

PART V:
Synopsis

Conclusion

This study on the relationship between literature and society - more specifically the relationship between fiction and nationalism – was undertaken in the field of popular fiction for children and is framed by the notion of the everyday life and approached from an interdisciplinary vantage point. It constitutes an attempt to contribute to scholarship on Afrikaner nationalism and the apartheid state by focusing on the cultural domain. While the scope of the study is broad, the *Keurboslaan* series is only one example of countless others through which the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism was circulated. As such, the study can make only a limited contribution in terms of its findings. However, as an interdisciplinary undertaking that engages with existing scholarship on Afrikaner nationalism, the relationship between literature and nationalism, and popular fiction for children, it is believed that the study can help to augment and problematise our current understanding of Afrikaner nationalism and speak to some of the questions posed in the fields of children's literature and literary studies. A summary of findings is presented under four rubrics: 1) The relationship between popular fiction and Afrikaner nationalism; 2) Implications of the study for understandings of Afrikaner nationalism; 3) Notes on studying popular fiction and children's literature; 4) Questions of methodology.

Reflecting on the *Keurboslaan* stories it may seem hard to imagine that these unlikely tales about the formidable Roelof Serfontein who single-handedly transformed a small town private school into a model institution for children of the Afrikaner elite should be worthy of scholarly attention. For one, the stories seem too far-fetched to be taken seriously. Moreover, they are hardly original since the format of the stories is closely modelled on the British public school story. There are many more reasons to disregard the series: the story lines are predictable; the style pedantic; the setting overly romanticized and, finally, the intended reading public for the series is children. Yet, this study has shown that the series was a vehicle for the dissemination of a discourse through which the Afrikaner nation could be imagined. The content aside, the very existence of such a series contributed to making the project of Afrikaner nationalism possible and feasible. Whilst it was not mass produced, the series was widely obtainable in public libraries and was reproduced a number of times to make it available to a few generations of Afrikaans readers. Consequently, Roelof Serfontein, Eugene Krynauw and the world of *Keurboslaan* became part of the social imaginary of

children reading Afrikaans fiction. It is hoped that the study is convincing in its claim that whilst an analysis of the *Keurboslaan* series can only provide a limited entry into the thematic of Afrikaner nationalism, it does have something to contribute to the debate and can do so in ways that are different and suggestive.

Afrikaner nationalism and popular fiction

The primary research question posed in this study is what light an analysis of the *Keurboslaan* series could cast on the relationship between popular fiction and nationalism. This research question ties in with eminent studies on Afrikaans literature and Afrikaner nationalism, notably that of Kruger (1991) on popular literature and Hofmeyr (1987) on literary texts. The research is framed by the notion of the everyday, which places it in the domain of leisure activity that is shared by Kruger's study of Mabel Malherbe and her publication *Die Boervrou*. The research is novel, though, in the sense that it opens up the field of popular fiction, and more specifically children's literature, in Afrikaans as a field for inquiry in relation to nationalism.

The work of Benedict Anderson is helpful in answering the primary research question, since it situates Afrikaner nationalism in a broader context by demonstrating the extent to which a mobilisation around texts sparked by print capitalism is a characteristic of nation building and nationalisms elsewhere. However, in the second instance, and perhaps more important, Anderson's analysis of the way in which nations are imagined in and through texts is helpful because he illuminates ways in which the mere presence of the text, as opposed to its contents, could be socially and politically meaningful and therefore powerful. In other words, Anderson draws attention to the fact that it is not only discourse circulated in texts that is of importance, but that the physical presence of the text, its materiality and its physical exchange, are other mechanisms worthy of scholarly scrutiny since those are ways in which the nation is both imagined and produced.

The production of the *Keurboslaan* series follows the trajectory of print capitalism in vernacular languages as described by Anderson. In particular, the research highlighted that the series was produced by J.L. van Schaik Publishers in Pretoria. This publishing company was closely associated with the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. Whilst the *Keurboslaan* series was predominantly published as an initiative that would produce profit, the publishing house did produce a number of texts that were not deemed to be profitable but that would advance the project of Afrikaner nationalism. The *Keurboslaan*

series was therefore produced with little intervention from the publishers, except for the directive that the series could not be translated into English. However, J.L. van Schaik's commitment to the establishment of Afrikaans as a print language paid off once the market, which it had actively tried to expand, had been established.

The study identified four mechanisms through which the *Keurboslaan* series in its materiality rather than through discourse made it possible to imagine the nation or to imagine the Afrikaner nation in a particular way. First, the very fact that it is produced in a specific language, in this case Afrikaans, becomes a significant way of imagining a community. Phrased in this way, the very act of reading for pleasure becomes invested with the political. A second way in which the imagining of the nation is given materiality is the fact that Blakemore's stories helped to capture an audience for Afrikaans literature and in doing so grew and expanded the market for Afrikaans books. Third, the individual act of reading the *Keurboslaan* stories produced a community of readers, who did not necessarily know each other, but who all felt that they knew Roelof Serfontein and his school. This community was not only constructed amongst peers, but also across generational boundaries, thereby somehow becoming part of the mythical fabric that creates communities and the social imaginary that gives such constructed communities coherence. Fourth, the physical books were shown to have conveyed its own meaning. Beautifully produced with attention paid to detail, even if the language was not always on standard, and slightly more expensive than the books produced by other publishers, the *Keurboslaan* books (and other books produced by J.L. van Schaik publishers) projected a different image of the market for Afrikaans books – and by implication its readers – by imbuing even popular texts with a status that could not easily be reduced to trash literature as was the case with many of Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel's books.

Through a comparison of the *Keurboslaan* series with two titles in the *Tweede Trek* series, the present study sought to demonstrate that the discourse circulated in *Keurboslaan* in broad brush-strokes was fairly similar to the discourse of the *Tweede Trek* series. The discourse in these two types of texts can be characterised as a discourse of nationalism and modernisation. It is argued that this similarity is not limited to the selected volumes of the *Tweede Trek* series, but will be sustained in a wider comparison of key texts on Afrikaner nationalism and the *Keurboslaan* series. It was furthermore argued that the medium of fiction meant that the *Keurboslaan* series had more impact than the *Tweede Trek* series. This view is supported by sales figures and the number of reprints. The discourse of fiction became salient, penetrated the surface

much deeper, was read by more people, and became part of the cultural goods and a collective memory in ways which was not possible for publications such as the *Monumente* series and the *Tweede Trek* series. Yet, popular books for children, or popular texts for that matter, are not the kind of texts that are usually selected as representative of authentic nationalist discourses.

Apart from the extra-textual ways in which the *Keurboslaan* series was to imagine the nation, the nation is imagined in interesting ways and through innovative strategies in the texts themselves. The first of these is through the device of the imagination, which offers the author of fiction the opportunity to rewrite the present. In other, words, the world of *Keurboslaan* initially did not correspond the real world of the 1940s. Blakemore was writing the present from the vantage point of what it could be, thereby turning the series into a form of aspirational literature. The second narrative device employed in the texts is the notion of showing rather than telling. The *Keurboslaan* texts showcased the lifestyles and value systems of the Afrikaner intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie in a most attractive way. Through that device desire could be linked to class mobility. A third feature of the *Keurboslaan* text that makes it powerful is the extent to which its focus is on narrating the future rather than the past. The *Keurboslaan* series does not portray the Afrikaner nation as a nation in progress, but as one that is already there and on par with existing nations, in particular the English. Taken together – the future that can be embraced, the lifestyles of the elite that can be aspired to, and the present that can be imagined different - these strategies produced a way of imagining the nation, which, whilst not substantially different from or dissimilar to other regimes of discourse on the nation, was different in one respect: it was a discourse vested with desire. This appealed to *Keurboslaan*'s readers, which were shown in all likelihood to have been drawn from a broad class basis.

This study has shown that there exists a link between the emergence of print capitalism and the production of popular fiction on the one hand and nationalism on the other. Whilst this is a link that is not often explored, an analysis of the *Keurboslaan* series and an overview of its production, dissemination and reception illustrate that the study of popular fiction can illuminate the practices through which nationalism gains popular support. The *Keurboslaan* series, whilst not produced as part of the authentic and authorised publications on Afrikaner nationalism, nonetheless furthered the aims of this project through its discourse and its insertion into the market for Afrikaans books.

Implications of the study for understandings of Afrikaner nationalism

This study on the *Keurboslaan* series and its relationship with Afrikaner nationalism can augment our understandings of Afrikaner nationalism in five ways. These are outlined below.

One of the questions posed in scholarship on Afrikaner nationalism is about the central idea of Afrikaner nationalism, that is, what central idea or image provided the glue that was able to cement together a group of people across geographical, class and gender divides to constitute the Afrikaner nation. Nationalism is usually associated with a strong sense of the Other. In the case of Afrikaner nationalism the, notion of the Other is generally embodied as either black South Africans and/or the British colonial power. Yet, the *Keurboslaan* series presents another possibility. Whilst in *Keurboslaan* both blacks and non-nationals (English, American and Jewish) are in different contexts portrayed as villains and therefore as dangerous to *Keurboslaan*, this is not painted as the most dangerous threat to the *Keurboslaan* community. Rather, the threat presents itself as the danger of the self to the self. The 'poor white', the sick, the alcoholic and the mentally disturbed, as well as the weak and the impulsive – these incantations of Afrikaners are very prominent in the *Keurboslaan* texts, which display a Foucauldian notion of the need to normalise these individuals. Whilst there exist an extensive scholarship on the so-called poor white problem of the 1930s and the way in which the economic movement was mooted to address this crisis, very little work has been undertaken to determine to what extent the very idea of the Afrikaner as deviant was constitutive of the social imaginaries within which Afrikaner nationalism found such popular appeal.

A second question that crops up in studies of Afrikaner nationalism is about the way in which the idea of Afrikaner nationalism was disseminated amongst the masses. This study has shown that popular fiction for children was one of the avenues through which this ideology was disseminated. This is a field that has not been examined before. However, the research demonstrated that the dissemination of Afrikaner nationalist ideas through the *Keurboslaan* series was not an orchestrated intervention that formed part of a grand plan aimed at unrolling Afrikaner nationalist ideas. This is in line with Deborah Posel's research on the making of the apartheid state, which she found to be far less a process of total social engineering as generally rendered. It was shown that Stella Blakemore was a marginal figure in the Afrikaner establishment. Whilst part of the Afrikaner elite, her ties with the British, both through her father's nationality and her

marriage to a Welshman, as well as her upbringing which included a schooling in English private schools in Natal, excluded her from the ranks of the Afrikaner intelligentsia. Still, this research demonstrated that Stella Blakemore was successful in areas where the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie had failed. Whereas the latter were trying to foster a collective Afrikaner consciousness through literary works such as *Ampie*, which portrays the life story of a so-called poor white Afrikaner – Blakemore's writings tapped into individual desire for social and class mobility that could be achieved within the fold of Afrikanerdom.

A shortcoming in studies of Afrikaner nationalism has been identified as the relatively limited information that is available on the persons that crafted themselves as self-conscious community creators, those in the ranks of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia who exerted themselves to promote the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism. Blakemore has been described in this study as someone who fulfilled the role of an organic intellectual, even though she cannot be described as a self-conscious community creator. Through Bourdieu's notion of habitus, it was attempted to explain, at least in part, Blakemore's ambiguous and sometimes contradictory relationship with South Africa and Afrikaners.

Jon Hyslop raised as a problem in the study of Afrikaner nationalism the almost exclusive national focus of research in this field. Other critiques of studies on Afrikaner nationalism include the preference given to analyses of symbolic representations. This study attempted to remedy this shortcoming by examining Afrikaner nationalism in the domain of the everyday life, an area that - with a few notable exceptions - has not been explored sufficiently. This marks a shift into the private space and opens up an avenue for exploring the way in which discourse on Afrikaner nationalism became inserted into and constitutive of everyday practices, routines and habits.

Finally, this study of *Keurboslaan* presented an opportunity to explore the kind of subjectivity portrayed in the series and to question to what extent this portrayal may have contributed to the creation of an Afrikaner subjectivity that was created and fostered by Afrikaner nationalist discourse, which Hyslop describes as comprising of a 'non-reflexive submission to authority' (Hyslop 2000:37). If the danger to the self is the self, *Keurboslaan* presents as the remedy to that danger discipline, in particular self-discipline and self-control, and compliance with authority. Drawing on Foucault, it has been shown that normalisation of the deviant subject by the system and the inculcation of self-discipline and self-control, are central themes in the series. The notion of self-

discipline as presented in the *Keurboslaan* series is a total philosophy that extends to all aspects of the self, including the physical self as was illustrated through an analysis of instructions on the body in *Keurboslaan* texts.

Notes on studying popular fiction and children's literature

The scope of this study also provided the opportunity to engage with discussions on the relationship between literature and society and popular fiction and nationalism more broadly, extending beyond the frame of Afrikaner nationalism. In particular, this study found that 1) there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of popular fiction as a construct; 2) the conditions under which a text is selected and read need to be taken into consideration in accounts of both the production of meaning and the construction of subjectivity; 3) popular fiction can be a vehicle for the promotion of nationalism; 4) the social context within which a text is produced and read may be more significant and telling than the form of the texts in terms of the meanings it acquires; and 5) there are gaps in the study of popular fiction and children's literature in Afrikaans and in South Africa.

It has been argued that the notion of popular fiction is not a self-explanatory construct, and therefore should not be treated as such. It would be very difficult to argue that the *Keurboslaan* series is a prime example of mass produced popular fiction for children based on a formula such as the *Goosebumps* series. Nonetheless, the study has also shown that the *Keurboslaan* series was not canonised or incorporated into the educational system, received a mixed response from critical reviewers, and is modelled on the British public school series formula. It was therefore concluded that the *Keurboslaan* series was a type of popular fiction, but given its relatively small print run and the fact that it was written in Afrikaans, it was not archetypical of mass produced fiction. Hence, not all theoretical assumptions about mass produced fiction may apply to this series. It has therefore been suggested that rather than posing these as binary opposites, a more useful approach to popular fiction and literature is to regard these as two poles on a continuum of written texts.

Literature on popular fiction generally suggest that popular fiction is tighter controlled and subject to more processes of social sanction than works of literature, since popular fiction is supposed to reflect societal norms and values. This view has been mainly forthcoming from studies of popular fiction that tend to focus on the content of these texts and not on the conditions under which such texts are read or on its readers. This

study posed questions about the way in which popular texts are read and the conditions under which popular texts are read. Popular fiction is generally not mediated through the educational system or official institutions. Whilst these texts would be difficult to access unless the system provides at the very least tacit approval of its contents and given that modern societies have a range of mechanisms to its disposal for screening materials, the experience of selecting and reading popular texts generally presents itself to the prospective young reader as freedom of choice within the set parameters, such as the shelf dedicated to children's literature in the public library. It could therefore be argued that societal control of popular fiction is masked as freedom of choice. In addition, the study found that in the case of Afrikaner nationalism, popular fiction for children was not regarded as strategically important beyond the recognition that provision ought to be made for the production of popular fiction for children in Afrikaans. As a result, based on the *Keurboslaan* case, children's literature manuscripts seem to have been subject to far less scrutiny than was the case with other types of texts. Moreover, whereas literary production was in the hands of a group of Afrikaner intellectuals, a person such as Stella Blakemore was able to produce children's stories with very little intervention. Finally, the public debate on *Ampie* also signals dissatisfaction from ordinary people about literature produced and authenticated through official channels. These three points provide an alternative lens through which to consider the relationship between various types of literature and social control.

The two points raised above are of relevance when one considers Corse's thesis in her study of the relationship between literature and nationalism. Corse argues that the genre of literature lends itself far more than the genre of popular fiction to become a vehicle for the promotion of nationalism. That is, she argues, because popular fiction is generic, while works of literature tend to focus on the local and contextual. The relationship between nationalism and popular fiction seems to be more complex than she suggests. Her analysis is weakened in part by the fact that she treats popular fiction and literature as two entirely separate domains. *Keurboslaan*, as indicated before, does not fit neatly into the category of mass produced popular fiction, and even though it is modelled on a generic version of the school story, its addressee is an exclusive audience and the texts contain many local features. In the second instance, it has been shown that the thesis on social control and popular fiction is not always correct. In the case of the *Keurboslaan* series, the series was subject to very little interference from both the publishing house and the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie. This may be ascribed to the fact that the content generally upheld the values and principles

that these groups wanted children's literature to reflect. Whilst this may be true, it is argued here that this situation is at least partially explained by the fact that popular fiction for children was simply not regarded as enormously strategic.

It has been shown that the *Keurboslaan* series displays the characteristics of a formula book and overwhelmingly conforms to the genre of the school story, a popular genre in formula books for children. In particular, it has been argued that the *Keurboslaan* series was modelled on the version of the school story so popular in Britain, i.e. the public boarding school genre. From this it would appear that what is of interest is not so much what is different between these texts and other series books, but rather the way in which ostensibly similar texts are inserted or inscribed into a broader social process that opens up the possibility to look at its political function. This points once again to the problem with methodologies that treat the ultimate meaning of the text as located within the text itself.

Finally, the study pointed to a gap in the study of popular fiction and children's literature in Afrikaans in particular, but also in South Africa more generally. There is a paucity of good quality reader studies in South Africa, especially on popular fiction and children's literature in Afrikaans. Where such studies exist, the methodologies employed are often not very rigorous. Most research on popular fiction and children's literature in Afrikaans explores the relationship between texts and society within the parameters of white Afrikaner communities. It may be interesting to research the penetration of these texts in other Afrikaans-speaking readers and communities, as well as to second language speakers, to examine the way in which processes of meaning making and reception have unfolded. In addition, there is a tradition of protest literature aimed at children, such as *Stanley Bekker en die Boikot* that has not received much scholarly attention. It has been indicated that Afrikaans series books dating from the 1940s to the 1970s, such as *Keurboslaan*, *Trompie*, *Maasdorp* and others have recently been reprinted and are still read by Afrikaans-speaking children. More research is required to produce an understanding of the way in which present conditions and the political dispensation influence the social imaginaries conjured by these texts from a different era. In conclusion, the present study seems to suggest that there is scope for comparative study of, for example, Afrikaans, British and German children's literature to explore the relationship between children's literature and nationalism more generally.

Questions on methodology

The study raised a number of questions pertaining to methodology, since it explores the relationship between literature and society and argues, albeit in a limited way, that the experience of reading a particular set of texts (the *Keurboslaan* series) and readers' reflections on that experience contributed to the development of an Afrikaner subjectivity among readers of these texts. The study challenged the notion that the subject can be utilised as unit of analysis to access the experience and meanings connected to reading, an assumption that is prevalent in many reader studies. It was argued that it is important to remember that there are significant limits to empirical studies. But it was also shown that there are important and marked limitations to ideology critique and textual analysis, which tend to sidestep both the reader and the context of reading in favour of the text and which present tremendous difficulty explaining or theorising a causal or relational relationship between the text and the formation of subjectivity. In essence, the methodological question underpinning this study remains: How do we access the experience of reading, how do we theorise the meanings attached and derived from this activity, and how do we explain the way in which the text 'works' and shapes consciousness and subjectivity? For a positivist the problem is the necessity to isolate the variable of the act of reading a specific text, set of texts, or type of text in order to fashion a causal relationship between the event and practice of reading and the emergence of particular kinds of subjectivities. But any one person's days are filled with a multitude of 'texts' and the practice of reading becomes a metaphor for ways of looking at and interpreting the world. Hence, it is not possible to isolate the variable of the reading experience linked to a particular text. Given the split and layered subject, it is also not desirable to rely solely on the subject's (the reader) account of that causal relationship. While more interpretive approaches are able to produce rich and deeply suggestive analyses of texts, such studies are impeded by their inability to explain the way in which texts 'work' and to assign weight, or, phrased differently, to prove the significance of any one text given that that texts are inscribed in a broader social context. This makes it particularly difficult to use this kind of approach in a study that attempts to explain the relationship between texts and reality.

In order to answer a question about the way in which texts work, this study subscribes to a soft reading of Althusser's theory of the interpellation of the subject through discourse. This is, however, enhanced with a theory of agency offered by De Certeau's notion of *tactics*, which takes account of readers' abilities to subconsciously or consciously usurp or resist particular elements of texts and Bourdieu's notion of the

habitus as an explanation for the range of possibilities from which Stella Blakemore wrote. In terms of methodology, this study embraced four approaches that flow from this theoretical framework and which attempt to address some of the issues raised by the question about the way in which texts ‘work’ and to counter some of the weaknesses inherent to the approaches outlined above. These approaches may assist in pushing the boundaries of the academic study of literature and popular fiction. Moreover, these approaches may also offer a way in which the study of literature can extend beyond its boundaries and contribute to other areas of social enquiry.

In the first instance, this study is based on the assumption that when conducting textual analysis as a method of explaining social realities it is necessary to move beyond that which is obvious in the text and to embed textual analyses within a theory of reading and writing. Phrased differently, the study rejects the idea that readers assimilate everything they read and therefore become like the texts they read. De Certeau’s reminder that readers are not fools is important. The position adopted here is not one that rules out studies that are solely text-based. Rather, it is argued that such studies need to be accompanied with a fairly explicit theory of reading and writing if they attempt to explain the way in which the text reflects or bears upon social realities outside of the text. Second, the study harnessed the advantages of a broad ranging inquiry that integrates issues of production, dissemination and consumption with textual analysis. This type of approach embeds textual analysis in the conditions of production and consumption and therefore assists in the process of making sense of the way in which the text has been inserted into the social world. Third, this study attempted to link and combine literary studies with other forms of social inquiry to produce a fuller picture of the social phenomenon that is being examined. In other words, the study favoured an interdisciplinary approach as a tool for embedding the study of a literary text in its social context, enabling and facilitating more comparative research, and encouraging cross-disciplinary theory development. Thus, it has been possible to situate the present study in the theoretical framework of nationalism rather than to limit it to Afrikaner nationalism, which may have played a role in upholding notions of South African exceptionalism. In addition, it has been possible to compare the *Keurboslaan* series with other literary formulas for children *and* adults, and to locate the *Keurboslaan* series in the social context within which it is produced and consumed. And this approach fostered a process of examining current understandings of Afrikaner nationalism to explore ways in which the present study may contribute to this body of scholarship and speak to some of its theoretical concerns. Finally, this study is premised on the importance of introducing the everyday as a terrain of academic study. It has shown

that it is a worthwhile enterprise to study the everyday, following in the tradition of Brink (1987) and Kruger (1991). But a claim that the *Keurboslaan* texts contributed to the formation of an Afrikaner subjectivity can only be sustained if it is recognised that its readings constitutes but one of the sites in which subjectivity formation takes place, and that there a multitude others. The educational system, church, popular magazines and newspapers, and so forth, together produced a 'sediment of Afrikanerness' .

Limitations of the study

As is the case with studies based on archival research, it holds true for this study that neither the material nor the problem has been exhausted. In particular, the study could have benefited from statistical data relating to sales and distribution figures. Whilst reader studies and empirical research about the reception of texts were highlighted as important components of broad-ranging research into the relationship between literature and society, the present study does not include a reader study component. This was a deliberate choice to limit the scope of the research, but was also in part influenced by the fact that this is an historical study, which makes it difficult to access the experiences of readers who are removed in time and space from their first reading of the *Keurboslaan* series. As a result, there is no empirical data to measure the 'effect' or impact of the *Keurboslaan* texts on its readers and very little that reflect readers' experiences of reading these texts. Whereas the limitations of empirical studies have been pointed out, this study would certainly have been enriched by a reader study. The difficulty of adequately accounting for the mechanisms and processes through which subjectivity is produced is a general limitation in theories of culture and nationalism. While this has been theorised in the present study and methodologies were selected to address this problem, the issue has not been entirely resolved. Given the luxury of hindsight, a final remark pertaining to the limitations of this study is that a more expanded use of Bourdieu's methodology, instead of limiting his theoretical contribution to his notion of *habitus*, may have steered the research in a different direction. This avenue may be explored in publications arising from this study.