

# Crafting popular imaginaries: Stella Blakemore and Afrikaner nationalism

by

**Irma du Plessis**

Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Literary Theory.

Supervisor: Professor PH Roodt

University of Pretoria  
December 2002

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: Notes on theory</b>	<b>11</b>
Afrikaner nationalism and the construction of an Afrikaner identity	11
Antonio Gramsci, hegemony and the organic intellectual	15
Pierre Bourdieu and the habitus	16
Charles Taylor and the social imaginary	19
Conclusion	20
<b>Chapter Two: Stella Blakemore and her world</b>	<b>22</b>
Stella Blakemore: A brief biography	22
Publications by Stella Blakemore	27
A concise history of J.L. van Schaik publishers	35
A brief overview of the critical reception of Blakemore's books	40
<b>Chapter Three: Stella Blakemore on the practice of writing popular fiction and her fictional characters</b>	<b>45</b>
Introduction	45
Blakemore and her readers	46
On writing popular fiction and the question of 'the market'	48

Blakemore and her characters	51
Conclusion	59
<b>Chapter Four:</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>A relationship spanning many years: Stella Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik publishers</b>	
Introduction	60
Blakemore's financial affairs	62
Stella Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik: A strained relationship	67
Blakemore's Afrikaans writing skills and the experts	74
Blakemore's personal circumstances and characteristics	76
Conclusion	81
<b>Chapter Five:</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Community and Identity: Blakemore's relationship with South Africa</b>	
Introduction	83
Writing in Afrikaans	83
Blakemore and South Africa	88
Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid: Race, class and gender in Blakemore's writings	92
<i>Race</i>	93
<i>Class</i>	100
<i>Gender</i>	102
Conclusion	104
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>106</b>
Introduction	105
Blakemore and the publishing industry	106
The Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and Stella Blakemore	107

Blakemore, the project of Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner subjectivity

109

Conclusion: Rethinking the imagined community through the notions of habitus, the organic intellectual and the social imaginary

112

**References**

**118**

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1:</b>	Publication date, chronological order, publisher details of and print run information on titles in the <i>Keurboslaan</i> series	<b>28</b>
<b>Table 2:</b>	Titles in the <i>Nuwe Keurboslaan</i> series	<b>30</b>
<b>Table 3:</b>	Titles in the <i>Keurboslaan Omnibus</i> series	<b>31</b>
<b>Table 4:</b>	Titles in the <i>Maasdorp</i> series	<b>31</b>
<b>Table 5:</b>	Titles in the <i>Maasdorp Omnibus</i> series	<b>32</b>
<b>Table 6:</b>	Other titles by Stella Blakemore (excluding titles in the <i>Keurboslaan</i> and <i>Maasdorp</i> series)	<b>33</b>

## Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor P.H. Roodt, whose teachings extended far beyond the scope of curriculum as it is conventionally understood and whose support and gentle guidance continue to play a valuable role in my life.

I am grateful for the ongoing support and sound advice I received from my colleagues at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) while I was completing the last part of this dissertation. Of course, any omissions or inaccuracies are my own.

Staff at the National Afrikaans Literature Museum and Research Centre (NALN) had been most supportive and helpful. Erika Terblanche, in particular, personally saw to it that I had access to all relevant materials when I was in Bloemfontein and promptly responded to my email queries from Johannesburg. NALN's vast collection proved to be an enormously rich and valuable resource.

Last, I wish to thank staff at the UNISA archives for granting me access to the J.L van Schaik Collection, Jan van Schaik, who agreed to be interviewed, and Thomas van der Walt from the Children's Literature Research Unit (CLRU), whose passion for children's literature is evident from the way in which he generously shared information.

## Abstract

This study explores the relationship between literature and society in the context of the emergence in South Africa in the 1930s of Afrikaner nationalism spearheaded by Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia and aimed at crafting an 'Afrikaner nation'. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson's analysis demonstrates the interrelatedness of print-capitalism, language – specifically the vernacular and the national print-language – and the interests of the intelligentsia in the development of texts, and thus opens up creative possibilities for linking the study of nationalism with the study of literature.

The micro level study foregrounds the life history of Stella Blakemore, an author of popular fiction for children. Children's literature is literature written for and circulated among children that is, for that reason, imbued with particular social significance, and therefore scrutinised, censored and controlled in particular ways. Popular children's literature has not received much scholarly attention in relation to the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism. Whilst Blakemore's series books, the *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan*, have achieved iconic status, surprisingly little is known about this author and about the production of these texts. The study offers a glimpse of the life history of a complex and perplexing figure in the Afrikaans literary scene in relation to her writing, her interaction with members and sectors of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, her relationship with her country of birth, and her multiple identities as woman, Afrikaner, exile, South African, and world traveller.

Drawing on Antonio Gramsci, the study poses a question about whether Blakemore can be regarded as an organic intellectual. Following from Bourdieu, it is argued that an author's *habitus* is instrumental in the production of fictional texts. In turn, as Charles Taylor illuminates, such texts have the ability to create a shared social imaginary, a way in which ordinary people interpret their social surroundings.

Whilst Blakemore shared a class position with the Afrikaner intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie mobilising around Afrikaner nationalism, she was never part of the inner circle. J.L. van Schaik publishers were explicitly committed to the cause of Afrikaner nationalism, and at times subsidised texts in Afrikaans, but popular

children's fiction does not seem to have been part of their core project. As a result, Blakemore retained virtually full control over the contents, bar one requirement: that her books had to be written in Afrikaans and could not be translated into English. Blakemore spent most of her life away from South Africa, and writing in Afrikaans was a way in which to retain links to her country of birth. At the same time, Blakemore's writings were also a very important source of income. It is therefore difficult to describe Blakemore as an organic intellectual, since she did not seem to have been self-consciously committed to fostering the Afrikaner nation. Yet, it can be argued that she fulfilled the role of organic intellectual for the petty bourgeoisie. Hence, popular children's literature may have been one of the avenues through which the ideas and ideology of Afrikaner nationalism were disseminated to a wider audience across class fractures to turn it into a kind of mass consciousness. However, by illuminating the complex and sometimes fraught relationship between Stella Blakemore and the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie, it was shown that this kind of dissemination was not only the prerogative of self-conscious community creators.

**Key words:** Popular fiction, Stella Blakemore, Afrikaner nationalism, J.L. van Schaik publishers, apartheid, class, petty bourgeoisie, children's literature, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Benedict Anderson, Charles Taylor, organic intellectual, Maasdorp series, Keurboslaan series.



## Samevatting

Hierdie studie ondersoek die verhouding tussen literatuur en samelewing teen die agtergrond van die opkoms van Afrikaner-nasionalisme in die 1930s. Hierdie nasionalisme is aangevoer deur die Afrikaner intelligentsia en *petit bourgeoisie* met die doel om 'n 'Afrikaner-nasie' te skep. In sy boek, *Imagined Communities*, wys Benedict Anderson op die onderlinge verbandhouding tussen publikasietaal – spesifiek die streekstaal en die nasionale publikasietaal – en die belange van die intelligentsia in die ontwikkeling van tekste. Hierdeur skep hy die geleentheid om die studie van nasionalisme te koppel aan 'n studie van literatuur.

Hierdie mikro-vlak studie fokus op die lewensgeskiedenis van Stella Blakemore, 'n bekende outeur van populêre lektuur vir kinders. Kinderliteratuur is literatuur wat geskryf word vir kinders en tussen kinders sirkuleer. Om dié rede word kinderliteratuur beskou as draer van besondere sosiale betekenis and word dit op spesifieke maniere ondersoek, gesensor en beheer. Die verhouding tussen populêre kinderlektuur en Afrikaner-nasionalisme het nog min akademiese aandag geniet. Blakemore se *Maasdorp*- en *Keurboslaan*-reekse het ikoonstatus in Afrikaanse kinderlektuur, en tog is baie min bekend oor hierdie outeur en die produksie van die tekste. Hierdie studie verskaf 'n blik op die lewensgeskiedenis van hierdie komplekse persoonlikheid in die Afrikaanse letterkundige wêreld. Die studie fokus op haar skrywerskap, haar interaksie met lede van die Afrikaner intelligentsia en *petit bourgeoisie*, haar verhoudings met haar geboorteland, en haar veelvuldige identiteite as vrou, Afrikaner, uitgewekene, Suid-Afrikaner en wêreldreisiger.

Gebaseer op die werk van Antonio Gramsci, stel die studie die vraag of Blakemore as organiese intellektueel beskou kan word. Dit word geargumenteer dat 'n outeur se habitus instrumenteel is in die produksie van fiksionele tekste. Sulke tekste het dan weer, aldus Charles Taylor, die vermoë om 'n gedeelde sosiale *imaginaire* te skep, 'n wyse waarop gewone mense hulle sosiale omgewings interpreteer.

Hoewel Blakemore 'n klasposisie met lede van die Afrikaner intelligentsia en *petit bourgeoisie* wat hul vir Afrikaner-nasionalisme beywer het gedeel het, was sy nooit deel van hulle binnekring nie. Nieteenstaande die feit dat J.L. van Schaik-uitgewers betrokke was by die uitbouing van Afrikaner-nasionalisme en soms selfs tekste

gesubsidieer het, wys hierdie stude daarop dat populêre kinderlektuur nie deel van hierdie kernprojek was nie. Om dié rede het Blakemore omtrent totale beheer oor die inhoud van haar boeke uitgeoefen, met slegs een voorbehoud: haar boeke moes in Afrikaans geskryf word en kon nie in Engels vertaal word nie.

Blakemore het die grootste deel van haar lewe buite Suid-Afrika spandeer. Haar Afrikaanse skryfwerk was dus vir haar 'n manier om kontak met haar geboorteland te behou. Terselfdertyd was die opbrengs uit haar boeke vir haar 'n belangrike bron van inkomste. Dit is daarom moeilik om Blakemore as organiese intellektueel voor te hou, daar dit nie lyk asof sy doelbewus die 'Afrikaner-nasie' wou uitbou nie. Tog kan dit geargumenteer word dat sy die rol van organiese intellektueel vir die *petit bourgeoisie* vervul het. Dus kan populêre kinderlektuur beskou word as een van die wyses waardeur die idees en ideologie van Afrikaner-nasionalisme aan 'n wyer gehoor wat oor klasgrense strek bekendgestel is en sodoende deel van 'n massa-bewustheid geword het. Deur die komplekse en soms moeilike verhouding tussen Blakemore en die Afrikaanse *petit bourgeoisie* te belig, het hierdie studie daarop gewys dat so 'n verspreiding van idees nie slegs die prerogatief van bewuste gemeenskapskeppers was nie.

**Sleuteltermes:** Populêre literatuur, Stella Blakemore, J.L. van Schaik-uitgewers, apartheid, klas, *petit bourgeoisie*, kinderlektuur, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Benedict Anderson, Charles Taylor, organiese intellektueel, Maasdorpreeks, Keurboslaanreeks.

Haar vader, kaptein in die Britse leer, die gehate vyand. Haar moeder Emma, uit die blouste Boerebloed as 'n mens ooit van 'n 'Boere-adel' kan praat. Uit dié teenoorgestelde pole, die twee wêreld, is 'n meisie gebore wie se skryfnaam, Theunis Krogh, 'n huishoudelike naam sou word, soos die tafels en stoele in die huise waar Afrikaanse boeke gelees word. Sy is in baie opsigte 'n lewende ironie van die geskiedenis: Half Brits, half Afrikaans, bereis en belese met 'n wye blik op die wêreld, onbekrompe en tog nog in murg en been een van ons.

**André du Toit, *Die Vaderland*, 28 July 1972**

[Her father, captain in the British army, the hated enemy. Her mother Emma, of the bluest Boer blood – if one can ever talk of Boer royalty. Of these two opposite poles, these two worlds, a girl was born, whose nom de plume, Theunis Krogh, would become a household name, like the tables and chairs in the homes where Afrikaans books are read. She is, in many respects, a living irony of history. Half British, half Afrikaans, who has travelled much and is well read with a open view on the world, broadminded yet still inherently one of us.]

## Introduction

Saartjie Bauman pushing away an unruly black curl from her forehead whilst playing hop-scotch in the tree-lined streets of Linden; Roelof Serfontein sitting behind his imposing writing table, his gaze dark and piercing; Kobie Malan coming down the staircase in her strict mom's house, her blonde curls bouncing as she hops and skips down the stairs, a twinkle in her velvety brown eyes... For the uninitiated these descriptions are empty, but for readers of popular fiction for children in Afrikaans this imagery has the ability to unlock their childhood.

There exists a specific category of literature (or fiction) that is not in the first instance organised and classified in terms of genre - as other literatures are - but rather on the basis of an attribute of its *readers* - namely their age (Hunt 1990:1). Whilst the field of children's literature is marked by this anomaly, it should be noted from the outset that both the distinction between adult and non-adult fiction (or adult fiction and fiction for children) and the various categories within the latter - which includes categories such as young adult fiction, youth or juvenile fiction, children's fiction, young teens, and even categories based on age, such as 'seven to ten year olds' (Nikolajeva 1996:7) - are, if not completely arbitrary, often overlapping, blurred and contested. Nonetheless, the distinction between children's literature - as a broad rubric including its many cross-cutting categories and sub-categories - and literature for adults remains analytically useful, if only because the notion of children's literature is saturated with particular social meaning and is therefore inscribed in the social in ways that is different from literature targeted at adult readers. This aspect is outlined further below.

Given that its categories are seldom discreet and frequently cut across each other, defining the realm of children's literature and classifying the texts in this field are no easy tasks. Hunt (1994:5) states that '[c]oncepts of childhood differ not only culturally but in units as small as the family, and they differ, often inscrutably, over time'. Hunt therefore suggests that an understanding of childhood and the social meanings attached to this concept need to be embedded in a definition of children's literature. According to Hunt, the concept 'childhood' refers to that part of the cycle of life in which the 'immediate culture' regards the

individual to be free from responsibilities and receptive to socialisation and moulding through the process of education. It is this understanding of childhood as *the formative years* of a person's life that explains the anomaly that children's literature is defined in terms of its readers.

It is therefore argued here that children's literature can be defined tentatively as literature written for and circulated among children that is, for that reason, imbued with particular social significance and therefore scrutinised, censored and controlled in particular ways. The basis on which this scrutiny takes place is far ranging – from assessments about character development and richness of language to the extent to which the narrative corresponds to reality and the aesthetic quality of the writing. Yet, this definition fails to fully encapsulate a category of literature that is very fluid and that is challenged in a number of ways. First, there are many examples of texts that belong to more than one category or that defy the very notion of genre and category altogether. Examples are Sue Townsend's *The secret diary of Adrian Mole aged 9 ½* or comic books. Second, some texts are appropriated by specific audiences even though they had clearly not been written in the first instance with that audience in mind. Take here, for example, the recent phenomenon of the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, which is widely read by adults. Other examples are *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carol, which is read and loved by children and adults alike, and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which was not written as a children's book in the first place, but was claimed as such by scores of young readers (Dixon 1978a:75). Third, some children's books are not only written *for* children but also *by* children. Finally, readers themselves resist and challenge the categories that comprise children's literature. It is the notion of childhood and scholarship on the phases of childhood that have led to the fragmentation of children's literature into various categories, each purporting to cater for the intellectual, psychological and emotional needs corresponding with that particular phase of childhood, such as puberty and adolescence. Yet, individual readers show different reading preferences, habits and abilities, which are reflected in the way in which they choose what to read and at what point in their development cycle they access particular works.

Despite this fragmentation and the internal contradictions that make it difficult to provide an accurate definition of children's literature, the link between children's literature and the important social notion of childhood has meant that debates about children's literature, its domain and its meanings have centred in the main

on an underlying question about the normative framework that these texts embody and propagate. It is because of this underlying similarity in debates about different kinds of non-adult literature and an attempt to withstand fragmentation in the academic field of study, that the title of this study explicitly situates the research in the broader domain of children's literature, rather than juvenile fiction or youth literature – two categories that perhaps describe more accurately the kind of fiction produced by Stella Blakemore.

Whilst children's literature is in the first instance classified on the basis of its *readership* and subdivided based on the *development stage* of the intended reader, these texts are classified further in terms of genre. Genres distinguished in children's literature include, among others, school stories, family stories, fantasy, mystery and adventure stories (Butts 1992:xiii). There is, however, another distinction that is often made with regard to children's books: that is between 'children's "Literature"' and 'children's fiction'. In the academic study of children's literature, this form of classification – which is similar to the distinction between popular fiction and 'high literature' – is sometimes phrased as the difference between the 'good book' or the prize-winning book and the popular and, by implication, non-prize winning book. This distinction has had important ramifications for the development of scholarship on children's literature, but the origins of this distinction can be traced back to the historical development of the children's book.

Literature for children as cultural products inserted into a market economy emerged much later than general literature, and when it did in the eighteenth to mid-eighteenth century<sup>1</sup>, it was closely linked to pedagogical theory and emerging forms of education. Butts (1992:x) and Richard (1992:2) argue that the genesis of the children's book in the West<sup>2</sup> was linked to at least three developments. First, ideas on the nature and importance of childhood as espoused by philosophers and scholars such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the subsequent emergence of scholarly work on the different development phases in the life of the child, such as adolescence and puberty, provided a theoretical framework for thinking about interventions in the development of the child.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the Anglophone world, the children's book was first produced in the mid-eighteenth century (Hunt 1990:1)

<sup>2</sup> The focus here falls on the development of the children's book in the West and more specifically in the Anglophone world, since the development of children's literature in South Africa is rooted in the English and Dutch traditions.

Second, the spread of education from the eighteenth century through the Sunday School Movement and the subsequent development of formal education systems driven by the state, through mechanisms such as legislation<sup>3</sup> stimulated the development of books for children. Third, technological innovations in the printing and publishing industry (underpinned by the spread of capitalism), enabled the print production of children's books. Hence, discourse on literature for children was from the outset influenced by concerns relating to pedagogy, such as the educational benefits of reading and the role of reading in identity formation and socialisation. Influenced by intellectuals of the day and the drive towards general schooling, the production of children's literature was grounded in an understanding that this kind of text had profound abilities to mould children in particular ways and to produce a certain kind of subject. It would therefore not be incorrect to suggest that the production of literature for children originated as a class project, which was launched by the intelligentsia and aimed at educating the children of the lower classes.

The development of print technology profoundly influenced the way in which literary markets – including markets for children's books – developed and continue to develop. In her study of the American and Canadian mass-produced paperback fiction market, Janice Radway (1991) traces historical developments in the printing and publishing industry. She argues that specific advancements in technology had influenced the way in which both the book as a 'product' and the market for this product have evolved. For example, she demonstrates that it was common practice for owners of printing presses (who were often publishers too) in the colonies to ask authors to pay a flat fee for the production of a book. The author was still entitled to royalty payments based on the sales of the publication, but the initial fee was a way for printer-publishers to hedge themselves against the risk of poor sales. The implication of this print practice was that authorship was limited to those who could raise the capital to pay the flat fee, which included members of the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie but also societies and organisations, such as religious and women's groups, and the state. The system of initial payment meant that control over the published work resided to a large extent in the hands of the author or relevant society or institution that sponsored the publication. It was therefore possible for individual authors and organisations to produce children's texts with particular formative qualities. Radway argues that

---

<sup>3</sup> An example of such legislation is the British Forster Act of 1870, which established free elementary schools.

subsequent developments in print technology (such as the development of new machinery, perfect binding, synthetic glues) as well as other technological advancements that supported the marketing and distribution of books gradually caused a shift from author risk and control to a situation where greater risk was being taken by publishing companies, but with a subsequent loss of control for the author. Print technology made it possible for print companies and publishing houses to play an active role in the business of commissioning and controlling the production of books, and the increased sophistication of marketing and distribution channels opened up the opportunity for these professionals to actively create the markets for their books. The rise of print capitalism made possible the development of a type of literature that catered for the desires of readers and which, for its success, depended on individuals' willingness to purchase a text, rather than on the distribution channels of the state or institutions. This development had a profound influence on the historical development of children's books, since it spawned the birth of popular fiction for children.

In line with its historical roots, the academic study of children's literature has traditionally been closely associated with understandings of children's literature as pivotal to the socialization and education of children. Corresponding to this understanding, a substantial component of scholarly work on children's literature is located within the disciplines of educational studies and library and information sciences. The primary concern of most debates on children's literature in these disciplines is not the literariness of these works, but rather the values that the texts are believed to transpose; the extent to which reading a particular text enables or disables younger readers to progress to works of high literary quality; the role of reading in the acquisition and mastering of language structures; and the ways in which the habit of reading can be fostered in children.

The study of fiction for children has always been regarded as an interdisciplinary undertaking that is not located in a particular discipline. As such it has remained a rich but fairly disparate and incoherent body of literature. A prominent scholar in the area of children's literature, Peter Hunt, argues that the fragmentation of the field is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it makes the question of publication and sharing of research difficult. Second, there is a dispute about control or primary affiliation in terms of the disciplines. Various disciplines, including psychology, information and library sciences, education, political science, sociology, and language and literary studies lay claim to the field of



study. Third, it has left scholars with an area of study that is 'rich but unstructured' (Hunt 1990:7) and very broad. At its best, Hunt argues, '[c]ontemporary criticism of children's literature... is eclectic, using new techniques, rereading and remapping old territories, and exploring new ones' (Hunt 1992:11).

Until recently, the product of the short history of academic work in the field of children's literature in South Africa, in particular on children's literature in Afrikaans, has been fairly modest. The field is dominated by a small number of academics from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, most prominent among these library and information sciences and education. Local debates have focused in the main on discussions about the 'good book' or 'appropriate' books for children and ways in which to encourage children to read (Van der Westhuizen 1999, De Beer 1991, De Villiers & Bester 1992, Steenberg 1982); the role of fiction in the process of socialisation (Machet & Bester 1990, Van Niekerk 1992, Stiebel 1992, Mitchell & Smith 1996); the reading preferences of children (Van Zyl 1990, Snyman 1994, Verwey 1999); the field of children's literature and the debate on children's literature as popular fiction or 'Literature' (Van Zyl 1988, Wybenga 1985, Wiehahn 1991, Gouws 1995); and the appraisal of individual texts (Mitchell & Smith 1996). A fair amount of postgraduate study has been undertaken in this area on a wide range of topics, but not much of this has filtered through to academic journals.

In the last decade, though, it seems that the importance of children's literature as an area of study, in particular the socio-historical dimension of this field in literary studies, is being asserted (see, for example Jenkins, 1994) and that new avenues are being explored. There is evidence of serious academic engagement with questions around popular fiction for children and the ideological and socio-historical legacies of children's literature in South Africa, specifically in Afrikaans. Following South Africa's democratisation in 1994, there appears to be a new interest in children's literature and more studies are emerging that focus on the social-historical aspects of children's literature. Often these studies centre on issues of representation, specifically race.<sup>4</sup> Whilst this development is to be welcomed, such approaches tend to render fairly 'narrow' readings of racism (and

---

<sup>4</sup> See for example a study by Greyling (1999), entitled *Die uitbeelding van apartheid in Engelse Suid-Afrikaanse jeugliteratuur*, and Miemie du Plessis' *Rasseverhoudings in Suid-Afrikaanse jeuglektuur sedert 1990* (1999). Gender representation is another angle from which children's books are scrutinized (see, for example De Villiers & Bester 1992).

sexism) in texts. Attempts have been made to produce a more comprehensive overview of the system of children's literature production and dissemination (see Van Vuuren 1994). More recently, Thomas van der Walt moved into the historical study of children's fiction, an area that seems to display many gaps (Van der Walt 2000 and Fairer-Wessels & Van der Walt 1999), and so has Maritha Snyman, who looks specifically at children's series books in Afrikaans (Snyman 2001). However, many of these studies are exploratory (see for example Fairer-Wessels & Van der Walt 1999, Snyman 1999, Snyman 1994, Snyman 2001, Verwey 1999) and there is vast scope for more descriptive and explanatory academic work in this area.

An article by Maritha Snyman, published in 1994 in the Afrikaans literary journal *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, introduced series books for children in Afrikaans as a terrain for scholarly inquiry. In the article, entitled 'Afrikaanse jeuglektuur: 'n herbesinning' she argues – against the orthodoxy of the time – that formulaic literature for children, such as popular series books, play a valuable role in children's development and that the practice of reading these texts do not discourage young readers from 'graduating' to more serious literature later on in their lives. In addition, she advocates the importance of further academic study of popular youth fiction in Afrikaans. In her article, she makes reference to a range of well-known Afrikaans series books, including *Maasdorp*, *Keurboslaan*, *Die Uile*, *Trompie*, *Saartjie*, *Soekie*, *Bienkie*, *Fritz Deelman*, and *Jasper*, arguing that these books remain the most popular texts for Afrikaans-speaking young readers. In particular, she contends that these series books should be reprinted for a new generation of young readers.

Virtually all the series books singled out for their popularity in Snyman's article were produced in the period between 1930 and 1970. Ostensibly missing from Snyman's argument, therefore, is any reference to the social-historical context in which these texts were originally produced and a consideration of the ways in which children's literature is inscribed in society, especially at the crucial moment of the historical formation of Afrikaner nationalism. In short, Snyman fails to engage with questions about the ways in which texts *work* and about their *performativity*, and chooses instead to focus exclusively on the ability of children's series books to stimulate the habit of reading and cultivate a love for reading.

This research is intended to take Snyman's project further and to push the boundaries of the research field in order to raise questions about the broader social meanings of popular children's literature. This is to be achieved through relating the production of children's literature to the project of nation-building and by using the study of popular literature as a mechanism for answering questions about the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism. The link between nationalism, vernacular language and literature is not new in Afrikaans. A number of prominent studies have been undertaken in this regard, two of which are worth mentioning here. The first is a study by Isabel Hofmeyr, entitled 'Building a nation from words, which is a comprehensive account of the relationship between nation-building and the production of literature in Afrikaans in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The second is a study by Lou-Marie Kruger on the author of the popular Afrikaans women's publication, *Die Boervrou*, Mabel Malherbe. This study draws on the work of both these authors and, in doing so, explores the role of the Afrikaans language, and, more specifically, print productions in Afrikaans, in the mobilisations around Afrikaner nationalism. The study focuses on the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and popular fiction for children in Afrikaans, a terrain that has not received scholarly attention before.

The study aims to address issues relating to class formation and the role of the petty bourgeoisie by foregrounding and examining the class position of the author, Stella Blakemore, and documenting her complex relationship with other members of the Afrikaner intelligentsia. It is this group that is generally thought of as self-conscious community creators or actors in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism. Yet, the petty bourgeoisie was not a homogenous group and their efforts to capture a new power base for themselves culminated in the establishment of a wide and disparate range of movements and interventions. Moreover, it is recognised that community creators do not operate in an unlimited field and that identity is fragmented and fractured along many other lines, including class, ethnicity, geography, and so forth. The broader question is therefore one about the strategies these self-conscious community-creators employ in order to craft myths and symbols that transcend, for example, class fractures.

Blakemore was one of the first writers of popular children's fiction in Afrikaans. She was also a very prolific writer and published more than 60 popular children's

books in Afrikaans.<sup>5</sup> Blakemore is also the undisputed doyenne of the series book in Afrikaans. In addition to the immensely popular *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series, she also wrote the *Blourand*, *Die Rissies*, *Janse Cloete*, and *Delarey series*. *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* are among the books Snyman (1994) considers as some of the most popular children's texts in Afrikaans. Yet, surprisingly little is known about this author and about the production of these texts. Two central questions animate this study. These are 1) how did the Afrikaner intelligentsia manage to disseminate its ideas and ideology of Afrikaner nationalism to a wider audience across class fractures and turn it into a kind of mass consciousness and 2) what was the composition of the petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, what evidence is available about upward and downward mobility between this class and other classes, and what kinds of contestation and resistance took place within this class? This study of Stella Blakemore and her world constitutes an attempt to answer these questions, albeit in a limited sense.

The study draws upon a range of resources. In the J.L. van Schaik Collection housed at the National Afrikaans Literature Museum and Research Unit (NALN), a very valuable collection of correspondence between Blakemore and her South African publisher, J.L. van Schaik, and later his son, Jan van Schaik, is stored. The letters are not representative of the total period over which her relationship with the Van Schaiks stretched. In the collection there are letters from the 1930s, when her business relationship with J.L. van Schaik commenced, another selection from the late 1940s, and a comprehensive set of letters covering the 1950s up to the end of the 1960s. In the period that Blakemore lived in Pretoria, between 1935 and approximately 1947 she was able to meet with her publishers personally, and there are therefore only records of contractual agreements for that period and no letters.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, there are no records of her exchanges with her publishers during the crucial 1970s or later. However, when she returned to South Africa in 1973 after an absence of more than eighteen years, her visit received extensive media coverage.

Through the letters and interviews she granted to the South African media during her visit, this study aims to provide a glimpse of the life and thoughts of a complex

---

<sup>5</sup> A full list of titles is provided in Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> In the NALN collection, the first letter sent by Blakemore to her publishers from Kumasi, in the Gold Coast, is dated 11 September 1947. Blakemore and her husband may have left South Africa already a few years earlier in 1945, as there is a gap in the correspondence and conclusive evidence is lacking, but based on the available evidence it seems likely that they did only leave sometime in 1947.

and perplexing figure in the Afrikaans literary scene at particular periods of her life in relation to her writing, her relationship with her country of birth, and her multiple identities as woman, Afrikaner, exile, South African, and world traveller. In addition, an interview with Mr Jan van Schaik assisted in illuminating the complex relationship between Blakemore and the publishing house, and the links between the publishing house and the Afrikaner establishment.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One outlines the theoretical lenses through which the research questions are filtered. In particular, selected concepts from the work of Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, Benedict Anderson and Charles Taylor, are introduced. Chapter Two traces Blakemore's personal and intellectual biography and provides an overview of her publications. Chapter Three provides an account of Blakemore's own understanding of her role as an author. In Chapter Four, the complex relationship between Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik publishers is examined. Questions about Blakemore's multi-faceted relationship with her country of birth and its policies of apartheid are addressed in Chapter Five.