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Between Transnational Socialism and White Privilege: Afrikaner Woman Worker's 'Library' in the 1930s and 1940s

Abstract

Afrikaans, a young language, was only officially recognised in 1925. Even though its speakers were a racially very diversified group, the language was appropriated by a white community of Afrikaners, who aspired to create a new white nation with Afrikaans as one of their national attributes. In this article, I set out to introduce the Garment Workers Union (GWU) prose as a neglected part of Afrikaans-language literature. I offer an overview of texts written or translated by the GWU members and published in the official trade union organ *Die Klerewerker/The Garment Worker*. The presented workers' reading list is divided into original Afrikaans writings and translations from English into Afrikaans. All these texts served to offer the newly created white working class a new identification, manoeuvring between belonging to the national imagined community of Afrikaners based on the concept of nation and whiteness, and to a transnational workers' community based on the category of class. A great deal of this literature comprised socialist propaganda texts, while the mainstream and high-brow literature in Afrikaans served nation-building efforts. I argue, consequently, that this found its reflection in the directions of literary and cultural transfer. Looking at the impact of the Dutch and English language traditions in South Africa, I propose that the way in which European conventions made their way to South African, in particular to Afrikaans literature, was class-based. The literature recognised as artistic and creative, which was incorporated in a new literary canon for a new nation, drew heavily on European, especially Dutch tradition. The English language turned out to be the medium that also circulated a less elitist thought. Therefore, it was English that enabled the movement of texts from Europe and the United States to South Africa that shaped the South African white working-class, including its Afrikaner part.

Keywords

Afrikaans literature, Afrikaans working-class literature, Garment Workers' Union, trade union press, white privilege, socialist literature, translation

Introduction

Introducing the idea of an imagined community, Benedict Anderson¹ underscored the impact of print culture on the forming of collective identity. He proposed that the circulation of printed text allowed individuals to be connected in a political community – a nation, even though its members will never know or meet most of their fellow-members.² The nation is, therefore, a mental image shared by a reading audience. He pointed to the role of the newspaper and the novel as a powerful means of representing and addressing imagined communities.³ Yet, the concept of imagined community can be applied on a transnational level as well when the community-shaping impact of translated literature is taken into consideration.⁴ Translation is one of the most conspicuous ways in which texts circulate transcending the language and nation community and creating new, alternative ways of identification – such as a transnational working-class community.

This article focuses on texts in Afrikaans which were written, translated, circulated, and read by white – in particular Afrikaner – women workers in the 1930s and 1940s on the eve of apartheid. Recruited from the so-called poor whites, mostly with a background in a traditional rural farming community, these women joined the Garment Workers Union (GWU) upon their arrival in Johannesburg. In this contribution, I undertake to reconstruct the garment workers' 'library'. Looking into how it reflected their collective identity, I point to the tensions between the identifications with the Afrikaner national imagined community, whose position rested on white privilege, and the transnational working-class community. How does this literature connect to the mainstream Afrikaans literary conventions? How does it introduce elements from the transnational socialist literary repertoire to draw attention to international social issues?

GWU literature tends to be excluded from Afrikaans literary histories. At best, it gets a cursory mention as part of 'buite-kanonieke Afrikaanse kulturele praktyke' [non-canonical Afrikaans cultural practices],⁵ or scholars focus on the mechanisms of its exclusion.⁶ Research in white working-class literature in South Africa still has no established scholarly tradition.⁷

This study is based on archival research at the Historical Papers at the Wits University in Johannesburg, which holds a vast collection of the Garment Workers' Union papers, including correspondence, miscellaneous notes by organisers, and issues of the union's official mouthpiece the *Garment Worker/Klerewerker*.

South African white working class

The South African white working class came into being in the 1920s and was a result of mass migrations to cities caused by the dramatic impoverishment of the countryside. While the

predominantly rural society felt the devastating consequences of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), cities, such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Port Elizabeth, grew rapidly thanks to industry funded on British capital. Industrialisation gave a promise of job opportunities. The Boer or Afrikaner country folk, however, had a hard time on their arrival to the cities: unskilled and unprepared uprooted population created a large group of urban poor whites – either unemployed or earning very low wages.⁸

For the first time in history, against the colonial setting of South Africa, whites came to share the same economic position as blacks. The racial labour division had its roots in the slave era when all manual labour, skilled or unskilled, was performed by people of colour. The very concept of a white working class could not have existed before, since white man's work was essentially supervisory or in today's terms middle class or white collar. Moreover, the position of industrial worker rendered a white person economically dependent and thus unfree. Admittedly, white farmers had to work manually, but they were independent and were not employees, therefore the relations of power on a traditional farm were closer to feudalism⁹ and as such completely differed from those in the industrial urban environment.

It comes as no surprise that this economic and social situation caused unease both on the part of the poor whites themselves as on the part of white Afrikaner nationalist politicians for whom keeping the divides between races was the cornerstone of national politics. It was men whose position was particularly unfavourable since they had to compete with much cheaper black workers for jobs in mines and heavy industry.¹⁰ Women, in turn, often fared better because they could find employment in rapidly developing textile and food industries. The wages that they earned, however, were far from satisfactory and lack of work regulations meant no social security or paid sick leaves.¹¹ Moreover, many young women who arrived from the countryside also had to struggle with criticism and contempt from Afrikaner nationalist politicians and church leaders who accused them of immoral conduct and indecent mingling with the workers of colour.¹²

Against this background, the first white trade unions were established. In 1930, on the initiative of Solly Sachs, an experienced socialist organiser of Lithuanian-Jewish descent, the Garment Workers Union came into being. This trade union whose members were mostly Afrikaans speaking white women¹³ offered a new home to the uprooted white women in the hostile urban environment of the Johannesburg suburbs. The trade union went on to set up branches in other industrial centres, such as Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. During World War II, many women of colour entered the clothing industry, but despite the non-racial

internationalist character that the union declared, women of colour were only admitted to a separate branch which was created in 1940.¹⁴

The activities of the union were not limited to representing the workers in confrontation with employers, struggle for higher wages, and protection against unlawful dismissal by petitioning and holding strikes. The union also strove to create a distinct white working-class culture and as a result shaped a new urban female identity. It was the union's objective to cater for the intellectual advancement of its members and to provide them with opportunities to socialise, in this way helping them adapt to a new environment. The garment workers published their own bilingual magazine *The Garment Worker/Die Klerewerker*, organised picnics and dances, held lectures on the history of socialism, and set up a library, a book discussion club, and a drama club.¹⁵ Importantly, as Foley¹⁶ in his discussion of the working-class culture observes, all these activities had a 'humanising' and dignifying value, and functioned as a counterculture, inventing 'its own means of expression in opposition to the petit-bourgeois art.'¹⁷

White privilege and South African workers

The identity-shaping role of the Garment Workers Union activities needs to be considered against the tensions at the intersection of race and class. Race in this case implies whiteness, which stands for 'the shared social space in which the psychological, cultural and political and economic dimensions of [...] privileged positionality are normalized.'¹⁸ Whiteness, as 'a passport to privilege',¹⁹ is institutional rather than personal and grants access to greater power and resources. It constituted, therefore, a crucial point of reference for the Afrikaner industrial workers, constructing their identity and the feeling of dignity in the for them humiliating economic circumstances, since South African whites 'never experienced their whiteness as invisible.'²⁰ By virtue of their skin colour, white workers subscribed to the white privilege and wished to embrace this political and economic advantage above workers of colour.

South African social historian Jonathan Hyslop refers to White Labourism as a 'weird combination of racism and egalitarianism.'²¹ Discussing specifically the South African workers' situation, he observes that the white working-class identity cannot be separated from British imperial patterns. It was not the Afrikaner racial ideology, therefore, that lay at the base of South African white workers industrial segregation, but the British tradition of unionism that directly transferred certain patterns.²² The working class's conception of whiteness was 'centred not around the notions of imperial heroism, but around whiteness as a definition of "ordinariness" and "decency"',²³ the notion that there is a set of qualities shared by only white

people. Hyslop points to the contradiction that marked the imperial working class: it was ‘unable to separate its hostility to its own exploitation from its aspiration to incorporation in the dominant racial structure.’²⁴

The Afrikaners, as a separate strand of South African whites, underscored their links with the Dutch cultural legacy. Some literary historians²⁵ tend to accentuate the importance of the Dutch literary tradition for the nascent Afrikaans national literature. It comes as no surprise that the leading poets of the 1920s and 1930s received their education in Dutch and were all well versed in Dutch poetry. In the 1920s, Toon van den Heever, A.G. Visser, Totius, and Jan Celliers evidently followed Dutch models to such an extent that the renewed editions of their poetry had to be modernised so the Afrikaans idiom they used did not contain that many Dutch loan words or foreign structures.²⁶ Also the celebrated poets creating in the 1930s, N. P. van Wyk Louw, W. E. G. Louw and Elizabeth Eybers, drew inspiration from the Dutch Tachtigers (i.e., poets of the 1880s) and the 1910s generation.²⁷

Moreover, Dutch publishers like JH de Bussy and Van Schaik in Pretoria or HAUM (formerly J Dusseau & Co) in Cape Town were printing and circulating Afrikaans literature, thereby directly supporting the Afrikaners national imagined community.²⁸ In particular, the role of the publishing house Van Schaik needs to be underscored. Its founder, a Dutch migrant JL van Schaik, built wide professional networks, including leading figures of the Afrikaner culture and politics (among them such authors as C. Louis Leipoldt, Gustav Preller or Eugene Marais) and tapped into growing Afrikaner nationalist sentiments, though his motivation was mostly economic.²⁹

It needs to be noted that for the Afrikaans-speaking elite, bourgeois authors, and intellectuals, the Netherlands was not the only link to European cultural heritage. They drew inspiration also from the English-language classics: Totius read Byron and Shakespeare,³⁰ Marais was inspired by Byron,³¹ while others, like A.G. Visser and C. Louis Leipoldt, studied in London.³²

When it comes to the working-class Afrikaners – in particular to the Garment Workers’ Union literary and cultural activities – archival research indicates no links between them and literature created by Dutch working-class authors. There is no correspondence between activists, and an analysis of literary texts shows no inspirations or influence on the artistic and ideological level. Authors writing in Afrikaans, catering for the needs of an Afrikaans-speaking worker, must have drawn inspirations from elsewhere – this will be discussed in the following section.

GWU library

Reconstructing a library of the Afrikaner worker in the 1930s and 1940s is a difficult task. The Historical Papers division at the Wits University in Johannesburg, which holds vast records of the Garment Workers' Union, unfortunately does not hold any inventory of books recommended or read by the union members. Even though archival issues of the *Garment Workers/Klerewerker* magazine mention an actual library with books for loan, these mentions are fairly general and do not refer to any specific titles. An Afrikaans issue from March 1940 contains a note that the library hosts a large number of English and Afrikaans books. In the January/February 1946 issue, a little note simply invites workers to borrow books, while the July/August 1946 issue gives library opening hours and reminds readers to renew books that are about to expire. Therefore, an attempt to reconstruct an Afrikaner working-class library may seem a dead-end street. Yet not entirely: the GWU magazine regularly printed literary texts, which can give us a glimpse of what the workers read.

The union's bilingual periodical *Klerewerker/Garment Worker (KW/GW)* appeared for the first time in October 1936, and from April 1940 until March/April 1953 it came out on a bimonthly basis.³³ The magazine was mostly financed by advertisers and was distributed among workers in factories of Johannesburg, Germiston, Benoni, and Pretoria; it also had some individual subscribers, mostly from Johannesburg and its suburbs.³⁴ The periodical consisted of 12-14 pages in English and in Afrikaans running back to back. It covered various practical issues: reports from meetings, communications on wages, but also published articles on the history of socialism and cultural subjects. Both language sections advertised cultural activities for the union's members: the workers were invited to join the amateur theatre group *Eendrag/Unity*, to send stories or poems to be published in the paper, or were informed about theatre performances by factory workers. The last pages in the Afrikaans section offered a space for literary texts. The following selection is based on this section of the periodical.

The majority of texts published there were original Afrikaans short stories, poems, songs and occasionally drama scripts written by working-class women, members of the GWU. Interestingly, this section also contained a number of pieces translated from foreign literatures. Despite the magazine's Anglo-Afrikaans bilingualism, in all cases these were translations from English into Afrikaans. This whole collection of texts reflects the readers' identification with two imagined communities: while the original Afrikaans texts connect to the body of Afrikaans national literature, translations enabled an Afrikaans speaking worker to be included in an

international imagined community of socialist readers. I will first look at the themes to be found in original texts written in Afrikaans by the GWU members.

Original Afrikaans texts by GWU authors

The originally Afrikaans texts written by non-professional author-activists and garment workers often had an autobiographical character: they described the shared experience of young country women arriving in the city to work in industry. Typical is the opposition between the rural-positive and urban-negative space, which was also a motif characterising the canonical Afrikaans literature of the 1930s. The so-called *plaasroman* (farm novel) genre thematised the inevitable end of the old times in which the mythical farm determined one's place in social hierarchy and the meaning of its inhabitants' actions and destiny.³⁵ This trope can be found in short stories, such as "Rype Ondervinding" [Mature Experience] (*KW*, Feb 1940, 14), which features a typical country girl-turned-worker, Anna Cloete, who is overwhelmed by the factory's monotonous work, and who daydreams about her past idyllic life on a farm, her parents whom she misses, and her lost love. In the short story "Die Baksteen" [The Brick] (*KW*, June/July 1940, 3-4) by Ida Muller the newcomer to the city is confronted with the indifference of urban surroundings: the starved man is roaming the streets in futile search of employment which could pay for some food. The short story "Pure Goud" [Pure Gold] by C. W. B. Venter (*KW*, Nov/Dec 1944, 14) is, in turn, a blatantly propagandistic piece in a socialist realistic convention, encouraging workers to join the union. It involves the protagonist Nellie, who, forced to leave the family farm, moves to the city in search of employment. Initially sceptical about trade unions, she becomes a converted socialist when the union saves her from hardship by helping her find employment. A more nuanced depiction of the transition from the countryside to the city and the related problems is offered by *Wie se Skuld* [Whose Fault] written by Elizabeth Möller. This lengthy serial which ran from the Jul/Aug 1946 issue until 1948 portrayed a young country family: Floors, his wife Annie, and son Jannie, who are forced to move to the city. Annie turns out to feel particularly unhappy there while Floors adjusts more easily to the new circumstances, which leads to a crisis in their marriage.

The autobiographical strand of GWU literature was created also by rank-and-file members of the union. Workers were frequently encouraged to contribute to the *Klerewerker* and send their own texts for a writing competition. For example, the August 1938 issue on page 3 published a call for autobiographical stories under the title: "My eerste week in 'n klerefabriek" [My first week in a clothing factory] and printed a story by Mev J. Bronkhorst,

the winner of the previous edition's competition for the best story "My ondervinding as 'n werkloze" [My experience as a jobless].

Some texts, showing how the political and social situation influences lives of individuals, place a sentimental love story at the centre of the narration, which makes the text more attractive to the reader. For example, "Waar die Winter-Windjie Fluister" [Where the Little Winter Wind Whispers] by Winnie Meyer, introduced as "'n Rustenburgse Tabakwerkstertjie" [a tobacco woman worker from Rustenburg], was published in the Dec 1939-Jan 1940 issue (11-12) and tells the story of Marie and Pieter's parting and Marie's death when Pieter was summoned to join the army and fight against Germans at WWII. Similarly, "Onder Treurwilger-takkies" [Under Weeping Willow Branches] by Corrie Gatzke (*KW*, Jan/Feb 1941, 5-7) recounts a romantic relationship between a young country girl Elsie and a city boy Danie from Johannesburg, which is set against the tensions between the city and country modes of life. The plot of "'n Tragedie" [A Tragedy] by Baby Bardone (*KW*, Oct 1938, 2-3) takes place at the time of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and depicts the Afrikaners who were forced to kill their compatriots during this conflict.

"Die Moordenaar!" [The Murderer!], a short story by Ms J. Botha from the March/April 1942 issue (3) exposes Afrikaners' stereotypical perceptions of people of colour. Portraying two groups of young men (referred to as 'kaffergroepen') led by Lucas and Salmon, the author uses such words as 'barbaars' [barbaric] or 'heiden' [pagan], while impressionistic descriptions of nature are supposed to offer a glimpse of an 'exotic' life in South Africa. In this way, the text accentuates the Afrikaners' identification as the whites, and as such separate from the non-white uncivilized other.

The periodical also published short drama texts, reminiscent of agitprops.³⁶ These overtly didactic pieces had the form of a dialogue between two workers: a knowledgeable trade unionist and a sceptical newcomer. In "'n Staaltjie uit die Lewe van Twee Klerewerkers" [An Episode from the Life of Two Garment Workers] by Mary Myburgh and Maud Goldwyer (*KW* Aug 1939, 8-9), Mary encourages Maud to join the trade union; in "Die Plig van Fabriekvertegenwoordiger" [The Duty of Factory Representative] (*KW* May/June 1947, 3-4) Bettie Botha explains to her colleague Sannie Smith the role of the trade union and how workers' representatives negotiate better working conditions with the factory board. Another short script, "Kersfees vir die Armes" [Christmas for the Poor], (*KW* Nov/Dec 1941, 5-6) tells how poverty deprives workers' children of Christmas joy and presents.

The only longer script to be published in the periodical was *Die Offerande* [The Sacrifice] by Hester Cornelius (Jul/Aug 1942, 3-5 and Nov/Dec 1942, 3-6). In this play, the

author transplanted the socialist realist³⁷ convention, a component belonging to the international repertoire of socialist propaganda genres, onto the South African setting packed with Afrikaner topoi that are easily recognizable to the workers public. The play underscores the workers' identification with the Afrikaner community and their subscribing to white privilege. It features stereotyped characters, such as the rural patriarch Oom Kalie and two incarnations of the Volksmoeder – mother of the nation – ideal: his wife Tant Annie, recalling the Anglo-Boer War, and their daughter Lettie, willing to sacrifice her personal good for the sake of the family. Furthermore, it contains references to key events in the history of the Afrikaners, such as the Great Trek and the Anglo-Boer War. Most importantly, the plot focuses on the inevitable end of the traditional pastoral life with the advent of modern times, which was the central motif of the canonical Afrikaans farm novel.

Translations

The choice of the texts that were translated reflects the union's reaction to social problems and to the international situation: they either point to the threat of Hitler's Germany and condemn fascism or focus on poverty and people's suffering and communicate the transnational socialist message. The translations were necessitated by the fact that many Afrikaner garment workers were poorly educated and did not know English,³⁸ but also the English language was ambiguously received. On the one hand, it was the medium of transfer of progressive, socialist ideas, but on the other hand, it was the language of the foreign capitalist, of the British factory owners exploiting the worker.³⁹ In most cases no name of the translator is given.

Anti-fascist message

From October 1938 until the end of 1940, the periodical printed the serialised novel *Moord Gepleeg in Duitsland* [Murder Committed in Germany], which was an Afrikaans version of a German text *Vaterland. Ein Tatsachen Roman aus dem Heutigen Deutschland* written by Heinz Liepmann and published in 1934. The Afrikaans translation was, however, based on the English translation by Emile Burns entitled *Murder – Made in Germany: A True Story of Present-Day Germany*. Heinz Liepmann was a German Jew, who gave an autobiographical account of his stay in a concentration camp. Depicting the atrocity of the persecution of the Jews, the text underscores the danger of Nazism. The choice of this text not only reflects the anti-fascist sentiments but is also a criticism of the antisemitism in South Africa. The Jewish roots of the GWU's secretary Solly Sachs, together with his advocating for multiracial trade unionism,

made him undesirable in the eyes of the nationalist politicians who portrayed him as a foreigner spreading an alien ideology of socialism, which threatened the Christian spirit of the Afrikaner people.⁴⁰

In the July 1939 issue appeared a text entitled “Briewe uit Holland, ’n Sketsie uit die boek ‘Die Moorsoldate’” [Letters from Holland, a Sketch from a Book “Peat Bog Soldiers”] (12, 14). The text is introduced as a translation of an English book by Wolfgang Langhoff *The Peat Bog Soldiers* (1935) and is a factual report of 13 months in a concentration camp by Langhoff. The first-person evocative narration emphasises the cruelty and suffering; it contains graphic descriptions of a man being beaten up by the Nazis, blood streaming from his body and his teeth being knocked out. After an excerpt from the book follows an appeal to workers to unite and protest against fascism so that people will not be tortured and murdered in concentration camps. The socialist slogan ‘Eendrag maak mag’ [Unity makes strength] refers here to the power of masses of workers to fend off fascism.

Another example of an anti-fascist text is *Kinders van Hitler* [Children of Hitler] written by Gregor Ziemer, which appeared in the May/June 1944 issue (6). Introduced as ‘Die boek wat die wêreld geskok het [The book that shocked the world], it shows how the Nazis indoctrinate their children and how they perceive the role of the teacher. The reader follows the plot from the perspective of a child, which gives a good insight into how the mentality of a Nazi is shaped. Ziemer was an American author and teacher who worked in Germany teaching children of American officials and businessmen in Berlin. This book was based on his first-hand experience: he witnessed ‘youth’s rites of initiation, their book-burnings, and their war games [and] assembled textbooks, songbooks, military manuals, fairy stories and other instruments of indoctrination, from which he amply quotes’.⁴¹ In 1943, the Disney Studio released the book’s adaptation, a short educational film under the same title, which is the film to which *Klerewerker* refers: ‘Hierdie verhaal is ’n rolprentvertoning gebaseer op die boek *Education for Death* (New York, Oxford UP 1941)’ [this story is a movie based on the book *Education for Death*].

Social issues

The second group of translated texts are those discussing social injustice. The longest serial that appeared in *Klerewerker* (from the May/June 1941 issue until May/June 1946) was *Hulle Noemy Timmerman* [They Call me Carpenter] by the American writer Upton Sinclair. This is one of the few instances where the translator’s name is mentioned. The text was translated by Hester

Cornelius – textile worker, activist, and one of the most prolific authors writing for the magazine and for the union’s drama group. *They Call me Carpenter*, published in 1922, had already gained the status of a socialist classic and had been published in many translations worldwide.⁴² The novel tells the story of Jesus set against the background of 1920s America. The reader follows the events from the perspective of the narrator Billy who meets Jesus when he, in a mysterious way, steps down from a stained-glass window in Sint Bartholomew Church to wander through a fictional Western City, a space reflecting any capitalist city. Jesus is confronted with the affluent people from the Hollywood-like movie business, heals the sick, preaches in front of a crowd of poor workers, advocates equal distribution of riches, and takes part in strikes. Finally, he gets betrayed and arrested for disturbing the public order.

The story must have been attractive to Afrikaner trade unionists due to the parallels between the American Western City and South African modernised Johannesburg with the gap between the wealth of factory owners and the poverty of factory workers. Moreover, it represents the struggle between socialism and capitalism in Biblical terms, as the eternal struggle between good and evil, which only makes the text more familiar to the conservative worker reading public.

Apart from this serialised classic novel, the magazine printed a couple of realistic short stories thematising the life of the poor and criticising social injustice. For example, the short story by the American writer and child and women’s issues activist⁴³ Caroline Slade „Gee ons vandag” [Give us today] (*KW*, Jan/Feb 1946, 7-15), points to the moral dilemmas of a poor mother who cannot provide proper food for her children. When her thirteen-year-old daughter Ruth steals a bottle of milk for her younger siblings, the mother accepts the milk, despite her wanting to be a good Christian for whom theft is a sin. Yet the story ends on an optimistic note and presents a solution to the problem of inequality: the poor family is offered help by the rich family from whom Ruth stole the milk.

Another example of a short story with a clear didactic message is “Die Laaste Geldstuk” [The Last Coin] (*KW*, April/March 1946, 6-7), by the British novelist Garald Kersh. The text, originally published as “The Last Coin of Mr Baer” (1940/41?), has an interesting structure of a story within a story. It begins with the introduction of a narrator who then gives an account of one Baer: ‘Ek ken Baer baie goed. Hy het die hart van ‘n engel – skoon en suiwer soos ‘n diep waterput, tenspyte van als ie swaar, treurige jare van sy lewe’ [I know Bear. He has the heart of a saint – fresh and pure as a deep well, in spite of all the hard, sad years of his life (original English version)]. Then Baer himself takes over and tells how hard his life has always been. He recollects the harsh childhood in Russia when he lost his family during the pogrom,

then travelled to Germany and as a young man started his own family but lost all again. Finally, he moves to France where he meets a poor and hungry man whom he recognizes as his oppressor from the pogrom. Overwhelmed by compassion, he gives him his last money so he could buy food. The story is overtly moralistic: it focuses on the persecution of Jews and calls for forgiveness and magnanimity. Most of all, however, it communicates a universal pacifist message that it is the violence of the two world wars that has caused the poverty and misery of people throughout the world.

Conclusion

The GWU's 'library' ultimately had a propagandistic character. Its aim was to shape a collective identity of a worker without cutting them off their Afrikaner heritage. Thus, the worker reading list based on the texts published in *Klerewerker* indicates two sources of identification. The first one reflects the wish to be included as an Afrikaner citizen, part of a privileged white nation, unique and separate from other ethnicities. The second manifested itself in the borrowed socialist propaganda conventions and translations of foreign socially engaged literature. The need to look for an alternative source of identification resulted from the resentment, bordering on rejection, on the part of leading Afrikaner politicians and bourgeois elites towards the newly emerging white working-class, in particular towards the Afrikaner woman worker. Therefore, the garment workers attempted to find dignity and political power in internationalist socialism, which at least theoretically, contrary to Afrikaner nationalism, assumed non-racial and more inclusive class identification.

Original Afrikaans texts published in the union's magazine were most of all didactic. Often simplistic, drawing from the socialist realist convention, they instructed in class struggle and trade unionism. Documenting shared experience of farmers-turned-industrial workers in the city, this literature offered not only identification but also consolation and practical guidelines. Characteristic was the nostalgia for the idyllic farm life, which contrasted with the challenges of a hostile urban environment. This opposition between the foreign city and the familiar, idealised countryside, was a motif that workers' literature shared with the canonical Afrikaans farm novel of the 1930s. GWU literature shows more features which testify to the workers' identification with the Afrikaner national imagined community: some short stories refer to important historical events such as the Anglo-Boer War or reflect the Afrikaner stereotyped perceptions of the black people.

The texts which were translated from English to Afrikaans, in turn, point to the union's concern with international political and social situation: social injustice, exploitation of the working-class, and suffering brought about by militarism. These texts communicate the socialist message by reference to the familiar Biblical figure of Jesus (*They Call me Carpenter*) or by means of realistic short stories exposing injustice, condemning the persecution of the Jews, and calling for a fair society in which people forgive old wrongs and goods are equally distributed.

The South African white working-class – including Afrikaans-speakers – constructed its identity by means of texts that were passed along in the medium of the English language. No links between Afrikaner workers and the Dutch working-class tradition can be traced, which testifies to the proposition that only middle-class Afrikaners and the elite treasured Dutch culture and identified with it. Thus, in the literature created by Afrikaner working-class authors, references to certain Afrikaner cultural themes can be found, but none to Dutch legacy.

Afrikaans literature has a marginal position within Dutch studies. The research into and teaching of this literature as conducted at European universities tend to prioritise white speakers representing the Afrikaner elite whose works are included in literary canon. This article, therefore, is an attempt to shed some light on a neglected field of non-canonical Afrikaans texts in which the tensions at the intersection of class and whiteness play out.

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Notes

1 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

2 *Ibid.*, 6.

3 *Ibid.*, 25.

4 Venuti, “Translation, Community, Utopia,” 482.

5 See chapter by Willemse, “‘n Inleiding tot buite-kanonieke Afrikaanse kulturele praktyke.”

6 See Stander and Willemse, “Winding through Nationalism;” Lourens, “Afwesig uit die Kanon;” Van Niekerk, “Die Afrikaanse Vroueskrywer.” For an overview of Afrikaans workers' drama see Coetser, “KWU-werkersklasdramas” and Brink “Purposeful Plays, Prose and Poems;” for more detailed analyses of selected plays positioning them as part of transnational working-class literature see Drwal, “The Garment Workers' Union's Pageant of Unity”; Drwal, “Afrikaans Working-Class Drama in the Early 1940s.”

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- 7 Drwal, "The Hybridity of South African Working-Class Literature", 197-8; the concept of Afrikaans working-class literature tends to be subsumed under other categories, such as urban literature (see Van Coller 2008).
- 8 Vincent, "Bread and Honour," 61-62.
- 9 Frederickson, *White Supremacy*, 205-6.
- 10 Ibid., 232.
- 11 Vincent, "Bread and Honour," 63.
- 12 Ibid., 66-7.
- 13 Ibid., 63.
- 14 Berger, "Solidarity Fragmented," 136.
- 15 Ibid., 36-7.
- 16 Foley, "Does the Working-Class," 138.
- 17 Ibid., 140.
- 18 Steyn, "White Talk," 121.
- 19 Dyer, *White*, 44.
- 20 Steyn, 122.
- 21 Hyslop, "The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself White," 406.
- 22 Ibid., 415.
- 23 Bonnet, "How the British Working Class," 401.
- 24 Hyslop, "The Imperial Working Class," 418.
- 25 See Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur*; Koch, *Historia literatury*.
- 26 Lindeberg, "Die poësie ná 1900," 33.
- 27 Jonkheere, "Periode van vernuwing en idealisme," 281, 315.
- 28 Le Roux, "The Early Years," 106.
- 29 Ibid., 93-95.
- 30 Koch, *Historia literatury*, 423.
- 31 Ibid., 620.
- 32 Ibid., 96.
- 33 In May 1952 the trade union decided to start a weekly newspaper called *Saamtrek*, which was also published in English and in Afrikaans, with more emphasis put on Afrikaans (Circular no. 31 by Dulcie M. Hartwell, Joint General Secretary, Garment Workers archival papers box 1092 Bcf 1.1.)
- 34 Garment Worker archival papers box 1092 Bcf 1.1.
- 35 Van Coller, "The peregrination of Afrikaans," 32.
- 36 Coetser, "KWU-werkerskladramas," 62.
- 37 Socialist realism prescribes that a work of art should be didactic, formulaic, easily comprehensible to a mass public, should communicate a clear political message and follow the *narodnost* principle, i.e., be linked to national culture and folk tradition. For a comprehensive discussion of this play, see Drwal "Afrikaans Working-Class Drama".
- 38 Fourie, "The South African Poor White," 13.
- 39 Brink, "Purposeful Plays," 108.
- 40 Dr. H.P. Wolmarans, a clergyman and professor of theology at the University of Pretoria, claimed that all workers were first of all members of the Afrikaner Protestant churches, which determined their national identity. In his brochure *Kommunisme en die Suid-Afrikaanse Vakunies* [Communism and South African Trade Unions] (1939) he portrayed Solly Sachs as a propagator of pro-Soviet attitudes among South African workers, attracting them to a foreign ideology and alienating Afrikaner women from their own people. This publication led to Sachs suing Wolmarans for slander, and Wolmarans having, by court's decision, to pay £300 damages (Visser, "The Production of Literature," 110-2).
- 41 Kallen, Review of *Education*, 563.
- 42 To mention only a couple of examples testifying to the international status of the novel, in the Polish *Gazeta Robotnicza* [Workers' Newspaper], the organ of the Polish Socialist Party of the Upper Silesia and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, a Polish translation of the novel (*Zwą mnie cieślą*) was serialised in 1926; a Swedish translation (*Man kellar mig Timmerman: en historia om Kristi återkomst*) appeared in the same year; a Czech translation (*Jsem tesář*) was published in Prague in 1923.
- 43 Rabinowitz, "Not Just the Facts, Ma'am," 108.

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