



Proudly South African: (Re-) imagining Afrikaans identity on South African television

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In South Africa, the subject of “being South African” is constantly scrutinized in our media of communication. There are beer-advertisements proudly rephrasing derogatory anti-apartheid slogans such as “one bullet, one Boer”, into “one nation, one soul, one beer, one goal”, while others single out how a variety of identities all fit neatly under one umbrella. In classrooms and newspapers, people are questioning the validity of a “rainbow”-identity, asking questions about what it means to be a South African in a society where racial/gender profiling is used to fill jobs and positions on national sport-teams. And in living-rooms across South Africa families are tuning in to soap operas such as *7de Laan*, *Isidingo* and *Egoli* through which they get a taste of the nation in color, where “unity in diversity” is a reality instead of the “pie in the sky”-dream that news-headlines would make us believe. It is with regard to the issue of identity formation and nation-building, that I believe an exploration of Afrikaans television’s role in contemporary South Africa can prove useful. While “the media” has received a fair amount of attention in South Africa with regard to its identity as a cultural industry acting as both reflector of the political conditions and a political agent in its own right, the *Afrikaans* media and communication environment have attracted only intermittent attention.

Much of the attention given to the Afrikaans media is focused on the diminishing role of Afrikaans in the South African public sphere. It is argued that the marginalization of the position of Afrikaans as a language of broadcasting is tantamount to a marginalization of the speakers of Afrikaans from the South African public sphere. This paper addresses the issue of identity formation as it pertains to South Africa’s Afrikaans television programs. It pays particular attention to the formation of Afrikaans identity against the backdrop of South Africa’s ongoing project of fostering a national South African identity. An important subtext for understanding the issue of identity formation in the Afrikaans media is therefore the media’s prescribed mandate to

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contribute to nation-building in South Africa and the implications of said mandate for the content and policies of Afrikaans television programs and channels.

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