



## **A precarious hybridity: war, mission, nationalism, anti-nationalism and the Murray family of South Africa**

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### **Abstract**

Since their arrival in South Africa in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Murray family walked something of a tightrope with respect to the formation of Afrikaner national identity. This article describes the Murrays' positioning regarding that identity formation as a "precarious hybridity". On the one hand, the Murrays identified themselves closely with the Afrikaner people among whom they ministered, an identification that was particularly tested by the traumatic experience of the South African War (1899–1902). On the other hand, they maintained wider ecumenical and international linkages, which were particularly enhanced by their involvement in missionary activities in Nyasaland. Such variegated positioning necessitated a pragmatic, accommodationist approach that was increasingly at odds with the hardening identity formation characteristic of Afrikaner nationalism as the 20<sup>th</sup> century proceeded. This article describes and analyses the ways in which some of these complexities played out.

### **Keywords**

*Andrew Murray Jr; Anglo-Boer War; South African War; Dutch Reformed Church; Scottish influence*

## **Introduction**

The question of identity lies at the heart of any nationalism. South Africa has had its fair share of nationalism, and the Murray family in South Africa had an interesting relationship with Afrikaner nationalism in particular.

This article will show some of the complexities of this relationship, especially in the contexts of war and mission.<sup>1</sup>

As descendants of Andrew Murray, an early 19<sup>th</sup> century immigrant from Scotland, the Murray family under discussion was part of a wider Scottish diaspora that had an influential impact on South Africa in general and the Dutch Reformed Church in particular.<sup>2</sup> Scots in the British Empire had a reputation for being adaptable, even to the harsh conditions that typified much of southern Africa under the British flag. Due to their polyglot background in Scotland and their own situation as a minority within wider Britain, among other conditions, Scots tended to seek out allegiances with non-British peoples abroad, and they assimilated much more readily and effectively than their English counterparts when it came to the Dutch culture they encountered at the Cape.<sup>3</sup> This was expedient as for many Scots who arrived in South Africa in 1820 as part of a contingent of British settlers to South Africa, their ability to succeed in their trades and agricultural enterprises was influenced by how well or poorly they were able to get along with their neighbours who often were Dutch-speaking farmers in the region today known as the Eastern Cape.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Andrew Murray and other Scots who became recruited as ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church [DRC], this issue of assimilation to the Dutch and eventually Afrikaner culture was, of course, even more strongly accentuated. Although they were government employees, as were all DRC ministers at the time, the Scots ministers had a particularly strong motivation to become as Dutch as they could as quickly as possible. It was a matter of being able to do one's job and live out one's calling in this unknown land.

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1 For a monograph length exposition on the general theme of this article but in broader context, see Retief Müller, *The Scots Afrikaners: identity politics and intertwined religious cultures in Southern and Central Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

2 John M. MacKenzie and Nigel Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, identity, gender and race, 1772-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

3 See, for example, for example, Mackenzie & Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa* 10, 13.

4 Ibid, 55.

## A Scottish emigrant among prospective emigrant farmers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Cape Colony

Andrew Murray and several other Scottish ministerial and educational recruits arrived in South Africa thanks to the efforts of Dr George Thom, another Scot who had become a DRC minister in 1818 after first serving in South Africa within the London Missionary Society for a time.<sup>5</sup> The Cape Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, commissioned Thom to recruit Scottish ministers to serve in the vacant parishes of the rural Eastern frontier of the Cape Colony.<sup>6</sup> Somerset actively promoted a program of anglicisation at the Cape during his tenure as governor, and this commissioning of Thom to recruit ministers and teachers in Scotland is generally seen to be part of that effort. The placement of the recruits in the Karoo borderlands – in towns such as Colesberg, Cradock, and Graaff Reinet – could also be seen as strategic. The hope might have been that the Scots ministers would act as a tempering influence on an unruly Dutch population that was becoming increasingly agitated against the colonial government's abolitionary policies. When the migration of farmers, known in subsequent Afrikaner folklore as the Great Trek, eventually occurred in the 1830s, this was indeed, at least partially, a rebellion against the recently instituted Ordinance 50, which legally placed the indigenous and settler populations on a similar footing.<sup>7</sup> Scottish ministers such as Robertson, Taylor, Reid and Murray protested and attempted to bring their congregants to heel. The DRC at large, by his time almost entirely controlled by the Scottish ministers, threatened the recalcitrant migrants with being barred from the sacraments, but to no avail. The Trek proceeded, and subsequently the Scots had to adapt their strategy of engagement by essentially becoming

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5 Frederick William Sass, *The Influence of the Church of Scotland on the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa* (Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Edinburgh, 1956), 17.

6 Sass, 15; Anonymous (1990). "George Thom (1789–1842): Scottish Pioneer in South Africa." In *The Banner of Truth*. [Online] Available: <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/george-thom-1789-1842-scottish-pioneer-south-africa>.

7 See Richard Elphick, *The equality of believers: Protestant missionaries and the racial politics of South Africa*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 28-29.

evangelists and missionaries to their rebellious flock beyond the borders of the Cape Colony.<sup>8</sup>

## Accommodation to the local context

Adaptation and even accommodation were important strategies employed by the Scots in the DRC as they continually sought to find points of contact between themselves and the Dutch/ Afrikaner culture. Language and its usage were pivotal aspects of this. After they were recruited, Andrew Murray and a number of his Scottish compatriots first spent some time in the Netherlands to learn the Dutch language before sailing to South Africa.<sup>9</sup> Once implanted in South Africa, they adopted a basic bilingualism over time. Andrew and Maria (Stegmann) Murray's daughter, Maria Neethling, would describe in a memoir how in her parents' family home, Dutch served as a public language to use in work and church, for example. However, English would occupy the more intimate place of the language between family members, evening prayers, and other such gatherings.<sup>10</sup>

As an example of this tendency towards accommodation, one could mention that Andrew Murray Sr's name is indelibly tied to the controversial decision of the 1857 synod of the DRC, where he introduced the controversial "weakness of some" motion. This was an accommodationist strategy undertaken to waylay the fears of white church members who might have opposed the ongoing missionary program of the DRC had it meant that black converts would be included together with the whites in the same church building for services, including communion. Murray's motion unambiguously stated that, although it was unscriptural and wrong to have racially segregated services, this arrangement could be permitted in congregations where "the weakness of some" stood in the way of integration.<sup>11</sup> The motion was accepted, and ever since then, this synod and

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8 A. Dreyer, *Die Kaapse kerk en die Groot Trek* (Kaapstad: Van de Sandt de Villiers en Co., 1929), 29.

9 M. Neethling, *Unto children's children: lives and letters of the parents of the home at Graaff Reinet, with short sketches of the life of each of the children, and a register*. London: Printed by T.H. Hopkins, 1909), 9.

10 Neethling, *Unto Children's Children*, 34.

11 See Acta Synodi 1857, DRC Church Archives, Stellenbosch.

its decision have been identified for crossing a sort of Rubicon on the way to institutionalised segregation and eventually apartheid in South Africa.<sup>12</sup> Particularly ironic was the fact that this was never the intention of Andrew Murray, his close family, and their group of influence. For example, both his eldest sons were noted for their racial equalising views. John Murray received some opposition from members of the congregation of Burgersfort for his social integrationist policies during the time that he was a minister there.<sup>13</sup> His younger brother, Andrew Murray Jr was introduced to his future wife, Emma Rutherford, via the mutual connection of the LMS's Dr John Philip.<sup>14</sup> Philip was chiefly responsible for the institution of the abovementioned Ordinance 50, and he was a notorious scourge of the anti-equalisation politics and practices of the Cape Dutch farmers. Emma's father, Howson Edward Rutherford, was a well-known Cape Town merchant and leading member of the most significant anti-slavery society in the colony, the "Cape of Good Hope Society for aiding deserving Slaves and Slave-children to purchase their freedom".<sup>15</sup>

These are just some examples of the early identitarian leanings of this group of people. It did not place them at the ideological forefront of segregation and proto-apartheid politics. Far from it, however, strangely, the subsequent history in which they had a role played itself out.

## The British Empire as a benevolent force?

Moreover, it is quite important to understand and acknowledge that the early Murrays, i.e., Andrew Sr, Andrew Jr, and John, had no reason to understand

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12 See, W.A. Saayman, *Being missionary, being human: an overview of Dutch Reformed Mission*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2007), 92.; Cf. Chris Loff, "The history of a Heresy," in John W. De Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, (eds.), *Apartheid is a heresy* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983); Dirk Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed: Collected Essays 3*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2009), 461.

13 See P. B. van der Watt, *John Murray 1826-1882: Die Eerste Stellenbosse Professor* (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel Transvaal, 1979), 76.

14 J. Du Plessis, *The life of Andrew Murray of South Africa*. London: Marshall Brothers, 1919), 168.

15 Du Plessis, *Life of Andrew Murray*, 168. Also see MacKenzie & Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa*, 70.

the British Empire as anything but a beneficial force in southern Africa. This is not to argue that they were British imperial agents, but merely to suggest that they, like almost all of their Scottish derived peers, understood the Empire as a necessary “civilising” entity among indigenous inhabitants that were, by and large, understood to be uncivilised. As an interesting aside, the Dutch farmers were also seen to be uncivilised from the imperial point of view, which was a double scandal. Unlike the indigenous Africans, these Boers were, after all, understood to have emerged from a previously civilised European stock.<sup>16</sup> The point I wish to make here is that there were clear hierarchical lines drawn, conceptually, to which the learned colonial classes all subscribed in varying degrees. Despite their generally enlightened tendencies, the Murrays and their peers were not free from such perspectives.

Andrew Murray Jr had the longest career of any of these early Murrays. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup>, he had an interesting, developing perspective and relationship vis-à-vis the British Empire. As his perspective towards the Empire evolved, so did his relationship with the Dutch/Afrikaner people. To illustrate this point, one could point to his career as a pioneer minister in Bloemfontein, which was then a far-flung outpost in the British controlled Orange River Sovereignty [ORS].<sup>17</sup> As the only DRC minister beyond the Gariep River, Murray had a mixed congregation comprising among others colonial appointees, and Dutch/Afrikaner farmers [*Boers*]. The latter were the numerical majority and they tended to be republican minded. At this time, Murray aligned himself more with the colonial party, especially with the interests of the anti-republican missionaries, which was mostly represented in that region by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. Even if the French missionaries had no particular love for the British Empire, they likely believed that their mission and the well-being of their converts and potential converts among the Basotho would be better protected by the Empire than under a Boer-

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16 See Timothy Johns, “The 1820 Settlement Scheme to South Africa.” *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* (2013). Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net. Web. [accessed 11/06/2020], in reference to J.M. Coetzee, (1988). *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 30.

17 Du Plessis, *Life of Andrew Murray*, 146ff.

controlled republic.<sup>18</sup> Andrew Murray's own sentiments, which had always been strongly missionary-minded, seemed to lean in this direction as well.

As time went by, the republican faction gained traction in the Sovereignty. This was aided by the fact that the British authorities at the Cape increasingly came to see this territory and its unruly inhabitants as less of a boon and more of a bane for the Empire. When a decision was announced that the British would relinquish the ORS, missionaries and British leaning residents were in an uproar. Some meetings took place among the pro-imperial party. Eventually it was decided that Murray, accompanied by an Army surgeon, a certain Dr Frazer, would set sail to England to protest against this plan at the British Parliament because it was perceived as unjust and harmful to British interests in Africa. So, Andrew Murray, much to the disagreement of a large segment of his congregation, left on a lengthy voyage to England and ultimately elsewhere in Europe. The mission itself failed. The ORS was relinquished and duly transformed into the Orange Free State.<sup>19</sup> Yet, more than anything else, this pro-imperial venture served to stigmatise Andrew Murray as anti-Boer, even as a kind of wolf in sheep's clothing among the republican leaning portion of the population (see below).

### **Andrew Murray Jr as an educational organiser and missionary statesman**

Not long after his return from the failed overseas mission, Murray, perhaps not surprisingly, left Bloemfontein to take up the pastorate at the Boland town of Worcester. In the next phase of his life and career, Murray eschewed political controversy, focusing instead on the theological and educational pursuits for which he is famous. These included a leading role in the revivalist movement that infused church life around the country, especially in the Cape, in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>20</sup> The Murrays also played a leading role in the founding of the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary,

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18 Ibid., 153. Also see Tim Couzens, *Murder at Morija: faith, mystery, and tragedy on an African mission*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

19 See Du Plessis, *Life of Andrew Murray*, 146-164; B. Spoelstra, Die "Doppers" in Suid-Afrika 1760-1899. (Kaapstad: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1963), 148.

20 M.W. Retief, *Herlewings in Ons Geskiedenis* (Kaapstad & Pretoria: NGK Uitgewers van Suid-Afrika, 1951), 10ff.; S.E. Duff, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the Protestant

which came to fruition in 1859. Andrew was an inspirer and advocate for the founding of this institution, and his older brother John would become the first professor to accept a call to teach there.<sup>21</sup> During this phase, Andrew Murray also became an apologist of Christian orthodoxy where he acted in his role as moderator at the time in the so-called struggle against liberalism, as espoused by several Dutch trained ministers in the Cape. This Murray did in court cases involving ministers J.J. Kotze and T.F. Burgers respectively<sup>22</sup> and through polemical writings, such as his, *De Moderne Ongeloof*.<sup>23</sup>

Andrew Murray also became increasingly involved in education and missionary enterprises, especially towards the top end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when he served in the congregation most regularly associated with his name, namely Wellington. These were not new interests for him. The Murray children grew up as friends of missionaries in Graaff-Reinet, and during their student days at Utrecht, Andrew, and his brother John, were active members of the Christian student society, Secor Dabar, including its missionary-focused offshoot, Eltheto.<sup>24</sup> Also, in terms of educational pursuits, Andrew Murray was no novice. In his final years in Bloemfontein, he became intrinsically involved in the founding of Grey College.<sup>25</sup> Years later, in Wellington, Andrew and his wife Emma would become the instigators of a partnership with representatives of Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, most notably Anna Bliss and Abbie Ferguson.<sup>26</sup> Following the Mount Holyoke model of Christian higher education for

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Atlantic: Revivalism and Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony.” *South African Historical Journal* 70, no.2 (2018): 324-347.

- 21 It seems that John’s younger brother, Andrew, already earlier learned that John was seen as a serious candidate for a professorship at the yet to be founded seminary during his earlier visit to Europe, as part of the failed attempt to prevent the relinquishment of the Orange River Sovereignty. See Andrew Murray’s letter to John in Du Plessis, *Life of Andrew Murray*, 163.
- 22 Cf. F. Hale, “A Cape Town minister contra orthodoxy: Ramsden Balmforth’s evolution as a religious liberal.” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 35, no. 1 (2009), 1.
- 23 See Andrew Murray, *Die Moderne Ongeloof. Dertien Leerredes*. Afrikaanse vertaling in *Versamelde Werke II* (Stellenbosch: Christen Studentevereniging van SA, 1942).
- 24 See Van der Watt, *John Murray 1826-1882*, 46-50.
- 25 Du Plessis, *Life of Andrew Murray*, 167-168.
- 26 Dana L. Robert, “Mount Holyoke Women and the Dutch Reformed Missionary Movement, 1874-1904.” *Missionalia* 21, no. 2 (August 1993): 103-123.



women, the Huguenot Seminary was founded in Wellington. This, in turn, became a springboard for the founding of several girls' schools around the country.<sup>27</sup> In addition to partnering with these American educationalists who were at the forefront of women's education from a Christian evangelical perspective, Andrew Murray and eventually other members of his family also became partners with Scots Presbyterian missionary agents. This included initial contacts with Dr James Stewart, of Livingstonia in Nyasaland but best known as principal of Lovedale College in South Africa, and subsequently a full-blown partnership with the Livingstonia mission for the accommodation in central Nyasaland of missionaries supplied by the Ministers' Missionary Union [MMU] from South Africa.<sup>28</sup>

The first missionary of the MMU to go to Nyasaland under this arrangement was a nephew of Andrew Murray Jr, Andrew Charles Murray. A.C. Murray, for all intents and purposes, entered his missionary career under the auspices of the Scottish Livingstonia mission, and he served under the supervision of its council.<sup>29</sup> Subsequent to A.C. Murray's initiative, numerous other Murray family members became involved in the DRC's missionary enterprises, both in Nyasaland and elsewhere. As this theme is addressed elsewhere in this collection of essays, I shall not dwell further on it here. My point of interest concerns the fact that the point of inception, as well as the subsequent history in Nyasaland, occurred in close collaboration and partnership with the Scottish missions already established there. I mentioned the importance of Livingstonia in the North of the country, which was a mission of the Free Church of Scotland. However, in the South, the Church of Scotland's Blantyre mission played an equally important, in some ways an even more substantial role in partnership with the DRC's Nkhoma mission in the central region. William Hoppe Murray, assisted by his daughter Pauline,<sup>30</sup> should especially be mentioned here for the role played in Bible translation,<sup>31</sup> which was conducted in close collaboration

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27 See Robert, "Mount Holyoke Women," 103-106.

28 A.C. Murray, *Nyasaland en mijne* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1931), 11.

29 Ibid, p. 15.

30 See Pauline Murray's personal commentary on Bible translation. (n.d.) DRC Archives Stellenbosch [PPV 1483].

31 See E.E Katsulukuta and Johan L. Pretorius (n.d.). The Translation of the Bible into Chichewa, 1900–1923, *DRC Archives Stellenbosch* [PPV 1483].

with the Blantyre mission, particularly with the Scottish representatives, Drs Napier<sup>32</sup> and Hetherwick.<sup>33</sup>

## Afrikaner opposition to the Murray tradition

All I have mentioned thus far regarding Andrew Murray's support for ongoing imperial control of the Orange River Sovereignty – his active participation in revivalism within the DRC, his advocacy of women and girls' schools in collaboration with North Americans, the foundations of a missionary enterprise in partnership with Scots – all of these and more played handily into a developing opposing discourse as propagated by budding Afrikaner nationalists, especially those who found their ideological home in the Paarl-based *Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners* (Society for Real Afrikaners).<sup>34</sup> The most significant oppositional figure to mention in this regard is S.J. du Toit, a formidable foundation layer for the codification of Afrikaans as a language, who among his other exploits founded the journal, *Di Afrikaanse Patriot*.<sup>35</sup> It was this journal that in the final decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century devoted a couple of highly slanderous articles under the pseudonym, Streng Gereformeerde Patriot, that accused Andrew Murray of being an enemy both of Afrikaner nationalism and Reformed doctrine.<sup>36</sup> A couple of decades later, Andrew Murray's biographer, Johannes du Plessis claimed that this author was none other than S.J. du Toit himself.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the case, among the points of contention raised by Streng Gereformeerde Patriot (SGP), Murray's advocacy of English language church services loomed large, as did his educational exploits.

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32 See *De Koningsbode* (1919 July): 132.

33 A. C. Murray, *Ons Nyasa-akker: Geskiedenis van die Nyasa sending van die Nederd. Geref. Kerk in Suid-Afrika* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1931), 28.; W. P. Livingstone, *A Prince of Missionaries: The Rev. Alexander Hetherwick C.B.E., D.D., M.A. of Blantyre, Central Africa*. London: James Clarke & Co., 1931).

34 See Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: biography of a people* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011), 217.

35 Ibid, 218.

36 Streng Gereformeerde Patriot, "Ds. A. Murray die grootste vyand van ons nasionaliteit." *Di Afrikaanse Patriot* (9 Februarie, 1893); Streng Gereformeerde Patriot (1893) "Ds. A. Murray di grootste vyand van ons gereformeerde leer" *Di Afrikaanse Patriot* (23 Februarie, 1893) [DRC Archives, Stellenbosch].

37 *Het Zoeklicht* (15 October, 1932): 312.

SGP had nothing good to say about the so-called girls' schools that Murray instigated. These basically served to de-nationalise good Afrikaner girls, which was tantamount to corrupting them in the view of SGP.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, according to SGP, Murray even committed the cardinal sin of apparently propagating women's preaching!<sup>39</sup>

S.J. du Toit was a noted follower of the Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper, who is typically identified with an anti-modern, contextual, society-wide reinterpretation of Calvinist theology, sometimes referred to as neo-Calvinism.<sup>40</sup> According to Du Toit's understanding, Andrew Murray, and in fact the entire Scots evangelical tradition from which he emerged were not properly Calvinistic and therefore not properly Reformed. In SGP's letter on this theme to *Di Patriot*, the author expounds at length on a plethora of reasons why Murray should, as a matter of fact, be seen as an enemy of the Reformed faith.<sup>41</sup>

This rising vitriol against Andrew Murray and the tradition he represented was part of a carefully strategized ideological program in which S.J. du Toit along with the pressure group he headed up in the *Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners* were busy defining and delimiting the boundaries of proper Afrikanerdom. A real Afrikaner was someone who subscribed to a rather hard-line rendition of Calvinism, and who sought to prioritise the usage of Afrikaans language over other alternatives, like English and Dutch. Hybrid types like the Murrays with their cultural and linguistic bilingualism, not to mention the perpetual suspicion of doctrinal heterodoxy hanging over their heads, were dangerous specimens in this context. For du Toit and his society it was important to be able to point out who was in and who was out in the grander scheme of Afrikanerdom. Despite his popular status among large segments of this population group, Andrew Murray was clearly out. His identarian boundaries on both the theological and national level were simply too blurry, it would seem. When the Society, in one of its earliest

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38 Streng Gereformeerde Patriot, "Ds. A. Murray di grootste vyand van ons nasionaliteit."

39 Streng Gereformeerde Patriot, "Ds. A. Murray di grootste vyand van ons gereformeerde leer."

40 See E. Brown "Die invloed van Abraham Kuyper op ds. S.J. du Toit." *Die Skriflig/ In Lux Verbi*, 27, no. 3 (June 25, 1993), 3.

41 Streng Gereformeerde Patriot (1893). "Ds. A. Murray di grootste vyand van ons gereformeerde leer."

publications, categorised Afrikaners variously as Afrikaners with Dutch hearts, Afrikaners with English hearts, and Afrikaners with Afrikaans hearts,<sup>42</sup> one could have no doubt under which group they would have divided Murray and his wider sphere of influence.

## War and Afrikaner reconfigurations vis-à-vis Empire

Ironically, this rising antagonism against Murray and his ilk occurred within the context of increasing imperial pressure on the two Boer republics, the Free State, and the Transvaal. The culmination of this pressure, the three-year-long Anglo-Boer War/South African War, would upend earlier ideological positioning in strange and perhaps unforeseen ways. The comparative positions of S.J. du Toit and Andrew Murray are quite interesting in this development.

As might be expected of an ideological firebrand like S.J. du Toit, he fully threw his weight in behind the Boer cause in the rising Afrikaner nationalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, he moved to the Transvaal, where he ended up as a pivotal administrator, tasked with education among, other things, in Paul Kruger's government. Here, du Toit pioneered schools based on the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper's model of Calvinist infused education.<sup>43</sup>

Andrew Murray, on the other hand, remained in Wellington. There he became increasingly agitated by the escalation of tension between Boer and Brit. He clearly understood the source of the aggression to be British imperial ambition, and he resorted to writing various letters and articles aimed at dissuading the British government from what he saw as an unjust course of action. *A Plea for Peace* is one example.<sup>44</sup> As the war inevitably got underway, Murray's pro-Boer stance increased notably, both as seen in his

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42 See, Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 218.

43 See, E. Brown (1993). "Die invloed van Abraham Kuyper op ds. S.J. du Toit". In *Die Skriflig/In Lux Verbi*. 27(3).

44 A. Murray, "A Plea for Peace: Chapter 1." *South African News* 5-16 (1899, Oct. 13). [DRC Archives: PPV 1460/4]; "A Plea for Peace: Chapter 3." *South African News* 5-16 (1899, Oct. 16) [DRC Archives: PPV 1460/4]. Also see, A. Murray, "An Appeal to the English People on Behalf of Peace", *South African News* 5-16 (1899, Oct. 5) [DRC Archives: PPV 1460/4].

personal writings and his contribution to official DRC missives. *The Truth about the Boer and His Church* is a good example of the latter.<sup>45</sup> It bears noting that one of Andrew Murray's sons, John Neethling Murray, who served as a missionary at Waterberg in the Transvaal, got drawn into the conflict, was convicted of treason, and sent off to a prisoner of war camp in India. This resulted from a series of unfortunate circumstances after John's mission station was closed under imperial orders. He was ordered to leave the Transvaal or risk internment. Then, at some point, he wrote a letter to a Boer friend, apparently expressing sympathy with the Boer plight. This letter fell into British hands and was enough to brand him a traitor. His father, in vain, tried to have his sentence commuted, as seen in a letter to Lord Kitchener.<sup>46</sup> No doubt, this episode only served to draw Andrew Murray out even further of the imperial orbit, ideologically speaking, and more definitively into the Boer camp.

S.J. du Toit, ironically enough, went in the opposite direction. About a decade before the outbreak of the war, Paul Kruger dispatched him to settle a border dispute involving the Transvaal and a neighbouring territory. Rather than conducting complicated negotiations, du Toit rashly annexed the entire area under dispute, which led to further diplomatic headaches for the Transvaal government. This incident, among other things, soured relations between du Toit and Kruger. Added pressure was heaped on the shoulders of du Toit when he lost much money with a poor investment in the goldfields. One thing led to another, and the net result is that du Toit returned to Paarl, penniless and disavowing the Boer republican cause he had formerly supported. By now, incredibly, he supported Cecil John Rhodes and the British during the South African War. According to Giliomee, Rhodes likely supported him financially at this stage as well.<sup>47</sup>

With that, I leave S.J. du Toit behind, although the ongoing feud between du Toit and what he represented, on the one hand, and the Murrays, on the other hand, would subsequently be taken up by his son J.D. du Toit (Totius),

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45 *The Truth about the Boer and his Church* (n.d.). [DRC Archives, Stellenbosch, B1250]. The letter was signed by J.H. Hofmeyr, A. Moorrees, J.P. van Heerden, A. Murray, J.H. Neethling, N.J. Hofmeyr, J.I. Marais, P.G.J. de Vos, C.F.J. Muller.

46 See, Personal correspondence by Andrew Murray to Lord Kitchener (1901 Sept.) [DRC Archives: PPV 1451].

47 See Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 222-223.

regarding whom more shall be mentioned below. First, let me elaborate on the roles of some other members of the extended Murray family in terms of the South African War. As it turns out, at least two Murray family members played leading roles as chaplains in overseas camps among Boer prisoners of war. I am referring now to Andrew Murray's younger brother, George, who was active in Diyatalawa camp on the island of Ceylon,<sup>48</sup> and A.F. Louw, son of Jemima (Murray) Louw, who was a sister of Andrew, among the prisoners on St. Helena.<sup>49</sup> A very important organisation to mention in connection to this is a South African branch of the American originating Christian Endeavor Society, which was locally named *De Christelijke Streversvereniging*.<sup>50</sup> The *Strevers*, for short, appears to have been brought to South Africa by none other than Andrew Murray, who was also its first local president. In the prisoner of war camps on Ceylon and St. Helena, which was also interpreted as islands of exile by the Boers, the *Strevers* played an important role in evangelising and providing spiritual nourishment, as well as envisioning a future goal for many of the prisoners, post-war. That was that they might become missionaries. A significant aspect of the *Strevers'* ministry concerned educating these Boer prisoners regarding the un-evangelised world and the need for missionaries who would offer themselves to go and till the proverbial field. As Boer chaplains, George Murray and A.F. Louw played formative roles in this society's programs and publications and, in fact, the first issue of one such publication, simply called *De Strever*, published in Dyatalawa camp, credited George Murray for establishing the society among the prisoners on Ceylon.<sup>51</sup>

Not all Murrays served in missionary, chaplaincy, or spiritual roles during the war. Some took up arms and fought and died. The abovementioned A.F. Louw's younger brother Willie was well-known in Afrikaner history

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48 *De Strever: voor Christus en de Kerk. Orgaan der C.S.V. onder de Krijgsgevangenen* (1901, Dec 19) No. 1, Diyatalawa Kamp, Ceylon. [DRC Archives.]

49 J.W. Kok (1971). *Sonderlinge vrug; die invloed van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog op die sendingaksie van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika*. Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, p. 34.

50 See, *Strewerskonferensieboek: Verslag van die 22ste Algemene Vergadering van die Christelike Strewersunie in verband met Die Ned. Geref. Kerke in Suid-Afrika, gehou 3–6 Julie 1941 te Riversdal*. [DRC Archives].

51 *De Strever: voor Christus en de Kerk. Orgaan der C.S.V. onder de Krijgsgevangenen* (1901, Dec. 19) No. 1, Diyatalawa Kamp, Ceylon. [DRC Archives].

as a kind of martyr, who was executed by the British after his capture for fighting on the Boer side.<sup>52</sup> Such was the plight of several Cape colonists who took up arms on the Boer side whilst being officially British subjects. Often termed Cape Rebels and revered by the Boers, they were seen as traitors from the side of the Empire.

However, lest the reader think that all Murrays became unadulterated supporters of the Boer republican cause, it is important to mention another tragic incident involving the younger brother of the abovementioned Nyasaland missionary, W.H. Murray, and cousin of Cape Rebel, Willie Louw. This concerns the case of Robert Murray, who, contrary to the path taken by his cousin Willie, joined the British forces on the Cape frontier. Ambushed by a Boer commando, Robert was fatally wounded in the ensuing skirmish.<sup>53</sup>

### Totius versus the *Strevers*

So, the larger Murray family lost boys on both sides of the conflict. Tragic though this undoubtedly was, this scenario is in line with the picture of precarious hybridity that I would like to convey regarding this family and its positioning vis-à-vis the Afrikaner *volk* and its republican and/or nationalistic pursuits. This is the kind of compromised positioning that haunted this family through much of their history in South Africa, a precarious hybridity that could easily be denigrated as insufficiently Afrikaans or insufficiently orthodox, whatever the case might be. I indicated above how S.J. du Toit's journal painted Andrew Murray as a veritable wolf in sheep's clothing. After the war, S.J. du Toit's son, the rising poetic and theological star, Totius (J.D. du Toit), took up the mantle of casting the Murrays and their associates in an unfavourable light. Totius completed his doctoral studies under the supervision of Dr H.H. Kuyper, the son of the well-known Abraham Kuyper, who was, among other things, the founder of the Vrije Universiteit where Totius studied for his doctorate. His thesis, *Het Methodisme*, was both a historical and a systematically critical

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52 "De Kerk en de Bijbel op Commando." *De Vereeniging*, (1903, Oct. 7), 7.

53 See letter by Robert Murray's cousin, Haldane Murray to Robert's mother (1902, May 3) [DRC Archives, Stellenbosch].

study of Methodism as a religious movement.<sup>54</sup> The study itself appeared to be reasonably balanced, although Totius was at pains to indicate how Methodism diverged from Calvinism. He subsequently published far more polemical writings and of interest here is specifically his attacks on *De Christelijke Streversvereniging*, which was evaluated as unambiguously “Methodist” and therefore not Calvinist. In a couple of pamphlets ostensibly aimed at evaluating the *Strevers* from a Reformed perspective, Totius indicates the theological inadequacies and borderline heresies underpinning this movement, the most important of which seemed to be the fact that it was a parachurch organisation and not representative of a church itself. To Totius, this type of organisation was reminiscent of the Wesleyan society within the Anglican church, out of which Methodism emerged. Of course, the interdenominational nature of the *Strevers* also bothered him, not to mention its American and international provenance, all elements that posed a threat to the strict Calvinism and Afrikaner nationalism that he propagated.<sup>55</sup>

The widening gulf between the international and interdenominational perspective adhered to by the Murrays, and their associates, increasingly finding their home in ecumenical missionary settings after the war, and the nationalistic, ultra-Reformed perspectives of Totius and his supporters steadily increased as the 20<sup>th</sup> proceeded. In some ways, these lines of division mirrored what was going on internationally in a wider protestant world. For example, when the modernist-fundamentalist controversy reached its crescendo in North American Protestantism in the 1920s, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was engulfed in the so-called Du Plessis case, in which Stellenbosch Seminary professor, Johannes du Plessis, who was Andrew Murray’s protégé and biographer, was accused of heresy and eventually side-lined and forced out of his position by the gatekeepers of orthodoxy.<sup>56</sup> Notably, a number of du Plessis’ strongest

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54 J.D. du Toit, *Het Methodisme* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1903).

55 See, J.D. Du Toit, *De Streversvereniging beoordeeld van Gereformeerd standpunt* (Potchefstroom: Hoveker & Wormser, 1905); J.D. Du Toit, *C.S.V. nog eens*. Antwoord Dr. J.D. du Toit (Potchefstroom, 1906).

56 André René Olivier, *Die kerk en die Du Plessis-saak met besondere verwysing na die ekklesiologiese situasie* (Unpublished D.Th. Dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 1990).



opponents, most prominently Dwight Snyman and D.G. Malan, had been graduates of fundamentalist seminaries in the United States.<sup>57</sup> Even more notably, Totius, despite being a member of the Gereformeerde Kerke rather than the DRC, proved to be among the fiercest and most effective witnesses against du Plessis, during the latter's heresy trial.<sup>58</sup>

What was unique about the situation in South Africa with respect to the polemic within Reformed Afrikaner circles was that there appeared to be an open and direct conflation of religious orthodoxy and Afrikaner nationalism in the minds of people like the abovementioned du Toit pair of father and son. I have mentioned S.J.'s positioning in this regard, but his son, Totius, was possibly even more of a nationalistic advocate, and he communicated his sentiments very effectively through his poetry.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Totius' theological exposition of biblical apartheid, exegetically disingenuous though it undoubtedly was, had been sufficiently convincing to many an Afrikaner ear.<sup>60</sup>

## **An ideological fault line among DRC missionaries?**

The Murrays and their circle of influence were also indirectly but perhaps more dangerously opposed by theological and nationalistic hardliners within the DRC. The most prominent name in this regard was the Free State DRC's mission secretary, J.G. Strydom. Strydom was among the earliest known apartheid apologists in South Africa, and he was a strict adherent of narrow Reformed dogmatism.<sup>61</sup> His ideological and nationalistic exclusivism ensured that he became an inveterate enemy of the ecumenically founded Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian [CCAP]

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57 Abraham Stefanus Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis 1868-1935: Baanbreker, Verbreker van die Gereformeerde Geloof* (Bloemfontein: UV Teologiese Studies, 2009), 332.

58 See, P.W. Bingle, (2019) "Du Toit, Jacobus Daniël (Totius)", in *Elektroniese Christelike Kernensiklopedie*. [Online]. Available: <https://ecke.co.za/du-toit-jacob-daniel-totius/> [Accessed: 28/10/2020].

59 See, Irving Hexham, "Just like another Israel – Calvinism and Afrikanerdom." *Religion* 7, no. 1 (1977): 1-17.

60 See Robert R. Vosloo, "The Bible and the justification of apartheid in Reformed circles in the 1940s in South Africa: Some historical, hermeneutical and theological remarks." *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*. 1, no. 2 (2015): 195-215.

61 See, Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 226ff.

in Nyasaland, of which the Cape DRC's mission at Nkhoma had become part through the formation of the Nkhoma Synod.<sup>62</sup> To a great extent the DRC's Nyasaland mission was a Murray family enterprise, as I intimated above. Their position was that it made perfect sense, both pragmatically and evangelically, to join forces with this ecumenical venture already being established between the Free Church of Scotland's Livingstonia mission and the Church of Scotland's Blantyre mission. However, when the Nkhoma synod ultimately joined the CCAP, which was established out of these ecumenical proceedings, this did not occur without a glitch. In subsequent years, Strydom and his supporters would cast various aspersions on the orthodoxy of the CCAP, which in a couple of cases nearly derailed the DRC's ongoing participation in the project.<sup>63</sup>

On more than one occasion, senior Nkhoma missionary, J.A. Retief, put pen to paper in defence of the legitimacy and orthodoxy of the CCAP over against the allegations to the contrary by Strydom and his supporters<sup>64</sup> Retief was not a Murray by birth, but he had married into the family. His first wife Helen, who would tragically die from blackwater fever in Nyasaland in 1928, was a daughter of the abovementioned Rev. George Murray, Boer chaplain among the prisoners on Ceylon and founder of the *Streversvereniging* in Diyatalawa camp.<sup>65</sup> J.A. Retief had himself been a Boer POW, in his case on St. Helena, where he had come under the influence of yet another Murray family member, the abovementioned A.F. Louw, who mentored Retief's already kindling missionary calling.<sup>66</sup> Several decades later, when he defended the CCAP against narrow definitions of Reformed orthodoxy, it was also evident that Retief had deeply imbibed the Murray ethos of Christian ecumenicity and identarian openness. Despite having

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62 See, C.M. Pauw, *Mission and Church in Malawi: The History of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian* (Thesis D.Th. University of Stellenbosch, 1980), 280.

63 Ibid, 278–279, 348.

64 See, for example, J.A. Retief, “Die Kerk van Midde-Afrika: ‘n Skewe Voorstelling.” *Die Kerkbode* (Aug 12, 1933): 200-201; J.A. Retief (1946, Feb, 8). Kaapstad. [Unpublished letter. DRC Archives, Stellenbosch].

65 See “In Memoriam. Mevr. Ds. J.A. Retief, Mkhoma Nyasaland.” *De Kerkbode* (1928, Feb. 15) and “Helen Murray Retief”; P. De Beer, “Helen Murray Retief”, *De Kerkbode* (1928, Feb. 15).

66 J.A. Retief, *Ontdekkings in Midde-Afrika* (Stellenbosch: C.S.V. Boekhandel. 1951), 19.

earlier fought as a Cape Rebel himself, i.e. voluntarily and illegally on the side of the Boers and against the British as a Cape colonist hailing from Graaff-Reinet, he would subsequently defend the orthodoxy of Scots in the CCAP of Malawi against allegations regarding their so-called liberalism by Reformed hardliners in the DRC.<sup>67</sup> Retief would also, towards the end of his life, write a letter pleading for unity among English and Afrikaners in South Africa, and against what he described as “racial feeling”.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

With the above allusion to Murray-influenced missionary J.A. Retief and his apparently shifting alignments over time, there is a fitting way to conclude this article. The Murray identity, described in this article as a precarious hybridity, has been indicated as a shifting identity. It might be described as a form of hybridity because it characterised a commitment of a Scottish immigrant and his family to be one with the people among whom they ministered, i.e., the South African Dutch/Afrikaners. It was precarious because that commitment was not always unambiguous, and moreover, it was subject to much suspicion from the side of critics in South Africa. Despite the interesting career of S.J. Du Toit, with the dramatic reversal in terms of his support of Boer republicanism, it seems that Murray opponents among the Afrikaner community, generally speaking, tended to adhere to more rigid, firmly fixed, and unambiguous notions of religious and ethnic identity. By contrast, it might be fair to argue that the Murrays subscribed primarily to a missionary identity that was by its nature pragmatic when it came to matters of ethnicity and orthodoxy. Being a missionary identity, this was an outward-looking identity. Partnership was important here, which meant that principles occasionally had to be compromised, leading to a certain amount of ideological vulnerability. On the other hand, their opponents tended to focus on fencing up their own ideological and cultural position as invulnerable within the general scheme of the DRC and eventually through the construct of apartheid theology. With this, they protected the so-called purity of their own doctrine, if only to their

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67 J.A. Retief, “Die Kerk van Midde-Afrika: 'n Skewe Voorstelling.” (1933, Aug 12).

68 J. A. Retief, “The Editor.” *The Rand Daily Mail* (ca 1951) [personal family archive].

own satisfaction. However, by continuously eschewing partnership in the ecumenical and international sense, this position became increasingly sectarian and ultimately identified as heretical within World Christianity.

Despite this article's evident bias in favour of what we might call the Murray perspective against that of their opponents in broader Afrikanerdom, this is not to suggest that the Murray tradition was somehow saintly or unproblematic. Particularly in a special journal edition such as this one, dedicated to a specific cause, person, or group of people, the temptation to sanitise, applaud, or glorify is quite alluring. In fact, it would not be difficult to construct a heroic history of the Murrays or individuals within that broader family, should one be inclined to do so. However, that would have to neglect some obvious flaws, most notably their role in ecclesiastical apartheid resulting from the 1857 synod. To argue that the intention of Andrew Murray Sr's "weakness of some" motion was, in fact, contrary to what ultimately developed out of it, however true that might be, would virtually be a moot point. The cliché regarding the road to hell being paved with good intentions is not so well-known for no reason.

Therefore, rather than constructing heroic histories of the Murrays, I think a far more useful and constructive approach would be to acknowledge their human fragility, short-sightedness, yes, even their sinfulness to put it in terminology that they themselves would have agreed with.

The question of identities, how they are formed, and their relative importance in the grand scheme of things is, of course, not only of interest as a matter of historical curiosity. They continue to infuse the human imagination worldwide, stretching in various directions, both political and religious, and often combining such elements. Think for example of white evangelicalism in the USA with its right-wing, increasingly nationalist tendencies. An apparently very different, yet somehow relatable phenomenon might be seen in the occurrence of Hindu nationalism as propagated by the current ruling party in India. In both instances, a specific understanding of religion is employed to bolster exclusivist political ideologies of what it means to be really American or really Indian, whatever the case might be. There are interesting parallels in these cases with the role of religion in Afrikaner politics during apartheid.

In conclusion, let me suggest that the Murray family's complicated position regarding the Afrikaner people was an ongoing negotiation of identity. In retrospect, it might even seem that this family's primary identity was a missionary identity, which pragmatically sought partnerships and accommodated itself to local contexts in various ways. Whatever problems such an identity might present, and there were some, it would be safe to claim that neither nationalism nor doctrinal rigidity was among its foremost attractions.

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