

Conclusion

Introduction

This study constitutes an attempt to link the study of popular fiction for children with the study of Afrikaner nationalism. Despite, the level at which the questions are posed, the argument that was presented here is fairly limited. It was argued that writing, reading and publishing can be construed as political acts in Benedict Anderson's terms. Two central questions animated 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? It was indicated that one of the problems of explanation in studies on Afrikaner nationalism is the level on which accounts are provided. Studies on Afrikaner nationalism tend to focus on national, macro level events and representations, which undermines the ability of such accounts to adequately explain the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism on the level of everyday life. In this case, it is hoped that this local, micro level study of the life of a popular fiction author will augment other theoretical accounts of Afrikaner nationalism. Against this background, this study attempted to illuminate linkages between language, community and history, by foregrounding the life history of Stella Blakemore, an author of popular fiction for children.

The argument presented here is that the realm of popular fiction for children is important study in relation to nationalism for three reasons. First, literature for children is imbued with specific social significance because of the link between the notion of childhood and development. Second, the sales of popular fiction for children, in the same way as mass-produced romance readers for women, are market-driven as opposed to support for canonised texts from the state. Sales figures for popular fiction therefore tell us something about readers and their reading preferences. Third, popular fiction, because of its popularity and associated high sales figures, permeate society in ways that literary works cannot. It was

argued further that the study of popular fiction for children in Afrikaans has not received much scholarly attention, and while the relationship between nationalism and Afrikaans literature has been explored by others such as Hofmeyr (1987) and Kruger (1991), the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and popular children's books is an untilled land.

The main research findings are reported in three sections: (1) Blakemore and the publishing industry; (2) The Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and Stella Blakemore; and (3) Blakemore, the project of Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner subjectivity. Finally, the argument is drawn together in the concluding section, entitled 'Rethinking the imagined community through the notions of habitus, the organic intellectual and the social imaginary'.

Blakemore and the publishing industry

In terms of the relationship between the publishing industry and Blakemore, the research demonstrated that Blakemore's books were never conceived of as a nationalist project by its publishers or its author. Given that her books were regarded as popular fiction for children, these texts were not explicitly tied in with any of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie's literary projects aimed at promoting the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. These arguments are supported by the overview of the founding history of J.L. van Schaik publishers and the firm's motivation for producing the *Keurboslaan* series sketched in the Chapter Two as well as Blakemore's reflections on her own reasons for writing the series presented in this Chapter Three. J.L. van Schaik's involvement in producing the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series seems to have been motivated by a combination of the drive for profit and commitment to the cause of Afrikaner nationalism and thus the promotion of Afrikaans. However, from the discussion in Chapter Two, it is clear that in the case of popular fiction for children, the profitability of ventures was a key concern. It was shown that J.L. van Schaik felt sympathetic towards the cause of Afrikaner nationalism and that the firm did indeed publish a number of books that served the interests of this cause despite the fact that these books were unlikely to be profitable. Yet, it appears from the correspondence between Blakemore and her publishers as well as from the interview with Jan van Schaik that the main motivation for publishing the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* books was simply profit. There was virtually no intervention from the publishers in the narrative of her books or attempts to give the books a particular political slant. On one issue the publishers

stood firm, though, and that was that Blakemore could not translate the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* books into English. While the motivation informing this directive may in part have been sentiment towards the Afrikaans language, the evidence seems to suggest that it is more likely that the publishers were concerned about the reaction of a conservative Afrikaans book buying public on finding out that these series books have also been published in English and the implications that would have for sales.

The Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and Blakemore

Whilst Blakemore's class position was that of the petty bourgeoisie, Blakemore's relationship with the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie seems to have been ambiguous. Based on her letters to her publisher it can be argued that Blakemore did not embark on writing books to promote the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. In truth, she distanced herself on many occasions from the terrain of politics in general. Besides the overarching objective of writing to obtain an income stream, her main motivation for writing in Afrikaans seems to have been sentimental and a marker of her South African identity. Not only did she often claim that she thought in Afrikaans, but after having left South Africa writing in Afrikaans provided Blakemore with a connection to the country to which she planned to return. For these reasons, she was prepared to write for an Afrikaans market and, in order to promote her sales, she was willing to make some changes to her manuscripts and to write her stories in a way that would be acceptable to her audience, even if she did not always agree with their sentiments. Yet, she made it clear on a number of occasions that she would have been more than prepared to have her works translated into English for a broader South African audience. Actually, in quite a few of her letters she requested her publisher to review this restriction. While she suggested more than once that she was not fond of 'the English', it does seem to be plausible to suggest that her problem with the English was largely with the British. Phrased alternatively, Blakemore seems to have had some dislike for both the British and South African English speakers who embraced a British identity rather than a South African identity. In terms of her own identity, it appears that she saw herself primarily as a South African, rather than an Afrikaner. In one letter, she states that one shouldn't marry outside one's race as she had done by marrying a Welshman, as such a union of necessity implied that one of the partners needed to leave their country behind. This implies that Blakemore understood a close relationship to exist between nation and country. The Transvaal was her heartland and she did not feel

at home in Natal, where she went to boarding school and which she felt was too English for her liking, or in the Cape Province. It could therefore be argued that rather than Afrikaner nationalism, Blakemore herself was embracing a kind of South African nationalism that was rooted in her experience of living in Transvaal but moulded by her experience of living away from South Africa, where her South Africanness came to dominate over her Afrikanerness and where distinctions between white Afrikaans and English speaking South Africans became more vague. In a sense, this sentiment therefore encapsulated a world where Afrikaners outweighed English speakers in numbers but where there was not a clear distinction between white Afrikaans speakers and white English speakers and where the boundaries between the groups were fairly fluid.

Blakemore did not form part of the inner circle of the Afrikaner intelligentsia that mobilised around the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. This could be explained by a number of factors but conclusive evidence is lacking. First, Blakemore's family history would have made it very difficult for her to be included in this circle. Whilst she was described as Afrikaner royalty, she wore the taint of the enemy given that her father was an officer of the British army. This would have been exacerbated by the attempts of the Afrikaner intelligentsia in the decades following the Anglo-Boer war to revive the atrocities of the Anglo-Boer War as a strategy for advancing the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. Second, Blakemore married a Welshman, which meant that her home language was English. Third, Blakemore was not an author of literary works in Afrikaans, but produced popular fiction for the youth, which was a marginal literature. Fourth, Blakemore's acceptance into this circle would have been hindered by her identity as a woman. While women did play a prominent role in advancing Afrikaner nationalism, Blakemore's identity as the wife of a foreigner must have made it very difficult to gain credibility. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that Blakemore herself wanted to be part of this circle. In many ways, her extensive travels and the long period she spent in various parts of Europe in her early twenties had turned her into a European cosmopolitan.

While she therefore clearly belonged to the stratum of the petty bourgeoisie, Blakemore was never a full member of the Afrikaner intelligentsia and there is evidence that many Afrikaners saw her as a foreigner. In terms of the broader white Afrikaans speaking population, Blakemore was not a very well known public figure. This was the result of the fact that she lived away from South Africa for so many years of her productive writing life, but also because her publishers were concerned

about the fact that boys would not be keen to read the *Keurboslaan* books if they knew the books were written by a woman. Moreover, after she had left South Africa, J.L. van Schaik was concerned that the reading public would find out that Blakemore did not live in South Africa and was indeed 'English-speaking'. As a result, Blakemore was in a way shielded from her reading public. Hence, the impact she could make as a public figure on events in South Africa was very low.

Not only did Blakemore not belong to the inner circle of the Afrikaner intelligentsia in Pretoria, but she clashed with members of the stratum on a number of occasions. Her outspoken, sometimes brash, manner landed her in trouble with many prominent Afrikaners in the Transvaal, an issue she comments on in her letters to J.L. van Schaik. Her disagreements with the Afrikaans language purists and the editors of her manuscripts have been well documented. Her relationship with her publishers is yet another example of an interaction with the Afrikaner establishment that did not always run smoothly. J.L. van Schaik's relationship with their author can be summarised as cautious. Whilst the relationship between Blakemore and the senior Mr van Schaik had always been strained, she developed a much closer relationship with his son, Jan. Yet, even Jan's relationship with Blakemore can be described as guarded and from the correspondence one senses that Jan saw his role principally as mediator, having to keep Blakemore away from and guarding her against the Afrikaner establishment. Finally, already in the early years, but particularly from the 1960s onwards her work was scorned by decision-makers in academic and government circles who described it as poor quality fiction. It is therefore very difficult to cast Blakemore in the role of prophet of Afrikaner nationalism and as spokesperson for the Afrikaner intelligentsia set on promoting Afrikaner nationalism. Not only did Blakemore not belong to that circle, but also there were some enemies of hers among their ranks.

Blakemore, the project of Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner subjectivity

Despite the fact that her books were not conceived as a nationalist project and that its author, Blakemore, was not a popular or well known member of the Afrikaner establishment, the combination of a private sector initiative, based on the expansion of the market of the Afrikaans book, and a well-travelled and at times voluntarily exiled South African writer homesick for her country of birth proved to be a powerful combination that played into the agenda of Afrikaner nationalism. It is argued here

that Blakemore's *books* contributed to the project of 'inventing' an Afrikaner nation and thus to the development of Afrikaner nationalism in at least six ways.

First, Blakemore's decision to write popular fiction for children in Afrikaans, whilst apparently born out of two competing motivations – the fact that entry into the Afrikaans market seemed to be fairly easy given Blakemore's need to earn extra income through writing and her sentiment towards the language and country of her birth – was deeply political, at least in terms of its implications. At a time when there were dismally few examples of children's literature in Afrikaans, she started writing popular fiction. When she started the *Maasdorp* series for girls in the early 1930s and the *Keurboslaan* series in the early 1940s the market for Afrikaans books was still very small. It can be argued that Blakemore did not only fill a gap in the market, but, instead, contributed to creating a market for popular fiction in Afrikaans. In this respect, her books have contributed to the expansion of the Afrikaans book market.

Second, the popularity of the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series enticed children to read Afrikaans books. On the event of Langenhoven's death on 15 July 1932, *Die Burger* wrote in its editorial that it was Langenhoven who had taught the Afrikaner people to read through his column in *Die Burger*, 'Aan Stille Waters', his books and his literature for children (Steyn 1992:39). After his death, though, it was Stella Blakemore – together with perhaps Mikro, though his children's books targeted much younger readers – who was to become the first author of Afrikaans children's literature that understood the charm of the formulaic series books and the popularity of series novels in English and who was able to produce an Afrikaans equivalent. After Langenhoven's death and the popularity of his *Brolloks en Bittergal* and *Die Krismiskinders*, and later E.B. Grosskopf's successful children's book *Patrys-hulle*, it was Blakemore who introduced the idea of the series book to a wide range of young Afrikaans readers, and, in doing so, expanded the market for Afrikaans books and created a captive audience lured by the attractiveness of the series book. For this reason, Blakemore's biggest contribution is often said to be the fact that she got Afrikaans children reading.

Third, through her books, Blakemore created a community of Afrikaans readers. The *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series functioned to create new kinds of communities. People who had never met each other before shared the experience of having read the *Keurboslaan* series and that became a way in which connections were made. While readers of *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* may not have known each

other, they were connected through the fact that they all felt that they knew Roelof Serfontein intimately. These connections should not only be seen as transgressing space and geography, but became inter-generational connections as successive generations of Afrikaans readers came to know the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* characters. As these books were not translated from or into English, they became part of a uniquely Afrikaans imaginary world. This is a practical example of how what Isabel Hofmeyr (1987) refers to as 'a sediment of Afrikanerness' began to settle in amongst Afrikaans speakers.

Fourth, while Blakemore was not an influential public figure in South Africa and among Afrikaners it was precisely because details about the author were not widely known in South Africa that she was able to make such a considerable impact through her fiction. For example, it was indicated that reviewers of the *Keurboslaan* books were of the opinion that the author, Theunis Krogh, was trying through his books to establish an indigenous educational system. Reviewers therefore actively and strongly encouraged parents and teachers to read the books themselves as an educational experience. From the correspondence between J.L. van Schaik and Blakemore, it is clear that, for a long time it was not known that she was the real author of the *Keurboslaan* books. The fictitious author therefore was received as a flesh and blood male Afrikaner who used the medium of children's literature to promote and develop his views on what an authentic Afrikaner educational system and establishment should look like. As a result, the obvious links between this genre of fiction in Afrikaans and the school story tradition in Britain was either overlooked or not regarded as important. As a result, the *Keurboslaan* series was imbued with a status well beyond that of popular children's fiction.

Fifth, the desire of both the author and the publisher to increase sales on the her books to the Afrikaans reading public saw both parties placing a strong focus on making the books appear as 'authentic' Afrikaans texts. Blakemore, for example, attempted to create an identity of a man and an Afrikaner in her many letters to fans. One of these letters was used on the cover jacket of the *Keurboslaan* series. It was therefore read by the many *Keurboslaan* readers. In this letter, she explained that the *Keurboslaan* characters were based on people she knew. For a range of reasons, the firm J.L. van Schaik too was trying to pass Blakemore off as Theunis Krogh. They therefore tried to keep Blakemore away from the South African public and were in fact quite upset when it was leaked that Blakemore had been the author of both the *Maasdorp* and the *Keurboslaan* series. These combined efforts

succeeded in obscuring the relationship between fiction and reality. This contributed to a dominant view that the series was written by an Afrikaner about Afrikaners and that even though the stories were fictitious they had a factual base in reality and that characters such as Eugene Krynauw and Roelof Serfontein were modelled on prominent 'real life' Afrikaners.

Sixth, returning to Taylor's notion of the social imaginary as the background against which social practices are performed and at the same time constitutive of the performance of such practices, it can be argued that Blakemore's books, in particular the *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* series, in some ways produced the Afrikaner social imaginary at the eve of Apartheid and the seizure of state power by Afrikaners. The *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series reflect and represent a kind of moral order. Phrased differently, it can be argued that these series produce answers to questions about the way in which one ought to live one's life and the relationship between members of the South African political society. Given that the social imaginary is not a set of doctrines, rules of values, but rather is captured or represented by images, myths and stories of which these texts, which were widely read in the white Afrikaans-speaking community, form part. Given that this study did not focus on the content of these two series, further research on this topic needs to be undertaken.

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

In terms of analysing power, Gramsci demonstrates the importance of taking into account notions of culture. This study embarked with a question about the way in which the ruling class exercises hegemony. Through his notion of the organic intellectual, Gramsci explains the way in which such intellectuals can persuade the population to share their beliefs. As part of his revolutionary politics, Gramsci therefore argues that organic intellectuals can assist to develop an alternative hegemony. This is achieved through the creation of a common culture. Faced with the erosion of their power base after the Anglo-Boer War, members of the Afrikaans-speaking intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie was faced with the double challenge of producing a counter-culture against the existing hegemony of British imperialism and acting against other organic intellectuals who attempted to foster a new hegemony on the basis of class.

The claim that Blakemore furthered the cause of Afrikaner nationalism through her writings therefore begs the question as to whether she can be regarded as an organic intellectual in Gramscian terms. In order to answer this question, we need to return to Gramsci and the evidence presented in this study.

In Chapter One, Gramsci's notion of hegemony was outlined. Focusing on cultural aspects of hegemony, Gramsci argues that political power cannot only be seized but that an alternative hegemony needs to be created in order to secure a complete revolution. Such a revolution is explained as a revolution that 'brings to power a coherent class formation united behind a single economic, political and cultural conception of the world' (Adamson 1980:171). This description seems to apply well to the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism, which did succeed – albeit temporarily – not in creating a coherent class formation but in bridging class divides and in uniting white Afrikaans speakers behind a single economic, political and cultural conception of the world. The question then is in what way Gramsci thought that an existing hegemony can be replaced with an alternative one. Adamson argues that Gramsci saw political change as possible through a dialectic interaction between what he termed 'organic intellectuals' and ordinary people (Adamson 1980:169). Gramsci argues that organic intellectuals emerge from the subject classes themselves and that they are successful precisely because they have themselves lived and grown up in the same environment as ordinary people:

New ideas would not be introduced or 'propagandized' as extraneous inputs into mass politics but would be integrated into the very fabric of proletarian culture, life-styles, language, traditions, etc. by revolutionaries who themselves worked and lived within the same environment. Only this could ensure the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, the intellectual and the spontaneous, the political and the social, which could lay down the foundations of an authentic *Marxist* subjectivity in popular consciousness itself (Boggs 1976:77-78).

Gramsci explains the reason why organic intellectuals have a better chance in appealing to the masses than intellectuals as follows:

The popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion on the other... The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without

understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned: in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual if distinct and separate from the people-nation, i.e. without feeling the elementary passions of the people... One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation (Gramsci 1971:418).

Boggs explains that it is necessary for organic intellectuals to work from 'within' and embed their projects within the very fabric of culture, life-style and traditions. If this is the case, then the domain of popular fiction for children provides fertile ground indeed for the operations of organic intellectuals. Returning to Blakemore, it is clear that she cannot be described in any terms as a Marxist organic intellectual. However, Gramsci did not see this as a unique future of the Marxist project. Rather, he argues that any political movement that wishes to succeed needs to have its own organic intellectuals. The question therefore is to what extent Blakemore can be described as an organic intellectual promoting the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. To answer this question, we have to turn to Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*.

If we take the *habitus* as a person's cultural habitat, an internalised and non-self-conscious set of dispositions acquired from both acculturation and personal characteristics, then the evidence offered in study may be used in order to draw some tentative conclusions about Blakemore's position as organic intellectual.

There is no evidence to suggest that Blakemore consciously set out to create or foster through her writings an Afrikaner community in Afrikaner nationalist terms. On the contrary, Blakemore distanced herself from what she regarded to be politics. Yet, she explicitly commented on the fact that it pleased her deeply to write for 'her own people' in Afrikaans. She articulated a close link between her understanding of nation and country, and she did indeed promote a kind of South Africanism. However, finally, if one takes into account her motivation for writing and producing texts at such frantic speed, it would seem that her notion of community was closely linked to her language: her children, mother and the elderly Afrikaans-speaking relatives are the ones on whose behalfs she felt she had to built up her financial resources. And in some way she thought of all three these groups as 'Afrikaners'.

There are many contradictions in the way in which Blakemore describes her project of writing fiction in Afrikaans. It is, however, clear that she did not use the blueprint of Afrikaner nationalism to guide her writings. The political and cultural content of

her writings in Afrikaans are perhaps best explained with the help of Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus*, or the field of possibilities within which an author operates, whether on a conscious or subconscious level. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is not unproblematic in this context as he clearly distinguishes between works of literature and mass-market fiction. However, whilst it is clear that Blakemore made a conscious effort in her writings to keep in mind the preferences of her target market she also stated that the kind of writing she undertook was the best she could possibly produce and that she derived great joy from her writings. Moreover, whilst it is true that she did try to shape her writings for a specific audience, she did so based on her own interpretation of that community, filtered and understood through her *habitus*. Blakemore used a medium – that of popular fiction – that crossed class divides and spoke to ordinary people. While it is therefore difficult to describe her as an organic intellectual, since she did not seem to be self-consciously committed to fostering the Afrikaner nation, it can be argued that she fulfilled the role of the organic intellectual for the petty bourgeoisie, based on the reasons provided in the preceding section.

It is therefore argued that – in some respects – Blakemore was more successful in fashioning an Afrikaner community through her children's literature than members of the Afrikaner establishment were in their endeavours to foster Afrikaner nationalism. Indeed, Blakemore succeeded in areas where the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie had failed. From her letters it is evident that a great deal of creativity and spontaneity went into writing her books. Yet, that her books were not part of the 'authorised'; canon of Afrikaner nationalist texts, but were read by ordinary readers who had to purchase the texts or obtain them from local libraries.

In summary, the author's *habitus* is instrumental in the production of fictional texts. In turn, as Taylor illuminates, these texts have the ability to create shared social imaginaries, which is the way in which ordinary people interpret their social surroundings. As such, the notion of the social imaginary is immensely powerful. This begs questions about the ways in which ordinary readers of the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series 'read' these texts and the way in which these texts embroidered the social imaginary of white Afrikaans speakers. Further research is required about the contents of these series. In particular, interesting questions remain about the processes through which subjectivity is developed and the role of texts and reading in this process. The extent to which the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series contributed to the creation of a self-referential Afrikaner world

needs to be explored. In this regard, following from Taylor, four question needs to be posed about the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* texts: (1) What sense of moral order prevail?; (2) What historical sense is portrayed?; (3) How do these texts explain or represent the way in which members of society relate to each other?; and (4) How do these texts legitimise the project of Afrikaner nationalism?

In addition, Blakemore's reflections on her writing indicates that the relationship between popular fiction writing and the market economy is more complex and less singular than it is often rendered in scholarship on the subject. The research demonstrate that Blakemore took her craft as a writer serious, and whilst she was acutely aware of market desires and the fact that her writing was not regarded as 'literary', she brought to her craft a certain amount of dignity and integrity. In some ways, this finding challenges the binary opposition between popular fiction and high literature and invites further research.

Finally, it was argued that 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.

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