave Coloureds some access to parliamentarism from 1984, strengthened the sense some Coloureds had of relative advantage compared with Africans, then the ANC-dominated governments in the 1990s in some ways actually threatened this advantage.

Indians were actually not afforded the same degree of protection by the state from African competition that Coloureds were, but nevertheless they acquired a position of relative economic advantage over Africans, maybe because of skills and connections brought from India and because of commercial opportunities afforded by Natal's marketplaces (Bhana). Indians entering the urban labour market also derived an advantage over Africans from their relatively rapid urbanisation and Anglicisation and Indians received were favoured from the 1960s by state-provided mass secondary and technical education (Freund).

So, despite they had suffered from severe discrimination from the 1890s onwards and being officially regarded as aliens up until 1960, Indians were generally less oppressed by the White state than Africans.

It is impossibly to deny, that the derailed system in many cases made Africans and Indians economic competitors and even antagonists.

Cheap African labour threatened to undercut Indian industrial workers in the 1930s and 1940s, while Africans encountered Indians as landlords, traders and better-off workers (Freund).

Resentments arising from these differentials fuelled incidents of Indian-African intercommunal violence especially in the incidents of in 1949 and 1985.

From an early stage, Indian economic advance also evoked the hostility of competing White traders and workers (Bhana) (Freund).

Material factors first and foremost Indian economic competitiveness thereby underpinned Indians sense of exclusion from White society and also their fear of Africans.

Different kinds of ethnic identity among Africans could actually serve a hole range of material needs.

For example for so-called traditional elites, actively maintaining ethnicity as a precondition for preserving their authority and wealth in the reserves (McAllister).

More westernised and in reality quite modern and rational African elites, such as the Inkatha leaders, could find advantage in allying with traditional rulers still enjoying some kind of popular legitimacy, such as the Zulu king. (Marks, Keegan).

Poor African peasants in need of land could try to use real or imagined ethnic connections to get it, for example by identifying with chiefs pursuing land-claims on behalf of "their" people. (Keegan 1986).

Migrant workers might have seen, in the system of so-called traditional rule in the reserves/bantustans, a mechanism for securing and maintaining access to rural resources and maybe for controlling their women during contract periods (Vail), while ethnically ordered information networks helped them to navigate in urban labour markets (Delius).

Nevertheless, I think, that up until now, the main reason for the upholding of Sub-African ethnicity was, that it also served White material interests.

White mineowners valued chiefs co-operation in labour recruitment. They could use the role of traditional authorities in maintaining discipline in the mine compounds, and they had the benefit the informal subsidy to their workers' wage, housing and social security costs, that came from migrants' continued attachment to ethnic reserves under the system of internal colonialism.

Urban employers of less skilled labour often preferred the so-called "tribal" African to more discriminating and demanding young urban African. (Posel).

State support for the homeland system in turn gave the small new African bureaucratic elites a material interest in keeping the ethnic order. (Murray).

Competition between Africans over scarce material resources in the reserves was in turn, both by Whites and Black transposed into experiences of specific inter-ethnic antagonism". (Murray).

Afrikaner ethnic identity has for the last 30 years been a classical case for both liberal and radical historians. Radical, materialist analysts have convincingly disproved the arguments of both liberals and Afrikaners, who considered afrikaanerdom to have a largely spiritual, ideological or metaphysical basis.

In two famous studies, Dan O'Meara scrutinised the growing influence of Afrikaner nationalism before and after the National Party victory in 1948. He showed driving forces such as a northern Afrikaner petit bourgeoisie, frustrated by its marginal position in the state bureaucracy and urban economy and eager to build a base of political and economic power. This interest group made a rather unstable alliance with the more bourgeois Afrikaner nationalism of the western Cape agricultural, financial and press establishment.

These core social groups of Afrikaner nationalism after sustained campaigning obtained the support of the majority of Afrikaner workers and Afrikaner maize farmers only by appealing to their material-economic interests, promising improved African labour supplies, subsidies to farmers - and at the same time greater economic protection to unskilled White workers.

When in power the Afrikaner nationalists built up a northern Afrikaner bourgeoisie and greatly expanded the proportion of Afrikaners in professional, White collar and supervisory jobs (Bunting).

During the 1970s the best educated Afrikaners slowly began to see an enlightened self-interest in political reform away from police-state-apartheid, because they did no longer need the protection from this strong ethnic state; and increasingly they marginalised from the backward parts of the Afrikaner working class and less well off farmers dependent on state subsidies. This class differentiation helped, O'Meara, Charney and others argued, to shatter Afrikaner unity.

O'Meara has been criticised for economic and class reductionism, and some of his details have been questioned. Critics have also emphasised continuities between the Afrikaner nationalism of the 1930s and that of earlier periods forged in different material conditions (Giliomee) and cast doubt on materialist explanations of Afrikaner disunity in the 1980s.

However, Giliomee, who has been a severe critic of O'Meara's reductionism, has actually himself explained how material forces in the first phase of Afrikaner

nationalism. He argued that the beginnings of Afrikaner national consciousness in the western Cape in the 1870s and 1880s were bound up with the material concerns of Afrikaner commercial farmers lobbying for protection, assistance and repressive labour legislation. They were also connected to aversion between British banks and poorer Dutch/Afrikaner farmers, and to the efforts of Dutch/Afrikaner financial promoters to mobilise the savings of Afrikaners in support of ethnic financial institutions.

Also the Afrikaner language movement in early twentieth century in South Africa was itself driven in part by the concern of Afrikaner school teachers, church ministers, journalists and writers that they would lose their pupils, congregations and readers, and hence their material livelihoods and social status, as a result of Anglicisation and the social degeneration of poor Afrikaners (Hofmeyr).

The attraction of material-economic explanation of ethnic identity and conflict in South Africa is obvious; its ethnic groups are not only economically "ranked" but the dominant groups have exploited the subordinate groups as a cheap labour force.

In many other countries, however, ethnic conflicts have apparently not so much to do with either labour exploitation or deep inequalities.

The comparative evidence thus invites a degree of caution about the sufficiency of economic explanation (Connor); it may indeed be that the very plausibility of material-economic explanation in South Africa blinds analysts to other factors contributing to ethnic identification and conflict in the country.

A second reason for caution about material-economic accounts is that they do not seem sufficiently to explain the intensities of feeling associated with ethnic mobilisation.

The willingness of individuals to sacrifice life and liberty for ethno-national causes is a phenomenon not easily assimilated to an understanding of individuals as rationally self-interested in the way materialists imagine them often to be.

Some of those who reject economic-materialist explanations have in recent times preferred to understand ethnicity as a discourse bearing its own internal logic and shaping the social world rather than being influenced or determined by external forces. This is, like the materialist, a constructionist argument but one which focuses on the

shaping powers of language rather than on the economic. (Kinghorn, Norval). But up until now there springs no general theory of the resonance of ethnicity from such works, though there do issue forth useful reminders of the importance of the stories, or narratives, which ethnic politicians and actors tell about themselves and their "people".

An alternative critique of material-economic explanations proceeds from an insistence on the importance of the psychological or "human nature". From this standpoint the problem with the Marxist and other material-economic accounts of ethnicity flows not from the limitations of material explanation as such but from the limits of a conception of the material that extends only to the economic.

It has been said that there is non-economic material in the world too, none more important to whom we are than our historically evolved brain (Glaser).

Another approach could be the need for human interaction. As social creatures humans seek group association partly for material-economic support, but also for companionship, which can not be reduced to its material functionality.

Ethnic association recommends itself to people seeking both practical and affective group interaction. A common language allows undemanding conversation and co-ordination of tasks; common values minimise emotionally hurtful challenges and misunderstandings; shared histories multiply common points of reference, facilitating gossip and reminiscence. In the course of interaction there are likely to develop feelings of mutual loyalty and obligation.

Humans also seek existential explanations. The adaptive mechanism of a large brain allows us an awareness of past and future, birth and death, and induces a need to understand the "purpose" of lives which are in reality mere accidents. Humans yearn to locate themselves within stories that begin before birth and continue beyond death. Religion offers stories conferring mystique on the earthly historical narratives of peoples such as Afrikaners, while nationalism supplies a shared past and future and a sense of collective significance. As the cases of Afrikaners and Zulus illustrate, ethnic nationalist stories work especially well where they can draw upon collective "memories" of heroic battles, martyrs and deeds (Thompson).

A third need satisfied by ethnic identity is for external affirmation or status. This can be sought by individuals directly but also through identification with a group that carries high status.

The according of status to others to whom one is linked in some fashion for its part allows the weak to identify vicariously with the strong and allows leaders some of the authority they need to lead.

Whatever its origin or function, the evidence of status consciousness in South Africa is not hard to find. The Black Consciousness movement, with its emphasis on psychological liberation, was an attempt amongst other things to free blacks of their sense of inferiority and to confer a status on blackness sufficiently magnetic to draw in the Coloured and Indian intelligentsias. While downward identification with Africans did occur amongst politicised middle class Coloureds and Africans, it seems that the upward pull of White status was in the end more powerful amongst the masses of Coloureds even after whites lost power in 1994. The majority of whites, Coloureds and Indians even now continue to affirm their sense of superiority over Africans even now by construing crime and corruption in post-apartheid South Africa as evidence that, as they always warned, Africans are not able to run a country.