Hermann Giliomee, ***Maverick Africans: The Shaping of the Afrikaners*** (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2020, 467 pp., ISBN 9780624089094).

After his monumental book *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (2003), South African and Afrikaner historian Hermann Giliomee has taken an updated look at 'his people's' history. In *Maverick Africans: The Shaping of the Afrikaners* he names and explains several, in his view, key moments in South African history in which an Afrikaner nationalism was forged, necessitated and embraced. Yet instead of offering a clear chronological overview, Giliomee's approach to this book is much more analytical as opposed to the more chronological approach in *The Afrikaners*. He discusses several well-known stages in the forming of the Afrikaner nation, such as the Great Trek (from 1830) and the South African War (1899-1902), and other less well-known episodes such as the 1865 decision of the British colonial government to forbid the use of Dutch language in schools and public services, all in the aim of examining the development of an Afrikaner ethnic consciousness, and the way the Afrikaners eventually became trapped in their own delusion of the apartheid ideal as the sole solution to their survival. This analytical approach, in seeking the reasons for the regression towards racist ideologies, is how this latest work of Giliomee distinguishes itself from his earlier work on the history of the Afrikaners.

However, in the process, Giliomee does not escape the tendency of many South Africans to see their country and their people's history as exceptional. This so-called 'South African exceptionalism', which has been observed and addressed by several scholars, most notably by Mahmood Mamdani[1], can arguably be understood and sympathised with considering the relatively peaceful transition of power in 1994, which was indeed exceptional and served as an inspiration to the world, but it is quite a leap to also apply this view onto the history of the Afrikaners as a nation. Were the Afrikaners indeed such mavericks when it comes to dominant global patterns in world history?

There are many parallels between the history of Afrikaners and the history of European settlers in other parts of the world. Regarding the struggle against British cultural imperialism and the Anglicisation of their language and culture, a parallel with the Canadian Québécois comes to mind. Similarly, one can make several comparisons to the settler history of the United States or the Australian outback, regarding a so-called 'frontier mentality'. Giliomee, however, states that when looking at the demographic numbers, the Afrikaners were an exceptional community compared to other

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settler societies, as they had always formed a minority, be it a very considerable minority, as opposed to for example white Americans or white Australians, and as such did not have the demographical upper hand in those parts of the world where they settled. The comparison that Giliomee prefers is that with other minority communities seeking power to enhance and ensure their nation's survival. Giliomee looks for instance at the Protestants in Northern Ireland or the Tutsi in Rwanda. His interests lie therefore mainly in the decisions and paths that such communities take in order to ensure their people's survival, the growing belief that power is a guarantee for survival, and the often questionable or simply inexcusable strategies which were employed to maintain power. This original approach allows us to see the history of the Afrikaners as an illuminating case study of the development of dangerous ideologies which advocate violence for survival, instead of only as a history of colonialism.

A crucial step in this development of an ultimately (self)destructive Afrikaner nationalism was according to Giliomee the rapid industrialisation of the Highveld and 'the way in which post-1870 industrial society adapted to pre-industrial social relations and used a modernist state apparatus to intensify the forms of oppression established originally by the settler society'. This, Giliomee argues, 'was the real turning point in South African history' (194). He is certainly not alone in this conclusion. The British historian John Iliffe has similarly remarked that it was the industrialisation of South Africa that set it on a unique and 'exceptional' trajectory different from the rest of the continent.[2] But this was a turning point for the whole of South Africa and in particular for the overall white settler society in South Africa, not specifically of the Afrikaners. If anything, as Giliomee remarks as well, this industrialisation further estranged the English-speaking whites from the Afrikaans-speaking whites, the latter identifying mostly with being farmers rather than industrial entrepreneurs.

The Afrikaner nationalism that emerged in the wake of the industrialisation of the former Boer Republics was characterised by an ethnic consciousness rather than a class consciousness. This was somewhat remarkable and certainly not inevitable, as the emergence and popularity of many white labour unions as well as the South African Communist Party (founded in 1921) pointed in a direction of a class-conscious political rift between a capitalist, globalised imperial elite versus a lower class, rural-based population. Giliomee writes that the emergence of a politically stimulated ethnic 'awakening' amongst the Afrikaners 'conforms to the general observation that in societies where class and ethnic ties tend to coincide rather than cross-cut, political entrepreneurs usually establish a following by relying

1 Mahmood Mamdani, *Monday Paper* 17:13 (1998), May 18-25.

2 John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge 1995).

on emotive ethnic distinctions between "us" and "them"' (105). With this observation, he takes his book and the history of the Afrikaner people out of the narrow frame of imperialist history in Africa, favoured by renowned historians like Terence Ranger and Walter Rodney, with its tendency to look at historical processes from a predominantly materialist point of view, and instead approaches this history in all its complexity.

Within the discussion on the future of Afrikaners in South Africa, Giliomee clearly takes position and argues for further integration of the two Afrikaans-speaking communities, the Afrikaners and the so-called 'Coloured' community, who are the descendants of enslaved people and Khoisan. Furthermore, he stresses that Afrikaans is not a white language in origin nor in current practice. Giliomee, unsurprisingly, is critical of the sacrifice of Afrikaans as a language of higher education. He makes an interesting observation – certainly for the Dutch academic perspective – when he states that the real decision of rejecting Afrikaans as a language of educational instruction in favour of English was not motivated by university management at, among others, Stellenbosch University and the University of Pretoria out of a desire for more inclusivity, but simply for economic reasons and prestige, as it allowed the university to attract more students, also from abroad, as well as to move up the international university rankings. In this light, he calls this decision the 'second betrayal'[3] of the 'Coloured' community by the Afrikaners, as this Afrikaans-speaking community is the one group that has had consistently lower success rates since the introduction of English as language of education (282).

Yet, this plea for a closer collaboration between the two Afrikaans-speaking communities does not seem to stem from a deep-seated wish for a more inclusive and non-racial view of the Afrikaans-speaking community, but more from present-day pragmatism. If Giliomee had truly seen the 'Coloured' Afrikaans-speaking community as part of the same kinship group, more of the intellectual history of this community could and should have been integrated into his book. Nevertheless, *Maverick Africans* is a poignant work on the history of the Afrikaners that positions their history in a broad perspective of rising nationalism and comparative imperial history. More importantly, it reminds us that sometimes 'the will to survive can contain something evil'.[4]

Anne van der Wal-Remy, Leiden University

3 The first betrayal refers to the racist policies created by the Afrikaner political party *Nasionale Partij*, targeted against the 'Coloured' community during the Apartheid era.

4 This is a quote from Nicolaas Petrus van Wyk Louw that appeared in John Christoffel Kannemeyer, *Leroux: 'n Lewe* (Pretoria 2008) 245 and was cited in Giliomee, *Maverick Africans*, 276.