

Long ago, we in the Flemish youth movement used to sing *My Sarie Marais*. We didn't really understand what the song was about, but we found the lively yet melancholy refrain heartwarming. At least we knew it was about the longing for one's beloved. We had no idea that it had been sung by South African Boers during their war with the British. Let alone that it was about the deportation of Boers, their wives and children to the British concentration camps. The tune itself was being sung as early as the American Civil War. And in 1953 it became the official march of the United Kingdom's Royal Marines Commandos. Strange and unfathomable are the ways of music. It is sung even in the French Foreign Legion, in French of course. Now there's an international song.

In 2010 it is exactly 100 years since the creation of the Union of South Africa, which later became an independent state within the British Commonwealth. A hundred years on, in 2010, South Africa is hosting the Football World Cup. For many people the World Cup symbolises the spirit of reconciliation that should characterise the new South Africa. And it must also demonstrate that the country is a fully-fledged nation.

South Africa has links with the Netherlands, or more precisely with the VOC, the Dutch East India Company. On 6 April 1652 three ships commanded by Jan van Riebeeck landed in Table Bay, where they were to establish a revictualling station for VOC ships rounding the Cape of Good Hope on their way to Batavia. But in 1646 a German had been there before them. Caspar Schmalkalden made the drawing you can see here of his bivouac on Table Bay.

It appears in the *Comprehensive Atlas of the Dutch United East India Company (Volume V, Africa)*, published by *Asia Maior/Atlas Maior Publishers*. We see three ships bobbing about in the bay, while on land there are two small tents and a screen behind which some men are lighting a fire. To the left are some ten natives. They are being fired at, and one of them is collapsing on the ground. The first image of the Cape is one of violence.

In this yearbook we are talking about South Africa and the Low Countries: how do they view each other nowadays? A South African writer rides her bike through the flat Flemish countryside and notes down what she sees and what happens to her. A Flemish and a Dutch writer who know and love South Africa give their candid opinion. We think about Common Cultural Heritage that is not always 'shared'. A South African strip-cartoonist is inspired by the clear lines of Tintin. The painter Marlene Dumas has long belonged to the world, but South Africa is still very much alive within her.

And then there is Afrikaans, one of South Africa's eleven official languages. This sister-tongue to Dutch is trying to maintain itself in the Babel that is the Cape. Not for a long time has it been a language exclusive to white Africans – and in fact it never was.

The poet Elizabeth Eybers, who moved to the Netherlands in 1961, has written superlatively well about the nostalgia of the emigrant who never arrives anywhere. The verses she wrote in Afrikaans on life as a refugee she has herself later recreated in English.

For the rest, in this issue you will find the usual mix of writers, visual artists, theatre people, musicians, intellectuals and architects from the Low Countries. This delta country has known Islam for centuries, Belgium continues to tinker with itself and in 2010 Congo, the one genuine colony the country ever had, will mark half a century of independence. South Africa and Congo: the continent where mankind was born still resonates in the Low Countries.