

## REAPING THE WHIRLWIND OF CHANGE: EASTERN CAPE WHITE COMMERCIAL FARMERS' DISCOURSES OF DEMOCRACY

Werner Böhmke  
Department of Psychology  
Rhodes University  
Grahamstown

David Neves  
School of Psychology  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Howard College Campus  
Durban

### **Abstract.**

*This paper deals with the accounts of Eastern Cape white commercial farmers on the subject of Democracy. Drawing on the methodology of Discourse Analysis, the paper seeks to provide an analysis of the rhetorical strategies and ideological positions within the participants' accounts. Such accounts of the social, historical and political circumstances in which farmers find themselves are thought to provide insight into the manner in which the process of democratic change has been received by members of the agricultural sector. Data collection was conducted via brief, audio taped, semi-structured interviews. Participants were white men and women, living in a commercial farming region of the Eastern Cape Province. Responses to the interviews were analysed according to the discursive approaches advanced by both Ian Parker and Jonathan Potter & Margaret Wetherell. Analyses reveal that participants tend towards criticism of the notion of democracy from a particularly liberal ideological standpoint and make use of notions and techniques of "Othering" to construct a defensive subject positioning. These findings illustrate what is in many ways still an ongoing political and ideological struggle in the rural regions of the country.*

### **INTRODUCTION.**

With the first decade of democracy in South Africa already behind us, the time is ripe to begin serious and critical evaluations of the extent of the social changes that South Africa has undergone. This endeavour should not only focus on the macro-level of political, historical and economic change, but also needs to pay attention to the micro-level of individuals' perceptions, opinions and actions. This paper describes the results of a discourse analytical study conducted with white commercial farmers in the Eastern Cape province. White commercial farmers were chosen as a study population specifically because of the manner in which life in agricultural communities, in the

largely rural Eastern Cape province, is historically, socially, politically and economically situated.

Before embarking upon a discussion of how the participants in this study constructed their accounts of democracy and democratic change, it is necessary to provide a discussion of several key theoretical concepts and the links between them. This is to be done to illustrate the logic underlying the analysis of the discursive practices employed by Eastern Cape white commercial farmers. To this end, the discussion focuses on providing both a definition and discussion of the concept “democracy” with the aim of illustrating the manner in which this idea can be variously constructed. This discussion includes an exploration of the ideological dimensions underlying certain constructions of the concepts “democracy”, by providing an examination of both “liberalism” and “racism”.

### **1. Democracy.**

Defining democracy as a political system is not easy. The same holds for attempting to investigate people’s attitudes towards the process of democratic change that has been ongoing in South Africa for the past decade. Arblaster (1994:3) writes “democracy is a concept before it is a fact, and because it is a concept it has no single precise and agreed meaning.” One is therefore tempted to apply a commonsense approach to arriving at a definition of this concept. The key feature of this paper is therefore an investigation of the ways of speaking employed by representatives of a certain sector of society in the construction of their attitudes towards democracy.

Accordingly, “democracy is a term which, whatever its precise meaning, will always signify for many a cherished political principle or ideal, and for that reason alone it is never likely to achieve a single agreed meaning,” (Arblaster, 1994, p. 6). Yet more formal attempts at definition of the concept do exist. For instance, Reynolds (1999:20) cites Martin Lipset’s procedural and mechanistic features of democracy as being important elements of a definition: “First, competition exists for government positions, and fair elections for public office occur at regular intervals without the use of force and without excluding any social group. Second, citizens participate in selecting their leaders and forming policies. And, third, civil and political liberties exist to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.” Naturally, such a definition assumes widespread popular support and consent for the system of government (Arblaster, 1994), as well as the adoption (and in most cases, constitutional protection) of certain liberal attitudes regarding individual rights and liberties. This does not mean that democracy and liberal ideology necessarily go hand in hand (and it is certainly possible to argue that they do not), but there are some domains of overlap. However, an in-depth discussion of the theory of democracy is beyond the scope of this paper.

Defining democracy substantively in terms of the procedures and mechanisms by which it functions as a political system may lose sight of popular attitudes and commonsense conceptions. For this reason, Mattes and Calland (2002:4) argue, “Democracy is a principle rather than a set of procedures.” Given this view, examining democracy in South Africa should not focus on institutional or procedural form, but rather should revolve around the extent to which the principle is realised (Mattes & Calland, 2002). This involves investigating the extent to which popular self-government has been

achieved as well as examining the discursive sets of ideas and attitudes that constitute the notion itself.

What is significant concerning an “end product”, or substantive conception of democracy is the ways in which it attempts to reproduce liberal political ideology – with a focus on the individual rights to freedom and private property. Yet it is simultaneously important to remember that liberalism does not stand “apart from any particular moral and political agenda. Rather it is a very particular moral agenda (privileging the individual over the community, the cognitive over the affective, the abstract over the particular)” (Fish 1994:137-138).

With this in mind, the notion of democracy can be utilised as a rhetorical lens through which to focus participants’ discussions concerning their perceptions of post-1994 South Africa. In this way it is anticipated that the use of “democracy” as a metaphor to describe the overall political culture will serve to highlight the possible tensions that may exist between substantive understandings of democracy and ascription to liberal ideology, as well as the manners in which the participants in the research attempt to account for such conflicts.

White commercial farmers were proposed as a study population specifically because of the manner in which agrarian life and labour, in the largely rural Eastern Cape province, is located at the centre of several intersecting vectors of race, class and historically constituted state-supported privilege (Bundy, 1979; Beinart, Delius & Trapido, 1986; Jeeves & Crush, 1997). This makes their particular discourses of democracy of analytic interest as a means of monitoring the extent of change in social attitudes and popular discourse that is assumed to have taken place since 1994.

## **2. Democracy and Liberalism.**

The notion of democracy implies the adoption of particular values, and it has been argued that definitions of the concept tend to share the common feature that they describe a political ideal, as opposed to an actual system of government (Arblaster, 1994; Mattes & Calland, 2002). This dualism between the concept of democracy, and the actual political practice of “democratic” societies has been commented on by O’Malley (1999). What develops out of this dualism is an often confusing and blurry distinction between democracy as a political ideal, and the substantive conditions of a liberal political dispensation. These two are often conflated and a necessary connection between democracy and liberal values and individual freedoms is assumed to exist.

However, Richard Arneson (1993) puts forward an interesting thesis on the nature of this assumed relationship. He argues, “Democratic rights are protective. Their primary function is to safeguard other, more fundamental rights” (Arneson, 1993:118). Yet different people will always have conflicting interests, and therefore there must exist a hierarchy of rights, with some being more fundamental than others (Arneson, 1993). Thus it falls to a “democratic” government to regulate and safeguard this hierarchical arrangement of individual rights through its constitution and judicial process. The “ins and outs” of democratic governance and law making notwithstanding, Arneson (1993) thus views democracy as purely instrumental, and there need be no fundamental connection between democracy as a political system, and the realisation of individual rights and freedoms for all (Sugden, 1993).

Yet much of the rhetoric – both party-political and public – concerning democracy makes just this sort of claim and the ideological argument is that democracy as an ideal is desirable because in practice, it delivers individual rights and liberty. It is therefore the opinion of this paper that a discussion of constructions of democracy should examine the ideological ways of speaking that underpin them, as well as pay attention to the social practices and institutions supported by such modes of articulation. To this end it is necessary to examine the manner in which liberal ideology commingles with, supports, and is in turn supported by, apparently contradictory, exclusionary and/or prejudicial ideologies and ways of talk.

Such a conception of ideology would suggest that it is dynamic and fluid. Fairclough (1995) argues this very point when discussing the relationship between ideology, hegemony and discourse. In order to elaborate this relationship, Fairclough (1995) states that it is necessary to view ideology neither as a product of the underlying structures of language practice, nor as a result of fluid discursive event, but rather as a result of the interaction of both of these elements. This approach to understanding the nature of the relationship between ideology and discourse leads to a dialectical view whereby “discourse is shaped by structures, but also contributes to shaping and reshaping them, to reproducing and transforming them” (Fairclough, 1995:73). This creates a dynamic view of the manner in which ideology informs and is informed by the discursive practices that individuals employ.

Thus, Fairclough writes that “rather than attributing specific and fixed ideological “contents” to elements, ideology is seen more dynamically as the shifting relationship of discursive practices to hegemonic (and more local-institutional) struggle” (Fairclough, 1995:81). In stating this view, Fairclough (1995) draws on Foucault’s argument regarding the multiple meanings and uses of discourses. Foucault (in Fairclough, 1995:81) argues the following point: “Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.” It is important to bear this argument in mind when investigating Eastern Cape white commercial farmers’ discursive constructions of the notion of democracy, particularly when such constructions appear to be vested in liberal ideological values – values that are seemingly used to support both positive and negative views towards democracy and the racial “Other”. Much of the discursive analysis carried out for this paper will focus on the manner in which liberal ideology is used in the discourse of the farmers interviewed, and to what ends this ideological resource is drawn upon.

### **3. Liberalism and racism.**

In a related vein, Wetherell & Potter’s (1992) analysis of discourses of race and racism in New Zealand also addresses this issue of the variable ways in which liberal ideology is drawn upon to support both racist and anti-racist attitudes and beliefs. Their departure point is the argument that racist attitudes and beliefs are by no means monolithic or necessarily contribute to the articulation of a coherent set of discourses. Instead, Wetherell & Potter (1992:176) focus on the ambivalences and inconsistencies in individual accounts and use this to argue that “racism is flexible; its manifestations change as material conditions shift and as the agenda for debate become successfully

redefined through various forms of struggle.” It is thus not too difficult to argue the point that liberal ideology and beliefs or ideas that are seemingly the antithesis of liberalism are in fact not really all that incommensurate.

A liberal ideology incorporating notions such as “individual rights and freedoms and the importance of contracts and equality [that are] taken for granted” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992:181) can be used discursively to argue for what would seemingly appear to be the precise opposite – the protection of the rights and freedoms of a few to the exclusion of true equality for all.

Together with this notion of liberal ideology, Wetherell & Potter (1992) provide a critique of contemporary social science investigations of racism that posit the development of a new, modern, ambivalent sort of racist attitude, as opposed to historical, more openly bigoted attitudes. This modern racism approach, according to Wetherell & Potter (1992), argues that contemporary expressions of racism and racist attitudes have become subtler and sometimes contradictory – to the point that such expressions seem to be the expression of attitudinal ambivalence toward the racial “Other”. Such ambivalence is seen as “the outcome of a conflict between anti-black sentiments and liberal values” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992:195).

Such an explanation would, at first glance, appear to have some validity when accounting for the discursive strategies employed by certain groups within a society to express attitudes or opinions that, as a result of broad political changes, have become widely regarded as socially unacceptable. Yet, as Wetherell & Potter (1992) argue, such an explanation of contemporary expressions of racism ascribe to the idea that racism and racist attitudes are purely the result of psychological factors and are therefore cognitive-affective in nature. Additionally, liberal values are viewed as being diametrically opposed to such prejudice to the effect that “liberal values are seen as attenuating anti-black emotions and related cognitions to produce the conflicted phenomenon of modern racism” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992:197).

What such cognitive conflict supposedly produces is an ambivalence of attitude to the effect that openly bigoted attitudes and the expressions thereof become replaced by superficial tolerance, combined with more subtle expressions of prejudice. Whillock & Slayden (1995:xi) argue: “As routine expressions of hate are pushed out of public discourse, they re-emerge in more subtle and less newsworthy ways.” Thus, even though racism has become taboo, racist attitudes and beliefs still underlie many seemingly innocuous and well-meaning attempts by whites to account for societal change.

However, this “weakening” of strong racism through the widespread adoption of liberal values, and its replacement by a more subtle form of prejudice is not necessarily the case. Liberal values, instead of providing more “rational” beliefs and attitudes (such as equality, the protection of individual rights, free enterprise, and the like) to counteract the affectively based, and therefore less rational, prejudicial attitudes associated with racism, instead provide individuals with a particular set of discursive resources that can be used to construct even the circumstances brought about by democratic political and social change in a negative light. To this end, Wetherell & Potter (1992:197) argue the following: “Discourse analysis locates the conflicts and dilemmas within the

argumentative and rhetorical resources available in a “liberal” and “egalitarian” society ... The conflict is not between a feeling and a value, between psychological drives and socially acceptable expressions or between emotions and politics, but between competing frameworks for articulating social, political, and ethical questions.” Thus, the focus of the analysis will be on attempting to elucidate the various manners in which liberal discourses are employed to argue both for and against the democratic change that has occurred in South Africa since 1994.

It would seem that a key feature of the variable use of liberal ideology to argue both for and against democratic change is that there appears to be an assumption (on both sides of such an argument) of the fundamentally obvious, inviolable and inarguably correct nature of these liberal values. It seems to be taken for granted that the liberal rights and freedoms should be accorded to all individuals without question, and yet at the same time such a universally required application of liberal values creates a curious double bind.

The broader societal sanction of liberal values and ideology in a sense demands that individuals within that society ascribe to the same values. South Africa’s democratic government has on many levels (political and economic) adopted liberal values and enshrined them within the country’s constitution – individual rights and freedoms are legally protected and legally enforced. Yet, Wetherell & Potter (1992:189) make an interesting point: “to define something as compulsory is, in terms of the liberal discourse of freedom and human rights, to define it negatively. Compulsion is automatically rhetorically bad.” The offshoot of this is then that individuals who were previously members of a privileged sector of society may well use liberal ideology to justify that privilege, but then find that the same liberal ideology of rights and freedoms creates circumstances that threaten that selfsame privilege – as was illustrated by Dixon (1997).

#### **4. The current context.**

The Eastern Cape is South Africa’s third largest province, and one of the poorest. Under the apartheid regime, much of the Xhosa population of the province was relocated to the two homelands of Transkei and Ciskei. Black commercial agriculture was effectively undermined and relegated to subsistence farming in the homeland areas. Much of the African labour force was taken up into the migrant labour system and many men went off to work on the mines of the Witwatersrand, or in the agricultural and industrial areas of the Western Cape. The only avenue for those remaining in the rural Eastern Cape was to work as agricultural labourers on White commercial farms.

The Eastern Cape has a long history of land appropriation under British colonial rule, most notably during the Frontier Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the subsequent establishment of vast areas of the province designated to be allocated to British and other colonial settlers. This trend, established in the mid- and late-1800s by British colonial government, was continued in the twentieth century by the white South African government. The net result was that a viable class of back farmers were marginalized and proletarianised by a complex web of legislation and social practice in the early twentieth century expansion of racialised agrarian capitalism (Bundy, 1979; Beinart, Delius & Trapido, 1986).

Government support for white commercial farming in the Eastern Cape came in many guises – the forced removal of African peoples into the homelands; favourable labour legislation that maintained colonial labour and power relations between farmers and labourers; infrastructural support such as the construction of a vast railway and roads system through very rural areas so as to enable the transport of wool to the harbours of East London and Port Elizabeth; as well as price regulation for agricultural produce such as wool (the chief commercial agricultural product of the region). From this it can be argued that the history of twentieth century South African commercial agriculture is the history of state intervention and support (Jeeves & Crush, 1997).

With democratic change came the dismantling of this state supported privilege: the dissolution of the homelands; fair labour legislation enforcing changes in the labour relationships between farmers and labourers; the privatisation of parastatal agencies such as Spoornet resulting in the disuse and closure of key railway lines; land reform legislation, and an increase in violent crimes committed against farmers - to name but a few of the changes in material conditions that white commercial farmers in the Eastern Cape have begun experiencing.

Thus, for Eastern Cape farmers there is a real discrepancy between the ideal of democracy, as discussed previously, and the material effects of democratic change. The liberal ideology that underlies the principles of democracy – that ethos of individual rights and freedoms which this particular sector of South African society has always been accustomed to, and which has been taken for granted – is, at one and the same time, also the ideology with which they are in conflict.

#### **METHODOLOGY.**

The study aimed to elicit the farmers' conceptions of, and relationship to, the democratic social transformation that has occurred since 1994. The interview texts gathered for the purposes of this research were subject to a discourse analytic procedure that draws on Ian Parker's Foucauldian-inspired form of analysis, as well as on Potter and Wetherell's more rhetorical kind of analysis. The chief aim of the research was to attempt to identify how members of this particular stratum of agrarian society: i) conceptualise the process of change; ii) understand their place as subjects within the new democratic order and finally; iii) what ideological frameworks inform their constructions of self and others.

Discourse analytic research focuses primarily on texts – arguing that individual accounts of experience, agency and subjectivity are structured by systems of representation, most notably language. Parker (1999:3) states that “ the term discourse is sometimes used to refer to patterns of meaning which organise the various symbolic systems human beings inhabit, and which are necessary for us to make sense to each other”. In this way, it is argued that language produces and reproduces meaning independently from the intentions of the individual language user (Parker, 1994). As such, our realities and individual subjectivities are constituted and informed by the ways in which we speak them. It is thus possible to analyse our world and social phenomena as a system of texts (Parker 1994).

The critical question posed by discourse analytical research regards the reproduction of power relations within individual constructions of the social world. Parker (1992:4-5) states: “Discourses do not simply describe the social world, but categorise it, they bring

phenomena into sight". This primacy given to language as a medium through which we construct explanations and understandings of our social realities also means that language becomes that which "constitutes who we are, constructs the positions we occupy, is the medium by which we interact with other people and understand ourselves" (Burman, Kottler, Levett & Parker, 1997:7). But more than this, discourses extend beyond subjectivity and individual agency to reproduce existing institutions, ideologies and power relations through individual accounts (Burman, Kottler, Levett & Parker, 1994).

Parker's method of analysis examines the manner in which different discourses function, in collusion or competition, to reproduce particular power relations and ideological positions for its subjects (Parker, 1992). This in turn opens up the analysis to not only examine the dominant ideologies reproduced in talk, but also to the strategies of resistance and the interplay of power relations. However, Parker (1999:3) argues that Foucauldian analyses tend "to fracture texts into different discrete discourses which then hold positions for speakers and reproduce relations of power". At the same time, other forms of analysis focus instead on "the whole symbolic domain, and analysis is then of the things that are done with discourse by speakers or of the distinct 'interpretative repertoires' they employ" (Parker, 1999:3).

In this vein, the analysis conducted in this paper also makes use of Potter & Wetherell's notions concerning interpretative repertoires (1988) and the variable rhetorical functions to which individuals can put them. This sort of analysis requires the coding and classification of the material into themes on an inclusive basis, followed by an analysis of these themes in terms of *function* (the intentional and unintentional uses to which discourse is put), *variability* (the different ways in which discourses are employed as they are put to differing uses), and *construction* (the manner in which the discourse is put together in order to perform different functions) (Potter & Wetherell, 1988).

An analysis of these interrelated aspects of the discourse then enables a discussion of the *interpretative repertoires* used (Potter & Wetherell, 1988). The identification and elaboration of different interpretative repertoires amounts to an integrated description of the ways in which a discourse is employed as a resource to construct an understanding of the social world and different objects and subjects within it. Yet, particular discursive repertoires should not be necessarily and exclusively linked to particular social groupings, but rather it should be remembered that "repertoires are available to people with many different group memberships, and patterns of accounting may not be the neatest way of dividing up society or confirming conventional group categorisations" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:156).

### **Procedure.**

The question informing this research revolved around the attitudes towards, opinions about, and perceptions of democracy by white commercial farmers in the Eastern Cape. Three basic questions were posed to the interviewees in order to elicit their ideas concerning democracy. These questions centred around: 1) the individuals' definitions of democracy; 2) the impact that democracy had had on their lives; and 3) whether, and how, they thought that democracy was working or not. Thirteen interviews – ranging in length from approximately 15 minutes up to an hour in length – were conducted. These



interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and analysed according to a combination of the two abovementioned methods of discourse analysis.

Participants were recruited on a convenience basis. The researcher, being familiar with the area and the farmers resident there, approached prospective participants telephonically and explained to them the nature of the research question, and asked if they would be prepared to take part in the research endeavour. Once participants had assented to the research, interviews were arranged and conducted. Participants were again informed of the research question and the purposes to which the research would be put. Permission for the tape-recording of the interviews was obtained, and participants were assured that both the recordings and transcriptions would be kept confidential. It was also explained to participants that the tape recordings would be erased after a stipulated period of time (6 months).

From a Parkerian analytical perspective, the focus of the analysis was predominantly on the three auxiliary criteria that Parker (1992) identifies – power, institutions and ideology. Rhetorically, the analysis paid attention to the manner in which similar ideological discursive repertoires were variously drawn upon and utilised in the construction of different subject positions with respect to attitudes towards democracy. While it is important to acknowledge the individual vicissitudes as well as regional and class differences of white commercial farmers, a relatively stable and moderately prosperous community inhabits the area in which the research was conducted. So while discourse analysis avoids claims of generalisability, it is anticipated that the discussion of the main findings that follow will resonate with other similar contexts.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.**

Initial expectations on the part of the researchers were that there would be a high degree of homogeneity and convergence in participants' discursive constructions of democracy. This assumption was based on some background knowledge of the political climate of the farming community where the research was conducted. Instead of the expected uniformity of attitudes, there proved to be a fair amount of diversity in these accounts. cursory analysis of the gathered interview texts showed it would be possible to divide responses and respondents into two broad sets – those who are broadly optimistic and positive about democracy, and those who are generally negative and pessimistic.

However when it comes to the various discursive practices employed – specifically in terms of ideological belief structures – these two broad sets of responses are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, many of the ideological assumptions informing these accounts are strikingly similar. The difference lies in their tenor, their formulation and the variability of the functions to which the discourses are put (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Furthermore, while these differences are heuristically explored between the two poles of optimistic versus pessimistic, it is anticipated that this type of study could in future be augmented by the inclusion of data from other groupings of research respondents, possibly across age cohorts, race or a rural-urban split.

### **1. Democracy: “It’s a hell of a bugger-up”.**

During the conceptualisation of this research we anticipated that age of the respondents would be potentially significant in influencing the articulated discourses. Accordingly, we

decided to draw a distinction between older and younger participants in order to evaluate any possible differences in discursive positioning that may be tied to membership of a particular generation. The distinction between older and younger participants was predetermined, somewhat arbitrarily, at the age of 45 years. This decision would seem to be vindicated by the responses to the interview questions, as members of the older generation (i.e. older than 45 years) tended to have a more negative outlook.

### **1.1. Liberalism, rights and freedoms.**

Respondents' definitions of democracy tend to centre on individual rights and freedoms, evoking what Dixon (1997) has identified as a liberal discourse – one that privileges and protects the ideology of the inviolability of individual liberties and rights. It would appear that this liberal discourse forms the basis for many commonsense as well as academic understandings of democracy (Deegan, 1999; Reynolds, 1999; Graham & Coetzee, 2002). The following two extracts from interview transcripts illustrate this:

Extract 1:

*I always had it that democracy is when you've got a free country, free vote, free [...] you know? That's the way I saw it.*

Extract 2:

*I think it's people that, you know, have their own rights and can exercise their rights [...] you know, that they can feel free to [...] in a controlled atmosphere, to be able to speak their mind and be able to do, and be able to achieve things as well. And to be able to receive.*

Both of these extracts, as well as other responses reveal a conception of democracy as involving the protection individual rights and freedoms – the abovementioned discourse of liberalism. In this particular articulation of participants' ideas concerning democracy, we find the existence of a significant ideological tension between the values espoused by a discourse of democracy for all, and the values embedded within a discourse of liberalism – a specific set of values concerning individual rights and freedoms, as Fish (1994) has pointed out.

Furthermore, this liberal notion of democracy acts to reify the concept – defining it in terms of idealised end products, tangible outcomes and institutions. O'Malley (1999), discussing the results of focus group surveys concerning democracy conducted in 1992, notes that respondents' ideas about democracy also took on this form. O'Malley (1999:123) explains: "Democracy was widely interpreted as the antonym for apartheid. It encapsulated the opposite of apartheid ... Participants did not see democracy as a means, but an end; not as a process, but as a set of goals, accomplishments, results."

As such, democracy was constructed not simply as an "ethic" that would form the moral basis for the New South African society (in contrast to apartheid South Africa) it was understood in terms of the more tangible social norms and practices that would stem from the adoption of this "ethic" (O'Malley, 1999). Interestingly, Deegan (1999) cites an IDASA survey conducted in the Western Cape in 1996, where the bulk of respondents viewed democracy as procedural rather than substantive, indicating a possible shift in commonsense understandings of democracy.

Significantly however, a more substantive conceptualisation finds symmetry and is echoed in the illocutions of white farmers – a class of citizens often more acutely identified with racialised oppression than other white South Africans. As Deegan (1999:74) argues, “If citizens [regard] the ‘substantive’ aspects of democracy to be important then their belief in democratic government could potentially lessen if they [fail] to gain material advantages.” White commercial farmers, perceiving the security of their social positions to be under threat, could thus make use of this substantive view of democracy – influenced by a liberal discourse of individual rights and liberties – to put forward a negative attitude towards democracy in South Africa.

### **1.2. Democracy as “apartheid in reverse”.**

This substantive view of democracy as end result (and the very antithesis of apartheid) is seen from a slightly different perspective by the participants in this study, as evident in the following extracts wherein the respondents use the notion of individual rights to claim the mantle of victim:

Extract 3:

*But I do feel that maybe it's just something that's turned around from the past, from the olden days, from, you know, when the whites were in power. They were suppressing - maybe you can call it, to use a hard word - suppressing the blacks in certain ways. I thought that was wrong. And I do feel that we, alternatively now, as whites are being suppressed ...*

Extract 4:

*I want to say I had a part in apartheid during my life, I might still live that way, but my grandchildren that are running around here didn't have anything to do with it. And they are being punished. So apartheid is, the way I see it, is just something that's been turned around.*

This “reverse apartheid” discourse, is contrasted with the liberal discourse of individual rights and freedoms, and is used as a basis for the negative and pessimistic articulations concerning democracy in contemporary South Africa. Thus, respondents rhetorically assert that democracy is not being properly implemented by the new state. Such arguments provide ideological support for lingering racist attitudes, as respondents argue that they are being discriminated against. These articulations and the use of the ideological notions of individual rights and freedoms are used to position subjects as a currently disadvantaged sector of the population, unjustly persecuted due to changes instituted under the new political dispensation.

This discursive construction of social and political identity entrenches notions of “us versus them”, and in so doing provides barriers to real change in that it supports a particular manner of subject positioning with respect to notions of citizenship. Deegan (1999:73) argues that “citizenship implies the bestowal of certain rights and duties upon the individual and, as such, the good citizen will acknowledge and abide by the conventions and expectations of his or her society”. This goes hand in hand with ideas concerning governmental responsibilities (Deegan, 1999) towards citizens and notions concerning the legitimacy of a political dispensation. The perceived legitimacy of a democracy therefore depends upon whether or not citizens feel that they are getting a

fair deal out of it – whether or not the government is treating them equitably and is responsible to them, aware of their interests and inspires confidence in its efficacy and the rule of law (Deegan, 1999; Reynolds, 1999).

Articulations in which respondents claim unfair discrimination and negative consequences to the process of democratisation display votes of no confidence in the political system, precisely because of the “failure” of democracy to deliver “substantive” returns. Yet farmers are perhaps not alone in this attitude. Responses to an IDASA Democracy Index survey in 2002 suggest that “many citizens in the country accord the government only theoretical legitimacy” (Friedman, 2002:23), whereby the government is accorded the right to make binding decisions, but individuals do not feel any necessary compulsion to obey them (Friedman, 2002). For the group of farmers participating in this study, perceptions of the illegitimacy of the government reinforce the expression of a discourse of difference, an “apartheid discourse” of race, culture, separateness and irreconcilable difference.

Extract 5:

*I see democracy as, let's say, a country with different ethnic groups of people, that has to hold an election – a fair one – to put a government in office to look after everyone's interests: minority groups as well as majority groups. Not just force things down people's throats – whether it's a language that you have to speak or, uh, something that you have to do. In other words, each group is entitled to their own – what do you call it? – culture, or way of living, right?*

Extract 6:

*I'd like to phone in on these phone-in programmes, because I say that Afrikaans has been given the right to run their own radio, and they can do what they like and they can retain their own culture. We in the English, we are subjected to blacks running the radio stations. They don't speak clear English like we speak English [...] you know, those sorts of things worry me because I feel in time that's going to break down [...] I say if it's got to be like that, sure, give them their own stations, let them run their own programmes as they are running now. Let us whites also have something that retains our culture.*

In these two extracts, we see the subjects drawing on notions of cultural pluralism, which should be ideologically distinguished from the ethic of multiculturalism encompassed by ideas such as the “Rainbow Nation”. The latter seeks foster an ideology that embraces diversity and tolerance, in which people from divergent social, cultural and political traditions can together feel part of a new and unified nation. The former, however, seeks to re-establish notions of distinctness – hearkening back to the apartheid doctrine of “separate development”. This constitutes an obstacle to the development of an ethos of democracy, as it illustrates “a tendency to see difference as a threat and to restrict political spaces in consequence” (Friedman, 2002:25). To use Reynolds’ (1999) criteria for “consolidated democracy”, for these farmers, democracy is only constitutionally entrenched, without being attitudinally widely accepted or behaviourally practised.

In light of the abovementioned idea of cultural pluralism, it is interesting to note that all of the interviewees frame their responses in rigid terms of “us” (whites and farmers)

versus “them” (blacks and government). An apparent act of racial solidarity with the white male researcher – who is assumed to empathise with these ideological views by virtue of being a member of the same racial group – this is also a classic example of the use of discourses of “Other” (Riggins, 1997) which are often (if not always) to be found at the basis of prejudice and racism. The rhetorical social practice of constructing the external / social “Other” can be described as the reference to “all people the Self perceives as mildly or radically different (Riggins, 1997:3). Furthermore, Riggins (1997:4) writes “Self and external ‘Other’ may be understood as unique individuals (I and You) or as collectivities that are thought to share similar characteristics (We and They)”.

In this sense, the practice of “Othering” forms an integral part of the processes of prejudice, as it involves the perception and positioning in discourse of “different” social groups. In terms of this study, one of the focal points of this analysis tends to fall on the ways in which the racial “Other” to the white participants is spoken of in association with the implementation of democracy, and the participants’ negative perceptions thereof. What emerges is then the construction of the racial “Other” as a vengeful and persecutory entity, responsible for the systematic implementation of “reverse apartheid discrimination”.

The above extracts illustrate this discursive manoeuvring through the creation of ideological boundaries between their constructed subject positions and the “Other”, based upon notions of racial and, by extension, cultural difference. It is argued, however, that these articulations of prejudice do not stem solely from an openly bigoted ideology of racial superiority, but are instead the result of a defensive subject positioning that is born out of the ideological tension created by the widespread adoption of liberal democracy, which must needs require the dismantling of individual privilege and the ideology of racial segregation.

### **1.3. Things are worse for farmers.**

Another element of the respondents’ pessimism appears to derive from the fact that farmers utilise a discourse of being systematically disadvantaged and worse off. Interviewees’ arguments make use of concrete illustrations to “prove” just how much worse off they are now, as opposed to the past. At the same time however there is a reticence around how privileged they were in the past. For the history of twentieth century South African commercial agriculture is the history of state intervention and support (Jeeves & Crush, 1997). This attitude reflects what King (2001) refers to as “dysconscious racism”. King (2001:296) argues that “dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as a given.” In this way, dysconscious racism “tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges” (King, 2001:297). As such, respondents do not view democratic changes as an attempt to redress past inequality, but instead see them as an assault upon the uncritically accepted “norms” of state support for white commercial agriculture that were for a long time the cornerstone of landed white South African society.

Rhetorical points raised by these kind of arguments include: the collapse of infrastructure; theft of stock; problems with safety and security; labour laws; affirmative action; lack of subsidies; importing of foreign agricultural produce; increased running costs and decreased demand for produce. This litany of localized concerns may have a

degree of validity to them, as they illustrate some of the failures of government – particularly at provincial level – to maintain infrastructure and basic services. Notwithstanding their factual accuracy, it is less the arguments themselves than the ideological uses to which these arguments are deployed that are of analytic interest here.

For example, affirmative action and employment equity is seen as being discriminatory – again calling upon discourses of liberalism as well as the abovementioned “reverse apartheid” discourse. Labour laws are similarly viewed as legislation that has been “forced” upon a sector of the population unable (rather than unwilling) to comply, thereby “showing up” the government as being undemocratic and prejudicial to white agrarian interests. This has resulted in farmers having to “thin out” their labour force, increasing unemployment, which in turn increases crime. The respondents articulate a keen sense of the social ecology of their locality wherein crime becomes the eventual by-product of the dismantling of white privilege. Similarly the new wage system for farm workers is described as exacerbating racial tension, precisely due to retrenchments. However possibly the largest and most contentious issue for respondents is that of land reform.

Extract 7:

*The blacks believe it's their right to take back, but I mean, who paid for these farms? We've all worked very hard; we're still working hard just to keep our heads above water. So we've taken nothing from nobody. We paid for what we've got. So I mean, it's not democratic to take another person's life, it's not democratic to want to take another person's place.*

Extract 8:

*The Land Affairs [department] are interested in buying up the ground and certain pockets of land have gone, uh, for that reason. You know, they are getting their rights [...] You know, unfortunately we are in the middle of this whole process and at this stage I can't see that, you know, there's going to be too much positive coming out of it. Because the people that have been given, allocated the land are not equipped to produce to make it viable. And the money that they're getting is money lost.*

Land reform threatens their assets and is seen as a waste of money in that the black peasantry are not considered able to farm commercially. Furthermore the reform process is not being done “efficiently”. This position draws strongly on liberal discourse concerning the sanctity of individual property. It is very similar to the kind of arguments and exclusionary discursive practices identified by Dixon (1997) in his study of the Hout Bay residents’ responses to the emergence of informal settlements in close proximity to their homes. Individuals are accorded the “inviolable” right to private property by the state, yet the very same state is threatening the sanctity of this property and this right (Dixon, 1997). In this way, it is precisely the participants’ support for notions of liberalism that makes it rhetorically possible for them to frame their perceptions of the transformation process as reverse discrimination.

In order to understand the nature of this discursive dilemma, participants draw upon the “democracy as reverse apartheid” discourse, as well as a racist ideology to construct

these events as unjust, and undemocratic persecution of white farmers. This is further supported by what Van Dijk (1987:91) characterises as “one of the most stereotypical moves used in prejudiced talk ... which usually contains a general denial of (one’s own) negative opinions about ethnic groups, followed by a negative opinion.” This apparent denial and negation of their racist attitudes serves (at least in the minds of the interviewees) to justify their indignation at their perceived persecution. Simultaneously, such utterances attempt to draw distinctions between statements performing particular ideological and positioning functions, and statements which are merely descriptive (Potter, 1996). In this case, respondents are using the disavowal of their prejudiced subject positions to attempt to construct their perceptions as “objectively true” descriptions of the way things are.

Extract 9:

*I’m of the old school, so certainly change has been very difficult to accept [...] Because you know we’ve grown up that way. It’s unfortunate that we did grow up that way. We were brainwashed too, to a certain extent. To a large degree, you know, the communities that we lived in, the people that we’ve grown up with, um, it’s just been like that. So I don’t feel I’ve got myself to blame for that [...] I’ve never been a hard-liner, I’ve never been a right-winger or any of that type of thing, but certainly as things are, sometimes I get very anti- ... anti-black. And I can tell you that straight because it’s, you know, there are certain things that are just not acceptable, and it’s always – unfortunately when there are unacceptable things – it revolves around the blacks.*

Extract 9, above, is a perfect exemplar of the manner in which participants’ “dysconsciousness” of the machinations underpinning their past positions of privilege prevents the ideological reconciliation between the proverbial “omelettes and eggs” of individual rights versus the rights of all. The expression of this conflict is made abundantly clear, especially if we consider that the same participant spoke of democracy the ability to act out one’s rights in Extract 2 – a particularly clear expression of democracy in terms of liberal values. Yet, there is more to this than simply an unwillingness to accept the changes in the *status quo* that are the end result of applying liberal democracy universally.

There is also an attempt to construct a subject position of righteously indignant victim through the active disavowal of both the participant’s own prejudice *and* culpability for the past political dispensation, where this disavowal of prejudice includes an attempt to divert attention from issues of race to focus more on the substantive living conditions experienced by farmers. In Extract 10, the participant positions himself as a more or less passive product of the social and political circumstances in which he grew up, and which he, as a mere individual agent, had (and indeed still has) no power to alter. This open denial of responsibility and dis-identification with the system of Apartheid is, however, a superficial rhetorical strategy, shown by the participant’s transfer of responsibility from the designation of in-group membership (“we were being suppressive”) to a more neutral and distanced collectivity (“*the Whites* were being suppressive”).

What this amounts to is a defensive racism – a reactionary backlash perpetuating prejudiced ways of talk that goes hand in hand with the constructed subject position

of victim. That this reaction takes the form of prejudiced ways of constructing the racial “other” is not too surprising, seeing as, at least in this sector of the population, racial modes of thinking have long been an accepted discursive tradition. These attitudes are perhaps reinforced by (not necessarily accurate) perceptions of governmental reform strategies as “entrenching racial and class divides and thus giving credence to those who think in racial terms” (Desai, 2000:3-4).

#### **1.4. The old days were better.**

There is a wistful longing for the old days in which things were “better”: a colonial farming lifestyle, with a subservient and cheap workforce, favourable state interventions and the benevolent, patriarchal farmer. We argue that this discursive position is a corollary to Fanon’s idea of the oppressed consciousness of the colonised. It is the oppressive consciousness of the coloniser. “The colonisation of the mind is manifested in a manner in which a people’s history is denied, and they are made to feel inferior and incapable of challenging the colonial power” (Ahluwalia, 2001:41). In the same way, the consciousness of the oppressor must be shaped by the colonial discourse to justify and maintain white privilege and liberty whilst denying black history, rights and humanity.

Ahluwalia (2001:40-41) citing Fanon, argues, “A necessary part of colonialism is that the colonisers problematise the culture and the very being of the colonised, and the latter come to accept the ‘supremacy of the white man’s values.’” And just as the colonised needs to be liberated from this, so does the coloniser. Ahluwalia (2001:41) states that, in Fanon’s view, for this to occur – for both the colonised and the coloniser to reach a more equitable and liberated state of being; for society to be restructured – “it is not enough that the colonial power be defeated. A new consciousness that is part of the national culture is required.” Fanon (1979:231) writes, “Both must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible.”

However, this liberation of the consciousness of the past oppressor – embodied in this case by the white farmer – does not seem to have happened, thereby giving credence to King’s (2001) ideas concerning dysconscious racism. For recourse to a liberal discourse about rights and freedoms, as Dixon (1997) suggests, does not preclude the possibility of collusion with a discourse of racial segregation and superiority. This “colonial discourse” and nostalgic construction of the past can be clearly discerned in the following extracts:

Extract 10:

*Ag, I mean in the olden days – when I was younger – when your people used to come to you, you used to help them, you used to ... and you could chat to one another and ... but now you can’t. They’re sort of so demanding [...] And of course I believe in the old days, the people, the people on the farms – even if they didn’t get much pay – they had a much better life.*

Extract 11:

*Earlier times, the worker got less as salary, but he got more in the form of food, clothes, shoes, housing, all those things. All those things. If one of my people got sick, I took my vehicle and drove him in [...] Through the years you build up a relationship with them. This servant that works here [...] she must have come to*



*work here in '86. She's seen my sons grow up. Now, I mean, if there was a bad relationship between us, she wouldn't have stayed.*

Extract 12:

*I had families here that had a lot of other people living with them, and which had young children. They would come on a Saturday and sweep the yard, at no "moerse" charge. The children got sweets and cooldrink. And I didn't have to call them to come and do it – they did it because they wanted to, if they could, you know, get cooldrink, or get sweets. Those type of things. Now I'm not allowed to use them.*

A key feature of attempts to reconstruct an idyllic representation of "the way things used to be" is that they plainly ignore the fact that the past political dispensation allowed such circumstances to develop precisely because of the gross exploitation and oppression of rural, black South African labour power – where even underage labour was used for the purposes of constructing the physical features of this idealised façade. There is even the attempt to construct the rural black South African labourer as a willing participant in the maintenance of this "colonial-esque" system of oppression. Now, however, there is the governmentally enforced compulsion to alter these circumstances and to sacrifice their freedom to enjoy the standard of living that these farmers construct as a right earned through their *own* hard labour.

What is more, such attempts at reconstructing a better past go further than expressing a nostalgic reminiscence for the past. These accounts also assert that there has indeed been some sort of substantial (not to mention negative) change in both the relationship between farmers and their labourers, as well as in the living conditions in the rural areas. The attempt is made to argue that circumstances for farmers have been substantially reduced and irrevocably altered for the worse by the process of democratisation. This further illustrates (for the farmers themselves, as well as for outside observers) the manner in which a supposedly liberal democratic system has failed to protect the rights and freedoms of a particular sector of society.

Yet it must at the same time be borne in mind that the above ways of speaking about democracy could very well be illustrative of the manner in which farmers are expressing their subjective positioning in response to the implementation of governmental policies that are not necessarily liberal in and of themselves (and land reform and affirmative action legislation are indeed examples of such policies), but which have been instituted in order to bring about an equitable society in the long term. As such, critiques of these policies from a liberal perspective are perfectly valid and understandable. Further research is required in this regard to examine the manners in which such critiques are made, drawing upon outmoded forms of discursive practice and racist talk, for what would be occurring in such a situation would be a more nuanced use of racial modes of speaking (as an available discursive repertoire) to frame possibly legitimate grievances.

### **1.5. Things are worse for the people, too.**

A related argument amongst those who view democracy negatively is that "the people" themselves are also worse off. Participants argue that many of the "democratic" reforms have negatively affected the rural poor, who make up their workforce. The same instances used to argue that they, as farmers, are worse off, are cited as evidence here. Labour laws supposedly make it impossible to provide employment for as many people

as used to be possible in the past. The farm wages legislation is blamed as the cause for farmers having to retrench workers, thereby increasing rural unemployment, and crime. The manner of implementation of land reform – over and above the supposed black inability to farm productively – is also said to make it extremely difficult for black farmers to produce anything other than subsistence needs, to the detriment of both the people and the productive capacity of the land.

While critical questions can be posed of the plight of the rural poor in the new political dispensation, the legitimacy of those formulating such critique needs to be examined. A striking example of this is to be found in Extract 15, below. In this case, the participant – a farmer – discursively distances himself from his own interests, referring to himself in the third person, whilst simultaneously identifying in the first person with his workers. In doing so, he creates the impression of concerned and legitimate criticism of the negative effects of new labour legislation, because he has looked at the problem from everybody's perspective.

Although possibly motivated by varying degrees of benign concern for the rural subaltern, this argument is used to perform certain functions. It can be asked are the farmers speaking for the marginalized rural poor, or is this merely discursive strategy for articulating and masking their critiques of democracy? If the latter, then the argument that “the people are worse off” is put to the ideological use of “proving” that the indigenous populace cannot govern, as well as to “show” the government up as inefficient, uncaring and unresponsive. To do this, use is made of examples of what are perceived to be poor (and unfair) democratic government by blacks.

Extract 13:

*If it's not going to go Zimbabwe's way, then it'll always be a democracy. But I mean, hey, Zimbabwe – if we're going to be sympathetic towards Zimbabwe, then we're not democratic. So then I'm afraid ... then we're just totally autocratic. And we don't want to be that way, certainly.*

Extract 14:

*We are having to give up certain things that, I mean, we never used to have to give up and, uh, the blacks that have bought farms, that are also employing labour, are not subjected to the same laws. And to me that's not democracy. And they're not going to force those black guys to comply, I can guarantee you right now they won't [...] but they will force us [...] certainly they're going to give us a hard time.*

Whilst critique of a government that is not delivering is legitimate within a democratic society – these kinds of arguments are used as “evidence” for specifically black governmental incompetence. This construction is then contrasted with the idealised apartheid era in the same kind of colonial discourse characterised by a “wistful longing” for a better past.

## **2. Democracy: “It should have happened a hundred years ago”.**

In contrast to the reactionary pessimism of the first group of respondents, the majority of the younger participants (along with a few older ones) can be characterised as articulating what might appear to be diametrically opposed, forward-thinking optimism.

For these farmers, the general outlook is much more positive, although as will be suggested, some of their critiques are based in similar discourse and ideology.

### **2.1. Democracy is about rights and freedom.**

Once again, definitions of democracy revolve around individual rights and freedoms, and as previously stated, democracy is positioned by these respondents as an end product of change rather than a means by which it can be achieved (O'Malley, 1999). Therefore, democracy is seen to work in an idealistic sense. There is however the admission of some discrepancy in the manner in which democracy is being implemented.

Extract 15:

*Anyone is free to voice their own opinions, to live their life the way that they wish to, to express themselves the way they wish to, to practice their religion the way they wish to, all within a safe, structured country with a reasonably good government.*

Extract 16:

*Democracy is freedom to live a person's life within the laws of the country. You know, government for the people by the people. No oppression. In whichever country you live in, which is a democracy, there is no oppression of one group by another. It means equality [...] We're all equal; everyone living in a democracy is equal in terms of dignity. It's about human dignity.*

Extract 17:

*But democracy is not just about rights. It's a word that is supposed to mean freedom, but that freedom doesn't really exist. So it's not just rights, it's more of an attitude, like respect. Respect for people equally – skin colour doesn't matter.*

The discursive occurrence taking place here is also an attempt by participants to articulate their experience of the ideological tension between the implementation of democracy and liberal values and ideology. However, this repertoire differs from the first in that participants here seem able to reconcile this tension through the use of a more “permissive” mode of speaking that makes allowance for this conflict of interest. Interestingly, participants articulating this second repertoire do not make use of attempts to disavow their past positions of privilege, but instead seem to recognise it as a salient factor in the constitution of the ideological conflict that they are experiencing.

This recognition, in turn, allows for a number of things. Firstly, participants are able to reconcile the disparity between the rights of the individual versus the rights of all, thereby freeing them up to articulate a more optimistic view of democracy. Secondly, participants, in reconciling this tension to some degree, are enabled to develop a more sophisticated and less substantively focused definition of democracy (and this is visible in their talk of attitudes, equality and dignity, as opposed to a more restricted focus on rights and freedoms).

As can be seen from the extracts, there is a general agreement with the “principles” of democracy as well as the implicit recognition that Apartheid was morally wrong. With these responses drawing heavily on the idea of rights, equality and freedom, it is easy to see that their illocution make use of a discourse of liberalism as described by Dixon

(1997). What is more, this use of liberal discourse recognises the need for political and social change to have occurred, and does not make use of the notion of individual rights to argue for the protection of white privilege. At the same time there is a denial of the privileged positions that participants occupied in the past, yet in this instance it is not used to strategically enable participants to construct their pessimism towards democracy as a “legitimate” defensive reaction to a threat. Instead, this distancing of the subject position from complicity with the “Apartheid regime” is drawn upon to rhetorically support the transition towards democracy.

Extract 18:

*Well I mean a lot of changes have come from the old regime to the new regime. But, uh, it should have happened a hundred years ago, that's what [...] If it happened a hundred years ago, we'd be ten times better off now. Because we're at the difficult stage at the moment and I say the word "apartheid" should have never been there.*

Extract 19:

*I've always been free and had privileges. The changes in the country have meant having to recognise that all people have the right to these privileges and to equality. Most people now have got access to what I've had all along and have taken for granted. For many, democracy has come too late. But it has meant that I've had to take notice of other people as equals. It also means that I have had to share the privileges I've had.*

There is also, amongst these participants, the admission of some discrepancy in the manner in which democracy is being implemented. The tension between liberal ideology and substantive democracy is not completely resolved, and participants are thus required to construct explanations for their experience of this conflict in such a way as to create a subject positioning that they believe is commensurate with both their already expressed support for the implementation of democracy, as well as the liberal values that they have espoused. In order to do this, participants draw on a discursive strategy that allows them to agree with democracy in principle, yet criticise the manner of substantive implementation.

## **2.2. Dysfunctional democracy.**

Criticisms of democracy revolve around the collapse of infrastructure, safety and security, and a sort of generalised anxiety concerning the political future of the country. No mention is made in these responses about the worsening plight of farmers or a deliberate reversal of apartheid discrimination. Instead, these criticisms of the government and of the processes of change seem to be premised upon the idea of farmers being able to maintain the standard of life that they have become accustomed to – again drawing upon liberal ideals. As long as this standard of life is not substantively threatened, respondents do not express much disquiet regarding democracy and change. This is coupled with a general sense of optimism – such that the current “bad” situations are not viewed as an unending downward spiral, but merely as part of an ongoing transitional period, more akin to O'Malley's (1999) conception of democracy as a “process”.

Extract 20:

*Well I suppose things must go down before going up.*

Extract 21:

*It's going to take time. Financially, the infrastructure has fallen to pieces, but I think in time it will build up again, because after the Boer war it was the same. There was no infrastructure, and it was built up again. So I see a future in the country. Uh, we're not used to this, as being white, we're not used to it ... it's difficult for us to accept it.*

This particular discursive positioning that allows participants to ideologically support democracy, yet maintain the conflicting position of being able to criticise the manner of its implementation. This position differs substantially from the negative and pessimistic criticisms of democracy articulated by participants using the first repertoire. Instead of constructing this critique from a defensive positioning, participants here are attempting to develop a strategy to rationalise the process of change that incorporates the tension felt to exist between individual rights and the rights accorded to all. This, in turn, means that the optimism that participants express is ameliorated to some degree, allowing participants to reconcile the contradiction between their already expressed support for the democratic ideal, and the “negative” impact that the process of democratisation has had on the substantive conditions that comprise their accustomed standard of living.

### **2.3. “They” just need to adjust.**

However, in trying to account for the discrepancies between the ideal of democracy, as constituted by a “liberal discourse”, and the realities of poor governance and service delivery in the province, racialised discourse are drawn upon to explain the transition, and the problems currently being experienced. However, this racist discourse differs from the “apartheid” and “colonial” discourses discussed above in that it does not actively advocate a return to a “better” past where whites were in control. Instead, it operates on a more subtle level by implicitly reaffirming white superiority in terms of intellect and governmental aptitude.

This implicit racism in the discourse indicates the manner in which an ideology of white superiority and black inferiority has adapted to the changes that have occurred in post-apartheid South African society, and still informs white explanations and constructions of the black “Other”. It allows participants to preserve the old manner of subject positioning in terms of racial superiority, by according them the opportunity to construct their critiques of democracy from a position that includes patronising attitudes and understandings of the new black government. An example of this is reflected in the idea that blacks are unable to cope with being in power and are therefore susceptible to corruption, or that they are still learning how to govern and need whites to help them. Such fundamentally ideological arguments serve to maintain the political, not to mention moral and intellectual superiority of whites.

Extract 22:

*Yes it works, the ideal of democracy. It has to work. It must work. But it doesn't if people seek their own gain. Maybe democracy can't work in practice if people become corrupt and greedy. It doesn't work when people only use it to look after themselves [...] I don't think democracy is working in South Africa. The new regime*

*oppresses others as well. I don't really know why ...perhaps it's all the change that has taken place; all the sudden "muchness" – perhaps they can't handle it.*

Extract 23:

*Sometimes I think they don't really know how to handle the situation, quite at the moment. They must still adjust to it. And that's the excuse that you give them. They've got a long way to go [...] And if more whites just want to help them to adjust it would go better. But some are still against democracy, so they're not willing to help and, you know, tell them "look, we think if you do this" ... or "we think if you do that" ... They want to tell them "look, you must do that" still, and then they must do that. And you know they were so far behind in the past, now they're standing up to it, I think. And then they just think "well, we're going to do it our way".*

Whilst such expressions of a patronisingly superior positioning of whites in relation to blacks in terms of governmental competence (not to mention moral rectitude, incorruptibility, and even intelligence) seem to be more subtle expressions of racism than the criticisms posed by the participants that articulated the first repertoire, both types of expressions of racism stem from attempts to address the ideological conflict experienced by participants in terms of the tension between the ascription to liberal ideology and the simultaneous adoption of democratic ideals. Thus, instead of the above extracts providing examples of what Whillock & Slayden (1995) conceive of as expressions of subtle racism, it is argued that all the expressions of racism and prejudice articulated by the participants in this research – both optimistic and pessimistic – illustrate two distinct rhetorical strategies for resolving what Wetherell & Potter (1992) have characterised as an ideological conflict.

#### **2.4. The future looks bright.**

Significantly, participants are very sanguine about the future of the next generation, feeling that children growing up in the democratic society will be more tolerant and accepting of each other. This is contrasted with respondents' own upbringing and relative difficulty in dealing with change. It is interesting to note that this notion might even be vindicated simply by looking at the age characteristics of the two different sets of respondents – the older respondents generally being more negative about democracy and finding it harder to cope, ideologically, with change than the younger ones.

Extract 26:

*I'm quite excited for my children's future, for their school career, because it will be radically different from my own, for various reasons. And I can already see the change in my own children from the way I grew up, or was brought up.*

Extract 27:

*For us, I mean, it's difficult to cope with what's going on. But for the little ones, for the kids – they're growing up with it now, so for them it's going to be easier.*

This optimism reflects the key difference between the two interpretative repertoires identified by the analysis, and shows how the ability of this second group of participants to reconcile the ideological conflict between the values entailed in the political ideal of democracy and those of liberal ideology can result in a subject positioning vastly

different to that created by the first group of participants. Instead of creating a position in which the participants defensively construct themselves as “victims” of a hypocritical and uncaring government that is systematically subjecting them to unfair discrimination (as is achieved in the first repertoire), here, subjects are able to construct a more positive notion of their own socio-political status, and therefore are able to remain optimistic about the future development of the country.

This second position, is however (as has been elucidated above) not one of unmediated optimism. Participants’ accounts still reflect that their experience of democratic change is one of an observable decline in their standard of living and the material conditions of life in the rural areas. However, these circumstances are put to the rhetorical use of positioning subjects as “martyrs”, who realise that there is a need for a levelling of the playing fields, as it were. Thus, it is possible for these participants to remain positive concerning the future of the country, as they can construe their negative experiences of democratic change as a part of the process of achieving the necessary political (and ideological) ideal of liberal democracy.

## **CONCLUSIONS.**

To conclude: a brief review of the findings of the research. Responses to the interview questions were divided into two broad categories, each making distinctive use of different discourses to construct the subjects in a particular way and each subtly promoting a particular ideological stance towards democracy.

The first category used the negative or pessimistic discursive practices. Responses in this category adopt a substantive and liberal discourse when defining the concept of democracy, seeing it primarily as an issue of sovereign individual rights and privileges, and arguing for the maintenance of these rights. Yet participants are simultaneously unable to manage the tensions that they experience existing between these two ideals – tensions between the protection of individual liberties and rights, and the universal democratic rights of all.

This inability to reconcile the contradictions between notions of democracy and liberal discourse forms the basis for constructing a negative and racist account of democracy in South Africa. The idea of individual rights and freedoms is used to highlight the “skewed” manner in which respondents feel democracy has been implemented, providing them with a justification for feeling aggrieved at the erosion of their former political and, to a lesser extent, economic status. As such it is used to construct an account of democracy as an illegitimate “reverse apartheid” in which the subjects (i.e. white farmers) are positioned as the victims. Stereotypical strategies of prejudicial talk (Van Dijk, 1987) are utilised in an attempt to disavow the subjects’ racism and to construct their “plight” as unjust and unwarranted and arguments criticising the apparent hypocrisy of the democratic government (always framed in strategies of talk that draw heavily on notions of the “Other”) are used rhetorically to assert the validity of their criticisms.

Together with this liberal notion of democracy, respondents draw upon an “apartheid” discourse of racial and cultural distinctiveness and separateness to construct a notion of how they would like democracy to function. This idealised notion of separateness, together with the attempted disavowal of their own prejudiced attitudes, contributes

toward a discourse of “dysconscious racism”. This paper posits such dysconsciousness as a corollary of Fanon’s “consciousness of the colonised” – the consciousness of the coloniser: a discursive and ideological “relic” of the old structure of South African society that is still being circulated. This discursive practice is played out in talk that expresses a wistful longing for a genteel colonial past in the rural areas.

In contrast, the second category encapsulates the positive or optimistic group of discursive practices. Responses adopt a more flexible version of the liberal discourse of democracy, seeing it as both an end product of individual rights and privileges, as well as a “process” of achieving those ends. In this way, liberal discourse is not used to argue for the maintenance of the privileged position of a particular group. Instead, there is the ability of the participants in this second repertoire to reconcile the different tensions inherent in the discourses of democracy and liberalism that they draw upon in the construction of their accounts, displayed by participants’ recognition of the rights of all to the rights and privileges that they would like to see maintained.

Criticisms of the implementation of democracy do not call up images of past colonial or apartheid glory. Instead, participants draw upon rhetorical positioning strategies that make use of a more subtle racist discourse based on the idea of competence and ability. Blacks are not seen as able to govern properly and competently without the aid of whites, and are constructed as easily corruptible by power. The way in which it is articulated, and the manner in which it positions its white speakers is far more nuanced than the openly racist discourses of the former category. In this way, speakers are able to ideologically maintain their superiority without blatantly (or even consciously) arguing for a return to political and economic privilege.

Respondents within this second group are thus able to adopt a more optimistic and forward-looking discourse about democracy and change in South Africa, and the future political and economic development of the country. Respondents construct themselves as individuals committed to sharing the country and political power according to the ideals of democracy.

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