

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND  
INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH

**Seminar Paper**  
to be presented in RW 7003 SEMINAR ROOM  
AT 4.00pm 26th SEPTEMBER 1994

Title: A Boerevolk for a Boerestand?: Broedertwis and Two  
Manuscripts of Platteland Modernity, c.1959.

by: Tim Clynick

No 367

## A Boerevolk for a Boerestand?: Broedertwis and Two Manuscripts of Platteland Modernity, c.1959.

Tim Clynick  
University of Bophuthatswana

I

This paper outlines the contents of two 'manuscripts of modernity' produced in defence of the Afrikaner Boerestand in the late 1950's. My reconstruction of these 'manuscripts' is both incomplete and sketchy. I hope that their intrinsic interest to the cultural exploration of the inner contours of Afrikaner ethnic ideology justifies the effort below. <sup>1</sup> The two 'manuscripts of modernity' are the cumulative opinions, ideas and objections of Afrikaner (male) academics, State officials, clerics, farmers and members of the rural bourgeoisie in evidence to the Commission of Inquiry into European Occupancy of the Rural Areas in the late 1950's. <sup>2</sup> They debate the relationship of Afrikanerdom to modernisation in a particularly vivid way. <sup>3</sup> In doing so, they demonstrate not just the contingent and protean nature of ethnicity, but the contested nature of modernisation to Afrikanerdom. In the context of the 1950's, with Afrikanerdom ascendant, this contestation within Afrikanerdom in regard to the Boerestand offers a unique view of how Afrikanerdom viewed the modernisation experience on the platteland farms under Apartheid..

The first 'manuscript' outlines a vision of modernity grounded in the *Boerevolk* ideal -- that "those that do the work, will ultimately rule the land." <sup>4</sup> It envisaged the defence of a homogenous Afrikaner rural society -- a *stand* -- as a counterweight to the new *arbeiderstand* in the cities (the product of the *verswarting* ('blackening') and *ontvolking* ('depopulation') of the platteland) and growing influence of anti-national urban capitalist interests on the State and urban Afrikaner society in the 1950's. The Transvaaler wrote in 1956:

"No Volk can exist without a Boerestand. We naturally mean by the Boerestand not simply landowners, but also those who ordinarily must do the physical labour on the farms. A sound Boerestand is necessary to serve as the basis for white civilisation in the Union (and) this foundation must be strengthened." <sup>5</sup>

Boerevolk promoters commented on increasing dominance of the State by the late 1950's by the 'urban interest'. This Boerevolk had to "perform the function of preserving and implementing the national spirit and culture" against the "urban tendency towards anglicisation":

Our history confirms the findings of sociologists that even when a Volk loses its independence, and is overwhelmed by force of arms, if it has a strong rural character, the Volk will in all probability be able to preserve its individuality and its culture, and thereby recover its political independence." <sup>6</sup>

The second 'manuscript of modernity' -- a 'modernisation charter' -- at first glance seems to be familiar to us. It outlined a development policy on the platteland that derived from the textbooks of the most avid pro-modernisation theorists of the 1950's. Yet when analysed in its historical-cultural context, it reveals a number of

core ethnic and cultural concerns in common with Boerevolk ideologues.

Like them, these modernisation proponents identified an ethnic 'crisis' within the State that had severe repercussions for the Boerestand. The 'modern' State was an unreliable vehicle for the defence of ethnic interests. The Boerevolk cry of "Back to the Land" was ill-conceived in the era of modernisation and of a multi-dimensional State. Populist programmes, almost totally predicated on State intervention, were thus doomed to failure. The Boerevolk ideal, based on the values, culture and material foundation of the small white rural family -- whether on the farms, or in the platteland *dorpe* -- was unrealistic and dangerous for Afrikanerdom's long-term survival. Rather create the conditions, they argued, for the emergence of a small, powerful class of Afrikaner capitalist farmers -- the rural parallel of that class of urban Afrikaner entrepreneurs -- that would dominate and transform the countryside by turning modernisation into a set of instruments for abiding ethnic domination. For them, the State was an important instrument -- but not *the* instrument -- of Afrikanerdom, because of its tendency by the 1950's to emerge as a mediator between powerful interests, rather than the simple instrument of ethnic domination. "We will not succeed in luring the youth to the platteland by idealising farm life or by romanticising unrealistically the farm and outdoor life," declared one official of the Department of Agriculture. "We must develop the idea of farming as a profession rather than indulging in sickly romanticism about mother earth, land and the boereplaas.<sup>7</sup> By professionalising 'agriculture', practising progressive 'modern' farming, eliminating waste and inefficiency, Afrikanerdom could turn the tide of *verswaring*, realise abiding rural economic growth, revive the economies of platteland towns and thus reconstruct a Boerestand on 'modern' foundations. To achieve this "Agriculture must once again become a duty and a calling -- as fulfilment of mankind's creation and destiny, i.e. to develop the earth, to work it and to preserve it."<sup>8</sup>

We will dwell a little on the two historical 'manuscripts of modernity' identified above as traces of an inner dialogue within Afrikanerdom at an important historical juncture. They comment on a number of important themes which have explanatory power for the agro-environmental trajectory of development on the platteland, as well as for 'Broedertwis' -- interethnic contestations within Afrikanerdom evident from 1965 onwards. In the following two sections we explore these two 'documents of modernity' in turn.

## II

For Boerevolk ideologues, the platteland's racial future lay in a diversified, complex white rural society, rather than in a flourishing, but much restricted class of highly capitalised commercial farmers. The rhetoric was dominated by concern for the "small man." The document echoes the debates of the 1920's where the Pact rigorously debated an appropriate "Back to the Land" strategy for poor whites. In the 1950's "Back to the Landers" identified similar dangers to the Boerestand that their contemporaries had identified four decades before: an imbalance between rural and urban growth (widening divisions between town and countryside), a distinct State funding bias in favour of urban industrial rather than rural agricultural growth, an artificially high price for land, product prices that failed to cover production costs, land concentration and centralisation that left the farms in the hands of land barons or companies who farmed with "native peasants", and

extremely high capital inputs for on-farm production. In consequence the Volk was dispossessed, its ethnic identity shaken. Afrikaners now clustered in their millions in South Africa's cities outside the bonds of kinship and community. This process had occurred at the expense of the Boerestand -- the mass of small, independent landowning farmers, but also small tenant families, white agricultural workers and, in the platteland towns, the Afrikaner petty-bourgeoisie and the town labouring class. In a rural labour market now dominated by cheap and oppressed black workers, the rural Afrikaner youth were lost to the cities. The "reliable platteland components" <sup>9</sup> of the Volk were becoming the victims, not the beneficiaries of modernisation.

There was no better exponent of this variant of the Boerestand ideal than Rev Johannes Rudolph Albertyn (NGK). <sup>10</sup> Rev Albertyn was perhaps the most prominent Afrikaner nationalist commentator on Afrikaner social problems of his day. His nationalist praxis went back to the turn of the century as a young dominee in a rural Cape parish where he was first exposed to the poor white problem. He represented the NGK to the Carnegie Commission of Enquiry into the Poor White Problem and he compiled the Sociological Report (volume V) of the Commission. In 1933 he became the first Chairman of the NGK Federal Council for Poor Relief (Federale Armsorgraad) and later its secretary until 1956. In 1936, he also became secretary for Poor Relief in the Transvaal Synod of the NGK, a post he held until 1947. He was responsible for planning the 1934 National Congress on the Poor White Problem, held at Kimberley in October 1934. Between 1945-47 he chaired the NGK commission into the Urbanisation of the Afrikaner. In 1947 he organised a Johannesburg conference into Afrikaner urbanisation and compiled the report *Kerk en Stad* (1947). For Albertyn, the declining capacity of the Boerestand was a nationalist tragedy and the most prominent social question of the day.

"City and countryside are equal partners, like man and wife," he proposed. But this partnership was clearly threatened. The Boerestand was losing its stature and had to be assisted. Nowhere was this more evident than in the equivocation of the State on the question of platteland rehabilitation. This was a measure of the declining political weight of the platteland: "Previously our leaders have all been plattelander's," he noted, "but now our Parliament consists of lawyers and businessmen." <sup>11</sup>

An interesting feature of Albertyn's testimony is that it is not anti-modern. He did not plead for a return to the simple, subsistence, isolated but impoverished way of life on the platteland, or as he pithily put it "the period of the ox wagon". Only in matching town and countryside in terms of standards of consumption and earnings could Afrikanerdom heal the disintegrative forces that drove Afrikaners into distinct rural and urban lives. He noted that industrialisation had brought enormous benefits to the Volk, that "the platteland today is fuelled by the dynamic, ambitious entrepreneurial spirit of the city, and that through new techniques of mechanisation and so on, farming has been totally transformed." Modernisation had thus ushered in an era of great prosperity for the Volk. New work opportunities -- many of them achieved with the assistance of the State -- made possible the elimination of Afrikaner unemployment for the first time in the twentieth century. Surely now an Afrikaner State could meet the national demand for a Boerestand? Western science and culture had contributed enormously to opening up the new economic frontiers for the Volk. Standards of living, of consumption and

expenditure, of earnings, had been tremendously enhanced by the modernisation process. If any Afrikaner wished to have evidence of the benefits of modernisation, Albertyn asked, they had only to note the total disappearance of the poor white question in the period of his lifetime -- "a problem that our Volk and the churches had been unsuccessfully grappling with for years." But the drive to industrialise, to modernize the instruments of the economy, the society and the State had been a mixed blessing for Afrikanerdom. It was in the Boerestand, stated Albertyn, that the confrontation of Afrikaner values, identity and the corrosive character of the spirit of modernity were most evident.

What dangers did urbanisation and industrialisation hold for the Volksges, and how would the persistence, or revitalisation of the Boerestand counter the corrosive culture of modernity? Like Afrikaner populists before him Albertyn was clearly anti-capitalist and anti-urban in sentiment but not opposed to progress as such. The most powerful and evil special interest group was money-power -- "die geldmag" -- that faceless conglomerate of urban industrial capital concentrated in the cities, controlling mining, manufacturing, trade and industry. New work opportunities for young Afrikaners in the urban labour market, new occupational ladders and standards of consumption, new 'modern' ways of life materially superior to that available on the platteland, drew the Afrikaner youth into the orbit of money-power. The servants of the Volk -- the parliamentary representatives, the civil servants, even their military and ecclesiastical leaders -- were now concentrated in the cities under the scrutiny and the influence of urban capitalists. How could an Afrikaner State preserve its unique spirit and identity in such a context?

Subjected to a constant barrage of urban propaganda by the modern mass media -- the press, the radio, the film industry -- by the new and powerful civil institutions of urban society (the professional associations in education, social service, welfare, law and medicine), South African society was truly becoming urban. Even the Afrikaans churches had become urban churches (stadskerke). The collective influence of the cities and industrial capitalism was dangerous:

The concentration of people in cities or industrial areas forms the breeding ground for racial problems, juvenile delinquency and crime of all kinds, and the aggravation and degradation of morals and customs. Our Volk will lose their unique Christian heritage in the city, because it is only on the platteland that these characteristics are built up and preserved.

With every passing election, and every agricultural season, the platteland was losing power to the urban centres. It was therefore not surprising that "the more progressive, intellectual members of the Boerestand must seek their fortunes in urban life". A powerful new urban interest -- a "mass urban Afrikaner proletariat" - - was also emerging to challenge to old urban middle class. There was a real danger, Albertyn noted, "that the Boerestand will no longer be the irreplaceable partner of the city, but its servant (kneg)."

Albertyn's programme of action for the revitalisation of the Boerestand resembled those of earlier Afrikaner populists in key areas of land reform, State support for family farms, labour and education. Because the major problem was

depopulation (ontvolking), Albertyn opposed the tendency evident in State agricultural policy in the late-1950's to encourage larger, more highly capitalised farms. Land barons, commercial companies and urban speculators with their thousands of morgan were destroying the small farmer (die klein boer) and thereby a more populous and viable white rural community. The elimination of small farm schools and the centralisation of white schooling in major rural centres by education authorities also contributed to the disappearance of the small family farm. "The small farmer must really be brought back but not on uneconomic farming units," he wrote. The family farm -- the central institution of national life in other western democracies undergoing modernisation in the post-war decade -- was the key to balanced agricultural commercialisation, rather than capitalist farms -- 'factories-in-the-field'. "On the family farm (familieplaas) the characteristics of the Volk will be preserved", he stated. State labour policies to channel cheap black migrants to the cities or onto capitalist farms, that favoured the payment of high cash wages rather than tenant farming, and that therefore threatened the 'small man', were a direct threat to the Afrikaner rural order.

Albertyn represented a powerful strand within Afrikanerdom that questioned the self-interest (selfsug) embodied in untrammelled commercialisation:

Some agricultural-economists even allege that our country has too many farmers, and that even more production will be possible by encouraging a system of even bigger farms owned by fewer farmers with greater capital. But won't the result eventually be -- as overseas -- the rise of a powerful labouring class (arbeiderstand) in our cities -- an Afrikaans proletariat, that will be the hunting ground of the Communists, which will eventually dominate our entire national economy through the ballot box and thereby give it an urban complexion?

Albertyn asserted the "absolute essentiality of an independent, numerically strong, energetic Boerestand... conscious of its great past as a Boer nation, that will energetically make its influence felt in all spheres of national life and, like yeast... permeate the whole land and influence it for the better".

Capitalist land accumulation was a danger to the Volk because it was finite. Land was a treasured resource. Uneven land ownership threatened the "instinct for possession" (die besit-instink) of the farmer that was intrinsic to his "patriotism" (vaderlandsliefde): "If he must sell his farm then he loses that instinct. For this reason Rev Albertyn is against large land ownership," noted Dr Vorster, the Commission's chairman. <sup>12</sup> "Large landownership has become an evil and the farms are being entrusted to the care of non-whites as managers to our own demise (ondergang), because those who do the work ultimately rule the country." <sup>13</sup> A graduated land tax was necessary to prevent this: "It will bring more land onto the market and bring the people back." <sup>14</sup>

The Federal Council for Poor Relief noted the extent of the 'evil' of unequal land ownership. In the Transvaal in 1956 3,764 (of approximately 26,000) farmers owned 9,344,169 morgan or 51% of the whole province, and also 417,178 morgan in other provinces. In other words 9,761,347 morgan was owned by 1,69% of the total white population of the Transvaal and 0.31% of the whole

population of the province.<sup>15</sup> Afrikaner depopulation could only be reversed by creating a more equitable rural land market. "An Afrikaans speaking proletariat is already on the rise," it concluded, "because just think that already 11,286 owners, or only 2.12% of South Africa's total population own more than 52,000,000 morgan of farm land in the Union which results in thousands of our Volk joining the proletariat."<sup>16</sup>

The debate in the post-war regarding optimum economic farming units, of concern for soil conservation, of robber-cultivation (roofbou) etc. reflect I think a contemporary concern as much with large-scale capitalist resource plundering, as with the 'proliferation' of uneconomic farming units. For Albertyn, high levels of individual land concentration and untrammelled commercialisation, led to excessively high land prices, monocropping and overstocking to the detriment of the newcomer on the platteland.<sup>17</sup> This was a consequence, some witnesses felt, of the failure of poorly conceived populist white platteland rehabilitation programmes that brought "impoverished people into competition with natives" without reference to a 'civilised' standard of life.<sup>18</sup> "On the grounds of faulty sociological and other theories it was believed that the simple habitation of the platteland (by whites) as such was sufficient, on both rehabilitative and spiritual grounds."<sup>19</sup> Prof DCS du Preez of PUK thus felt that "Whites will never be settled on the platteland in large numbers unless they return there as skilled workers or as independent farmers."<sup>20</sup> "If young boys want to enter farming as unskilled sharesowers (deelsaaiers), shareworkers (deelwerkers), farm foremen or farm managers they will have to compete with experienced natives."<sup>21</sup> Populist programmes for a Boerestand thus also required retraining to ease the adaptation of Afrikaners to a renewed life on the land.

Albertyn wanted to revitalise the rural white labour market that was undermined by the creation of a national one dominated by strong urban employers. In this national labour market the State and a powerful new white urban proletariat had carved out a special place for unskilled white workers in the industrial conglomerates and in the civil service. Job reservation and Christian National trade union's thus drew white families irresistibly from the Boerestand into urban industrial occupations for which they were spiritually, educationally, and culturally quite unsuited. The city thus swallowed up the very people whose experience marked them for a future "landheer" -- not simply as land owners, but as potential rural labour aristocrats. Even Prof Tomlinson believed in the myth of white labour competitiveness: "It will pay," he said, "to incorporate whites on the farms. Many whites cannot become farm owners. We are not making the best use of our white human resources and we are using them only in certain reserved jobs in the cities; therefore the platteland is becoming 'bantu-ised.'"<sup>22</sup>

Albertyn felt that urban job reservation undermined the capacity of farmers to compete for unskilled and semi-skilled white workers. State education policy on the platteland -- with its 'academic' bias -- undermined the competitiveness of white farmers to attract white labour to the farms. Also by favouring the centralisation of all schools -- primary and secondary -- in selected regional platteland towns the provincial authorities undermined the Boerestand by destroying the widely-dispersed farm schools that had maintained a physical link between the child, the family and the farm in the past.<sup>23</sup> There should be no education for blacks on the platteland: white farmers would always prefer cheaper

black labour than more expensive white labour, and why unduly penalise white workers by in addition educating and training black workers? The 'blackening' (verswarting) of the platteland would be encouraged in two ways through policies based on training a more efficient and effective black labour force. White farm families would be replaced with cheaper, and more exploitable black farm families - a countryside dominated by a 'landheer' with a black peasantry, or as the Under Secretary for Agriculture, SJ de Swart put it, a "kafferboerdery." <sup>24</sup> Secondly, skills training would draw black farm workers to urban industries, and they would leave their families -- uneconomic labour units -- behind on the white farms to be supported by white farmers.

Albertyn was especially suspicious of the innovations of Prof Tomlinson, and the SABRA intellectuals in general, to revitalise the Reserves as Bantustans to absorb blacks turned back from the urban areas by influx controls. Black farm families were necessary on the small white family farms as tenants/workers. It would not be wise, even practical, to eliminate a black presence on the platteland altogether until the tide of white depopulation (ontvolking) was reversed. White family immigration schemes would help reduce the need to maintain black farm families and physically strengthen the platteland. These white immigrants, Albertyn suggested, ought to have a farm background. Care must be taken to ensure that they could be assimilated easily into the culture of the Boerestand. For this reason, suggested Dr Slabbert, the "father of the white farm labour immigration scheme" <sup>25</sup> these immigrants could be drawn from Eastern European refugees fleeing Communist aggression -- especially from Poland, Rumania and Hungary. <sup>26</sup>

Albertyn thus called for a broad policy initiative -- economic, cultural and spiritual -- to revive of the Boerestand, through the nurturing of a Boerevolk. The State had a central role to play in this, but its obligation had to be to Afrikanerdom exclusively. The central State role was to ensure security of Afrikaner tenure on the land, because "attachment to the land is the foundation of patriotism" <sup>27</sup> :

The farmer is the largest owner of fixed property in the country... . His constant interaction with nature advances his relationship with the God of nature. He is constantly aware of the wonder of the creation of new life in animals and plants and he contributes to the creation. Attachment to the land (Bodemvastheid) and a bonding with nature (natuurgebondenheid) is the foundation stone of all national progress. <sup>28</sup>

Private land ownership stood as a symbol of the Volk's natural aversion to socialism, and a commitment to the nationalist project. Dr CC Nepgen put it this way: "The agriculturalists as a professional group are the largest owners of immovable property. Percentage wise, the platteland population owns more land and houses than city dwellers. This economic fact has important social consequences: the farmer is always a strong supporter of private ownership, and is certainly always opposed to the communist ideology." <sup>29</sup>

Social and biological revitalisation, however, would require the revitalisation of the farm family ('boeregesin'). In Nepgens words, "The members of the "Good Family" are the genuine aristocrats of the platteland and of the country." <sup>30</sup> The family farm -- familieplaas/boereplaas -- was the bulwark of the agricultural

economy and the basic unit of the nation's structure, of "the genuine, unadulterated Afrikaans way of life."<sup>31</sup> To recover its essential values for Afrikanerdom -- "an honourable, morally distinguished personal and family life, love of liberty and sense of religion"<sup>32</sup> -- the family farm would have to be nurtured and protected by the State from a national market dominated by vested urban interests. This was the reason given for the necessity of product control boards and agricultural co-operatives.

On the Boereplaas, stated Mr DP van der Merwe, of Brondal (Eastern Transvaal) there was a "deeply-rooted attachment and love between the farm child and his farm, his nation, and his Volk."

It is an utterance from the soul when the child speaks of: my dad, my mom, our grandparents, our pioneers, the Voortrekkers, our church, our minister, our member of Parliament, our farm-hands, our mealie-fields, our cattle, our farm, our landmarks, our fountain, the plovers on our koppie (little hill), my horse, my rifle, my nanny, our evening prayers... . The national history affects him to the extent that it effects those dear to him -- his father, his mother, his grandparents, his minister, our general, our commandos, our struggle, our defeat or our victory. Layer by layer, additions are made to the mutual family and national monument: the solid structure which, in its silence and isolation, continues to be built upon, undisturbed by foreign or external influences. The invisible bonds bind together in the national life a personality strong and full of character."<sup>33</sup>

The Boerestand was taxed with an historical task: "In the past our boerestand was the protector and watchman of the Volk's spiritual treasures. The farm family (boeregesin) was always one of the bulwarks of an agricultural economy rooted in the soil and honourable in its motives."<sup>34</sup> The revitalisation of the boeregesin was a cultural/national project.

The waning political power of the Boerestand was a function of its decline. The State had to restore it to its place in the life of the nation:

Up to about a quarter century ago agriculturalists were strongly represented in our national gatherings (volksvergaderinge) -- our leaders of State and our military leaders were nearly all practical farmers. The platteland's influence set the tone, and farmers' interests occupied an important place in national policy. Today the position has been reversed and it is overwhelmingly town and city people -- lawyers, teachers and businessmen -- who sit in our highest councils (raadsale).<sup>35</sup>

Even programmes designed to rehabilitate white rural communities - such as the Orange River Irrigation Scheme - were shelved by the State in favour of urban interests, such as the Sasol project, and the Van der Bijl Park Iron and Steel development.<sup>36</sup>

Albertyn suggested that the State focus on building a "representative Boerestand", that is, one composed of Afrikaners drawn from all classes of

Afrikaner rural society.<sup>37</sup> To make this viable, the State had to combat the tendency towards larger farming units. He suggested a graduated land tax for this purpose, and differential access to State resources. By providing more State assistance for small and aspirant young farmers, the State could also create a *meaningful ladder of opportunity for white workers on the land so that they could rise to the level of independent farmers*. This would also introduce new blood into the Boerestand, based on enterprise and initiative, rather than inherited wealth. A rural colour bar, perhaps erected through rural technical training for white workers (and its denial to black farm workers) would assist in keeping a white work force on the farms as mechanisation progressed. And by extending (rather than limiting) irrigation settlements and lands department programmes, small farms constituted of young Afrikaner men and women would biologically and economically breed a new rural society. Modernisation was also to be shackled more closely to this nationalist and ethnic project. Mass electrification programmes should span the platteland. Post and telephone services would meld the isolated farms into a rural community. Improved platteland health care, more farm schools, expanded and extended agricultural services by provincial unions and extension officers, a new rural radio service, would capture the platteland in a net of appropriately modern services.

Albertyn's extended discussion is interesting for the linkages it exposes between modernisation and nationalism. Material progress of the Boerestand must guarantee "the satisfaction of his spiritual needs and instincts". This would only happen if mediated through spiritual and cultural values. This broad policy would be predicated on a thorough understanding of Afrikaner "mentality." Because "Boere live in a different sphere (dampkring) to urbanites they think differently, they experience things differently, and they do business differently."

There were six distinctive spiritual/cultural values that the Boerestand contributed to Afrikanerdom. Through isolation the Volk received its moral and entrepreneurial backbone: "In his life and endeavours he looks solely to himself for success. He lives in his own working area without any interference from others." This bred "independence... initiative and resourcefulness". The Boerestand satisfied the urge for self-realisation. A life on the land offered "abundant opportunities for self-expression... opportunities to do something for his people".

On the platteland the Boerestand refined the instinct for self-preservation (veiligheidsdrang) that urbanisation undermined:

It is difficult for the urbanite, surrounded by his neighbours, by streetlights, by policemen, to understand the fear complex of the farmer on his isolated farm. Fear of attack on dark nights, fear of sudden sickness and death, whilst far from medical assistance. Fear of natural disaster and droughts, of over-production, falling markets. Fears that he will be outwitted in the marketplace by the middleman. It is this fear that sometimes makes the farming community suspicious, querulous and unhappy with his lot.

But through this instinct to self-preservation the Volk acquired determination and collective will to survive. The instinct for possession was inherent in the Boerestand: "It is traditional for them to own fixed property. When a strong farmer buys up neighbouring farms at high prices, he sometimes does not grasp the violence he

does to the instinct for possession of the previous owners. An integral part of the State's farming policy (boerebeleid) must be to protect and develop the instinct for possession of farmers." Die family urge - the fundamental building block of a Volk - was rural in origin. Both scripture and biology showed this:

On the relatively isolated platteland, Afrikaner family life reached its fullest expression -- the farmer was more member of a family than an individual. More than anything else it was the honourable family life of the platteland that set the tone for our Volk's character. We think of how family-daft the farmer was, how attached to his family origins, how respectful of his parents, how seldom we saw divorce or abandonment.

And in the religious consciousness of the Boerestand resided the spiritual values of the Volk: "today, more than ever before, the Volk depends on the Boerestand as their religious anchor in a time of rapid change and lack of faith."

Albertyn's 'manuscript' vividly portrays the cultural and ethnic concerns of a collective identity being shaped by modernisation. The Boerevolk 'ideal' is revealed as a dynamic and creative response to the challenge of modernisation.

### III

The second important 'manuscript of modernity' is the modernisation charter. Its major author was Dr PW Vorster, the head of Agricultural Extension in the Department of Agriculture, and the chairman of the commission. Aspects of this document are often discussed in the historiography as the policy of "organised agriculture" -- often simply description of isolated policy decisions of the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU). But these accounts often present the proponents of modernisation as simply a-culturalised, often a-politicised capitalists, unmoved by or at the least increasingly alienated from ethnic priorities. This is a very hasty judgement, as the recent affiliation of the Transvaal Agricultural Union to the Afrikaner Volksfront testifies. Contemporary debates distinctly reflected a more culturally and politically charged content.

Like Rev Albertyn, Dr Vorster spoke of the "spiritual, moral and cultural aspects of our agricultural industry" thrown out of relation by modernisation:

In this machine age everything stands in the image of mechanisation. There is a real danger that science and the development of technology are getting out of hand. Mankind is not only becoming slave to the machine, but is living in the greatest fear that he will be obliterated by his own discoveries. An atomic anxiety psychosis is evident everywhere with a crippling effect on society. <sup>38</sup>

In phraseology resonant with the later prose of Marcuse, Vorster spoke of the rise of a powerful urban industrial complex, made possible by specialisation, efficiency and mass-production. In these "factory cities" -- "forests of concrete and steel" -- clustered masses of faceless proletarians under the all-powerful eye of a techno-industrial complex:

In the large industries where all processes are mechanised and planned and organised to the last detail, man as labourer is degraded to a mere cog or wheel in a colossal factory mechanism. The labourer thereby loses responsibility and freedom. He becomes a sort of automaton. Labour becomes a commodity whose value is measured only in terms of money.

Materialism, wrote Vorster, controlled the whole life of mankind and "everything stands in the image of the planner":

"All the activities of the modern mass-man (massa-mens) are planned by the power brokers (bewindhebbers). His whole life is organised for him and controlled and directed from above... . By means of mass propaganda -- the press and the radio -- mankind is told what to think and what to do. The individual is no longer expected to think for himself, to make decisions or to bear any responsibility. In modern business there is a deliberate levelling process or massification (massafisering) of all the national questions, and the drive for equality becomes dogma."

For individuals, modernisation -- the "revolution of the twentieth century" -- was experienced in growing State control and interference: "Dependence on the State and State Socialism go hand in hand." This was linked with a fundamental and all-pervasive moral and spiritual crisis:

The traditional Christian viewpoint and the moral principles of Western civilisation are vanishing. The foundations of Christianity are everywhere being undermined... . Secularisation is evident on all fronts. Western man is becoming totally without religion. The mass-man possesses only a materialistic and nihilistic philosophy and is busy losing his grip on the purpose of life. Everywhere we encounter a process of decadence and disintegration.

South Africa was caught up in these universal changes. This was evident in developments in industry and mining in the last twenty years. A powerful new working class had emerged, accompanied by large scale rural depopulation. The old components of Afrikanerdom's ethnic alliance were increasingly restless in a modern world.

In agriculture -- Vorster understood this to mean within the white commercial sector -- the practices and character of the farming profession had been changed beyond recognition. On farms, large-scale mechanisation transformed farming into an industrial process:

Farming displays more and more the features of a technological food-processing industry in which the role of the industrial leader or entrepreneur becomes ever more significant. The application of the principles of the factory, especially in planning, organisation and effective productivity, become essential in modern agriculture.

*Mechanisation had entirely transformed the atmosphere and milieu of the farm --*

barns and kraals are metamorphosed into workshops. The farmer no longer cares only for animals and plants, but is also a mechanic or agricultural engineer. Organisational, scientific and technical specialisation transformed South African farmers into managers. Within one generation:

the character and principles of agriculture in this country have undergone a total metamorphosis. The isolation of the farm is a thing of the past. On many farms the same amenities are found which only urbanites were privileged to possess. Together with these amenities, the spirit of the city has taken its place in the life of the farm.

The traditional farm life was disappearing and the lifestyle and practices of the town and the city were becoming fashionable on the platteland. Modernisation, Vorster concluded, had totally secularised farm life.

Afrikaner farmers thus had to adapt to modernisation. And contrary to the prevailing view that they were failing in this test, in their rapid assimilation of modern farming systems and their adoption of technological advances, South African farmers were second to none in the Western world. This had brought great material advances to the rural population. But there were other problems that accompanied modernisation. These were moral and spiritual problems -- "the non-material aspects of agriculture":

The crisis facing agriculture is not in the first instance a question of production, soil erosion, price or economics, but has a deeper root cause which is connected with the general spiritual crisis of the times. It concerns the very basic questions of the life and principles of Christian civilisation.

In this concern, Vorster's modernisation charter closely tracked a central concern of the Boerevolk document. The real meaning of agriculture as a national issue lay in its rootedness in the Christian character of the boerebevolking: "that our forefathers, as children of the Reformation, honoured the Calvinist way of life."

The Volk's identity and character grew out of the Boerestands' unique Christian rural way of life and their philosophy. The "religious foundations of agriculture and our Christian practice" were thus fundamental to the Volk's national struggle. Like Albertyn, Vorster centred the theological meaning of the Boerestand in the Calvinist Calling. God planted Adam, the first "worker of the soil, husbandman or farmer", in the Garden of Eden. "The garden, or if you like, the farm, was the original and natural home of man." This cemented the sacred trilogy of land, agriculture and the Calling:

This love and attachment to the earth and the farm has always been the most unique characteristic of the South African farmer. In the past, as well as today, to many owners the family farm is a holy shrine with such sentimental value that money cannot buy it from them... . To be a farmer is in their blood.

Because of God's wisdom, man was at his happiest when working the earth (die bodem). Through this Calling, mankind developed the characteristics that God

determined. Thus by nurturing the Boerestand, God moulded the sacred character - the traditional virtues -- of the Afrikaner Volk: "hard-work, thriftiness, perseverance, independence, a strongly developed spirit of freedom, and patriotism, hospitality (and) attachment to tradition". And through the Boerestand, God worked His will on the Volk:

In our country Calvinist philosophy has made a large contribution to the development of a unique Boere outlook and life-style on the platteland. A healthy and strong family life with respect for moral and spiritual values was always the pride of the Boere community... . Therefore a healthy and prosperous Boerestand is also one of the greatest treasures that a Volk can possess.

The ethnic and nationalist agenda at the theological core of a Calvinist Boerestand was not antithetical to modernisation. Rather, the nationalist project could be enhanced by meeting the challenge of modernity as part of the Divine plan. Thus, Vorster explained, through science and technology "Mankind has found, with God's help, the most powerful and effective means on earth to create and control and thereby to satisfy his cultural task. The practise of science and culture is thus the duty and calling of mankind." Science contributed hugely to increased production:

The application of science to agriculture has made it possible for fewer and fewer farmers to produce for more and more people. This emphasises the necessity of more agricultural research especially as South Africa industrialises so rapidly and its population increases so quickly.

Agriculture (landboubeoefening) is therefore the "realisation of the task of creation and destiny of man." Only through scientific progress would the Boerestand meet the challenges of the modern age.

In meeting this challenge, the State played an important, but contradictory role. It was a crucial instrument of progress, but because its powers grew from a universal, immutable impulse, it was an unreliable instrument for the particularist needs of the Volk. Thus Vorster asserted the independence of the Boerestand from the State, as a separate sphere, a "stand" (station), rather than a fraction of a class of bourgeois entrepreneurs. He stated:

Taken as a whole the Boer community of South Africa possesses more freedom and independence than any other. Even the marketing and soil-conservation laws are grounded largely on democratic principles. The laws are in any event a compromise between full farmer responsibility and total State control. So long as the farming community acknowledge and meet their responsibilities in full, the danger of total state domination of farmers should not arise.

The Boerestand's sovereignty in its own circle (in eie kring) was necessary to preserve its Christian democratic principles. Individual entrepreneurial freedom was in this way bound up with community responsibility and accountability: "A person is only free when aware of his Task and Calling."

In this rural world there was clearly no room for unprogressive farmers -- farmers unwilling to be filled with the spirit of progress. Vorster opposed State intervention in rural markets. This State patronage for unprogressive farmers was 'artificial' as it violated the independence of the Boerestand in its own circle, and eased the transition to State socialism. The State's role ought to be restricted to smoothing out obstacles in the path of individual effort, streamlining the flow of technical and scientific inputs, and preserving the sovereignty of the Boerestand in their own sphere "against exploitation and domination by other established concerns." That is, against foreign capital and urban Jewish middlemen, cartels and monopolies controlling agricultural supplies, rural Indian middlemen and black sharecroppers.

Vorster and Albertyn thus agreed on the centrality of the Boerestand to the Volkslewe, but Vorster felt that this role would be achieved by "healthy development of the farming industry" based upon individual enterprise, not a collective effort for mutual support. Production should be maximised through scientific methods, but in harmony with nature: "In this way the platteland will become a source of moral power for the Volk. It will serve as a bulwark against all dangerous and foreign (volksvreemde) influences" By embracing modernisation within the framework of the Calvinist world view the Boerestand's future role was assured:

Even though on the farms all the modern urban amenities may be encountered and scientific farming practices are applied, the platteland can still preserve its own lifestyle, so that urbanisation of the rural population can be stemmed. Even if farmers make up an ever smaller percentage of the total population, their influence on the volkslewe does not need to wane.

An acceptance of the naturalness of Afrikaner rural proletarianisation thus underpinned Vorster arguments: "A prosperous Boer community, of strong character, and conscious of its calling, is the ideal and objective for which (farmers) and the Department of Agriculture are striving."

The professionalisation of agriculture was vital to the Calling identified by Vorster, yet this technical imperative was shackled to a romantic nationalist programme, rooted in the Boerestand ideal, as a counter the corrosive Godless modernist spirit:

Farmers, especially in South Africa, should have a special heartfelt love of farming, such as the love of farm life, a bond with the earth, and so on. This was the hidden power of our farming profession in the past. It allowed our fathers to rise above almost overwhelming difficulties, whilst also being the bearers of Western civilisation in the South African interior.

In practical terms, the modernisation charter's programme of action underpinned rural renewal with capitalist entrepreneurship. Dr le Clus of the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU) felt, for example, that "we cannot go against economic tendencies because of social concerns" because "An economically healthy and strong platteland will be more stable and enduring than a weak

platteland with more people." <sup>39</sup> The SAAU justified agricultural policies that led to rural depopulation (ontvolking) on grounds that the physical number of whites on the platteland was not the first criteria, but rather that farmers should "make a living and so preserve the good characteristics of a rural way of life." The Boerestand required only "healthy... independent farmers". <sup>40</sup> Without an "economically independent Boerestand, there could be none of those desired sociological influences of the platteland elsewhere in the national life." <sup>41</sup>

The bantu-isation (verbantoeing) of the platteland was to be reversed by implementation of the "Squatters Law" and labour-saving mechanisation to break the back of the "old labour system". Inter-racial shareworking and other 'inefficient' production systems would be eliminated, and the 'subsistence' household -- both white and black farm families -- removed as a factor on the platteland. This would resolve the crisis of free labour, and eliminate 'uneconomic' use of the land. "(I)f plots were uneconomic then the boer was a danger to the stability of the platteland", stated the SAAU. <sup>42</sup> Progress would naturally eliminate the small man from the platteland and this was a good thing. There was no space in the capitalist Boerestand for unprogressive and inefficient farmers. <sup>43</sup>

The SAAU held that the direction of State rehabilitation policies -- especially schemes of the Department of Lands that provided small farms to rehabilitated farmers -- were anachronistic -- and expensive -- as "farmers could not... find good white employees, and a poor white manager was seldom economical. <sup>44</sup> Rehabilitation programmes -- based on the principle of small family farms -- were uneconomic and uncompetitive. Affiliates of the Union explained that most white families leaving the platteland did so "because they could no longer make a living on the farms", that is, they were poor farmers. <sup>45</sup>

Industrial systems of labour supply implemented by the Apartheid State also inhibited the economic viability of small family farms:

"Labour problems have also helped to demoralise (ontmoedig) the small farmer. Many farmers confronted labour problems, and with insufficient capital to mechanise, trek rather to the cities, than adopt the American and British practice of working smaller farms with the help of their own families. This family farm system is also not possible in many parts of our country. The system of ploughing, planting and harvesting crops on contract as practised in America does not exist at all in SA. <sup>46</sup>

For this reason -- the improbability of the white rural family farm system emerging on the platteland independent of the labour of black farm families -- the SAAU saw in urban industrialisation the 'real' long term solution to the disintegration of the 'old' Boerevolk ideal.

The major challenge to development planners in agriculture was thus economic, stated the SAAU. Unless farming became economically attractive, the Afrikaner project -- the effective and viable long term occupation of the land -- would fail. White rural immigration programmes to bolster this project, as envisaged by Rev Albertyn and other white Boerestand romantics, were thus doomed at the outset. <sup>47</sup> As with Dr Vorster, the SAAU held that "In the majority of districts the

economic position of the farmers is such that there is very little opportunity for new (white) immigrants, unless measures are taken to improve the economic position of the present inhabitants." <sup>48</sup> The future for non-landholding whites on the platteland was thus equally dim. In reply to questionnaires sent to affiliates enquiring about positions for young white men on farms as sharesowers, shareworkers, foremen, managers or labourers, there were only 85 vacancies in Natal, 40 in the OFS, 50 in the Cape stock region, 125 in the rest of the Cape, and 150 in total in the Transvaal. <sup>49</sup>

The depopulation of the platteland, the SAAU pointed out, was inevitable:

The cry: back to the land cannot stop the process. No matter how much is spoken and written on the subject, the process cannot be reversed because it is simply an unalterable economic law. The movement between city and countryside will eventually balance out. The fundamental motive for the trek of our rural population to the cities is their desire to improve their economic position. The farmer's son (boereseun) will remain on the farm if it pays him. <sup>50</sup>

Whilst farming was an occupational field for 'Super-Afrikaners', rural employment off the farms in the platteland towns offered the possibility for a rural life for those 'victims' of modernisation: "It appears," stated the SAAU, "as if our struggle must rather be: 'back to the platteland village' where a rural way of life could be preserved without the invidious influences of the large cities." <sup>51</sup> "Perhaps if we want a larger platteland population," mused one SAAU representative, "our biggest need is employment opportunities, and this we can only do by establishing rural industry wherever material resources, power, labour, water and transport make this possible." <sup>52</sup> This line of reasoning based on industrial decentralisation, platteland racial zoning, black migrancy, and the restructuring of the platteland towns as "white islands" became a central plank of the SAAU's development programme for the platteland. <sup>53</sup>

#### IV

As 'manuscripts of modernity' the Boerestand charters of the late 1950's voice the wider cultural dissonances within Afrikanerdom at the political climax of Apartheid power. They also demonstrate the contested character and contingency of both ethnicity and modernisation. As Newman comments: "In the course of modernization ethnic political identities and institutions are repeatedly created and re-created anew, a process that constantly destroys the old ethnic loyalties while creating new ethnic ideologies, institutions, and constituencies." <sup>54</sup> The modernisation process, in the subjective perception of authors of these 'manuscripts of modernity', generated uneven ideological and organisational resources for different elements within the Volk. But it also transformed their view of modernisation as a 'natural' process with a common form. For Boerevolk advocates in the late 1950's conflicts over the form of modernisation -- the development strategies backed by the State -- with the 'modernisation charterists' did not detract from its value as a process. Rather, it cemented their demand for an exclusive Afrikaner State -- a "Boereplaas", in the words of Gagiano -- dominated by 'genuine' Afrikaner leaders grounded in the 'true' values of the Boerestand who would understand that "those who do the work, will ultimately rule the land." <sup>55</sup>

1. This idea is drawn from a suggestion offered by Saul Newman, "Does Modernisation Breed Ethnic Conflict?", World Politics, 43, (April 1991), 451-178.
2. See Union of South Africa. *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into European Occupancy of the Rural Areas*. G.P.-S.7029095-1959. For the unpublished evidence of the Commission, see Central Archives Depot (CAD), State Archives, Pretoria, Commission Number K103.
3. This paper does not address the question of whether Afrikaner ethnic identity was eroded or not by modernisation, but rather the inner content of the ethnic political debate about modernity. The major texts that explore this period are therefore not utilised in this paper. But for the relationship between Afrikanerdom and the Apartheid State, see D. Posel, The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991), and H. Gilliomee, "Broedertwis: Intra-Afrikaner Conflicts in the Transition from Apartheid" African Affairs (1992), 91, 339-364.
4. CA, K103, Box 3, Stuk 156, Formal Evidence, 27 May 1958, Ds M. Postma: Gereformeerde Gemeente, De Aar, p.30.
5. Die Transvaler 25 August 1956 "Versterk die Boerestand."
6. Central Archives (CA), Report of the Commission of Investigation of White Occupancy of the Platteland (K103), Bylaes, Box 2, Stuk 93, Dr CC Nepgen "Die Funksie van die Platteland in ons Volksbestaan," p.16.
7. Stuk 76, Dr PW Vorster, Reprint from Farming in South Africa October 1956, "'n Heerlike Taak", p.2.
8. *Ibid.*, p.4.
9. 10 June 1958, Evidence: Dr C.H. Neveling: Acting Secretary of Agriculture, p.9?
10. Johannes Rudolph Albertyn, b. Middelburg, Cape Colony 6.8.1878; d. Cape Town 14.11.1967. The *Dictionary of South African Biography* describes him as "Minister of the NGK and authority on social problems." (C.J. Beyers, Editor in Chief, *Dictionary of South African Biography* (Durban and Pretoria, 1981), Volume IV, 3-4) Albertyn pleaded in the 1930's for the State to take over all welfare services with Ds P. du Toit, the first secretary of the new department of Social Welfare. He received an Honourary Doctorate from the University of Pretoria in sociology and social work in 1949.
11. CA, K103, Box 3, Stuk 156, Verbatim Evidence, 2 June 1958, Dr J.R. Albertyn (for the Federal Council for Poor Relief of the NGK), p.52. The section below is based on Albertyn's verbatim evidence, and his written statement at CA, K103, Box 3, Bylaes, Stuk 146, Dr JR Albertyn, (on behalf of the Federal Council for Poor Relief of the NGK), "Die Onmisbaarheid van 'n Getalsterke Geeskragtige Boerestand".
12. Albertyn, *Op.Cit.*, Bylae 156, p.53.

13. CA, K103, Stuk 156, 27 May 1958, Dr Postma: Gereformeerde Gemeente, De Aar, p.31.
14. Albertyn, *Op.Cit.*, Stuk 156, p.53
15. Stuk 99, Federal Council for Poor Relief, p.1.
16. *Ibid.*, p.3.
17. Albertyn, *Op.Cit.*, Stuk 156, p.53-54; Stuk 146, p.2,5.
18. CA, K103, Stuk 31, 27 June 1956, DCS du Preez, PUK (Dept Sosiologie en Maatskaplike Sorg), "Memorandum i.s. Blanke Bewoning van die Platteland," p.4.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p.5.
22. CA, K103, Stuk 156, 24 June 1958, Regional Directors of the Department of Agriculture, p.99.
23. For an exploration of the relationship between education and rural white rehabilitation, see T. Clynick and A. Paterson, "Rural Schools: The Salvation of Poor Whites?" in *Matlhasedi* 12(1), July 1993, 21-25.
24. CA, K103, Stuk 156, 9 June 1958, Evidence of S.J. de Swardt, Under Secretary of Agriculture, p.87.
25. CA, K103, *Op.Cit.*, Stuk 156, 24 June 1958 (Regional Directors of the Department of Agriculture), p.102; 30 June 1958 Mr A.R. Haveman (Chief: Division Economics and Marketing) and Prof F.R. Tomlinson, p.109.
26. *Ibid.*, p.102.
27. Albertyn, *Op.Cit.*, Stuk 146, p.3.
28. *Ibid.*, p.3.
29. CA, K103, Box 2, Bylaes, Stuk 93, Dr C.C. Nepgen "Die Funksie van die Platteland in ons Volksbestaan," p.9.
30. *Ibid.*, p.17.
31. Albertyn, *Op.Cit.*, Stuk 146, p.3.
32. *Ibid.*, p.4.
33. CA, K103, Box 2, Bylae, Stuk 45, Memorandum by D.P. van der Merwe, Brondal, Eastern Transvaal, "Die Ontvolking van die Platteland," p.1.
34. Albertyn, *Op.Cit.*, Stuk 146, p.4.
35. *Ibid.*

36. Albertyn, *Op.Cit.*, Stuk 156, p.52.
37. Albertyn, *Op.Cit.*, Stuk 146, p.7. The following section of the paper is drawn from this reference in its entirety.
38. CA, K103, Box 2, Bylae, Stuk 70, Dr P.W. Vorster "Boerderybedryf gefundeer op Christelike Grondslag," reprint from Primary Producer, 4 March 1955. Vorster's 'manuscript' is constructed from the above article and his verbatim evidence.
39. Stuk 79, "Streng Vetroulik. South African Agricultural Union. Memorandum vir voorlegging aan "Die Kommissie van Ondersoek na Blanke Bewoning van die Platteland," p.12.
40. *Ibid.*, p.13.
41. *Ibid.* p.11.
42. *Ibid.*, p.14.
43. *Ibid.*, p.12.
44. *Ibid.* p.12.
45. *Ibid.*, p.12
46. *Ibid.*, p.14.
47. *Ibid.*, p.14. In the Transvaal, of 85 farmers associations who gave figures, in only eight were the majority of farmers able to earn incomes of more than \$1000 per year and in only one case did more than a quarter of farms deliver more than \$2000 per year. In 75 cases the majority of farms earned lower than \$1000 per year (and in 25 cases all the farms did so). In 40 cases the majority of farms earned less than \$500 per year. In 7 cases all farms earned less than \$500 per year." (*Ibid.*, p.15)
48. *Ibid.*, p.16.
49. *Ibid.*, p.16.
50. *Ibid.*, p.18.
51. *Ibid.*, p.10.
52. SAAU, Verbatim Evidence, 22 May 1958.
53. CA, K103, Box 2, Bylaes, Dok36/57, SAAU, "Supplementary Memorandum for Submission to the Commission of Enquiry into European Occupancy of the Rural Areas," p.1.
54. Newman, *Op.Cit.*, p.452.
55. JIK Gagiano, 'Meanwhile back on the "Boereplaas"', Politikon, 13 (1986), pp.3-21.