

Absent Presences

**Decolonizing Our Views of
the Zuid-Afrikahuis and its
Collections**

**edited by Barbara Henkes,
André Paijmans and
Margriet van der Waal**

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Edited by Barbara Henkes, André Paijmans
and Margriet van der Waal.

This publication was generously funded by
the Van Ewijck Foundation.

SZAHN Series No. 3. Series Editor: Angelie Sens.

Design by Alex Walker.

ISBN: 978-90-830385-2-0

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***Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut* (Amsterdam)**
between 1991–2018

Introduction

**Barbara Henkes, André Paijmans and
Margriet van der Waal**

Setting the Scene

In 2023 the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH) celebrated 100 years of residence in the imposing canal house on the Keizersgracht 141, in Amsterdam. To mark the occasion, the editors decided to focus this volume (#3) of the new Zuid-Afrikahuis series (successor to the SAI-series) on the collections and artefacts of the ZAH. What do certain books, documents, objects or images have to offer for the analysis of the historical, transnational South Africa-Netherlands entanglements? And how can we approach these remains of a colonial and settler-society era from a new angle to uncover information and experiences, which hitherto remained out of our sight?

We invited several authors to select an object — such as a text, photo, painting or other material artefact — from the ZAH's collections and asked them to consider, in a short essay, what happens to our understanding of the Zuid-Afrikahuis, its history and its collections, when we start looking at it with a critical, decolonizing lens. What 'absent presences' become visible when we look at these African-European interactions, in particular those between the Netherlands and South Africa? How are these intertwined relations — think for example of the construction of transnational whiteness — constituted in the existing collections and in the furnishing of the ZAH?

Before we get to answering that question, it is useful to reflect briefly on the events during the late nineteenth century that led to the acquisition of the stately Keizersgracht house and establishment of the organizations that preceded the ZAH. After the British unsuccessfully tried to annex the South African Republic (Transvaal) during the Transvaal Rebellion (1880-1881, also known as the First Anglo-Boer War), sympathy grew for the Boers who had successfully resisted the powerful British empire. In the Netherlands, identification with this group of white settlers was reinforced by references to the Dutch colonial heritage in South Africa as a result of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company, VOC) history.

In 1881, these pro-Boer sentiments led to the establishment of the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging* (Netherlands-South African Association, NZAV), with the aim of supporting the Boers against the British and the survival of the independent Boer republics Transvaal and Orange Free State. In order to be economically less dependent on the British, the president of the ZAR, Paul Kruger, desired a railway line connecting the Boer republics with the harbour in Delagoa Bay near Lourenço Marques (today's Maputo) as an alternative to the harbours in the British-ruled colony of Natal. Thanks to European investors and South(ern) African labourers, the *Nederlandsch-Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorwegmaatschappij* (Netherlands-South African Railway Company, NZASM), was able to construct this railway infrastructure. During the South African War (1899-1902) the British took over control of the railway lines. After the Boer republics' surrender and after a lengthy process of negotiation between the British government and the railway concession holders, the British government took over the shareholders' debt and paid out 1,4 million guilders compensation to the NZASM.

This amount was used as start-up capital for the *Zuid-Afrikaanse Stichting Moederland* (South African Motherland Foundation, ZASM) and enabled ZASM to offer financial support to the NZAV and organizations associated with it. In 1923, ZASM bought the premises on the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam, originally built during the seventeenth century by a successful beer brewer. Although initially called 'Het Huis De Dubbele Arend,' (The Double Eagle House) it soon became known as the 'Van Riebeeck' house after the Dutch VOC commander in charge of the Dutch occupation of the Cape in 1652. Since the end of the twentieth century, the building became gradually called the Zuid-Afrikahuis, with the reference to Van Riebeeck falling into disuse. During the twentieth and early twenty-first century, it accommodated a range of institutions and organizations, which were associated with the NZAV, including the *Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut* (South African Institute, SAI) and its library. In 2016, the NZAV, together with the other institutions and organizations housed in the building, merged with NZASM and became known as the current *Stichting Zuid-Afrikahuis Nederland* (Foundation South Africa House Netherlands, ZAH, in conventional usage simply ZAH).

The NZAV's history of strong support to Afrikaner nationalism may explain why, until the end of the twentieth century, the activities of the ZAH precursor institutions focused mainly on exchanges with 'white', predominantly Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. This positioning also determined, for most of the twentieth century, the selection and preservation of books, documents, and objects acquired by the organizations housed at Keizersgracht 141.

Knowledge Production

Our goal with this volume reflects recent developments to pay attention to the role archives and libraries play in constituting and strengthening a global 'Western' system

of knowledge and hierarchical ordering of the world.¹ Multiple historians of science have shown in recent years to what extent, from the late eighteenth century onwards, the practices of collecting, describing, comparing, naming, classifying and valuing gave birth to racial categories that laid the foundations for a racist world-view.² This reinforced and legitimized the unequal power dynamics between European metropolises and colonial/settler societies in this case, between the Netherlands and South Africa. Racial inequality also manifested within the colonial and settler societies, and its legacy remains visible and tangible to this day in both countries. This inevitably had repercussions on the collections of the ZAH, some of which pre-date its foundation. Tycho Maas makes this evident in his contribution to this volume, referring to the continued colonial influences in the classification system used in the ZAH library.

The way of collecting and classifying has been and still is crucial for what is missing or not immediately apparent in the ZAH. The institution is far from a 'neutral' entity (if such a thing exists), but rather a 'distorter': it creates memories within the confines of its own frameworks. This applies not only to the archive but equally to the library and the furnishing of the ZAH. At all these different levels visitors may feel addressed, and experience recognition, nostalgia, estrangement, and exclusion as Ronelda Kamfer and Nathan Trantraal show in their contributions.

The organizations and persons involved in the forerunners of the ZAH persistently and for a long time

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- 1 We may question the use of Western and the West as a rubric that conceals and prefigures other social divides, as is also the case with the 'global north' and 'global south'. See Olaf Kaltmeier and Thomas Eriksen, "Concepts of the Global South", *Voices from around the World*, 1 (Global South Studies Center, University of Cologne, 2015), https://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/6399/1/voices012015_concepts_of_the_global_south.pdf.
 - 2 See for example Siegfried Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

identified with the white settlers that called themselves *Boere* or Afrikaners and their programme of Afrikaner nationalism that culminated into the apartheid regime. This extended well into the twentieth century, despite all the dissenting voices that were increasingly strong and resonant in Dutch society in the second half of the twentieth century. This position was legitimized by emphasizing that the identifications would be of a *cultural* and *not political* nature, even though it was and is impossible to separate these realms.

However, the identification of these ZAH predecessors with — now fading — forms of white (settler) power and authority does not diminish the potential value of this postcolonial knowledge institution-cum-meeting place.³ Thanks to its documents, library, collected objects, and spaces where people can meet and exchange, it provides the opportunity for critical questions about what is there and what is not there; or in the words of Saul Dubow, for a 'complex process of reckoning'.⁴

Process of Reckoning

This process of reckoning applies not only to the ZAH, but very much to ourselves as initiators and editors of this project too. During a first meeting with initially invited authors, Christi van der Westhuizen pointed out the elephant in the room, namely the whiteness of all the participants at that initial exchange. We (the editors) realized that within the field of Dutch academia, scholars

3 Saul Dubow's proposal, during the anniversary conference of the ZAH in May 2023 to describe the ZAH as a 'postcolonial institution' makes sense because the ZAH was founded in 1923 — almost 130 years after the VOC lost its foothold at the Cape. However, the prefix 'post' should not be used to conceal the ongoing effects of colonialism and apartheid.

4 Saul Dubow used this phrase during his keynote speech at the anniversary conference of the ZAH in May 2023.

writing about Dutch-South African affairs are predominantly white and that European-Southern African entanglements are often unfairly considered to be a 'white' affair. For a broader, more inclusive critical approach to the ZAH, we had to cast our net wider and approach people from a broader range of fields, including journalism, and the arts.

This strategy enabled us to develop a more interdisciplinary and transnational approach. In their contributions, both Kamfer and Trantraal highlight how indispensable such a more complex approach is for a critical reflection on the transnational production of memories in public sites, such as in the ZAH. The memories of their visit to the house in 2012, cast in the form of a multi-disciplinary work of art consisting of a drawing and a poem, make evident how this environment was experienced by them as alienating. The art practitioner and scholar Nkule Mabaso on the other hand, takes a very different approach. The editors asked Mabaso to look into an artwork by Ruan Hoffmann, entitled '*Actie Boekenstorm 1984*' ('Action Book Charge 1984'). The title of the work seems to refer directly to the 1984 anti-apartheid protest against the institutions located at the Keizersgracht 141 (this protest is also referred to in the contributions by Van der Westhuizen and Maas). Hoffmann, a South African ceramic artist who grew up under apartheid and settled in the Netherlands, denies any connection between the work and this particular event. Mabaso not only calls Hoffmann to account for the fact that he — despite the artwork's title — refuses to connect himself to this political event against apartheid and in this context explicitly refused his permission to include photographs of himself and the artwork illustrating Mabaso's essay in the volume. In her text she also points out that the ZAH missed the opportunity to reflect on its own political position-taking in this matter.

The combination of authors and their various approaches from different disciplines not only led to surprising, new insights, but equally to sometimes painful confrontations and unforeseen misunderstandings. This was particularly true in the case of the editors' need to historicize older publications on the history of the ZAH, the building, and/or the labelling of specific artefacts. We strived to avoid the trap of 'presentism' (the introduction of present-day ideas and perspectives into depictions or interpretations of the past) in order to recognize how individual utterances formed part of the racialized discourse of a specific community and era. It is not our intention to dismiss the problematic discourse, nor to dilute the sharpness of the current analysis, but rather to acknowledge that changes and continuities of (racialized) discourse need to be identified.

Inevitably, we were faced with the stickiness of a worldview and practice that implies (Afrikaner) whiteness by default as norm in the ZAH. This applies equally to how gender and class are involved in that transnational and intersectional process of reckoning. Marian Counihan addresses this in her contribution on Elisabeth Eybers. Generally, Eybers is recognized as an innovative and esteemed poet who — seemingly neutral — kept away from political controversies. Counihan invites us to think about how differently Black female poets were situated both in terms of the freedom to fashion their lives, and in the topics they wrote about. Her contribution can be considered as a challenge to the ZAH to expand its collection with poetic voices from 'another' South Africa.

Stamverwantschap

Neutrality is a recurring notion in the history of the ZAH and its precursors, both in the stance of individuals and the institution(s). It was often emphasized that

these precursors (and its staff and 'friends' (members)) were 'neutral' towards the apartheid regime.⁵ Neutrality then refers to political aloofness, while others — those who spoke out against apartheid — would be politically entrenched and thus not 'neutral'. This position was substantiated by presenting politics and culture as two separate domains. When the NZAV presented itself as a cultural organization, aimed at maintaining and strengthening cultural and economic ties between the Netherlands and South Africa (read: white, Afrikaner nationalist South Africa), the concept of '*stamverwantschap*' was a central theme.

Stamverwantschap is often translated in English as ethnic kinship, thus losing its connotation with an organic tree trunk (*stam*) or a traditional tribe. When summarizing its conventional definition, one refers to a group of people sharing a common, or similar language; a common genealogy (family trees and surnames that trace back to a Dutch origin) and a common culture, focusing on a shared protestant Christian religion. The latter element apparently poses no obstacle to consider the predominantly Roman Catholic Flemish Belgians as *stamverwanten*, especially at times when language and language struggles are emphasised. Nor is the German, French or Scandinavian origin of many South African settlers an obstacle to consider them as *stamverwante* Afrikaners — and thus linking them to a kind of Europeanness with a shared racial element of whiteness.

However, in this conventional definition, dominant in the archives and library of the ZAH, one element is conspicuous in its absence. It ignores the Afrikaans speaking, descendants of mixed origin — including Dutch settlers, local peoples (Khoe, San and African),

5 See for example Sief Veltkamp-Visser, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam. De geschiedenis van de Leerstoel Afrikaanse taal en letterkunde aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam en het Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut (1932-2016)* (Amsterdam: Stichting Zuid-Afrikahuis Nederland, 2018), 258-259.

and enslaved people from other parts of Africa and Southeast Asia. Yet, the intimate entanglements, as well as the material and cultural exchange of Dutch and European settlers with African peoples and enslaved people, are obvious.

Famous and notorious was the meticulous research by the South African historian Hans Heese for his 1985 book *Groep sonder grense: Die rol en status van die gemengde bevolking aan die Kaap 1652-1795* in which he points at the indigenous origins of many prominent, Afrikaner nationalists. Alas, the implications of such research for the perception of Netherlands-South Africa entanglements escaped most Dutch historiography at the time. These contact zones were ignored, as were the less belligerent, day-to-day contacts between the Boers and British. The focus remained on the exchanges between the Dutch and the Boers, or Afrikaners.

Several authors (Pieter du Plessis, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, and Christi van der Westhuizen) examine the exclusionary understanding of the notion of *stamverwantschap* as a form of transnational whiteness. Van der Westhuizen calls attention to the central role that *stamverwantschap* (or in Afrikaans: *stamverwantskap*) played in the 1881 founding of the NZAV and thus in the collections and publications of the ZAH. With his tour through the large meeting room of the ZAH — tellingly still referred to as the ZASM room — Du Plessis shows how ZAH precursor organizations enabled forms of Dutch and Afrikaner whiteness to develop alongside each other, mutually informing one another. Kuitenbrouwer shows how the Afrikaans programme of *Radio Nederland Wereldomroep* (Radio Netherlands Worldwide), broadcast from the Keizersgracht 141, was firmly rooted in the idea of *stamverwantschap*. His contribution traces how radio was used as an instrument to connect Dutch people with their white 'kinsmen' in South Africa.

Reading against the (Archival) Grain

The popularity of the notion *stamverwantschap* cannot be considered separately from the impact of — what is called — the scramble for Africa, when nineteenth century European nation states became caught up in the imperial ambitions towards the African continent. The development of this 'new imperialism' was accompanied by heightened nationalism in the European metropolises. There was an enhanced identification with the obstinate Boers who fought British supremacy and were now characterized as *stamverwanten* from Dutch descent. New imperialism also involved a boost to a racist worldview about the so-called 'dark continent' whose inhabitants of colour had to be civilized, or marginalized or even eliminated if necessary.⁶ And indeed, in these simultaneous developments transnationalism and racism interacted and reinforced each other. It determined the image of South Africa in the Netherlands and Europe as it would develop well into the twentieth century: namely, that of a *white man's country*. In the Dutch imaginary there was a lack of awareness, or an unwillingness to realise that the majority of the population was ignored and excluded as such. There was also little or no interest in Black South Africans who played a central role in the country's development and history.

Insofar as they figure in the ZAH documents, artworks and photographs, Black South Africans mostly remain passive and anonymous. But sometimes, while reading 'against the grain', insights into the agency of Black South Africans emerge. By studying the annual reports of the NZASM in the ZAH, Bart Luirink discovers traces of resistance among the migrant workers who were transported to and from the mines in Johannesburg. Luirink is also the one whose reference to the work of

6 Cf. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

South African journalist and scholar Ruth First raises the significance of Oral History for a decolonizing perspective. When it is about non-documented or poorly documented visual representations of Black South Africans, Manon Braat imagines the life of the anonymous Black man in Frans Oerder's painting in the stairwell of the ZAH, while Farren van Wyk takes 'Photo No. 20 Issued by the State Information Office, Pretoria' of an anonymous, so-called 'Cape Coloured Girl', as a starting point to reflect on both the woman in the photograph, and her (Farren's) own family. In this way, Black subjects, as we find them in the ZAH, gain subjectivity and agency.

By reading 'along' and 'against' the 'archival grain', as Laura Ann Stoler calls it,⁷ it becomes clear how the notion of *stamverwantschap* was used to narrow down the image of South Africa and its population. We need to analyze when and how *stamverwantschap* is done and how it can be undone or deconstructed; how it functioned and still functions as a deeply racialized concept, simultaneously neglecting and articulating transnational whiteness in the collections of the ZAH.

Words Matter

In dealing with the collections at the ZAH, there is another pressing issue we need to identify: the changing meanings and also sensitivities around language use. Since the publication of the Jewish philologist Victor Klemperer *LTI - Lingua Tertii Imperii: Notizbuch eines Philologen* (The Language of the Third Reich, Notebook of a Philologist, 1947), we have known about the tensions that a certain terminology evokes or, on the contrary, tries to hide with the use of euphemisms. Specific contributions in this

⁷ Ann Laura Stoler *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

collection make evident how the use of words such as 'neutrality', *stamverwantschap* and *overval* (raid) function to obscure racialized inequalities, exclusion, and (in particular with reference to *overval*) suggest certain subject positions of perpetrator (anti-apartheid activists) and victim (the office of the NZAV and the library of the SAI, and their employees).

We were not only facing the capacity of words to conceal, but also how the meaning of language changes according to the context in which it is used, read, and spoken. Both the texts by Braat and Luirink make a clear case in point with reference to a particular racialized pejorative that was common usage at the moment of NZASM and the NZAV's establishment at the end of the nineteenth century and endured well into the twentieth century. They employed different strategies to deal with this pejorative — censoring it or reproducing the veracious usage of the archival source. Both strategies demonstrate various approaches that can be taken to deal with the use of words that have become highly inadmissible in a new (contemporary) context.

Conventions regarding this issue vary between disciplines, generations, countries and individuals, and the different engagements with pejoratives in this publication highlight the choices authors are confronted with in order to differentiate between the use of the pejorative in historical sources and their own writing. In time, our use of nomenclature might become part of similar critical scrutiny. We have decided to capitalize the noun and adjective 'Black' to refer in the first place *not* to skin colour or ethnicity, but to a broad category of minoritized, racialized humans in South Africa who share an experience of having been oppressed by customs, world views, rules and laws differentiating on the basis of notions of race produced by European colonialism in the first instance and in its wake, apartheid. Thus Black can refer to, or include (but is not limited to) Indians,

(so-called) Coloureds, and Africans. It is along this line of reasoning and in contradistinction to the category of 'Black' that we have decided not to capitalize the noun and adjective 'white': we do so to critically reflect on the fact that this identity category conventionally functioned and often still functions problematically as the 'norm' of humaneness.

In Conclusion

The contributions to this volume give an impression of what becomes visible when holding items from the ZAH archive and collections against a post-colonial light: in the first place, it allows to investigate how persons give meaning to their own experiences of the ZAH (expressed through contemplation on artefacts), and secondly to express their own personal engagements with the ZAH. As editors we value this critical-reflexive space that affords personal position-taking in relation to the entanglements between the Netherlands and South Africa.

At the back of our minds was the question of why and how the boards of directors of the precursor organizations of the ZAH could continue to identify with a white nationalist South Africa for so long, while the public discourse in the Netherlands increasingly distanced itself from it. In this sense, we can conclude that the precursor organizations of the ZAH were implicated in a racialized discourse on South Africa and its people. Understanding implicatedness is not limited to the views and actions of our historical subjects in the past. We know all too well that we (as editors) through our choice of the theme of this volume and our selection of potential authors also shape the narratives on the transnational intertwinements between the Netherlands and South Africa. In this sense, we ourselves are implicated in the narrative that we put forward with *Absent Presences*.

We can, as Michael Rothberg does, distinguish two dimensions of implication: the involvement of our historical subjects in power relations in the past (diachronic) and the involvement of our own histories in the present (synchronic). These dimensions are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, there is neither a clear break nor a clear continuity between past and present.⁸

The contributions in this volume offer stimulating, provocative and new angles on how to approach this specific colonial and settler-society era archive and collection. We hope that readers will feel inspired by it and that the suggested engagements with the archive and collection will entice a new generation of (potential) users of the ZAH, ranging from teachers, students, and all those who feel involved in the transnational histories that connect Europe and the Netherlands with South Africa and the African continent, to step across the threshold of Keizersgracht 141 in Amsterdam.

We are lucky to have the archive, collection, and library of the ZAH as (potential) meeting points or sites of gathering and exchange. Indeed, these provide a good starting point for the work that needs to be done on grasping the transnational histories that transcend a narrow Dutch-Afrikaner relationship of *stamverwantschap* and make present those seemingly absent social subjects whose experiences are part of these (post)colonial entanglements.

A warm word of thanks goes to the specific individuals and institutions who have been instrumental in helping us realize this volume. For their editorial support, we would like to thank Rosalie Dols, Sabine Bruyn, Simon Scholte ter Horst (all at the ZAH library), Jamy van Baarsel (ZAH events and communication coordinator), and the director

8 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

of the ZAH, Angelie Sens (also series editor), for their support in many different ways. We are especially grateful to the Van Ewijck Foundation for a generous financial donation. We also acknowledge with appreciation the efforts by Pauline Burmann (Chairperson of the Thami Mnyele Foundation) for her involvement in this publication, in particular regarding the text of Nkule Mbaso. And lastly, we gratefully acknowledge the labour performed by Isabelle Heusing, who provided proof-reading assistance, Alex Walker, who designed the lay-out of the publication, and Sean Fitzpatrick, whose professional photographs of objects in the ZAH illustrate several contributions to this volume. Our sincere thanks to you all for making this publication possible.

Simeon

Nathan Trantraal

This essay aims to analyze the creative process behind a visual artwork inspired by the miniature *ossewa* (ox wagen), displayed at the Zuid-Afrika Huis (South Africa House, ZAH) until the process of its renovation which started in 2014. My discussion will focus on the representation of the fictional character Simeon as a symbol of democratic *Afrikanerskap*, as well as the utilization of traditional Afrikaner motifs and symbols in contemporary art as a means of subverting dominant narratives and challenging the historical power dynamics that shape the post-colonial space of the ZAH.

The Graphic Novel

To provide a wider contextual understanding, it is important to start this essay with an introduction to the art style and genre utilized in creating the illustration of *Simeon*. It is necessary to familiarize the reader with terms like anime, comics, and graphic novels.

In 1964, Richard Kyle used the term 'graphic novel' for the first time in an essay for the fanzine (fan magazine) *Capa-Alpha* to describe comic books aimed at a more mature audience. The term first began to gain popularity in the mainstream comics market after Will Eisner's graphic novel *A Contract with God* appeared in 1978, and with the start of Marvel Comics' first graphic novel series in 1982. However, the graphic novel first gained wider recognition and began to gain traction with the publication of Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus: My Father Bleeds History* in 1986. Today, it is not at all

unusual for major publishers such as Johnathan Cape or Penguin to publish graphic novels.

Underground comix: counterculture comix entering the mainstream

In the late 1960s and 1970s, an alternative comic book scene emerged in the USA, written as 'comix', for disambiguation with 'comics', to signal that they were not children's literature. Some viewed them as inappropriate for adults as well due to their satirical, grotesque, and crude content. One pioneer of the medium, Robert Crumb, for example, had his work deemed obscene and pornographic by courts. Police would raid independent comic book shops, confiscating offensive material and arresting store owners on charges of distributing contraband. In 1967 Robert Crumb started a small independent comix zine, called *Zap* to self-publish his and other creator's works. Later, this publication was renamed *Weirdo*. In response to Crumb's magazine that was more visceral and offensive, Art Spiegelman along with his wife, Françoise Mouly, created *RAW* — still satirical but geared toward a more avant garde readership. *Maus* was originally published as an ongoing series in *RAW* magazine.

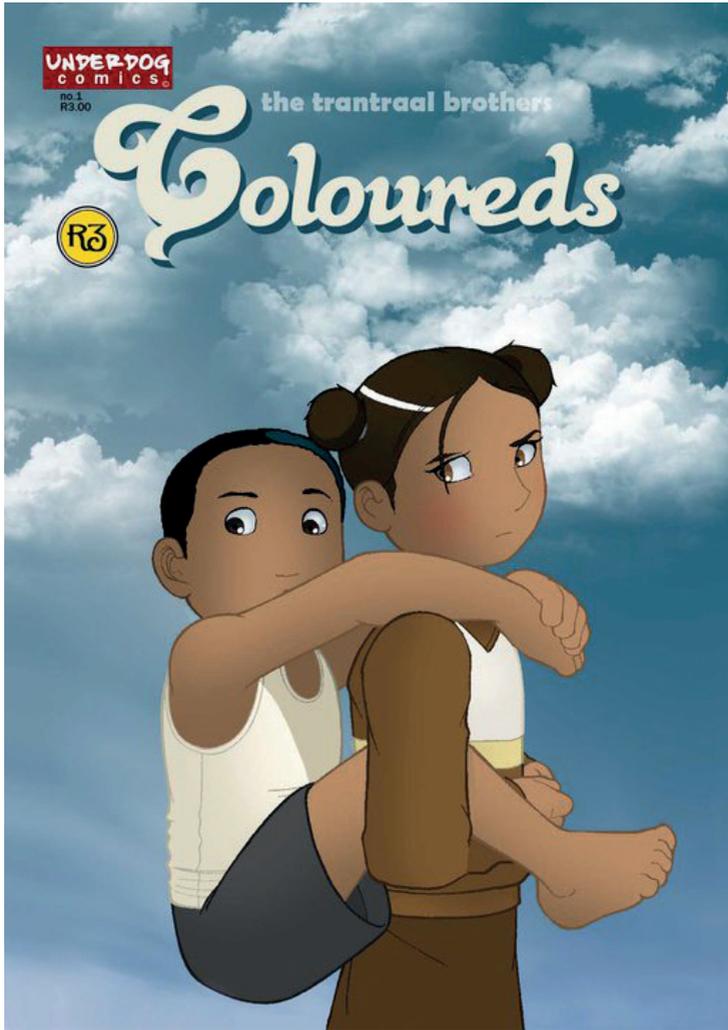
There isn't one specific moment in the history of comix that saw it move out of the underground and into the mainstream, it was a confluence of things, changing times and a loyal fanbase were major contributors, as well as the formation of the underground publishing house Fantagraphics in 1987. If you had to isolate one thing though, as the most significant of this amalgam of factors, it would have to be the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* which, along with winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, was also a phenomenal commercial success, selling millions of copies. *Maus* is the autobiographical account of the experience of Spiegelman's

parents, Vladek and Anja, as Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz during the second world war. The story is told in the form of interviews that Spiegelman conducts with his father. With *Maus*, Spiegelman undermines the traditional cartoon's use of anthropomorphic characters, by portraying the Jews as mice and the Nazis as cats.

Both Robert Crumb and Art Spiegelman have only been intermittently active over the last few decades. Crumb published his last major work, a comic adaptation of the book of *Genesis* of the *Bible*, in 2009. Spiegelman has mostly contributed short stories here and there and literature relating to *Maus*. Their influence remains strong though, on the generation of cartoonists who have picked up their mantle, like Joe Sacco, artist and author of *Palestine*, and Marjane Satrapi, whose animated adaptation of her successful graphic novel *Persepolis* won the prestigious Cannes Jury Prize at the Cannes film festival.

In my own work in the graphic novel field, I am influenced equally by American creators such as Crumb and Spiegelman and Japanese anime. While social commentary is a critical component of my work, I am drawn to the simplicity, vivid colors, and exaggerated anatomy found in anime and manga. In 2010, I collaborated with my brother André Trantraal to publish a 12-page graphic novel titled *Coloureds*. We drew visual inspiration from anime, particularly Studio Ghibli's *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*, while the content was heavily influenced by Joe Sacco's vignette-style storytelling in *Palestine* and Art Spiegelman's autobiographical elements in *Maus*. *Coloureds* depicts the harsh reality of two children growing up in an abusive household in impoverished Cape Flats.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s South Africa's comics market was dominated by *fumetti neri* (lit. black comics) or *fotoverhale* (photo stories) series, including



The cover of the graphic novel, *Coloureds*, by Nathan and André Trantraal (Cape Town: Jincom Publishers, 2010).

Ruiter in Swart (Rider in Black), *Grensvegter* (Frontier fighter), *Wit Tier* (White tiger), and *Kaptein Duiwel* (Captain Devil). These adventure stories were driven by Nationalist ideology, Christian dogma, and apartheid-era propaganda. They were extremely successful and popular. As a result, these, along with the long-running Dutch cartoon series *Bollie*,¹ (were my first exposure to comics. At around the same time a few South African artists, inspired by *Fantagraphics*, *RAW*, *Zap* and *Weirdo*, developed their own underground comix scene. The most notable of these zine-style comix would have to be Conrad Botes and Anton Kannemeyer's *Bitterkomix*.

Anime

Anime is a Japanese form of animation popularized by Osamu Tezuka, who after watching Walt Disney's *Bambi*, was inspired to create his own animation studio. Tezuka created some of the most influential animated films, including *Astro Boy* and *Black Jack*. In the process he fathered a whole creative industry that still dominates Japanese pop culture to this day. Anime has its own unique aesthetic, most notably characters with strange hair colours, indistinct racial or ethnic phenotypical references, and massively over-sized eyes.

The earliest export of Japanese anime, was the TV series *Heidi*, based on Johanna Spyri's novel. The series was dubbed in Afrikaans during the 1970s and made a major impact on South African viewers. As a child I was myself transfixed by it. Unbeknownst then was that many of the artists working on the series, most notably Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki, would decades later go

1 Original Dutch title is *Bobo*, the cartoon still runs as a magazine for toddlers. In South Africa it was serialized in the popular family magazine *Huisgenoot*.

on to form the animation powerhouse Studio Ghibli, and would have an immeasurable influence on my own work.

Creating Simeon

In the process of creating this collaborative work, I tapped into both these respective sides creating an anime-styled art work but also documenting a perception, or my understanding, of the modern way Afrikaner symbols are used. My wife and creative partner, Ronelda S. Kamfer, created the character Simeon and loosely based him on someone she knew as a child growing up in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town. When designing Simeon, I needed very few personal details, because the right-wing Afrikaner image is one that many South Africans are very familiar with. I took into account Ronelda's words in the actual poem, but also her emphasis on Simeon being an innocent child, based on her own experience and interactions with Simeon and his obliviousness to the brutality his khaki uniform evokes. For him his khakis meant camaraderie, a sense of belonging and pride in a history he only understands from a very limited perspective. The use of the khaki clothes as symbol of history is used in this illustration to put emphasis also on how these symbols are then re-contextualized and almost re-branded.

Symbols of oppression can undergo a process of re-branding, whereby their original oppressive meaning is subverted or challenged through the adoption of a new meaning or context. The website for the popular South African T-shirt brand, *T-Shirt Terrorist* can be considered a post-colonial critique of historical figures through the use of retroactively re-branded images.² One T-shirt, for example, shows a picture of Steve Biko with dark

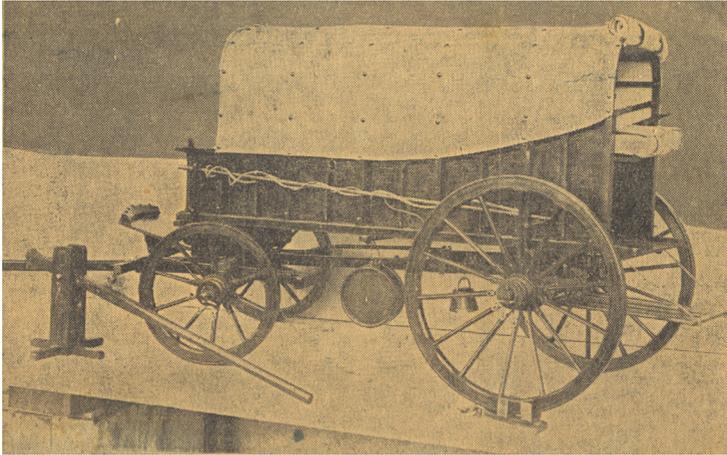
2 <https://www.tshirtterrorist.co.za/>.

sunglasses and the logo 'Bikool' below it.³ The image is accompanied by the tagline 'I wear what I like' – a riff on Biko's famous revolutionary collection of writings, *I Write What I Like*. On the opposite side of the political spectrum is a T-shirt of the famous colonizer Jan van Riebeeck, re-styled to look like a clown, with the logo 'Fun Riebeeck'.⁴ These designs challenge the traditional representations of historical figures and subvert their iconic status, inviting critical reflection and engagement. They offer a unique opportunity for critical engagement with the past. However, some argue that these symbols and objects are being commercialized and branded, free from historical context. This debate has been the subject of much scholarly and public discussion. One well-known example is the commercialized image of Che Guevara. Another example is the appropriation of the Afro comb, which was once a symbol of Black resistance against white beauty standards. However, the Afro comb has since been appropriated and commercialized by non-Black designers and retailers, who have rebranded it as a fashion accessory. This appropriation has sparked debates about the ethics of cultural appropriation and the erasure of the Afro comb's political and cultural significance.

To understand the power and influence of symbols in a post-colonial space, we can examine the #rhodesmustfall protests between 2015 and 2018 in South Africa. These protests shook the country and brought it to a halt. The protestors argued that statues of colonial-era generals and leaders were representative of the institutional racism that underlies the university system. They believed that removing these symbols was necessary for true reform to benefit all Africans, not just white South Africans.

3 <https://www.tshirtterrorist.co.za/product/bikool/>.

4 <https://www.tshirtterrorist.co.za/product/riebeeck/>.



The model ox wagen that was on display at the Great Trek exhibition in 1938 in Amsterdam, organized by the *Suid-Afrikaanse Studente Vereniging* (South African Students' Association) with the support of the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging* (Dutch South African Association, NZAV). This model was produced by the *ambagskool* in Ficksburg, South Africa, for the exhibition (ZAH, Beeldbank, Map 8-4. 'Ossewa vervaardig deur die Ambagskool te Ficksburg OVS, in 1937 vir die Eeufeesviering van die Groot Trek' ('Ox wagen produced by the trade school in Ficksburg Orange Free State, in 1937 for the centenary celebration of the Great Trek'). This newspaper photo is reproduced in a text about the material heritage in the ZAH collection by G.J. Schutte (2021), 'Beelden uit het archief: Assegaien, kieres, en ossewagens', <https://www.zuidafrikahuis.nl/2021/04/29/beeld-van-de-maand-assegaien-kieres-en-ossewagens/>.

The re-branding of symbols of oppression reflects an ongoing struggle for social justice and equality, highlighting the complex and contested nature of their meanings. While re-branding may offer a means of challenging oppressive meanings, it also risks diluting or erasing the historical and cultural significance of the symbol.

My initial response to the miniature *ossewa* in the Suid Afrikahuis was that of confusion: why would this space have an *ossewa* out for all guests to see? What a weird thing to put on display – are these people oblivious to the meaning of the *ossewa* for Black South Africans? A

bit like traveling in rural South Africa and entering a guest-house that still has an old South African flag on the wall.

But, since I am tasked with creating something, I ask myself how do I use this *ossewa* and allow it to be exactly what it is, but also disconnect my own views from what is being created? Our collaborative approach was simple: Simeon is a child, burdened with a history and a cultural conditioning in the same way we all are or were. You decide as an artist what you want to say, the rest you leave open for the reader or viewer to interpret. Our main objective was to create something that incorporates an object we found in the ZAH and let that be the story.

Ironic racism and white identity politics

In the wake of the end of apartheid in 1994, modern Afrikaner culture in South Africa has undergone a significant transformation. Afrikaners have had to navigate a changing political and social landscape, grappling with the loss of political and economic power, and attempting to find a new place and identity within a diverse and democratic South Africa. But with this transformation, the rise of ironic racism became common, as a form of disassociating from the horrors of apartheid. While leftist thinking and progressive politics became the social norm, this also made space for the rise in embracing rather than rejecting racist symbols and interpret it as identity. *Bitterkomix*, mentioned earlier, were early adherents to this creative direction in their comix. Often employing the racially-loaded image of the 'gollywog' to signify white suburban fears, Botes and Kannemeyer have frequently been accused of smuggling racist ideologies into their work under the guise of satire. The permissibility of racially charged imagery or language

in satire is an enduring debate unlikely to be resolved definitively. With *Bitterkomix*, Botes and Kannemeyer followed the tradition of 1970s American underground comic, namely Robert Crumb's divisive 'When the Goddamn Niggers Take Over America!' and 'When the Goddamn Jews Take Over America!'. Similarly, in 2014 Brett Bailey's controversial 'Exhibit B' featured Black people in cages as human exhibits, deeply offending many. While some defended the artist's metaphor, ordinary Black people were profoundly hurt.

In the context of Afrikaans literature and art, Afrikaner self-deprecating humour can be found everywhere – from tv-shows mocking Afrikaner *kommin* behaviour. This term is used to describe in patronising tones the social behaviours of regular working-class people, derived from the English word 'common': an image that stands in stark contrast to the perceived white superiority perpetuated by apartheid.

Conclusion

While the ironic use of oppressive symbols and ironic racism can be viewed as forms of resistance against oppression, they are not without controversy. Some contend that these practices trivialize the experiences of those who have been impacted by oppression and contribute to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. Others, however, maintain that these practices can be a potent means of exposing and challenging the roots of oppression, while also fostering critical thinking and promoting social change.

Ultimately, the significance and ramifications of these practices depend on their context and the underlying intentions behind their use. In conclusion, the confrontation with the *ossewa* and my artistic reflection on it, allowed me to examine my own view on colonial spaces

and objects, and how I interpret it. But most valuably, it enabled me to investigate how I allow myself as a Black artist to navigate these spaces without assimilation, nor complete objectivity. Symbols are like rivers – their meanings twist and turn throughout history. Once a confederate flag fluttered for slavery, now recreants would claim it for heritage. The swastika spun from sacred origins to genocidal ends, yet some still yearn to rebirth its benign beginnings. And the prejudice of the Gollywog doll – birthed as a racist mockery – was later masqueraded as childish fancy by its manufacturers.

But symbols leave stains that cannot be scrubbed away by the passage of time or whims of those who hoist them. Their roots remain, whispering of the malign forces that spawned them, no matter how their handlers try to re-spin their intent. We must listen to those originally hurt by these symbols, who still feel their lingering pain. For it is only by facing the complex past that we can hope to redeem the future.



Simeon. Artwork by Nathan Trantraal (watercolour and ink on paper, 29 cm x 21 cm) and poem by Ronelda S. Kamfer, 2012, Amsterdam.

Africa in the Zuid-Afrikahuis: The Creation of an Illustrated Poem

Ronelda S. Kamfer

My essay will be focused on the poem 'Simeon', and I will be delving into the many layers of narrative being represented in the poem: how the Afrikaans experience and the Afrikaner experience can be so vastly different. As a marginalized person, I will focus on the construction of the poem solely based on an object and a voice emerging from that object. The poem fits into my own narrative around the conflict of my own Africanness towards the way Africanness is portrayed in an almost museum-like time capsule in a colonial space. My text will not be an academic critique of the space that is the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH) but more an inward reflection of the creative process while manoeuvring my own perspective.

'Simeon' is a poem I wrote during my 2012 writing residency on invitation by the Dutch Literature Fund. The Dutch translation of my second collection of poetry *Santenkraam* (2012, Afrikaans original *grond/Santekraam*, published in 2011) was released during my stay. As part of the cultural exchange, myself and my husband, Nathan Trantraal — who is also my creative partner — decided to create this illustrated poem. The opportunity to create something for the ZAH was a perfect moment for us to use this form of merging the visual with the poetry. I look at an object and write a poem, inspired by the object and if the theme or subject matter is too obscure, I give a brief explanation and Nathan creates the image.

Simeon is one of a group of characters I created a few years before the residency for a collaborative project I was doing with Nathan. Simeon was the youngest

member in a family who owned a signage business in the Kuilsrivier/Bellville area in the Northern suburbs of Cape Town. The creation of this character was triggered after I went to a signage shop as a teenager with my mother and noticed in a far corner of the store a pile of old apartheid era metal signs with inscriptions such as '*slegs blankes*' ('whites only') and 'non-whites'. As a person growing up in post-apartheid South Africa these signs fascinated me, but I was also intrigued by how the business had re-branded itself as makers of customized 'beware of the dogs' and 'private property' signs. We never got to complete the project but this experience and the creation of these characters stayed with me and when I entered the ZAH in 2012, I was able to find an outlet to use the character of Simeon. I knew that I wanted the character to be very innocent and drawn in a way that would render him familiar and ordinary. Writing about ordinary things and people is what I am instinctively drawn toward. I chose the name Simeon because of the religious connection: Simeon of Jerusalem, who was seen by some Christians as being the second bishop of Jerusalem. This played directly into the concept of being part of a legacy — in this case Afrikaner and apartheid legacy.

I wanted the name to emphasize the weight and burden of expectation and tradition. The poem itself is written in a simplistic form, that plays on Simeon's age. The emphasis on the '*donker huis*' ('dark house') came from wanting to place the narrative into something inherently complex that also represents the history of a family and a country: a painful dark history and a place that is also home, a safe space. Very few things are as complicated as homes. A home is also a place of belonging and an inheritable object, especially from family. Home is a common metaphor used in poetry to represent a variety of themes and emotions. Academically, this metaphor is often used to explore ideas related to identity, belonging, comfort, and safety.



The Zuid-Afrikahuis,
Keizersgracht 141.
Photographer Aart Klein,
Amsterdam, no date. (ZAH,
Beeldbank, Map 187-16, 'Huis
Keizersgracht 141'.)

In terms of identity, a home can represent the physical and emotional space where one feels most like oneself. It can also represent a connection to a particular culture or community. For example, in Langston Hughes' poem 'Theme for English B', the speaker describes his home as a place where 'colored folks' live and suggests that this shared experience shapes his identity.

Belonging is another theme commonly associated with the home metaphor. A home can represent a sense of place, a feeling of being rooted in a particular location or community. In Maya Angelou's poem 'Still I Rise', the speaker describes herself as 'a black ocean, leaping and wide' who is 'rooted in the past' like a tree. This metaphor suggests that her connection to her history and culture gives her a sense of belonging.

Comfort and safety are also important aspects of the home metaphor. A home can represent a refuge from the outside world, a place where one can relax and feel at ease. In Robert Frost's poem 'The Death of the Hired Man', the speaker describes his home as 'the place where, when you

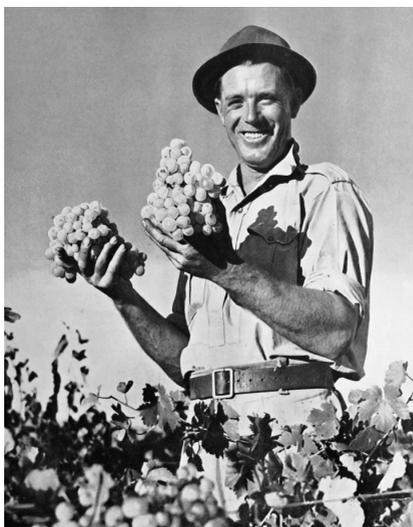
have to go there, They have to take you in.’ For Simeon, the home in the poem is dark and filled with history – a history unknown to him as a child. I used an over-simplified standard Afrikaans for the poem, as I wanted the unpolishedness of the Afrikaans to create a type of hindrance to the reader. The repetition of ‘*daar*’ (‘there’) creates a semantic connection to traditional Afrikaans poetry.



In literature and poetry, the eeriness of leaving tradition behind is often explored through imagery and symbolism. For example, a character may be described as wandering through a dark, unfamiliar landscape or struggling to find their way in a new and confusing world. This imagery can evoke a sense of unease and disorientation, highlighting the emotional toll of breaking away from established traditions. It was very important to me that the illustration provides a brief moment in the life of Simeon. Almost banal, a boy stands with a toy soldier and his little old-fashioned mini *ossewa* (ox wagen) in the background. This poem is not an attempt to analyze the *ossewa* as a symbol of Afrikaner nationalism and its implications for my own sense of belonging and identity. The *ossewa* was a vehicle used by the Boers (Afrikaner settlers) to traverse the vast and harsh terrain of southern Africa. It became a symbol of their resilience, independence, and defiance of British colonial oppression. However, the *ossewa* also represented the settlers’ exclusion and isolation from the diverse and complex realities of the region.

As a person of mixed heritage, I find myself in a position of ambivalence and alienation towards the *ossewa* and what it stands for. In the image, the *ossewa* almost takes the focus by way of its placement on the illustration, while the rounder manga style lines evoke childhood and innocence. But for the poem I wanted it to be level with the rest of the narrative and metaphor.

I share some of the cultural and historical ties with the Afrikaners, but on the other hand, I also recognize the violence and injustice that they inflicted on the indigenous and marginalized communities. In this poem, I explore how the *ossewa* shapes my own sense of othering and otherness, and how I can challenge and transcend its narrow and oppressive meanings. Another element I wanted to come across was his 'uniform' with its tri-colour badge on the sleeve. I wanted to explore how perception can change but the feeling remains: on the one hand, the impact of this clearly white child in his khaki uniform playing with his toys, but on the other hand, what this uniform represents for the reader or viewer of the text and image.



A farmer wearing khaki clothes, a type of clothing used historically for military uniforms, but in South Africa often associated with Afrikaner farmers or *Boere*. (The Peoples of South Africa: A Pictorial Survey (Pretoria: State Information Office, n.d. [ca 1951]), 14. Note from the editors: it is ironic that although Afrikaner *Boere* are often associated with khaki clothing, the word 'kakkie' in Afrikaans is used as a pejorative reference to the British. This use of the term originated during the South African War (1899–1902) and referred to the military uniform made of khaki cloth worn by the British soldiers.)

My main concern for the text was that I did not want to describe Simeon or the clothes he was wearing. Because I was simplifying the theme, I needed the illustration to voice that. The use of clothing in poetry oftentimes centres the narrative, for example, Seamus Heaney's 'The Tollund Man', which describes the body of a man who was sacrificed by his own people during the Iron Age. Heaney uses the Tollund man's clothing to evoke a sense of sadness and loss:¹

Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country nearby
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle (...)

The Tollund man's clothing, which is preserved by the peat, is a reminder of his violent death and the suffering of his people. To remain true to Simeon's innocence with the words in the poem, he needed to exist in the two mediums separately. In word form, he is voiceless but has thoughts. In the illustration only, he has no context but can only be read through what he is wearing and how he bears his clothes.

Together with the text Simeon has a context, which allows the reader or viewer to interpret the artwork of image and text.

1 Seamus Heaney, *Wintering Out* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 47.

Whiteness and the Dutch Imaginary in the Zuid-Afrikahuis

Pieter du Plessis

The first time I visited the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH) was in the summer of 2022. I had the opportunity to walk through the building, browse the library and look through archival materials. One room in particular — the meeting room on the *bel-étage* at the backend of the building — stayed with me as I left later on and walked along the Keizersgracht. This is the ZAH meeting room, still called the 'ZASM-room' in commemoration of the organization — *Zuid-Afrikaansche Stichting Moederland* (South African Foundation Motherland, ZASM) — that purchased the Keizersgracht building in 1923. The ZASM is derivative of the *Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorwegmaatschappij* (Netherlands South African Railway Company, NZASM), which built and since 1894 exploited the railway between Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) and Pretoria (now Tshwane).¹ After the NZASM was generously compensated by the British for the loss of their railway in 1908, following the South African War, the interest from those revenues was used to purchase the property and subsidize the organization of the archive, the library, and different kinds of activities in the ZAH.²

The heritage of the ZASM leads us straight to the examination of the furnishing of this room. When I entered the room, the first thing I noticed, besides the long table

1 Nicholas Clarke and Roger Fisher, *NZASM Footsteps along the Tracks: The Identified Extant Built Residue of the Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg-Maatschappij (1887-1902)* (Pretoria: Visual Books, 2016).

2 Gerrit Schutte, *Stamverwantschap onder druk: De betrekkingen tussen Nederland en Zuid-Afrika, 1940-1947*. (Amsterdam: Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut, 2011), 21.

surrounded by chairs, the chandelier hanging above it, and the quaint backyard garden that can be seen through the tall windows, was a portrait of Paul Kruger in a detailed golden frame hanging in the centre of the right-hand side wall. Kruger is depicted as sitting behind a table with an open copper-covered bible, his left hand resting on the pages and his right hand gripping the edge of the chair's armrest. I was taken aback. What was a portrait of Kruger, or, as those around me where I grew up called him, *Oom Paul*, doing in the Netherlands and more so, hanging prominently in the ZAH? I had learned a lot about Kruger as I grew up in Mpumalanga, or as it was previously called, the Transvaal and before that, the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek of which Kruger was president between 1883–1900. I had learned about him not so much from my history textbooks, but it was around the dinner table or *braais* (barbeques) where the myth of the *Kruger-miljoene* (Kruger millions) and its whereabouts were speculated, where I would hear about his *spoegbakkie* (spittoon) and how he was a man of God. Kruger was a *volks* hero, I learned. Through God's power, he led the Boer-Afrikaners against the British during the Transvaal Rebellion (or Anglo-Transvaal war, 1880–1881), and it was thanks to him that we, the *Uitverkore Volk* (chosen people), are still here today.

*

In 2015, when I was a student at the University of Cape Town, I witnessed and formed part of the #RhodesMustFall movement. During this time, my understanding and the images of Rhodes but also Kruger, 'the white men who built South Africa', started changing. This was one of the first moments in my life that I, as a white Afrikaner, was confronted with my white skin, the language — Afrikaans, that filled my mouth and heart — and my own history in the place we call 'South Africa'. To start engaging with these aspects only at the



Portrait of Paul Kruger, seated, with bible, during his stay in Utrecht. Painting by Thérèse Schwartz (oil on canvas, 140 cm x 110 cm), 1901, Amsterdam. Photograph by Sean Fitzpatrick, 2023, ZAH, Amsterdam.

age of 22 is the epitome of white privilege. During this time, a statue of Paul Kruger in the centre of Tshwane also became a site of protest, exposing me to different narratives of Kruger and the history he represents for many Black South Africans.³

As I stared at the portrait back in the meeting room, several questions came to mind: who painted this and why, and of course, why is it hanging in this room? However, as these questions came and went, I noticed another object to the right of Kruger's portrait, in the corner next to the entrance door: a Zulu shield covered with Nguni cattle skin, knobkerries, and iron spears reaching out from behind it, hanging from the wall. Puzzled, I walked closer to inspect the shield with spears. How did this object make its way here, and was it supposed to say something together with the portrait of Kruger? Was this to symbolize and commemorate the wars between the Zulus and Voortrekkers? Alternatively, was it an attempt to showcase aspects of South African iconography and culture?



Both objects tell a story. Let me start with what I have learned in the meantime about the portrait of Kruger. It tells us about a period in the Netherlands when the Dutch 'rediscovered' their 'long lost cousins' at the tip of Africa. It was a time, at the end of the nineteenth-century, during which there was a Dutch nationalist identification with the 'distant cousins' in South Africa, who successfully defended themselves against British imperialism.

3 For an in-depth analysis of the protest and statue of Paul Kruger see Luvuyo Dondolo, 'Racialised Heritage in Post-apartheid South Africa: The Paul Kruger Statue in Pretoria,' in *Paradise Lost. Race and Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Gregory Houston, Modimowabarwa Kanyane, and Yul Derek Davids (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 315–345, for an in-depth analysis of the protest and statue of Paul Kruger.

The identification with the Boer-Afrikaners, a group of people that looked like them, and spoke the same language — or one close to theirs — made it possible for a sense of familial relationality and pride to grow among the Dutch public. The idea of the Dutch empire was symbolically revived.⁴ When the Dutch public started learning more about the Transvaal Rebellion — mainly between the Boer-Afrikaners and the British, and that the Boer-Afrikaners were able to overcome the British during this war — a *Boerenliefde* (Boer love) constructed around notions of racial kinship grew, fostering new cultural and economic ties between the two groups.⁵

Kruger was an icon in the Netherlands, alongside the other Boer-Afrikaner generals who led the war. During the South African War (1899–1902), which the Boer-Afrikaners lost against the British, the pride and support among the Dutch for the Boer-Afrikaners emerged once again. So much so, that Queen Wilhelmina — a supporter of the Boer-Afrikaners and their cause against the British — sent a cruiser to Lourenço Marques to bring Kruger to safety in the Netherlands. Interestingly enough, in the same meeting room, leaning against the wall across from the portrait of Kruger is a tile tableau of Princess Wilhelmina, depicted at the age of ten, soon to become queen of the Netherlands.⁶ The exiled president reached

4 Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *The Netherlands and the Rise of Modern Imperialism: Colonies and Foreign Policy, 1870–1902* (New York: Berg Publications, 1991).

5 Barbara Henkes, *Negotiating Racial Politics in the Family. Transnational Histories Touched by National Socialism and Apartheid* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 175–177.

6 Until her eighteenth birthday in 1898, Wilhelmina's mother Emma was the deputy monarch. The tableau, edged with a crown and orange apples, was made by plate painter Daniël Harkink who worked after a stationary portrait of ten-year-old Princess Wilhelmina in mourning dress after her father's death in 1890. It was gifted by Queen Wilhelmina in 1902 to President Paul Kruger, exiled from South Africa — whose ZAH portrait, incidentally, was painted in that same year too. Later it came into the possession of the ZAH.



Rozenburg tile tableau of Queen Wilhelmina, aged 10. Painting on ceramic tiles by Daniël Harkink, produced by Rozenburg Pottery Factory (ceramic tiles, 7 x 10 tiles), 1891, The Hague. Photograph by Sean Fitzpatrick, 2023, ZAH, Amsterdam

the cruiser via the same railway line constructed by the NZASM and was met with large crowds of Europeans when he arrived via France and Germany on his way to the Netherlands in 1900, while the South African War raged on.⁷ In 1902, the very portrait of Kruger was painted in Utrecht, where he resided, by Thérèse Schwartz, a prominent Dutch artist.⁸ Schwartz, who usually painted portraits of royals and elites, was not commissioned. Instead, she chose to produce the portrait of Kruger and of other Boer-Afrikaner generals such as Piet Joubert and Christiaan de Wet, to commemorate the Boer-Afrikaners and raise funds for their cause. The portrait was purchased in 1925 by the ZASM in light of the 100-year commemoration of Kruger's birthday that was celebrated in parts of the Netherlands.⁹

The portrait of Kruger gives us a glimpse into the historical relationship between (white) South Africa and the (white) Netherlands. A relationship with its roots in the Dutch colonization of the Cape in 1652 and that has seen several changes over time. Considering the period in which this painting was produced, it provides us insight into particular Dutch imaginaries at the time: about Kruger as a hero, but also an imagined racial kinship with the Boer-Afrikaners during a time of intense colonial competition and opposition toward the British. These imaginaries are what led to the purchase of the Keizersgracht 141 in 1923 by the ZASM. The ZASM as well as other organizations such as the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging* (Netherlands–South African Association, NZAV), already rented space in the building since 1917. To continue as well as to strengthen cultural

7 Paul Zietsman, *Paul Kruger se laaste jare: 1899–1904* (Pretoria: Binedell Uitgewers, 2006).

8 Cora Hollema and Pieterneel Kouwenhoven, *Thérèse Schwartz: Painting for a Living* (Amsterdam: Stichting Fonds Publicatie Thérèse Schwartz, 2015).

9 ZAH, Objectinventarisatie Zuid-Afrikahuis, 2015, object nr. 30.



Zulu shield with spears and knobkerries. Artist unknown (Nguni cattle hide, wood, and steel), date unknown, location unknown. Photograph by Sean Fitzpatrick, 2023, ZAH, Amsterdam.

and economic ties between the Netherlands and South Africa or rather the Boer Republics, the ZASM purchased the building allowing several more Boer-Afrikaner-oriented organizations to operate from inside the *Huis*.¹⁰ The presence of the portrait in the building today is symbolically loaded and telling of Dutch and Afrikaner forms of whiteness that have developed alongside and informed one another. It is then important to recognize, that the building in which this portrait hangs today has been a home for the cultivation of a white kinship relation and we might push it further to ask whether it still is and will continue to be. What or whose narrative is being privileged about South Africa through the current placement of the portrait and how has this or does it continue to create a sense of who can feel 'at home' or like they belong in the ZAH?



The Zulu shield with spears and knobkerries and its current placement, on the other hand, tell us more about the South Africans who, for a long time, did *not* 'belong' in the ZAH. Alongside this, it also tells us about another aspect of the Dutch imaginary and how it produces and reproduces particular images of 'Zuluness'. While the portrait of Kruger can be traced back to who produced it, when, and why, not the same can be said for the shield with spears. There is no indication as to when the object was obtained and brought to the Netherlands, when and by whom it was created, and what the significance of the

10 Willem Philippus Coolhaas, *De dubbele arend: het huis Keizersgracht 141, thans "Van Riebeeckhuis" genaamd, nu daar een halve eeuw gearbeid is voor de culturele en economische betrekkingen met Zuid-Afrika* (Amsterdam: Vereeniging Zuid-Afrikaansche Stichting Moederland, 1973).

object is.¹¹ Zulu shields and spears, among many other crafts or curios, are often sold in formal and informal markets around South Africa, as well as at Zulu cultural villages. We could assume that the object was obtained in this manner. These spaces have been argued to be 'staged to the non-African public to signify images of Africa' thereby inspiring an encounter with the Western visitor.¹²

Aurelia Wa Kabwe-Segatti has pointed out that these 'images are often conditioned by an essentialized understanding of African identity' through those who invest and regulate this cultural tourism sector.¹³ Wa Kabwe-Segatti continues that these images are informed by and inform harmful stereotypes entangled in notions of 'primitiveness' and 'wilderness' shaped by a colonial imaginary.¹⁴ In line with this, Nokulunga Zamantshali Portia Dlamini has highlighted how cultural tourism, in particular about Zulu culture, in South Africa is still influenced by a postcolonial discourse that functions on othering to convey images of Zuluness, but also that commodifies and transacts Zuluness for profits.¹⁵ Through studying Zulu cultural villages and the discourses on Zuluness that they draw on, Dlamini argues that they 'portray

11 See Gerrit Schutte, 'Beelden uit het archief: Assegaaien, kieries, en ossewagens' Het Zuid-Afrikahuis, 29 April 2021, <https://www.zuidafrikahuis.nl/2021/04/29/beeld-van-de-maand-assegaaien-kieries-en-ossewagens/>, where he shared his own observations about the Zulu shield with spears and knobkerries. He was not able to trace the origins of the object. He does however make the comment that the face of the maker of the object is carved into one of the knobkerries. This however cannot be confirmed nor used to trace it back to its origins.

12 Aurelia Wa Kabwe-Segatti, "'We Offer the Whole of Africa Here!'. African Curio Traders and the Marketing of a Global African Image in Post-apartheid South African Cities'. *Cahiers d'études africaines* 49, no. 193-194 (2009): 285-308.

13 Wa Kabwe-Segatti, "We Offer," 302.

14 Wa Kabwe-Segatti, "We Offer," 302.

15 Nokulunga Zamantshali Portia Dlamini, 'Constructing the tourist gaze in KwaZulu-Natal: the production and representation of "Zuluness". A study of cultural villages (PheZulu and Ecabazini) and tour operators (Vuka Africa and 1st Zulu Safaris)' (MA diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017).

landscapes as exotic and depicts customs, artefacts, crafts, and indigenous lifestyles as pre-modern'.¹⁶ At one Zulu cultural village part of Dlamini's research, a Zulu shield and spear hung on the wall as part of the décor. She provides the following reading in that space:

The spear and the shield (*Iklwa nesihlangu/ihawu*) date back to the era of Shaka as a warrior underlining his genius military tactics. The shield demonstrated and depicted a (sic) (warrior) status in society. To date, this myth embodies connotations that communicate victory, endurance and strength, and the bravery which Shaka was acknowledged as a military genius.¹⁷

What is interesting to note here is how Dlamini's reading of the shield and spear could be said to be appropriate for the setting in which she analyses the object. I say this considering that these Zulu cultural villages function on myths of Zuluness to convey particular images to non-African and mostly Western audiences. When considering the 'Zulu' artefact in the meeting room, what are then the images of Zuluness that are actively and non-actively being portrayed in this instance – especially in relation to the portrait of Kruger?

While Kruger, glorified in the golden frame, takes centre stage as an individual white man and leader that I would argue represents forms of Afrikanerness and whiteness, Africans or in this case, Zuluness, is represented by means of an object, in other words, in objectified form. Considering the ongoing legacy of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa that led to the dispossession and oppression of Black South Africans by white Europeans for hundreds of years, the shield with spears and knobkerries alongside the portrait indicates a racial hierarchy. One where the white Christian European man is placed at the top and the Black African, thought of

16 Dlamini, 'Constructing,' 60.

17 Dlamini, 'Constructing,' 160.

as having no God, at the bottom – in this case, in the corner, behind our backs when we enter the room. We could also look at it differently: is the shield with spears included in the room to attempt to signify clumsily the diversity of South Africa, in a house that never intended to include Black South Africans? The point is that Black South African subjectivity, and more so in its contemporary form, cannot speak for itself and on its own, in a space about South Africa, and in a room that is the centre of (symbolic) power of the ZAH.

This then leads me back to the railway line that made the purchase of the building possible. Arthur Barker in his article 'B(l)ack-ground and Foreground'¹⁸ provides a brief but compelling analysis of photographs in the NZASM archives taken during the construction of various train lines, including the one from Pretoria to Lourenço Marques. Barker pays attention to 'race relations' in these photographs and how white Dutch and Boer-Afrikaner railway workers were differently portrayed in comparison to Black African railway workers. He notes how the photographs 'express the hierarchy, importance and status of 'white' individuals and the sublimation of black labour',¹⁹ while also being able to showcase the amount of Black African labourers, who were the majority of labourers and contributed to building the railway lines. These labourers have been left out or erased until recently from the narrative about the NZASM railway lines and there is little known about their experiences.²⁰ I draw attention to this since an 'absent presence' emerges when we think about the Black African labourers who built the railway — who made it possible — and how their labour was entangled with the capital that was used to purchase the property. This raises another question about how this

18 Arthur Barker, 'B(l)ack-ground and Foreground,' *Architecture SA* 72 (2015): 32–35.

19 Barker, 'B(l)ack-ground', 32.

20 See also the contribution by Bart Luirink in this edited volume.

silent or rarely discussed history operates in relation to the portrait of Kruger and the Zulu artefact, and how it perpetuates the idea of the ZAH as a home for white belonging.



The two artefacts in the ZAH discussed above, allow us to learn more about how the various forbear organizations of the current Stichting ZAH imagined their relationship with different South Africans. Moreover, the way in which these objects are presented today, tells us about how forms of whiteness, in this case, Dutch whiteness in tandem with Afrikaner whiteness shapes space. Space is always political — those who own the space and have power can give shape to who feels like they belong and who does not — or who cannot.²¹ The recent announcement of a campaign to construct a statue of Paul Kruger in the Afrikaner-only settlement, Orania, is telling of this.²² When we are faced with the objects and their current composition that I have discussed here, they are not innocent or meaningless. Instead, they are symbolically loaded and can provoke powerful memories and images of the past and current day realities, as well as humanize and objectify people. It does, of course, also depend on who the onlooker is. To contextualize these objects better and to make clearer why they find themselves in their current position today, different points of view and voices need to be considered — especially those that have been excluded. The ZASM-room and its contents speak to the 'absent presences' operating in the background when we look closer. It tells us about racial hierarchy instated

21 See also the contribution by Ronelda S. Kamfer in this edited volume.

22 Dirk Hermann, 'Van dorp na Afrikanerstad', *Maroela Media*, August 24, 2023, <https://maroelamedia.co.za/debat/meningsvormers/van-dorp-na-afrikanerstad/>. The motto of the campaign is "Oom Paul trek Orania toe!" (Uncle Paul is moving to Orania).

through white supremacy and how it manifests in symbolic form today in the ZAH, which further leads us to see how this influences the politics of belonging in the *Huis*. By interrogating the Dutch imaginary of South Africa and in particular of Black South Africans, it becomes possible to engage with the images in our heads and to question in what ways these images are harmful. It is as feminist scholar, Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa notes: 'Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.'²³

23 Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 2012), 109.

Derailed Memories

Bart Luirink

Both in the many hymns of praise and in the sparse critical reflections on the history of the *Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorwegmaatschappij* (Netherlands South African Railway Company, NZASM), there is scant attention paid to the rebellion and agency of African workers.

The history of the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH) in Amsterdam is strongly intertwined with that of the NZASM. Its archives and library contain a seemingly endless array of items that bring this history to life. Many hundreds of annual reports, books, diaries, correspondences, newspaper and magazine articles, theses, photo reports and memorabilia tell the story of a miraculous achievement. The company, founded in 1887 by Dutch, French and other settlers such as Cecil John Rhodes, with the support of the Rothschild family, made a name for itself, in part due to the construction of a rail link between Pretoria and Mozambique's Lourenço Marques (today's Maputo) near Delagoa Bay.¹ The railway, called the *Oosterlyn* (Eastern Line), gave the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State access to a port and secured supplies of machinery, military goods, coal, food and mail, and exports of gold, among other things. This nearly 600-kilometre lifeline, meandered through the South African landscape from 1895, a long way from the then British-ruled Natal. This new railway enabled the Boers to bypass the port city of

1 ZAH, Archief NZASM, inv. nr 74. 'Stukken betreffende uitgifte aandelen. Incl. enkele exemplaren van aandelen en obligaties 1899, archief van de Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorwegmaatschappij, 1884-1909'.



One of two NZASM canisters containing numbered stubs related to the dividend payment of NZASM bonds. The description on the canister reads: *Nederlandsche Zuid Afrikaansche Spoorweg Maatschappij, 4% Leening ad f 15.000.000. Anno 1890* (NZASM, 4% loan at 15.000.000 guilders, steel canister with painted letters, containing paper stubs). Photograph by Sean Fitzpatrick, 2023, ZAH, Amsterdam.

Durban and avoid the risk of imports and exports falling into British hands.

A few years before the opening of the railway, gold was discovered in the area near Johannesburg. The new South African mining industry unleashed a demand for Mozambican labour. The southern provinces of Mozambique tapped into a seemingly infinite pool of contract workers, who got paid less and, in the belief of the 'Rand Lords' (a name derived from the region's name, the Witwatersrand), were more docile than South African workers due to the temporary character of their contracts. Unlike imperialist England and France, the Portuguese regime did not have sufficient capital to invest in facilities for the white, colonial elite. Trading contract workers offered a revenue model, and NZASM trains were used to supply miners.

In 1900, during the South African War (formerly known as the Anglo-Boer War), the NZASM was placed under British military control. After the war, the company merged with its sister company in the Orange Free State, and the *Centrale Zuid-Afrikaanse Spoorwegmaatschappij* (Central South African Railway Company, CZSM) was formed. Another merger followed in 1912, two years after the foundation of the Union of South Africa which united the former British colonies of the Cape and Natal, and the Boer Republics. Together with the railway companies of the Cape and Natal, the CZSM formed *Spoornet*, later to be known as Transnet. While ownership changed time and again, one thing remained the same: the supply of labour power. A calculation from 1960 totalled 5 million journeys by migrant workers up to that point.²

Rehabilitation payments eased the pain of the expropriation of the NZASM by the British. It was a remarkable

2 Charles van Onselen, *The Night Trains: Moving Mozambican Miners to and From South Africa, 1902-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, online edition, 2019), 23.

form of compensation from one limb of the white tribe to another. In the end, the British put a total amount of more than 2.6 million guilders³ on the table of which a little more than 1.4 million guilders was used as start-up capital of the *Vereeniging Zuid-Afrikaansche Stichting Moederland* (South African Motherland Foundation, ZASM) until its dissolution in 2016.⁴ Today, these assets and the returns accumulated with it, form the foundation of the ZAH, which grew out of the ZASM. Thus, the flow of money moves through one lifeline to another.

Onder Kruger's Hollanders

It is an understatement to say that the NZASM was 'proud' of the memories it stored in the ZAH collection. Perhaps the crowning glory of this collection is the two-volume historiography of the NZASM, *Onder Krugers Hollanders (Amongst Kruger's Hollanders)*, published from 1937 onwards, by historian Prof. Dr Pieter-Jan van Winter (1895–1990), who for many years served as president of the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging* (NZAV) and as editor-in-chief of its magazine, *Maandblad Zuid-Afrika*. The study contains a meticulous reconstruction of the company's origins and development. It portrays the NZASM as an example of Dutch decisiveness, entrepreneurial spirit and perseverance, qualities which were, until recently, celebrated as part of a true 'VOC mentality' (in the wording of a Dutch Prime Minister in 2006), referring to Dutch colonial expansions. Moreover, the construction of the railway is

3 Using the IISG calculator, the amount of 2.6 million guilders paid in 1908 would have been worth roughly € 32.8 million in 2021 (inflation correction having been applied). The start-up capital for the ZAMS is equal to about € 17.6 million.

4 B.J.H. de Graaff, *De mythe van de stamverwantschap. Nederlanders en de Afrikaners 1902–1930* (Amsterdam: SAI, 1993), 82–91. *In memoriam N.Z.A.S.M.* (Amsterdam, n.d.), 160–161.

portrayed as an expression of solidarity with the beleaguered white *broedervolk* (brother nation) in South Africa — although this bond between the Dutch and Afrikaners is, as one reads Van Winter, regularly under pressure.



Building the railway at 200 km mark, ca 1892. (ZAH, Beeldbank, AVA 1 Passe Partout Map 74–28, 'Aanleg van die spoor by KM 200, ca. 1892'.)

But these are family disputes, and they bear no relation to the terrifying *Umfeld* in which white South Africa feels it operates. Already on the first page of the introduction to this history, a rather frightening image of 'ongetelde massa's naturellen' ('uncounted masses of natives'), 'negrophiele elementen' ('negrophilic elements') and 'Kaffers' looms — but that is all.⁵ In the rest of the study, not one Black South African is mentioned. Only in the epilogue of his book does Van Winter refer to the new mining industry's need for Black labour (whose supply from Mozambique was made possible by the railways).

5 P.J. van Winter, *Onder Krugers Hollanders*, deel 1 (Amsterdam 1937), 1.

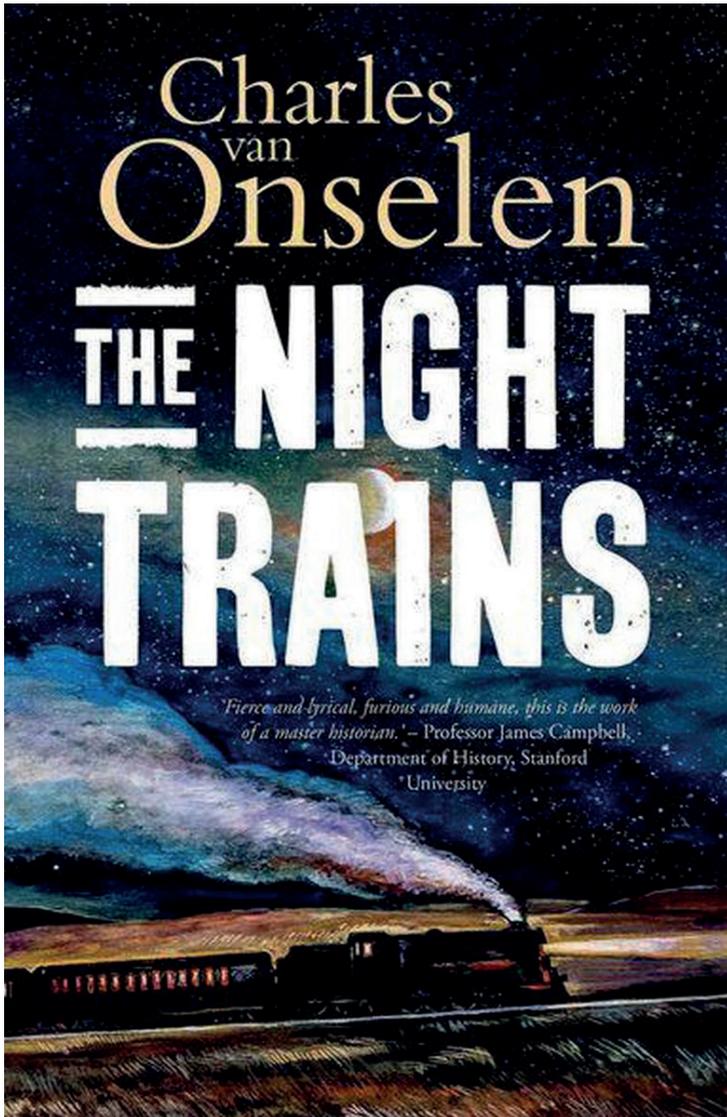
Anyone who wants to know anything about the Black railway workers who did almost all the heavy work, the relationships with the Black populations living in the construction area, or the transport of Mozambican migrant workers does not need to consult Van Winter. The miracle performed is attributed entirely to the hard-working Dutchmen.

The Night Trains

A study by the authoritative South African historian Charles van Onselen on migrant traffic between the poverty-stricken Mozambican Sul do Save region and the gold fields around Johannesburg between 1902 and 1955 was not yet available in the ZAH library at the time of writing this story. *The Night Trains*, published in 2019, was ordered some time ago but has not yet been delivered. Postal traffic today takes considerably longer than in the time described by Van Onselen.

His historiography, which fortunately is also available as an eBook, offers a haunting testimony of a colonial practice that, the historian writes, left 'everlasting scars on the consciousness of poorly educated rural Africans'. The significance of this history marked by deep inhumanity probably extends far beyond southern Africa. With approval, Van Onselen quotes German-American Jewish philosopher and political thinker Hannah Arendt: 'There was something in the practice of colonialism that might have helped prepare the way mentally for the European barbarism of the twentieth century.'

The freight carriages were not adapted when they were used for passengers from 1895 onwards. They lacked sanitary facilities and seating; the workers travelled standing for almost 24 hours. Hospital coaches rode along without doctors or nurses, causing many passengers to succumb to the lung disease silicosis or



The Night Trains by Charles van Onselen. (Image of cover reproduced with permission by Jonathan Ball Publishers.)

tuberculosis *en route*. 'Coffins on wheels,' the Red Cross at the time aptly reported. The workers, including minors, were given numbered dog tags before departure and were locked in cordoned-off carriages. Supervisors restrained the workforce with lashes. The Mozambicans were regarded as goods, as 'human freight', and so were Black South African passengers. Both were also referred to as 'natives in batches', 'items of property', or 'boys' — they formed the 'contents' of a 'kaffir train'.

The night train was, in Van Onselen's words, a 'metal snake', moving across the landscape with an open mouth and an appetite for Black labour.

Resistance as a footnote

Only in the conclusion of his work does Van Onselen refer briefly to forms of protest or resistance to the aforementioned practices. He mentions that in 1911, the South African Native Convention, a precursor to the ANC founded a year later, passed a motion calling for better treatment of Black workers in the mining sector. Van Onselen also describes 'a degree of political consciousness [...] evident in waves of strikes involving hundreds of "East Coast Boys"' and 'disputes around issues of contact, proper payment, food rations'. He concludes by referring to 'activists' who were 'blacklisted', and to 'passive resistance [...] faking of illness, go-slows, destruction of mine property and theft of equipment'. Van Onselen cites another warning about 'natives' becoming 'restless' in a report by the mine bosses.⁶

All in all, this is a meagre reference to forms of self-determination that are not explored or described anywhere

6 Van Onselen, *The Night Trains*, 511.

in the study prior to the conclusion.⁷ It appears as a footnote rather than a truth-based, representative depiction of events. This wrongly risks creating the impression that the masses of migrant workers allowed themselves to be led like meek lambs to the slaughter.

It is a typical omission. Many current texts by white authors overpower each other in their abhorrence of colonial practices. The superlatives used to describe what was done to Black people drip off the pages. But in the end, an image of mere victimhood prevails. This is also the case with Van Onselen, who seems to want to reinforce his denunciation by repeatedly describing the suffering of workers. This study lacks what should be an important emphasis in the description of colonial exploitation: the story of what Black people themselves undertake to get a grip on their fate. A clear plea not to overlook this drive for self-determination can be seen in Nelson Mandela's choice to make a stanza from a poem by William Henley his motto: 'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.' Similar omissions have characterized many white studies of the history of slavery and the abolitionist movement. It is only very recently that careful attention is being paid to Black rebellion, imaginative rebel leaders and passive resistance. Events that are already common history among survivors of enslaved people are finally being recognized.

When victimization is the central narrative, the imaginary of Black people as an amorphous, anonymous mass is never far away. It is remarkable that Van Onselen

7 The concept of self-determination is a complex one that has many different meanings, especially in the South African context. Whereas it was often used in an African context after 1945 to refer to the process of decolonization and development of African nationalist politics, it was also used by Afrikaners in South Africa during the twentieth century to stake their claims for an ethnicity-based system of political sovereignty and Afrikaner nationalism.

also falls into this trap. After all, the historian made a name for himself with his impressive study *The Seed Is Mine* (1996), a biography of South African sharecropper Kas Maine, who lost his land as a result of racist land laws introduced in 1913. In this study, Van Onselen reconstructs Maine's life in the deepest detail.⁸

Evils

That written sources of earlier Black histories sometimes hardly exist is evident, but in his study of the night trains, Van Onselen takes the easy way out. There are quite a few records of the forms of rebellion briefly discussed in his conclusion, even in the ZAH collection, although they are rather hidden in various documents and sometimes described in naive terms. For instance, the 1895 Annual Report of the NZASM mentions (under the sub-heading '*Ongevallen*' ['accidents']) some arson attacks on *kafferrijtuigen* ('kaffir coaches') near Krugersdorp, whose 'cause remained unknown' ('*de oorzaak bleef onbekend*').⁹ Something similar occurred at Waterval-Boven, where a hospital was also attacked. In this incident, according to the NZASM, it was clear that there was '*kwaadaardigheden*' ('malice'). Also, '*van tijd tot tijd werden weder steenen op de rails gevonden, deels daarop gelegd door kwaadwilligen, deels tengevolge van steenstortingen*' ('from time to time stones were again found on the rails, partly laid thereon by malicious persons, partly as a result of stone dumping').¹⁰ The Annual Report for 1896 describes a comparable practice: placing stones on the railway line was still '*een geliefkoosd vermaak van sommige kaffers*' ('a favourite amusement of some

8 Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985* (Johannesburg: David Philip, 1996).

9 ZAH, Archief NZASM, map 9. Jaarverslag NZASM 1895, 34.

10 Ibidem, 35.

kaffirs').¹¹ Even before the railway became operational, the NZASM anticipated possible rebellion because several *kafferonlusten* ('kaffir riots') were already occurring in the Portuguese-controlled area of Mozambique, according to their Annual Report of 1894.¹² Equally remarkable are the statistics of labour arrivals and departures in the various annual reports. Time and again, significantly more workers were transported to the mining areas for the six-month contract period than travelled back when their contracts were up. Mortality in and around the mines was partly to blame for this, but just as likely were forms of desertion.

Interviews recorded by South African journalist and scholar Ruth First offer numerous references to disgust and protest. First, who was killed by South African death squads in Maputo with a letter bomb in 1982, researched migrant labour. Her posthumously published book, *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant* (1983),¹³ offers an impressive account of the experiences of hundreds of former miners whom she and her students encountered in the compounds of the recruiting society in the late 1970s and early 1980s. First refers to the fact that around 1895, the region from which most migrant workers came was a hotbed of resistance to colonial rule. The rebellion, led by resistance leader Gugunyana, was fuelled in part by the growing demand for what First describes as 'forced labour'. Her interviews with workers recruited in later years make frequent references to the uprisings. Equally striking are the many songs the miners sang during labour. These are lyrics that were often handed down from generation to generation. Texts like '(t)here is great suffering under the colonialist' and 'I am burdened with colonial passes' translated from Tsonga

11 ZAH, Archief NZASM, map 10. Jaarverslag NZASM 1896, 42.

12 ZAH, Archief NZASM, map 9. Jaarverslag NZASM 1894, 31.

13 Ruth First, *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983).

into English by First are not uncommon. Some texts are laced with indignation but sometimes resign themselves to an inevitable fate. 'Stay where you are even if you have to suffer' is an apparent reference to an even more disastrous reality in the homeland. In another song, addressed to the women left behind: 'Your husband has not deserted you (...) he is the victim of the white men's way'. These were unintelligible lyrics to the white overseers.

The history of colonial migrant labour has been articulated and depicted in a wide range of cultural expressions. In 1974, South African jazz musician Hugh Masekela recorded *Stimela* (Steam Train). It is a ten-minute ode to migrant workers brought in from all over southern Africa, intoxicated by the rhythm of the ever-thriving train. Anyone opening the photobook *Portrait of a People* (1981) featuring work by ANC sympathiser Eli Weinberg, will find several images of mining and railway workers.¹⁴ Such images also stand out in South African photographer Ernest Cole's oeuvre. His image of undressed miners, subject to the scrutiny of supervisors, can be seen life-sized in the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. In this space, too, one might wonder why so little attention is paid to aspects of migrant labour that represent a vanquished victimhood. After all, the mining industry is also the birthplace of a powerful trade union movement, a massive expression of the desire for self-determination that made an extremely important contribution to the struggle against apartheid. For many migrant workers, both from South Africa and neighbouring countries, the great migration to Johannesburg meant new vistas of a rapidly developing world that offered opportunities to escape poverty and resist systemic racism.

14 Eli Weinberg, *Portrait of a People: A Personal Photographic Record of the South African Liberation Struggle* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1981).

Obviously, a future collection of the ZAH should do justice to the testimonies of a deeply inhuman system of dislocation and oppression. Here lies an important task for researchers. It is quite possible that the archive of the ZAH still contains many seemingly hidden traces of systemic oppression of the Black workforce. This is equally true of other collections, such as those of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, and certainly in South Africa and Mozambique. But at least as interesting are sources and memorabilia that draw attention to forms of resistance under which that system eventually succumbed.

The Absent Centre: Whiteness in the Zuid-Afrikahuis

Christi van der Westhuizen

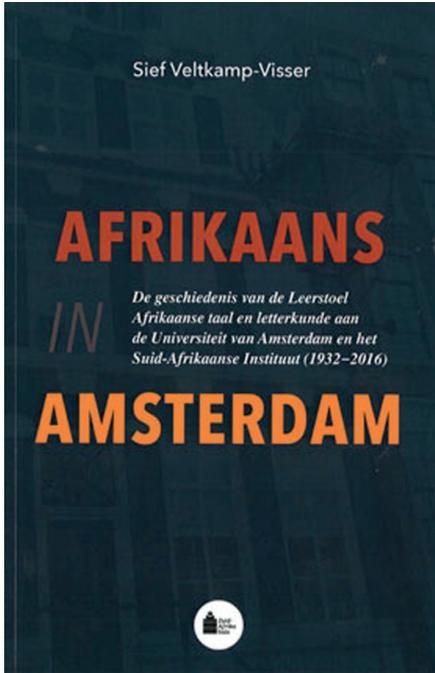
In answering the invitation to apply a decolonizing lens to the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH) at its centenary, it is useful to revisit recent fraught history. Anti-apartheid protesters stormed the building on Keizersgracht in January 1984. In response, the board of the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging* (Netherlands South African Association, NZAV) released a public statement. It defended the NZAV as a Dutch association that had been independent since its founding in 1881. Moreover, the NZAV was based on 'Dutch norms and values. As such, it is in no way "constructive" towards apartheid in South Africa or the government in Pretoria. The NZAV is not an association with political objectives (...);¹ rather, it is active on the 'broad terrain of cultural matters'.² At the time the building was still known as Van Riebeeckhuis, which makes the insistence on a lack of politics curious. How did these denials fit with the founding purpose of the NZAV as a nationalist movement advancing Boer interests against the British empire by strengthening the '*Hollandse element*' ('Dutch element') among these Dutch '*stamgenoten*' ('kinsmen')?³

1 Translated from Dutch. All translations by the author.

2 Sief Veltkamp-Visser, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam: De Geschiedenis van de Leerstoel Afrikaanse Taal en Letterkunde aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam en het Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut (1932-2016)* (Amsterdam: Stichting Zuid-Afrikahuis Nederland, 2018), 258.

3 Veltkamp-Visser, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam*, 2. See also Barbara Henkes, 'The 1952 Celebrations of Jan van Riebeeck's Tercentenary in the Netherlands and South Africa: "Stamverwantschap" and the Imagination of a White, Transnational Community', in *Imagining Communities: Time, Space and Material Culture in Community Formation*, edited by Gemma Blok, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer and Claire Weeda (Amsterdam: University Press, 2016), 180.

The notion of *stamverwantskap* (kinship) asserting an ethnic kinship between the Dutch and Boers as European settlers of mostly Dutch descent is telling. It refers to a shared historical and genetic ‘origin’ traced to Dutch colonization of South Africa, drawing together similarities between Dutch and Afrikaans family names, religious practices and — last but by no means least — skin colour to mobilize identification.⁴



Afrikaans in Amsterdam
by Sief Veltkamp-Visser.
(Image of cover
reproduced with permis-
sion by SZAHN.)

4 Barbara Henkes, ‘Turbulent Kinship: The Dutch and South Africa’, in *Good Hope: South-Africa and the Netherlands from 1600*, edited by Martine Gosselink, Maria Holtrop, Robert Ross (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum/Van Tilt, 2017), 287; Gerrit J. Schutte, *Stamverwantschap onder druk. De betrekkingen tussen Nederland en Zuid-Afrika, 1940-1947* (Amsterdam: Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut, 2011). The publications by Veltkamp-Visser and Schutte are published in a series of the SAI. An overview of SAI publications is provided elsewhere in this volume.

After the Dutch lost possession of the Cape Colony in 1806 to the British, ever larger territory of what became South Africa was incorporated into the British Empire. Dwindling Dutch interest in South Africa became more pronounced during the nineteenth century, also when the British tried to annex the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek in 1877. But disinterest was replaced with 'a wave of enthusiasm and admiration' when the Boers defeated the British and reclaimed white republican independence in 1881 after what would be called the First Anglo-Boer War.⁵ This enthusiasm was associated with a 'rediscovery' of the Boers as descendants of Dutch colonists who founded a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. These were perceived as '*stamverwanten*': a 'rediscovered "Dutch tribe" or "Dutch-Afrikaans nation" in Transvaal', as Sief Veltkamp-Visser, erstwhile administrator of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Stichting Moederland* (South African Foundation Motherland, ZASM) and former director of the *Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut* (South African Institute, SAI), explains in her historical overview of the institutions promoting Afrikaans in Amsterdam during the twentieth century (notably the SAI and the Chair for Afrikaans language and literature at the University of Amsterdam).⁶

Hence the ZAH is historically an institutional expression of the nineteenth-century rapprochement between the Dutch and the Boers, which continued in cultural and political nationalist forms during the twentieth century.⁷ Following Henkes, *stamverwantskap* is here read as an expression of transnational whiteness, used by both the Dutch and the Afrikaners to assert white superiority.⁸ Recently again, upset arose about ZAH being too

5 Veltkamp-Visser, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam*, 2.

6 Veltkamp-Visser, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam*, 2.

7 Henkes, 'The 1952 Celebrations', 180.

8 Henkes, 'The 1952 Celebrations'.

narrowly focused on Afrikaners and Afrikaans.⁹ A letter from the ZAH archives is analysed here through the lens of the imagined kinship, to explore what the *stamverwantskap* discourse enabled, or may still enable.

A passing affection?

The NZAV's denial of political support for apartheid in 1984 fits with a latter-day discourse in Dutch society that suggests that *stamverwantskap* was just a 'passing thought' and that a radical alienation occurred between the Dutch and Afrikaners after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.¹⁰ Kuitenbrouwer in his criticism of this denial describes it as sketching a picture of two peoples moving in opposite directions, with the Dutch relinquishing their colonial possessions and coming to different insights about race after the Holocaust by no longer 'assuming' white superiority.¹¹ This discourse is problematized by Kuitenbrouwer and Schutte.¹² Kuitenbrouwer finds 'continuous interaction' manifesting in sites of remembrance in South Africa where *stamverwantskap* remains tangible – sites that implicate Dutch propagandists as cultural transmitters of 'nationalist imagining' in *both* countries, and as approvingly projecting South Africa as founded on white superiority.¹³ The implication of the Dutch in Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid through

9 Petra Vissers, 'Geruzie over de "kleur" van het Zuid-Afrikahuis', *Trouw*, 7 March 2020, <https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/geruzie-over-de-kleur-van-het-zuid-afrikahuis~b6f5b78d/>

10 Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, 'De geografie van de stamverwantschap. Op zoek naar Nederlandse plaatsen van herinnering in Zuid-Afrika', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 124, no. 3 (October 2011): 336.

11 Kuitenbrouwer, 'De geografie,' 346.

12 Kuitenbrouwer, 'De geografie'; Gerrit J. Schutte, 'Stamverwantschap als cultureel imperialisme', in *Apartheid, anti-apartheid, post-apartheid. Terugblik en evaluatie*, edited by Wim Couwenberg (Budel: Damon, 2008), 11–19.

13 Kuitenbrouwer, 'De geografie', 336, 337, 342, 349.

the *stamverwantskap* idea was later lost from view due to the Dutch anti-apartheid boycott and decolonization movement.¹⁴

It is argued here that the alienation argument affords a convenient distancing from apartheid that benefits Dutch identity and, specifically, Dutch whiteness. This distancing suggests a power dynamic in which the (post)colony perforce declares its transgressions, while the erstwhile metropolitan centre fails to do so. It was demonstrated as recently as in 2017 in the Dutch treatment of this colonial relationship in an exhibition of the Rijksmuseum, titled '*Goede Hoop. Zuid-Afrika en Nederland vanaf 1600*'. Both Annemarié van Niekerk in an article on the exhibition publication and Mamokgethi Phakeng in her contribution to the publication remark on the relative scarcity in the publication of Dutch engagement, when compared to South African engagement, with the question of how the Netherlands was influenced by its contact with South Africa.¹⁵ Kuitenbrouwer suggests that *stamverwantskap* should be understood within a transnational context, to also make sense of the Dutch 'colonial worldview'.¹⁶ *Stamverwantskap* is examined here as a form of transnational whiteness contributing to global coloniality.¹⁷

14 Ibid., 340, 349.

15 Annemarié van Niekerk, 'Goede Hoop. Zuid-Afrika en Nederland vanaf 1600, 'n Bespreking', *NeerlandiNet*, 28 February 2017, <https://www.litnet.co.za/goede-hoop-zuid-afrika-en-nederland-vanaf-1600-n-bespreking/>; Mamokgethi Setati Phakeng, 'Epilogue: Reflections on the Past; Truths of the Future', in *Good Hope: South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600*, edited by Martine Gosselink, Maria Holtrop, Robert Ross (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum/Van Tilt, 2017), 351–355.

16 Kuitenbrouwer, 'De geografie', 348–349.

17 On coloniality and whiteness, see Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhuizen, 'Viral Whiteness: Twenty-first Century Global Colonialities', in *Routledge International Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness*, edited by Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhuizen (Oxon: Routledge, 2022).

Approaching the archive

The ZAH today includes the former NZAV and SAI libraries, as well as archival collections 'uniquely' focused on Dutch-South African relations from the nineteenth century to the present.¹⁸ The collections are understood as per Hamilton's framing of an archive as a 'power-laden assertion' of status for its contents: An archive directs a 'demand' that its contents are worth 'preserving, investigating and reinvestigating, in perpetuity'.¹⁹ Hence, restoration to improve preservation and accessibility, as was done in 2014–2015 at the ZAH, publicized with a book and articles,²⁰ is here read as such a demand.

The question arises: What is being claimed as worthy of preservation? From the name of the building, the assertion transpires as preserving 'Zuid-Afrika'. Given the country's history of conquest, domination and division, which version of South Africa was historically constructed by these institutions? The name the building carried for most of the collections' existence, 'Van Riebeeck', would confirm an exclusionary white South Africanness as the version to be preserved. These questions are hence pursued in relation to race, employed in Western colonial systems of domination as a social marker of difference that determined a hierarchy of human liveability. *Stamverwantskap* manufactures and foregrounds the relationality of transnational Dutch-Afrikaner whiteness, while simultaneously

18 Jeltsje Stobbe and Lisa Cavero Cuenca, 'Van Boerenoorlogen naar Big Data: de archieven van het Zuid-Afrikahuis', *Maandblad Zuid-Afrika* 93, no. 2 (2016): 38–39, 38.

19 Carolyn Hamilton, 'Archive and Public Life', in *Babel Unbound: Rage, Reason and Rethinking Public Life*, edited by Lesley Cowling and Carolyn Hamilton (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2020), 125–143.

20 G.J. Schutte, *Op de zolders van de Keizersgracht, Nederlands – Zuid-Afrikaanse geschiedenissen* (Amsterdam: Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut, 2014), and Stobbe and Cuenca, 'Van Boerenoorlogen'; Hendrik-Jan de Wit, 'Op de zolders van de Keizersgracht, Nederlands – Zuid-Afrikaanse geschiedenissen', *NeerlandiNet*, 16 March 2015, <https://www.litnet.co.za/op-de-zolders-van-de-keizersgracht-nederlands-zuid-afrikaanse-geschiedenissen/>.

obscuring the co-production of this whiteness by another, suppressed relationality: the relationality with colonized people. What are the features of the whiteness — or whitenesses — that stand in this denied but co-constructive relation with those racialized as Other to whiteness?

By doing an online search of the archives with keywords directed at probing racialization in the creation of the catalogue, a text was found that shows the racial uses of *stamverwantskap*.

Artefact: 'Open brief van eenige
Hollandsche Afrikaners aan hunne
broeders in Nederland'²¹

The selected artefact is an open letter dated August 1896 written by the publishers of the then only Dutch magazine in South Africa, *Ons Tijdschrift*, to solicit subscriptions in the Netherlands. It was issued during the increase in Dutch interest in the plight of the Boers. The solicitation is based on the shared interest in protecting Dutch as the mother tongue in South Africa. *Stamverwantskap* features prominently: the title page emphasizes the letter as being addressed to the 'Hollanders in Europa' ('Dutch in Europe'), by 'hunne stamverwanten in Zuid-Afrika' ('their kin in South Africa'), with 'een broederstem' ('a kindred voice').²² The Dutch consul general in Cape Town pledged his official support at the start of the letter. The Greater-Dutch magazine *Neerlandia*²³

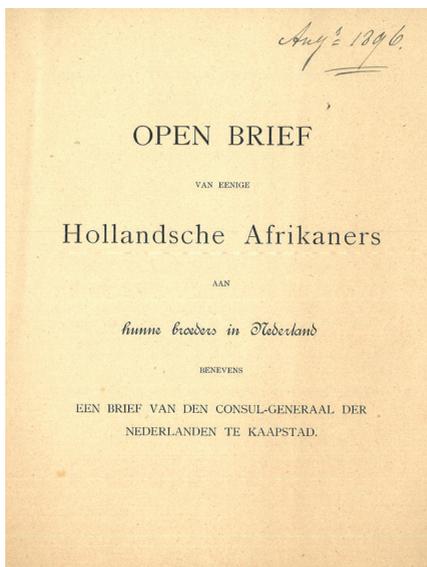
21 A. Moorrees et al., 'Open brief van eenige Hollandsche Afrikaners aan hunne broeders in Nederland' (Amsterdam/Cape Town: Jacques Dusseau and Co., August 1896), ZAH, Archief NZAV II, inv.nr. 103.

22 Ibid., 3.

23 The magazine of the *Algemeen Nederlands Verbond* (General Dutch Association, ANV), founded in 1895, promoted the 'Groot-Nederlandse' idea of the national unity of the Netherlands, Flanders, and the 'Dutch' element of South Africa.

published an article during the same year backing the request from *Ons Tijdschrift*.²⁴

The open letter contains proto-nationalist elements informed by rising European nationalisms, bearing out Kuitenbouwer's argument that the claiming of Dutch kinship bolstered Afrikaner nationalism. The authors of the letter argue that the loss of Dutch to English as the mother tongue will lead to a loss of national identity.²⁵ But the nationality in question is not Dutch: the plea is to prevent 'Afrikanerism' from dissolving into Englishness.²⁶ The plea is based on kinship: the '*echt Afrikaansche hart*' (true Afrikaans heart') believes that '*de wortel van ons volksbestaan Nederlandsch en niet Engelsch is*' ('the root of our national existence is Dutch and not English').²⁷



Open brief van eenige Hollandsche Afrikaners aan hunne broeders in Nederland (Open letter of some Dutch Afrikaners to their brothers in the Netherlands), 1896, Amsterdam/Cape Town. (ZAH, Archief NZAV II, inv.nr. 103.)

24 *Neerlandia*. Jaargang 1 (1896–1897), https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_nee003189601_01/_nee003189601_01_0092.php.

25 A. Moorrees et al., 'Open brief...', 7.

26 *Ibid.*, 6.

27 *Ibid.*, 8.

The assertions against Englishness should be read as indicating internal contestations within South African whiteness. The boundaries of whiteness change continuously, as is historically evident from the shifting positions of Jewish, Irish, Italian, and Afrikaner whites.²⁸ Inclusion in the structural power and privilege of whiteness is subject to internal hierarchisation. Differential racialization of some groups and individuals as 'lesser' or 'inferior' whites creates an order of whitenesses.²⁹ At the time of the writing of this open letter, a European and later specifically British discourse positioned Afrikaners as lesser whites, too long removed from European civilization and therefore having taken on the characteristics of 'inferior' indigenous people.³⁰ *Stamverwantskap* is wielded in the letter as an assertion of Afrikaner identity as European, thereby underscoring it as a settler-colonial identity.

This emphasis achieves a distancing from mostly unnamed racialized Black and Brown others and facilitates the claiming of whiteness for Afrikaners. The South African population is described as consisting of white and 'Coloured'³¹ people. Indigenous Black people are erased in this account; Coloured people are not referred to again. However, these suppressed racialized others are hinted at through repeated assertions of *stamverwantskap* as based in blood. The first reference is in several paragraphs dedicated to explaining the French Huguenot contribution to Afrikaner identity, with French and Dutch unifying and becoming one in *bloedverwantskap*. *Stamverwantskap* is tied back through blood,

28 Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010); Christi van der Westhuizen, *Sitting Pretty: White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2017).

29 Hunter and Van der Westhuizen, 'Viral Whiteness', 8.

30 Van der Westhuizen, *Sitting Pretty*, 25–32.

31 A term used to refer to people who emerged in the colonial encounter in the Cape after 1652 between Dutch and other European settlers, indigenous Khoi and San people, and enslaved people from Indonesia and elsewhere.

making the racial connection with Europeanness. In a signature ascription gesturing towards Afrikaner nationalism's containment of women as biological and social reproducers, this is also the only reference to women: *'de zonen en dochteren van beide volken zich onderling door den band des huwelijks verbonden. Zoo is ons geslacht ontstaan en aldus vloeit er gemengd Nederlandsch en Fransch bloed door onze aderen'* ('the sons and daughters of both peoples are tied together through the bond of marriage. This is how our generation came into being and thus mixed Dutch and French blood flows through our veins').³² Blood is connected with religion and culture to assert unity with the Dutch despite being separated by ocean and by state.³³ Repeated references to being 'brothers' further underline *stamverwantskap* as blood and cultural relation. Dutch language, morals and customs are held forth as having an effect of *'veredeling van ons [Afrikaner] volk'* ('ennoblement of our [Afrikaner] people').³⁴ Afrikaners owe the Dutch gratefulness, also as *'baanbreker [...] voor de godsdienstige en burgerlijke vrijheid'* ('pioneer [...] of religious and civic freedom').³⁵

The contradiction of the last statement fetting civil liberty is notable in relation to the colonial discounting of indigenous people evident in the letter. The miscegenation that characterized the Cape colony under Dutch rule, involving settlers, indigenous and enslaved people, is swept from view. In its place, a more acceptable 'mixing' is inserted that affords the Afrikaners a claim to whiteness. The letter's authors are five white men whose names and designations are provided at the end of the letter, a semiotic indexing that stands in contrast to many of the photographs from the ZAH archives showing nameless exoticized, decorative or labouring Black bodies.

32 A. Moorrees et al., 'Open brief...', 4.

33 Ibid., 8.

34 Ibid., 9, 13.

35 Ibid., 5.



An example of this kind of exoticizing imagery in the ZAH archives. Photographer unknown, location unknown, 1899. (ZAH, Beeldbank, Map 57-25, 'Swart meisje met 'n bordjie met goeie wense vir die jaar 1900 / [Zwart meisje met een lei waarop] Heil en zegen in 1900' (respectively translating as 'Black girl with a sign bearing good wishes for the year 1900' / [Black girl with a slate with Salvation and blessings in 1900].)

Conclusion

Reading the text of the open letter as declarative of the differentiations and stratifications internal to whiteness, it speaks to the colonial motivation of establishing and maintaining Afrikaner-Dutch *stamverwantskap* as the basis of Afrikaners' claim of white superiority and hence their political claim to South Africa. *Stamverwantskap* with the Dutch provided access to whiteness and associated power and privilege to the Afrikaners at the very moment when the British cast doubt about their whiteness. As the letter shows, the political project of *stamverwantskap* allowed Afrikaners to tap into a proto-nationalist discourse with eugenicist overtones of European blood purity in defiance of actual Afrikaner history of miscegenation.

It is further argued that interpreting *stamverwantskap* through the lens of geopolitics shows it not only propped up Afrikaner whiteness but also Dutch whiteness. The Netherlands' shrinking influence and relative

geopolitical weakness in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century was confirmed by its decision to remain neutral during the South African War (1899–1902). The Dutch received an injection of a sense of importance through the small courageous *volk* standing up to the mighty British empire, to paraphrase the writing on the motivation for their sudden interest in Afrikaners.³⁶ It is worth exploring further which role imaginaries of *stamverwantskap* played to elevate and reinforce Dutch whiteness in relation to (dominant) Anglo whiteness at the time.

The tone of the letter, with its reference to the 'ennobling' effects of Dutchness on the Afrikaners, hints at the positioning of Afrikaner whiteness as inferior, dating back to the nineteenth century and persisting during the twentieth century. Notably, when the NZAV board was confronted by anti-apartheid activists in 1984, it was quick to emphasize 'Dutch norms and values', suggesting that in the board members' eyes, Dutch norms and values automatically precluded them from supporting apartheid.³⁷ Kuitenbrouwer, as part of his discussion about the anti-apartheid movement as an example of the continuation of cultural imperialism by the Dutch from the nineteenth century, describes the action of throwing ZAH library books in the Keizersgracht in 1984 as the activists refusing the "'infected" heritage' from Afrikaners.³⁸ Hence, the historical internal hierarchy within Dutch-Afrikaner transnational whiteness created an opportunity for Dutch people to distance themselves, despite their own promotion of *stamverwantskap*, from complicity in apartheid. Dutch opposition to apartheid acted as a moralising deflection allowing the Dutch to be slow to confront their own colonial legacy,

36 Van Niekerk, 'Goede Hoop'; See also Schutte, 'Stamverwantschap als cultureel imperialisme'.

37 Veltkamp-Visser, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam*, 258.

38 Kuitenbrouwer, 'De geografie', 346.

as demonstrated by the government's belated apology for slavery in December 2022. It oddly mentions various former colonies but not South Africa,³⁹ which was founded on Dutch slavery. The ZAH is the bricks-and-mortar instantiation of the 140-year-odd effort at constructing *stamverwantskap*. Its archives should assist in analysing and resisting coloniality, as contributed to by the legacy of the *stamverwantskap* discourse.

39 Government of the Netherlands, 'Government apologises for the Netherlands' role in the history of slavery', 19 December 2022, <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2022/12/19/government-apologises-for-the-netherlands-role-in-the-history-of-slavery>.

'Stem uit die Stamland': Zuid-Afrikahuis as a Radio Studio for Dutch Broadcasts to South Africa during the Early Years of Apartheid (1949-1959)

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer

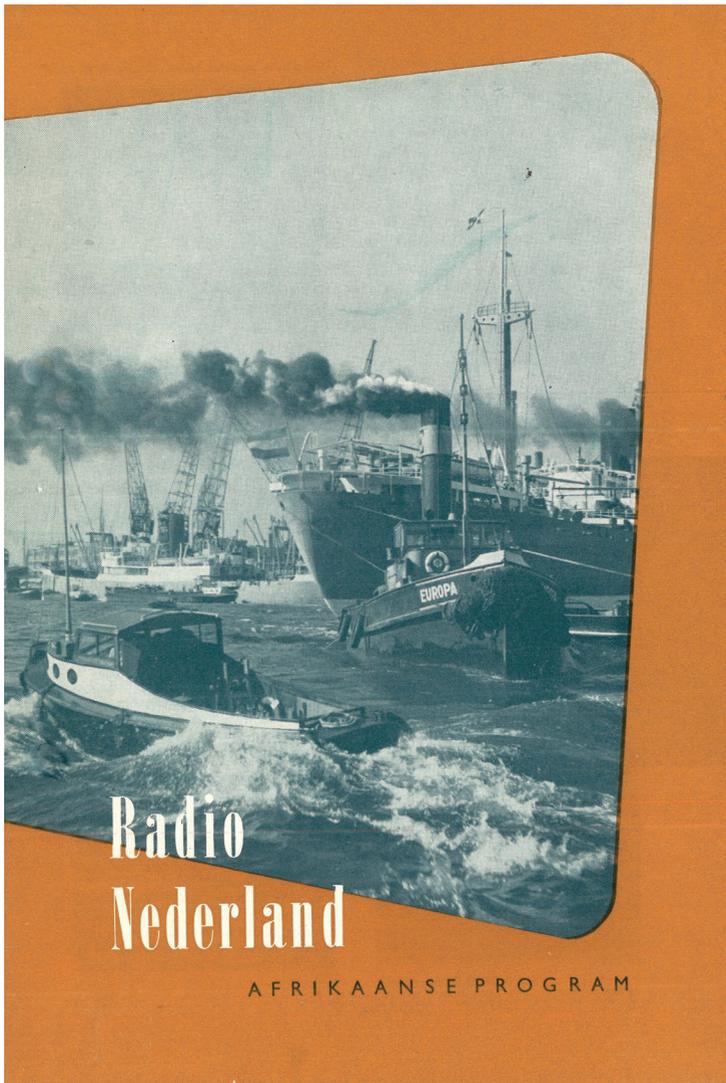
During the first wave of the sars-cov-2 pandemic in 2020 many cultural institutions worldwide became broadcasting organizations overnight. As physical events became impossible because of lockdown measures, people working in the cultural sector set up facilities to enable online streaming services to keep in touch with their publics, generating new ideas and sharing productions. The staff of the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH) also jumped on this train and broadcasted various events, ranging from poetry evenings to award ceremonies, via the organization's YouTube channel.¹ Worldwide, pundits interpreted this kind of online broadcasting as a sign of the final breakthrough of the digital era in the twenty-first century. Indeed, it seems likely that digital cameras are there to stay in the theatre room at the ZAH and that part of the public will remain glued to their screens at home to follow events online, even those that are also attended by a live audience. The advantage of this system is that people from all over the world can connect with the theatre room that is located at the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam. Looking at it from this perspective, online streaming could provide an opportunity for the ZAH to engage with diverse publics around the world, who are interested in various South African cultures and histories. As such, online streaming during the sars-cov-2

1 'Zuid-Afrikahuis officieel', YouTube Channel, 31 January 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgzSGZdb04u4Wcr13Xa1mbg>.

pandemic may provide us with a glimpse of the shape of things yet to come.

At the same time, this practice also allows us to reflect on the past as the ZAH has been a site of international broadcasting before. This essay is about Dutch shortwave radio transmissions to South Africa by *Radio Nederland Wereldomroep* (Radio Netherlands Worldwide, RNW). Two years after its foundation in 1947, this international broadcasting corporation inaugurated a programme in Afrikaans. In the pages below, I will explore the first ten years of this programme, which had close institutional ties to the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging* (Netherlands South African Association, NZAV) that had its offices in the ZAH, which back then was called the Jan van Riebeeckhuis. In addition, the staff of the Afrikaans programme of RNW made various recordings at the Jan van Riebeeckhuis, which in effect was partly set up as a radio studio. In the late 1940s and 1950s international radio broadcasting was the premier global communication technology and provided opportunities for people in various countries to connect. However, as this contribution will argue, the Afrikaans programme of RNW during its first decade provided a schedule specifically designed for the Afrikaans-speaking white minority in the early years of apartheid in South Africa. As such this particular broadcasting programme in that period did not only enable global connections, it served as an instrument for exclusion too. To understand this dynamism, we have to consider radio in the historical context of white supremacist repression and the resistance against its legacy.

In an essay on the role of radio broadcasting in the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), Franz Fanon argued that the medium at the onset of the conflict had been an instrument for the French colonial regime. It used radio to promote French language and culture, in order to bolster the white minority regime and to boost the morale of the *colons*. Fanon went on to show that



Cover of a programme booklet RNW, celebrating 10 years of Afrikaans programming. (ZAH, Archief RNW, inv, nr 62.)

this use of radio as a tool of colonialism was successfully challenged by the anticolonial movement FLN (National Liberation Front) that set up a broadcasting station in neighbouring Egypt, which it used to mobilize Arab resistance.² Scholars working on the early years of radio in the United States of America also have noted that the medium initially was used by white Americans as a tool for racial segregation. Derek Valliant has argued that Chicago radio stations, that were dominated by white Americans, in the 1920s broadcasted 'sounds of whiteness' as African American voices were marginalized. If Black people were broadcasted they were assigned certain roles, such as jazz musicians. In addition, white actors mimicked Black voices in a radio equivalent of blackface minstrel shows, in which they mocked African Americans.³ Writing on radio in a context of what she calls 'the sonic color line', Jennifer Stoever concurs with Valliant and adds that such soundscapes affected the 'listening ear', which means that listeners associated Americanism with whiteness.⁴ Also in the case of the USA, both these authors have pointed out that Black radio makers effectively contested the use of radio as a medium to promote white norms and eventually succeeded in broadcasting their own voices on their own terms.⁵ The cases of Algeria and the USA show that radio was a contested medium that was used both to promote white supremacist ideology *and* to resist it.

This was also the case in South Africa under apartheid, during which the ether was a contested space in various ways, in the context of the rise of Afrikaner

2 F. Fanon, 'This is the Voice of Algeria', in: *A Dying Colonialism* (Grove Press: New York, 1965), 69–98.

3 Derek W. Valliant, 'Sounds of Whiteness: Local Radio, Racial Formation, and Public Culture in Chicago, 1921–1935', *American Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2002): 26.

4 Jennifer Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York University Press: New York: 2016), 7 and 12.

5 Valliant, 'Sounds of Whiteness', 38–39; Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, chapter 5.

nationalism which resulted in the 1948 election win of the *Nasionale Party* (NP). Firstly, Afrikaner nationalists successfully promoted standard Afrikaans, an important marker of their identity, through the *Suid-Afrikaanse Uitsaaikorporasie* or SAUK (also known as the South African Broadcasting Corporation, SABC). At its foundation in 1936 English was the dominant language used by the SABC (with an estimated 80:20 ratio), but in 1938 Afrikaans was granted its own 'channel B'. In the years that followed this channel developed into an important medium for Afrikaner nationalists to mobilize supporters.⁶ In the decade after the NP came to power in 1948, the grip of the apartheid government on the SABC/SAUK gradually increased and full control was established by 1959. In that period the Afrikaans service became an instrument to mobilize the NP electorate by creating unity in this group with broadcasts featuring folk music and important ceremonies of Afrikanerdom.⁷

In a further effort to legitimize segregation laws based on racial and ethnic differentiation among Black population groups in the country, the SABC/SAUK broadcasted pro-apartheid propaganda in various African languages through what it called 'Radio Bantu' between 1960 and 1994.⁸ This type of broadcast must be seen as an attempt to appropriate Black voices to serve the goals of white minority rule. However, as was the case elsewhere in the world, there was resistance. A number of Black announcers on the Northern Sotho programme challenged the racist hierarchies within the organization of the station by occasionally slipping in subversive messages in their

6 Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, 'Language, Programming and Propaganda during the SABC's First Decade', *African Journalism Studies*, 36:2 (2015): 59–76,

7 Graham Hayman and Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, 'Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924–1971', in *Broadcasting in South Africa*, eds. idem (Anthropos: Bellville 1989), 54–6.

8 See Liz Gunner, who details in particular the history of Zulu radio in South Africa (Gunner, *Radio Soundings: South Africa and the Black Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

broadcasts.⁹ Moreover, Black liberation groups in South Africa started their own radio organizations to contest the broadcasts of the apartheid regime. The most prominent contender of the SABC/SAUK was Radio Freedom, a station established by the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) 'uMkhonto we Sizwe' (Spear of the Nation, MK). However, it took a long time before this radio station was able to establish a foothold amongst listeners in South Africa to mobilize them for their cause. After a false start in the early 1960s, Radio Freedom only rose to prominence after the Soweto Uprising of 1976, broadcasting from stations in various countries in the region.¹⁰ Taking this timeline into consideration, it is safe to say that Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid ideology dominated South African radio broadcasting in the late 1940s and 1950s, propagating the idea that the country was to be ruled by the white minority. It is in this context that RNW started broadcasting to South Africa.

In his inaugural speech for the Afrikaans programme on 1 November 1949, RNW director Henk van den Broek stated that it was 'better late than never' to start with direct radio broadcasts to South Africa, implying that they should have started earlier.¹¹ For radio makers in the Netherlands, South Africa had been a region of interest from the start of international broadcasting by the Philips company in 1927. At the time radio was considered as a tool of empire and priority was given to colonial radio broadcasts to the Indonesian archipelago and the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. The focus of these broadcasts

9 Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi, "You are Listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation": Vernacular Radio, Bantustan Identity and Listenership, 1960–1994', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 586–587.

10 Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi, 'The African National Congress's Radio Freedom and its audiences in apartheid South Africa, 1963–1991', *Journal of African Media Studies* 2, no. 2 (2010): 139–153.

11 Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision (hereafter NISV), RNW logboeken, 01/11/1949.

was on white colonial expats, to help strengthen their ties with their country of origin.¹² A commission that drew a plan for a state-sponsored international radio corporation in 1938 recommended that in addition to the 'overseas territories', the *stamverwanten* (kinsmen) in South Africa deserved 'special attention'. It explicitly mentioned that radio could be used to strengthen the 'cultural ties between the Netherlands and South Africa'.¹³ The Second World War prevented these plans from being executed, but this resolve was clearly not forgotten at the foundation of RNW in 1947. Although the Dutch station initially inaugurated foreign language programs in English, Spanish and Bahasa Indonesia, Afrikaans was included in the first expansion of the programme in 1949.¹⁴ Remarkably, RNW sources do not contain references to the political situation in South Africa, where in 1948 the NP had won the elections. To people in the Netherlands, this came as a shock as leading members of the party had shown sympathies for Nazi Germany during the Second World War and had not criticized the occupation of the Netherlands. In addition, the Dutch press initially reported negatively on the racism of the NP. Within a year, however, condemnations of the new South African government in the Dutch public sphere had waned and the Dutch government forged new

12 Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, 'Radio as a Tool of Empire. Colonial Broadcasting from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies in the 1920s and 1930s', *Itinerario. International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction* 40, no. 1 (2016): 83-103.

13 Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA), Archief van het hoofdbestuur van de PTT (2.16.93), inventarisnummer 542. 'Rapport van de contact-commissie werelduitzendingen' (1938), 43-44.

14 RNW also inaugurated an Arabic programme in that year. This expansion must be seen in the context of the War of Independence in Indonesia (1945–1949). Because the archipelago was home to a large Muslim community officials wanted to reach out to the heartland of Islam to muster support for the Dutch position in the conflict. See: Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, 'Orientalism on Air: The early years of the Arabic service of Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep (1949–1950)', in: *Ruling the Waves: Transnational Radio Broadcasting in the Middle East and the Mediterranean between Production and Reception*, eds. P.V. Olsen and P. Wien, 1920–1970 (in review).



So sien 'n Afrikaanse student in Amsterdam, Klaas Havenga, die Afrikaanse uitsending vanuit Nederland met sy vaardige tekenpen.

Cartoon by Klaas Havenga in a RNW programme booklet, 1973.
Caption: 'So sien 'n Afrikaanse student in Amsterdam, Klaas Havenga, die Afrikaanse uitsending vanuit Nederland met sy vaardige tekenpen' (This is how an Afrikaans student in Amsterdam, Klaas Havenga, depicts the Afrikaans broadcast from the Netherlands with his skilled drawing pen') (ZAH, Archief RNW, map 53.)

connections between the two countries.¹⁵ In this context, Van den Broek was fully committed to the inauguration of the Afrikaans programme.

The new Afrikaans programme of RNW was also connected to the idea of *stamverwantschap*, a concept that was used to envision the 'kinship' between the Dutch people and the Afrikaners. Historians have identified various layers of meaning of this word, that was used in references to culture (shared history, religion and language) and race (blood ties).¹⁶ The second speaker at the inauguration of the Afrikaans programme of RNW, the South African legate to the Netherlands, Dr Bosman, also appealed to feelings of *stamverwantschap* by mentioning the landing of Jan van Riebeeck at Table Bay in 1652. With this reference, Bosman argued that the RNW broadcasts lay in line with a long '*geskiedenis van die verkeer*' ('history of the traffic') between the Netherlands and South Africa.¹⁷ Moreover, the early apartheid government used the landing of Van Riebeeck in another way, as it became the foundation myth of the regime. Its main argument was that in 1652, the foundations for modern South Africa were laid by the forefathers of the Afrikaners, who essentially were Europeans ruling the country. This was the main message of the grand tercentenary festivities

15 Stefan de Boer, *Van Sharpeville tot Soweto. Nederlands regeringsbeleid ten aanzien van Apartheid 1960–1977* (SDU: The Hague 1999), 70–2; Barbara Henkes, 'Shifting Identifications in Dutch-South African Migration Policies (1910–1961)', *South African Historical Journal* 68, no. 4 (2016): 641–669, especially 654 and 657.

16 For a reflection of these factors see: Barbara Henkes, '*Stamverwantschap* and the Imagination of a White Transnational Community. The 1952 Celebrations of the Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary in the Netherlands and South Africa', in *Imagining Communities: Historical Reflections on the Process of Community Formation*, eds. Gemma Blok et al (Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam 2018), 173–196, 175–177.

17 ZAH, Archief RNW, map 62. 'Toespraak Dr. D.E. Bosman op 1 november 1949'. Voor de Nederlandse herinneringscultuur rond van Riebeeck in de jaren 1950 zie: W.P. van Ledden, *Jan van Riebeeck tussen wal en schip: een onderzoek naar de beeldvorming over Jan van Riebeeck in Nederland en Zuid-Afrika omstreeks 1900, 1950 en 2000* (Hilversum 2005), 56–95.

in 1952 in South Africa as well as in the Netherlands.¹⁸ RNW contributed to that particular narrative in several instances during the 1950s. In 1952 it broadcasted several programmes about Van Riebeeck celebrations in the Netherlands, which centered in the town of Culemborg where he was born. In a speech on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Afrikaans programme in 1959, it was argued that radio broadcasts from the Netherlands provided the Afrikaners with a '*stem uit die stamland*' ('voice from the homeland') as it was the only Afrikaans programme outside the borders of South Africa.¹⁹

RNW also tried to lure Afrikaner listeners by providing them with features that would suit their tastes. This effort was wholeheartedly supported by organizations that were housed in the Van Riebeeckhuis. To gather information about the preferences of white Afrikaans-speaking radio audiences, RNW installed an advisory board for Afrikaans broadcasts in 1954 including a representative of the NZAV; the first one was J. Keuning, a banker who acted as chairperson of the executive committee. He actively advocated the importance of the Afrikaans programme and promoted its existence. The NZAV representative used the network of the association to arrange meetings between high-ranking RNW staff members, including the director, and their counterparts at SABC/SAUK and other cultural institutions in apartheid South Africa. The goals of these meetings were to create goodwill between the organizations and to gather information about Afrikaner radio listeners. Through these contacts, RNW also recruited radio presenters from SABC/SAUK for its Afrikaans broadcasts and in the 1950s

18 Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, 'The 1952 Jan Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History in South Africa', *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (1993): 447–68; Henkes, "'Stamverwantschap" and the Imagination', 187–194.

19 ZAH, Archief RNW, map 62. 'Die stem uit die stamland. 10 jaar Afrikaans oor Radio Nederland'.



Cover of a RNW Afrikaans programming booklet. (ZAH, Archief RNW, map 54.)

several young Afrikaners temporarily worked in Hilversum for RNW. Promotion folders of the broadcasting station regularly contained short portraits of these people, providing biographical details (especially about their education) and highlighting their specific programmes. In 1959, for example, Frikke Kraamwinkel was mentioned for his broadcast on Thursday evenings meant for *'almal wat lief is vir die plaas en platteland'* ('everybody who loves the farm and the countryside').

Another strategy to create a link between the Netherlands and South Africa was to broadcast recordings featuring the Afrikaner community in the Netherlands. One noticeable group were students at Dutch universities. Once a month RNW was present at a so-called 'coffee table' meeting at the Jan van Riebeeckhuis to record greetings from the students for family members back home.²⁰ The building also was turned into a recording studio on other occasions when Afrikaners gathered there. One such event was the annual ceremony on 16 December to commemorate the battle at Blood River/Ncome River in 1838. This event was a key feature of Afrikaner nationalism symbolizing the victory of Afrikaners over one of their main rivals for dominance in South Africa, the Zulu kingdom. The military narrative was carved into stone and marble at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, which was opened with a mass meeting six weeks after RNW started its Afrikaans broadcasts — something that Van den Broek explicitly mentioned in his inaugural speech in which he expressed the hope that radio would make it possible for people in the Netherlands to 'partake in' (*'meebeleven'*) the annual event.²¹ In the 1950s the remembrance of the battle shifted in tone and was recast as 'Geloftedag', emphasizing the part of the Afrikaner story in which their leaders made a vow to God to turn the

20 ZAH, Archief RNW, map 62. Booklet 'Radio Nederland. Afrikaanse program'.

21 NISV, RNW logboeken, 01/11/1949.

day of the battle into a day of prayer if they were granted victory. In the 1950s Afrikaners in the Netherlands met at the Jan van Riebeeckhuis for a morning full of prayers and sermons led by ministers from the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. These soundscapes were complemented with songs from the Afrikaner nationalists' songbook, including the national anthem of apartheid South Africa, *Die Stem*. RNW was present at these meetings and recorded them for its Afrikaans broadcasts.²²

The material that has been consulted for this contribution suggests that in the first ten years of its existence, the Afrikaans programme of RNW was firmly rooted in the idea of *stamverwantschap*, using radio as an instrument to connect Dutch people with their white 'kinsmen' (*'stamverwanten'*) in South Africa. Although contemporary Dutch and Afrikaner sources present this concept as a logical outcome of history, it was a construction that had political and ideological implications in the context of the early apartheid regime. As has been argued RNW broadcasts included key sonic features of the myths surrounding Afrikaner nationalism, commemorating events that were celebrated as moments that led to white supremacist rule in South Africa, such as the landing of Van Riebeeck and the battle at Blood River/Ncome River. Moreover, there were close institutional ties between RNW and the SABC/SAUK in attempts to attract Afrikaner listeners. Such practices are comparable with the strategies of French broadcasters in colonial Algeria and white broadcasters in the USA who tried to uphold the sonic colour line.

As was the case with the examples from Algeria and the USA these broadcasting practices that were meant to accommodate the white 'listening ear', were contested by other organizations that became active on the ether. In the Netherlands criticism of apartheid grew over time and

22 For example see: NISV, RNW logboeken Nederlandse dienst, 16/12/1954.

in that context, several organizations started to protest against the Afrikaans programme of RNW in the 1960s and 1970s. Dutch anti-apartheid groups started to raise support, technical and monetary, for Radio Freedom's stations in Southern Africa, which was able to expand its activities from the late 1970s onwards. In context of the escalating tensions between the apartheid regime and the ANC after the Soweto Uprising, RNW decided to terminate the Afrikaans programme in 1977. As a consequence, the ZAH ceased to serve as a radio studio. After more than 40 years, online streaming technology has made it possible to rethink the venue as a place for broadcasting. One of the main challenges will be how to include a vast array of voices that can contribute to the diverse soundscape of post-apartheid South Africa.

**Photo No. 20 Issued by the State
Information Office, Pretoria. A Cape
Coloured Girl**

Farren van Wyk



'Photo No. R.20 Issued by the State Information Office, Pretoria. A Cape Coloured Girl.' (ZAH, Beeldbank, AVA II, Fh 41.)

When the invitation to write an essay about an object in the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South African House, ZAH) came my way, I had the opportunity to see and choose from an archive of portraits of Coloured people that was taken during the apartheid era. During this visit, I found a portrait titled 'Photo No. R.20 Issued by the State Information Office, Pretoria. A Cape Coloured Girl'.

The portrayed woman has curled hair, styled in a European fashion, pearls around her neck and a fruit and flower-patterned dress with embroidered lace around the shoulders. The background of clouds does not give a hint of a location as the portrait was taken from a lower angle. Her smile is positioned away from the camera and makes one think that this pose is directed by the photographer. Looking closer at the portrait, one of her teeth has a golden cap. The only information we have about this portrait is that it was taken in Cape Town, according to the label on the back of the photograph. No date is written down, no name of the photographer, nor the name of the portrayed lady.

Yet seeing this portrait, the woman — I'd like to call her 'the Lady' — touched me in a very specific way. She reminded me of how my grandmother looked, and opened up memories of my childhood in South Africa. I remember dressing up for Sunday mass. All the women in my family did that and my grandmother had chiffon dresses and tailored suits. We did not eat breakfast but our family Sunday lunches made by my grandmother were abundant with soup, curry, rice, potatoes and different vegetables. Our family also threw lavish parties where my mother played the latest hits of Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, and Lauren Hill with the Fugees. Christmases with loads of gifts under our colourful Christmas tree. My mom told me that my grandparents were very poor but looking back at those memories through the family photo albums, as they were photographed by aunties and uncles, we do not look



Photograph from the Van Wyk Family Album. Farren is the baby on the right side being held by her mother. (Photographer unknown, 1993, Salsoneville, Port Elizabeth (SA).)

poor. We look sophisticated, because my family found ways to buy what was in fashion, get hold of the newest tunes, and spend days at the beach with potato salads and braai meat.

'The Lady' is an echo that reminds me of memories I have of my home, but unfortunately, the ZAH has no other information about her. There are only speculations and no official documents about the history of the portrait and its journey from South Africa to the ZAH. The backside of the photograph links this portrait with South Africa's former State Information Office. It may have arrived at the ZAH collection through a personal contact, although information confirming this is lacking. What is known of the State Information Office is that it had a special department aimed to influence public opinion abroad and used portraits such as these as propaganda material to counter the anti-apartheid organisations. In this manner, the Office provided 'knowledge' about South Africa



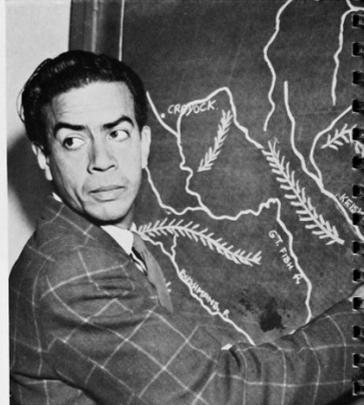
A Coloured fisherman plying his trade off the coast of the Cape.



A retired Coloured headmaster of a training college now grows orchids as a hobby.



This Coloured girl is employed as an assistant in a Cape Town photographic studio.



Teaching in a school for Coloureds is his chosen profession.

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The photo of 'the Lady' was published in one such propaganda publication by the State Information Office — on the various population 'groups' in the country — in a chapter on 'Cape Coloured' South Africans, preceded by a chapter on 'Hottentots', and followed by a chapter on 'Cape Nguni' people. The photo of 'the Lady' has as caption 'This Coloured girl is employed as an assistant in a Cape Town photographic studio'. Her photo is one of four photos referencing various professional 'types': a fisherman, a training college headmaster, and teacher. (*The Peoples of South Africa: A Pictorial Survey* (Pretoria: State Information Office, n.d. [ca 1951]), 32.)

and the visual language needed to depict how sophisticated the country and its inhabitants were.

The magazine *Panorama*, for example, was published by the Department of Information of the apartheid government that functioned as a counterweight to the anti-apartheid magazine *DRUM*. In *Panorama*, portraits just like the one of 'the Lady' were published. *DRUM*, on the other hand, visualized the culture, dreams, and hopes of the Black community. This opens up the thought that the lady was portrayed to create a one-dimensional picture of the position of Coloured people within the country. 'The Lady' embodies a mixture of South African and European aspects as her tied-up hair and dress seem to be influenced by the British Victorian style. Her right shoulder is pointed forward and the fact that her face is not directed towards the camera fits the tradition of portraiture in England at that time. Her curly hair was straightened which was a distinctive characteristic for South African women to conform to European standards. The State Information Office therefore represented a 'created' type of Coloured that was sophisticated and urbanized while at the same time, the government and state continued to dehumanize and discriminate against people of colour.

Throughout history, the anthropological and empirical visual portraits of South African women of colour had specific characteristics. One of them was that women were primarily portrayed half naked, standing or sitting in front of a hut with a child on their lap. The State Information Office understood that they needed to deviate from this historical visual narrative. The Office used portraiture as a tool to create a type of population group to present its alternative narrative. Instead of representing the portrayed person within the complexities of apartheid South Africa that marked her everyday life with exclusion, poverty and discrimination as a person of colour under the system of apartheid, the portrait of 'the Lady', had to signify an urbanized and sophisticated

population group of so-called Coloureds. This constructed narrative was meant for outsiders — people whose negative opinion about the country had to be swayed towards understanding and possibly sympathy or support for the State's apartheid policies.

This portrait was taken with an analogue camera on black and white film. However, black and white film does not represent the real colour of skin and therefore photographs cannot be used (as the State Information Office tried to do) to legitimize practices of segregation based on perceived differences in the colour of skin. This puts 'the Lady' in a grey area as the 'Coloured' skin is not white nor black on film, but a tone of grey. As I have two homes, the Netherlands and South Africa, I too sit in this grey area. The grey area is the space from which one does not take knowledge to be the truth but a place to see connections and where these come from.

I first assumed that the portrait was taken closer to the abolishment of apartheid as it did not fit within the colonial visual language. Through researching the State Information Office and figuring out what their goals were, traces of colonial representation and aesthetics came to light. This opened the door for questions about the portrayed lady and created space to dissolve the traces of how portraiture was used to segregate people. Coloured people's existence embodies the coming together of people with different skin colours and backgrounds. This did not only happen through colonialism, slavery and apartheid, it happened through love and intimacy as well. Thus, within the grey space of the colonial and apartheid 'contact zone', complexities of lived experiences challenge presented 'knowledge' through such images used by the State Information Office. Here one has the freedom to ask questions without the need of arriving at answers.

I was born in Port Elizabeth (today Gqeberha) in 1993, the last year of apartheid. My grandparents were

politically classified by the apartheid government as Coloureds and forcibly removed to the Coloured appointed neighbourhood of Salsoneville, the birthplace of my parents and myself. Even though our family immigrated to the Netherlands when I was six years old and I have spent most of my life here, apartheid is embedded in my identity. Coloured people's identity was



"Our Anthropological Golden Era". Photograph by Maaïke Kuiper, directed by Farren van Wyk, 2021, Gelderland (NL).

based on the fact that we were neither white nor black. Within the ideology of segregation, we were difficult to identify as one singular ethnicity and it created in me a restlessness: having a mixed background was presented and reproduced as a problem. This mindset continues to persist, as in the Netherlands I am seen as South African and in South Africa I am seen as Dutch. If I am never really home, where do I belong while having this identity of absence?

I was given my first camera after graduation from high school and photography became my passion and obsession. Portraiture intrigued me immediately as it is a carrier of identity and within the medium of photography I can create my identity. I get to be who I want to be and step out of the apartheid politics that wanted to (and was used to) define me and my family. Although being categorized as Coloured, within Port Elizabeth we sometimes referred to ourselves as mixed, which seeps through into my photographic project as *mixedness*. I chose to study photography at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht and continued with a Masters's Degree in Visual Anthropology, all towards my life's mission to decolonize portraiture.

We don't know who the woman in the photograph was, nor how she lived her life. The name of the photographer is left out too. Also, did 'the Lady' have a say in how she would be portrayed and was she aware of the visual European influences bestowed into making her portrait? So: what does looking at this picture do for me and for us? Apartheid's politics around social categorisation were one-dimensional, yet the life of 'the Lady', that of my family, and mine are so complex that it can never fit this one-dimensional categorization. This is what the grey space is about: the richness of everyone's life.

This Man Has a Name

Manon Braat



Swart man wat eet (unconfirmed title).

Painting by Frans David Oerder (oil on canvas, 210 cm x 135 cm), 1898, Pretoria. Photograph by Sean Fitzpatrick, 2023, ZAH, Amsterdam.

When you enter the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH) in Amsterdam you see him immediately: the life-sized man on the painting in the stairwell. He is sitting, wears a hat, his pants are torn and he is barefoot. Next to him is a shovel and amongst the straw on the ground lie a knobkerrie and a kind of duffel bag.¹ Further details are indistinguishable because the work is not only quite dark, but also appears to be heavily soiled. Moreover, because it hangs high on the walls of a stairwell, you cannot get closer than three meters from the canvas. Removing the work from the wall for closer analysis is unfortunately not an option for the ZAH because of the high expenses such an action implies. An initial thought that comes to mind when looking at what the painting depicts, could be that the man is a farm labourer who is resting in a barn or a simple house. He seems to be holding something in his hand — in a letter (see below), it is stated that the depicted man is kindling a fire (*'vuurslag aanblazen'*).

If this image was painted 'from life' we may wonder: who was this man? How did he regard being painted? Did he have a choice in the matter? These are the kinds of questions I want to find answers to. I think they are important because they focus on the Black body as the subject of the artwork instead of Oerder, the artist of the work. Answering these questions is far more difficult than it is to find facts about the artist, as much art history across the globe has been written from a Eurocentric perspective.

So, let's start with the information that is provided by the artwork itself. The painting is signed 'F.D. Oerder, Pretoria, 1898'. The artist is the Dutch-born Frans David Oerder (Rotterdam, 1867–Pretoria, 1944), who at the time of making the painting would have just returned

1 A knobkerrie is a form of wooden club, used mainly in Southern and Eastern Africa. Typically, they have a large knob at one end and are used for hunting or for clubbing an enemy's head.

to Pretoria from his months-long journey through what is now called KwaZulu-Natal. After his journey, Oerder painted numerous portraits of Black people, often full-length. The painting in the ZAH is not referenced in any archive or book that I could find. It was probably privately owned before it was acquired for 250 guilders in 1949 from the estate of E. Middelburg by the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging* (Netherlands South African Association, NZAV).²

Het Vaderland, a Dutch leading newspaper of progressive-liberal signature, which also gave considerable coverage to art and culture, published an article in 1899 on the departure of G.A.A. Middelberg from South Africa back to the Netherlands, as director of *Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorwegmaatschappij* (Netherlands South African Railway Company, NZASM). As a farewell gift, he was offered two paintings by Oerder, one of them depicting an African person.³ Nothing more is said about the paintings in the article so we cannot know for sure if this is the painting that is currently in the ZAH. But if it is, then it's likely that E. Middelberg inherited the painting from his father G.A.A Middelberg and the NZAV acquired it from his estate. That could be the reason why so little is known about it, given that the painting had been in private collections since 1899.

The painting was exhibited in 1921 at the fortieth anniversary of the NZAV in the *Paleis voor Volksvlucht* in Amsterdam. From a letter by E. Middelberg to the secretary of the NZAV, Johan Visscher, we learn that the title of the painting references in pejorative terms an African person kindling a fire.⁴

The pejorative word is not reproduced here because it offends. Originally, it was an Arabic term that

2 Vergadering HB NZAV, 19 March 1949. NZAV IV nr. 133.

3 'Brieven uit Zuid-Afrika.' *Het Vaderland*, 4 February 1899.

4 Brief van E. Middelberg aan J. Visscher, 27 February 1921. NZAV I nr. 2318.

was used by white South Africans and Europeans to refer to Black people in a disdainful way. In the minutes of 19 March 1949 of the NZAV, the painting is referenced, using the pejorative term again, as depicting a seated African man. This pejorative term has formally fallen into disuse since the first free elections in South Africa in 1994 and is now regarded as a hateful term. On a list of objects drafted by the ZAH in 2015, the painting is renamed: *Rustende inlandse arbeider* (Resting Indigenous labourer).⁵ So, at some point, the painting was retitled. I have asked employees at the ZAH whether this happened (long) before the list of objects was drawn up in 2015 and who was responsible for it, but nobody seems to know. In conversations with people at the ZAH, I've heard the former title being used, which raises the question if the title had only been adjusted for outward appearances. Does the use of words like these obstruct the decolonization of language and the mindset that is needed for the desired transformation of the institution?⁶

The term *inlander* (Indigenous or Native), that was chosen as a new title, is problematic too because it was used by the Dutch government as a legal term to distinguish between original inhabitants and the white settlers, mainly in colonial former Dutch East Indies, to organize society on a race-based system. This word too, has fallen into disuse, since the Dutch public discourse around

5 ZAH, Objectinventarisatie Zuid-Afrikahuis, 2015, object nr. 3.

6 This issue of pejorative language use is in no case unique to the ZAH, and it's a problem that all colonial archives have to deal with. It is worth stating here that, while working on this publication, we (as editors) have heard from several persons who have been working with the ZAH archives about how violent the encounter with pejorative language used in documents and/or colonial portrayal of Black South Africans in photographs had been to them. To reinvent themselves as inclusive, decolonized (or decolonizing) organizations, institutions such as the ZAH must adjust their behaviour and language, and should warn people about the violent colonial and settler signs (both visual and linguistic) in their archives.

colonialism and racism was given a new impulse by global and national social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Kick Out Zwarte Piet.⁷

When examining other works by Oerder depicting Black people, there appears to be no other work with the racist term today. The titles are often rather neutral descriptions of what has been pictured using words that were common at that time, for example, *Dolosgooier in 'n winkel* (Diviner in a shop), *Die skapoespeler* (The bow player), *Na die maal* (After the meal) or *Swart musikante* (Black musicians). However, there is reason to believe that these are possibly not the original titles given by Oerder himself, as there are references in letters from Oerder in which he uses this pejorative reference.⁸

In my research to find out more about the painting and the man portrayed in it, I contacted Alexander E. Duffey, director of the Department of Arts at the University of Pretoria and author of *Frans David Oerder Anglo-Boereoorlogtekeninge en skilderye*.⁹ According to Duffey, Oerder titled the painting *Swart man wat eet* (Black man who eats). He is convinced that a watercolour, entitled 'Swart man wat eet', also dated 1889, is a preliminary study for the painting (see image 2). There is indeed a striking resemblance between the two works. The somewhat spread-legged pose of the man against a wall, the hat on his head, the bare feet and the two hands that hold something. The large square hole on the

7 For a discussion of terminology and the use or removal of pejorative terms in the Dutch museum context, see the publications *Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to World Choices in the Cultural Sector*, edited by Wayne Modest and Robin Lelijveld (Amsterdam: National Museum of World Cultures, 2018) and Samuel Mounir, *Waarden voor een nieuwe taal. Een veilige, inclusieve en toegankelijke taal voor iedereen in de kunst- en cultuursector* (Code Diversiteit en Inclusie, 2021), codedi.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WAARDEN_VOOR_EEN_NIEUWE_TAAAL.pdf.

8 See for example: Alexander E. Duffey, *Frans David Oerder Anglo-Boereoorlogtekeninge en skilderye* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2017), 37.

9 Ibid.

left knee is remarkably the same. But where the man in the watercolour seems to look the viewer directly in the eye, the gaze of the man in the painting at the ZAH is directed downwards, onto what he holds in his hands, and the knobkerrie and shovel have been added to the final work. It therefore seems safe to say that these were choices made by the painter that did not necessarily have anything to do with the actual belongings of the man.

Duffey told me that he found documents in the archives of the Johannesburg Art Gallery saying that Gustaaf Adolf Frederik Molengraaff (1860–1942), a Dutch geologist who became the 'state geologist' of the Transvaal Republic, bought the painting from Oerder. The man portrayed is supposed to be 'a beggar living in a poor area of Pretoria'. It's possible that the painting was bought from Oerder before 1899, and that Molengraaff sold it to the NZASM, so they could offer it to their director Middelberg upon his departure from South Africa in 1899. The documents Duffey mentions don't state the name of the portrayed man, and it seems virtually impossible to get more information about him. But it's likely that he was a real person and that he met Oerder, as was the case with other people Oerder portrayed in paintings on which more information is available. It makes sense to assume that his place of residence was Marabastad, because this township was 'a poor area of Pretoria' where most Black people in Pretoria lived around the time Oerder made the painting.

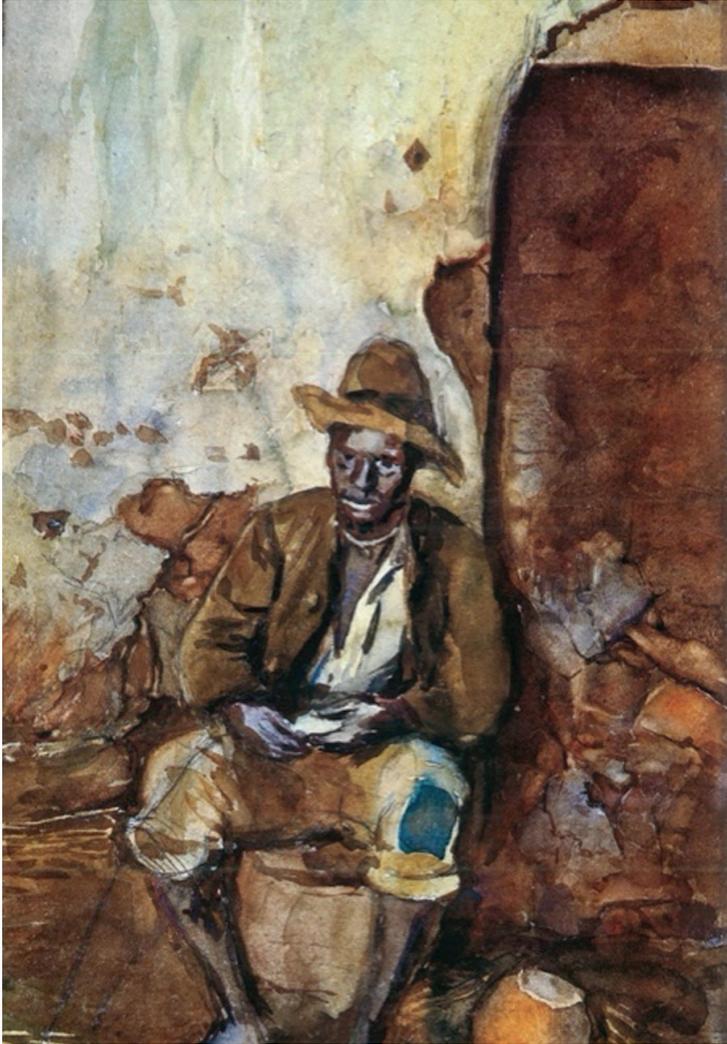
Marabastad was an amalgamation of ethnicities, cultures, and religions at the end of the nineteenth century. The area was created around 1870 following the settlement of the local Southern Ndebele chief Maraba, chief of the Mashashane people. With the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in the 1880s, local and overseas migrants flocked to the newly established Johannesburg and Pretoria (now Tshwane). As a result, Marabastad also grew rapidly. It was administered by the Zuid-Afrikaanse

Republiek (ZAR) and residents had to rent a piece of land from the government on which they could build their house. Indian settlers, Chinese traders, people of mixed descent from the Cape and Black South Africans from the surrounding rural areas settled there in search of income.

Perhaps the man in the painting had also come to Marabastad from the countryside in the hope of finding work but had not yet succeeded when he met Oerder. Without an income, he would have had to take care of his livelihood by other means. Would he have found work later? What were the socio-economic consequences for an African man such as the person portrayed by Oerder in an increasingly racially segregated society as a result of the implementation of the Transvaal Native Land Act of 1913?

My search to find out who the man in the picture was turns out to be a dead end. But there is no doubt that there has been an unequal power relationship between him and his portrayer. He was a poor Black man in a land occupied by white settlers who, approximately half a century later, would establish apartheid.

In his monography, Duffey argues that Oerder is one of the most important painters ever to have worked in South Africa. According to Duffey, he laid the foundation of a realistic style based on the principles of European art academies in South African painting and was widely respected. In 1985, the South African Post Office even issued a set of stamps featuring his paintings. Oerder left behind a vast variety of paintings, from landscapes and scenes of rural life to portraits of Boers and Black South Africans and scenes from the South African War. Although he painted different aspects of life in South Africa, he painted from the perspective of a white man who lived with the privileges that white people in South Africa have had since the occupation of the land by Europeans. The fact that a white Dutchman is presented by Duffey in



Swart man wat eet. Watercoloor by Frans David Oerder (watercolour, 42 cm x 23,5 cm), 1898. (Duffey, *Frans David Oerder Anglo-Boereoorlogtekeninge en skilderye* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2017), 218.)

2017 as one of South Africa's most important artists says a lot about how those skewed power relations and inequality of opportunity are still a reality.

After all, who writes (art) history and determines what is published? From a Eurocentric perspective on art history — a lens through which much South African art history is (still) looked at — Oerder is praised for his portraits of Zulu people during his journey in 1897–1898 through KwaZulu-Natal. On the website of the London Art Week from 2022, where Elliott Fine Art offered a portrait by Oerder, *Portrait of a Zulu*, for sale, Oerder is said to have been the first European artist to depict Zulu persons as 'people' rather than 'exotic beings', emphasizing their individuality.¹⁰ Through a decolonial lens, however, it is difficult to describe the paintings that Oerder made of Black people, with ostrich plumes, cowhide belts, beads, and bracelets, as representations that do not exoticize. The painting in the ZAH is not an exotic depiction. Except for a single work, his paintings of people of colour do not bear the names of the people portrayed.¹¹ Instead, they have titles such as *Portrait of a Zulu* or *Zulus cooking*. The portrait he painted of his gardener also does not state the man's name but was titled by Oerder as *My gardener*.

Most sources, however, pay little attention to the works that Oerder made of the original South African population altogether and focus mainly on the landscapes, South African war paintings and the flower still lifes that he made in his later life. From his departure in 1890 from the Netherlands to South Africa and his early years as paint contractor in the service of NZASM — a period of four years during which he was appointed to paint wooden stakes white and supply them with black

10 'Old Masters to Early Modern: Frans David Oerder *Portrait of a Zulu*,' Elliott Fine Art, 5 May 2022, <https://londonartweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/05/Frans-David-Oerder.pdf>.

11 *Portrait of Ishinza Anthonie Zivingle* (Duffey, 218). This also holds for many paintings with white subjects though.

letters — these sources skip to his later work painted when he was an official painter of the South African War (1899–1902), appointed by ZAR president Paul Kruger, and the work which followed in the subsequent years during which he painted many landscapes and portraits of white Afrikaners.¹² The years in the late 1890s during which he painted Black South Africans, are simply left out, even on the website oerder.com, managed by Oerder's descendants.

What steps need to be taken to transform this institution from one that strongly identified itself with the project of Afrikaner identity politics to one where all South Africans feel welcome and represented? The best first step for the ZAH would be to remove the painting from the wall and see if there is anything on the back that might provide information about the man portrayed. Then it can hopefully be restored and given a prominent place in the building, accompanied by a text that starts with the words: 'This man has a name'.

12 Ibid, 16. One example is the portrait of Louis Botha (1862, Greytown (Natal) South Africa–1919, Pretoria, South Africa) who was leader of the Transvaal army in the South African War (1899–1902) and the first prime minister of the Union of South Africa (1910).

When the Personal isn't Political: Elisabeth Eybers at the Zuid-Afrikahuis

Marian Counihan

Who are South Africa's literary heroes? If we consider the South African literary canon, who is included? From the perspective of the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH), one of the unmissable names is Elisabeth Eybers. She was one of the most successful and celebrated South African poets, in South Africa as well as in the Netherlands, and had a special bond with the ZAH.

Eybers' life and oeuvre is well represented in the archive of ZAH: the library holds all of her poetry volumes, her biography written by Ena Jansen,¹ as well as special issues of literary magazines and other publications which respond to her work. The inclusion of Eybers in the archive is nothing if not appropriate, given her literary status, as well as her connection to both South Africa and the Netherlands. The celebration of her life and work is indeed entirely fitting, entirely unsurprising, but, as I will suggest here, perhaps a little cosseting.

Eybers is celebrated as a poet of rare talent, and additionally as a *woman* poet, writing at a time when the literary field was very much dominated by men and their concerns. This makes the high regard in which Eybers is held understandable, yet also somewhat myopic. Recognition of Eybers' talent, coupled with a focus on her gender, does not take into account the naturalized categories and underlying political ideologies which

1 Ena Jansen, *Afstand & verbintenis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998). Also worth noting is that Jansen held the Chair in South African Literature, Culture and History at the University of Amsterdam, funded by the ZAH, from 2002–2016.



Elisabeth Eybers on her seventieth birthday. Photograph by Bert Nienhuis, 1985, Amsterdam. (ZAH, Beeldarchief, Map 143-6a, 'Elisabeth Eybers — 70ste verjaardag — 1985'.)

otherwise scaffolded her position in society,² and thus facilitated the possibility of a literary life for a woman in her situation. It is this scaffolding which I would now like to draw our attention to, to question how we understand Eybers' achievements, her inclusion in the archive, and the occlusions this inclusion belies. In particular, I will argue that a simple celebration of Eybers averts our attention from the challenges, restrictions and oppressions which characterized (literary) life in South Africa at the time she was active, specifically for Black poets and those who were politically active.

2 The notion of an 'invisible knapsack of privilege' by Peggy McIntosh echoes here too, but I prefer not to use as it suggests an individual burden which must be carried, rather than structural features which ensure a 'higher' position in society.

Elisabeth Eybers was born in 1915 in Klerksdorp and raised in a bilingual household, with an English-speaking mother and an Afrikaans-speaking father. She studied modern languages at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Here she also met her future husband, Albert Wessels, with whom she had four children. Wessels later became a successful businessman. Eybers found it difficult to combine her literary ambitions with the role of wife and mother. She experienced deep betrayal by her husband when he had an affair. Soon after, she chose to leave South Africa and to emigrate to the Netherlands. She arrived in Amsterdam in 1961 with her youngest daughter and lived there until her death in 2007.³

In Amsterdam Eybers continued to write, often composing poems in both Afrikaans and English, and she published several collections in South Africa as well as in the Netherlands. Over the course of her literary career, she was highly celebrated in both countries. In South Africa she won the Herzog Prize twice (1943 and 1971); in the Netherlands, she won the Herman Gorter Award in 1974, the Constantijn Huygens Prize in 1978, and the PC Hooft Prize in 1991, even though she never wrote in Dutch.⁴ It is worth noting that she was eligible for this prize because she was able to gain Dutch citizenship after

3 Financially, she continued to be supported by her husband, who was commercially successful as director of Toyota SA (he acquired the Toyota franchise in South Africa in 1961). To give some additional context: in the early years of their relationship Eybers and her husband were 'intellectual companions', both committed to Afrikaans nationalism, and motivated to develop Afrikaans as a language of the arts, thus part of what is called the 'Dertigers' ('writers of the 1930s') group. For this group, developing Afrikaans as a legitimate cultural medium was a project of self-development, and symbolized emancipation from the Dutch. Up until that point Afrikaans intellectuals such as Eybers and her husband, although they lived in a multilingual context (Dutch, Afrikaans, and English), had principally been educated in Dutch. This brief biography is based on personal correspondence with her grandson.

4 Guus Middag, 'De mens is de enige diersoort die weet dat hij dood zal gaan', *NRC Handelsblad*, 25 June, 1993, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1993/06/25/de-mens-is-de-enige-diersoort-die-weet-dat-hij-dood-7187467-a909991>.

she emigrated to the Netherlands, a point to which I will return. In jury reports she is praised for her direct and authentic tone, centring her work on seemingly small, prosaic moments of personal experience, and for 'retaining the ability to see circumstances through young eyes'.⁵ Guus Middag, a critic of the liberal Dutch newspaper, *NRC Handelsblad*, describes her as 'someone who wants to continuously hold herself against the light ... honest and unsparing'.⁶ Over the years she addressed themes emanating from the domestic and private sphere of the home-working woman, such as motherhood and child-rearing, friendship and relationships, desire, longing, and ageing.

Eybers also often wrote about South Africa and about her status as a migrant,⁷ such as in the poem, 'Displaced Person':⁸

Whatever survives of the innermost me
contains you too, unfailingly,
South Africa. But the traditional lore
seems less persuasive than before
they chose to bisect your proper name

5 Translated by the author: 'Zij heeft het vermogen bewaard om de omstandigheden met jonge ogen te bezien.' Cited on Literatuurmuseum.nl, 'Elisabeth Eybers; 1991 P.C. Hooftprijs', n.d., <https://literatuurmuseum.nl/nl/ontdek-en-beleef/museum/literatuurprijzen/pc-hooftprijs/1991-elisabeth-eybers>.

6 Translated by the author: 'iemand die zichzelf voortdurend tegen het licht wil blijven houden... Eerlijk en nietsonziend' quoting Guus Middag in *NRC Handelsblad*, 10 October 1997, reproduced on the back cover of Elisabeth Eybers, *Winter-surplus* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1999).

7 See for instance also Eybers' poems in the recently published anthology compiled by Ena Jansen, *Immigrant* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2021).

8 This poem was written in both English and Afrikaans by Eybers, as was fairly typical of her work after her move to the Netherlands in 1961. It was initially published in Afrikaans in the collection *Respyt* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1993) and republished in the anthology *Versamelde gedigte* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2004 and Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2004). Emphasis in the original.

by calling you *Africa*, where, on the whole,
disaster plays an alarming role
quite foreign to what I recollect
and cherish as a sacrosanct debt.

South Africa, while you disappear
I try to keep your status clear
by claiming that you're exempt from blame.

What is noticeable in this poem is how Eybers encloses her country in 'whatever survives of the innermost me', and cherishes her personal memories, distancing it from how it is talked about in public discourse, that is, aligned with the rest of *Africa*, and the 'disaster' which is playing 'an alarming role' there. She wants to keep the country, as she remembers it, 'exempt from blame'.

Eybers' writing career played out over roughly the same period as the apartheid regime of South Africa. Various laws of apartheid were implemented in phases from 1948 until 1990, consecutively restricting the freedom and rights of the majority of the population of the country. Yet Eybers considered herself apolitical. In an interview she gave in 1993, the period in which the apartheid system was being dismantled, she said:

I have never paid much attention to politics. I grew up before apartheid was formulated as a policy. Of course, it is easy for me to say, but we always had very nice black acquaintances. And the relationship between black and whites, for instance in the cities, was in general very good.⁹

9 Translated by the author: 'Ik heb nooit zoveel aandacht geschonken aan de politiek. Ik ben opgegroeid vóóordat de apartheid als een beleid werd geformuleerd. Ik heb natuurlijk makkelijk praten, maar wij hadden altijd ontzettend aardige zwarte kennissen. En de verhouding tussen blank en zwart, in de steden bijvoorbeeld, was over het algemeen heel goed.' Middag, 'De mens is de enige diersoort die weet dat hij dood zal gaan'.

In other contexts, as Ena Jansen has noted, Eybers talks of her Black domestic workers as being 'like family' and the period of living in South Africa with them as 'idyllic'; Jansen concludes that '[Eybers'] blindness to the black women's circumstances is startling'.¹⁰ Leaving aside what we may think of Eybers' synopsis of life in South Africa, it is worth noting that she doesn't feel the *need* to pay attention to politics. She's not interested in the effects of the systematic discrimination of apartheid; as Jansen said, she was 'blind' to it. And that was accepted. I would like to suggest that this inattention to the political was — is still — precisely a white woman's privilege.¹¹

The same cannot be said of Eybers' Black contemporaries. In fact, an apolitical literary identity could hardly be said to have existed for Black women. It's not just that history hasn't recognized Black women (or men); it's that under the conditions of apartheid, a Black Elisabeth Eybers perhaps *couldn't* exist. The time and mental space to sit with, reflect and make art from private concerns, with apparently no intrusion of the political or societal context, is not readily afforded to those who live with oppression, disenfranchisement, lack of access to education and denial of other opportunities.¹²

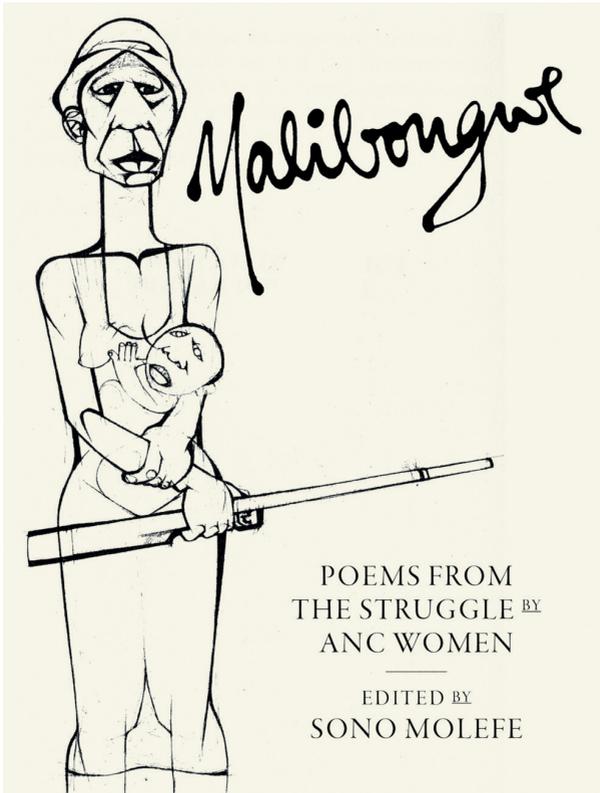
The majority of Black women poets active in the same period as Eybers focused their poetry on the anti-apartheid struggle and related themes. Literary scholar, Gloria Vangile Kgalane, argues that for Black women poets such as Gladys Thomas, Alice Ntsongo, Winnie Morolo, Boitumelo Makhema, Sono Molefe and others, 'poetry was

10 Ena Jansen, *Like Family* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019), 116.

11 Cf Charles Mills, "White Ignorance" in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, edited by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 11–38; this also has parallels to Gloria Wekker's stronger point in *White Innocence* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), of disavowal of racial discrimination by whites in the Netherlands.

12 Pamela Ryan, 'Black Women Do Not Have Time to Dream: The Politics of Time and Space', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 11, no. 1 (1992): 95–102.

primarily a cultural weapon of struggle, rather than an on-going means of self-expression'.¹³ This is echoed in Sono Molefe's introduction to *Malibongwe*, a collection of poems written by ANC women involved in the struggle: 'there is no romance here... only pounding reality'.¹⁴



Malibongwe edited by Sono Molefe. (Image of cover reproduced with permission by uHlanga Press.)

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- 13 Gloria Vangile Kgalane, 'Black South African Women's Poetry (1970–1991): A Critical Survey'. (Master's Thesis in English, Johannesburg, Rand Afrikaans University, 1996), 102.
- 14 Sono Molefe (ed), *Malibongwe: Poems from the Struggle by ANC Women* (Durban: uHlanga Press 2020), 29.

Women writing in exile were highly conscious of the public role of their poetry. Kgalane observes that:

[P]ersonal reflections on the nature of exile, a sense of alienation, displacement and loneliness, is in general absent from exiled women's poetry. Although in interviews or in private some women expressed precisely the 'typical' sensations and feelings of displaced exile, alienated in a foreign country and longing for home, their poems were seen as a powerful cultural component of the struggle, *and also part of the public sphere*: thus it seems that it was more difficult for women to express personal misgivings about the state of exile in published poetry.¹⁵

Kgalane's observations reveal a sentiment that is sharply different to that expressed by Eybers in her poem 'Displaced Person/Uitgewekene'. As described above, Eybers encloses her country in 'whatever survives of the innermost me'. The political, in other words, is elided from the personal. This inverts what the Black women poets in exile were doing, according to Kgalane: carefully excising the personal, in order to foreground the political, in their literary work.

It is key to consider the double role of gender in this dynamic. Eybers received acclaim *as a woman* for pursuing a literary life, for overcoming the restrictions of feminine domestic and familial roles. Yet at the same time, the very fact that she was a (white) woman, and that her poetry centres on personal and domestic themes, allows it to be considered apolitically — unconnected to the socio-political context in which she developed her practice as a poet. She can be seen as a 'purely' literary

15 *Ibid.*, 102, emphasis my own.

figure, recognized for bringing women's concerns into the poetic field, and for achieving success in what has traditionally been a male-dominated field.¹⁶ But this focus on her gender thereby occludes the aspects of privilege that further shaped her identity and her position in society. Her gender differentiates her success *and* simultaneously serves to hide other forms of privilege which scaffolded her success: her whiteness, her class, her financial stability.¹⁷

By contrast, O'Brien cites Sibongile Mthembu, a woman who was detained for her part in the 1976 Soweto uprising, who states:

At the time it is more important for me to fight for political rights as a black person...thereafter I might fight for my rights as a woman. But sometimes I think the two wars should go together...*we have no option but to face the political struggle.*¹⁸

'We have no option but to face the political struggle' — a starker contrast with Eybers' declaration that 'I have never paid much attention to politics' could hardly be made.

It was not just a commitment to overcoming apartheid which connected literary and political life for many Black women, subsuming their writing to resistance

16 Cecily Lockett, 'South African Women's Poetry: A Gynocritical Perspective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 11, no. 1 (1992): 51-61.

17 I am here pointing to the need for an intersectional understanding of gender. See for instance, Audra Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1984), Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal article 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Policies.' *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989): 139-167, and Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

18 Emphasis added. Cited in Colleen O'Brien, 'The Search for Mother Africa: Poetry Revises Women's Struggle for Freedom', *African Studies Review* 37, no. 2 (1994): 152.

literature, as Gilfillan notes.¹⁹ Several other structural factors contributed to the cultural expressions of Black women being hidden from view, particularly in South Africa. Women's role in developing and transmitting oral traditions of storytelling has been largely under-recognized; oral traditions more generally have been under-registered in archives set up according to Western literary traditions, which did not lend themselves to capturing such cultural forms, and authorship, when accorded, has in the first place been accorded to men.²⁰

Ongoing spatial and temporal obstacles were also embedded in the system of migrant labour under apartheid. This meant that women were often singlehandedly heading households in rural areas, thus reducing the time and opportunity to develop themselves. Moving to urban areas meant moving to a new cultural space, leading to 'an interiorized sense of displacement'.²¹ This combination of oppression, fracturing, and displacement make a 'purely' literary life an almost impossible reality, practically, but also psychologically: '(t)he overriding problem of where to position herself, how to develop a politics of identity for herself, is, not surprisingly, acute. Where is she to locate herself? Where is her place?'²² Ryan suggests, following Cunningham, that Black women found themselves in a 'No [woman's] Land', which was both psychological and physical, with a literal and symbolic lack of space in which 'to move and dream'.²³

19 Lynda Gilfillan, 'Black Women Poets in Exile: The Weapon of Words', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 11, no. 1 (1992): 79–93.

20 Kgalane, 'Black South African Women's Poetry'.

21 Pamela Ryan, 'Black Women Do Not Have Time to Dream', 99.

22 *Ibid*, 97–98.

23 *Ibid*, 99.

We see this sentiment of displacement in place echoed in a recent poem by South African poet Koleka Putuma, 'Local':²⁴

My mother tongue
sits in my throat like an allergy

It feels like I will die if I speak it
It feels like I will die if I don't

I am carrying
An overnight bag
A bag of tricks
A survival toolkit
A suitcase of DOs and DON'Ts

There is no space to pack
or unpack my histories or my selves

I am trying to move
without attracting too much attention
to what I don't have
or what I have lost
or what has been stolen from me.

Putuma, writing more than twenty years after the end of apartheid, shows us that the past is in the present: it still has the power to shape the connections between personal and political experience for Black people in South Africa, to give a sense of displacement, of a lack of space, and of belonging on, at most, conditional terms, even in one's own country.

24 Koleka Putuma, *Collective Amnesia* (Cape Town: uHlanga, 2017).



Koleka Putuma, at the Göteborg Book Fair, 2022. Photograph by Per A.J. Andersson. (Wikipedia.)

Eybers was based in the Netherlands for half of her life; as she herself states, she grew up before apartheid was legally institutionalized and became official state policy. How should we understand her position in the Dutch context, in the setting of ZAH? How is the reception of her work connected to the racial hierarchies structured by notions of white superiority historically embedded in South Africa and in postcolonial Dutchness?

Even though the nationalistic project of developing Afrikaans as a literary medium against the dominance of English (and initially also Dutch) continued, it is worth noting that under apartheid the similarities between the English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking white population were emphasized in legal terms, and these groups were increasingly affiliated as white 'European'.²⁵ The

25 Barbara Henkes, 'Shifting Identifications in Dutch-South African Migration Policies (1910–1961)', *South African Historical Journal*, 68, no. 4 (2016): 641–669. This contrasts with the period in the 1930s when the 'Dertigers' were engaged with the project of developing Afrikaans as a literary medium, as against the dominance of English or Dutch.

focus lay on distinguishing whiteness from blackness, via the system of racial hierarchy.

This system of racial differentiation and hierarchization wasn't a new project; the employment of racial hierarchies to organize society didn't simply emerge fully formed in apartheid. Rather, it was embedded in earlier historical dynamics of racial segregation, and has shaped our understanding of citizenship, also in Europe. This point is perhaps obvious but bears repeating. Colonial expansion explains the presence of both the Dutch and the English in South Africa in the first place. Racial hierarchies were present in all colonial territories and, as Gosewinkel points out, 'the history of citizenship in Europe is not contained within the geographical boundaries of the continent'.²⁶ The development of concepts of citizenship in Europe is deeply connected to that of non-European territories — and has inequality built into it. Gosewinkel sums up:

Characteristic of all these territories was a hierarchy of personal status relations dichotomizing the population. Alongside — or rather beneath — a usually small group of 'white' citizens of the metropole enjoying full citizenship rights were the rest of the inhabitants, mostly of indigenous origin. [...] [t]heir legal status was segregated and drastically curbed, their freedom of movement often considerably restricted.²⁷

Although Gosewinkel here describes the praxis of the European colonial project, he might just as well be describing the apartheid regime in South Africa. From this perspective the exceptionalism accorded to the apartheid

26 Dieter Gosewinkel, *Struggles for Belonging: Citizenship in Europe, 1900–2020* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 183.

27 *Ibid*, 183.

regime is artificial; it is rather that the colonial project is on a spectrum with the apartheid regime, one along which racial hierarchisation forms a foundational organizing principle for society.

Eybers occupied a social location at the top of this racial hierarchy both in South Africa and in the European context. Yes, she was a woman, but she was a *white* woman, upper middle-class and financially secure — and this makes all the difference. The possibility that Eybers could emigrate to the Netherlands reflects her social location in the hierarchy of citizenship, in South Africa as well as in Europe, and the fundamental freedoms afforded by it. Additionally, the financial security afforded by her (ex-)husband's commercial success in South Africa contributed to the situation in which she could focus on her writing and lead a literary life during her years in Amsterdam. Finally, the choice she made to emigrate was motivated by personal strife — which, as difficult as it was for her, was a choice reflecting pursuit of *personal* development and happiness.

The reception of Eybers' poetry, and in particular, her inclusion in the archive of ZAH, does not directly engage with the political context of Eybers' life and the privileges this afforded her. When we start to pay attention to the largely invisible scaffolding afforded by her racial identity, social position, citizenship rights, and financial security, all directly or indirectly shaped by apartheid and colonial histories, we also start to become aware of those who were not able to benefit from such scaffolding. The seemingly 'neutral' private person, the person who can freely move and choose to live a literary life — they are granted that possibility by a society which marks them as such, and which hides their scaffolding. This was the privilege of Elisabeth Eybers, and it was the pain of her Black contemporaries.

In this sense, the work of decolonizing the ZAH archive is a twofold task: firstly, to reveal this scaffolding,

and secondly, to bring other stories, those which have not been told, to the fore. Regarding the first task, this means making the political, relational context visible, again and again, even for seemingly apolitical figures, thereby connecting the history of the ZAH to the larger dynamics of colonization and migration between Europe and Africa. Behind every literary hero is a societal and political structure which scaffolds their success. Regarding the second task, this means a process of rehumanizing: reclaiming and making space for the personal histories of those may not be recognizable as such because of their subsumption to political projects or misrecognition in colonial contexts. Storytelling, as Putuma puts it, is 'how my people archive. How we inherit the world'.²⁸ Decolonizing the archive, therefore, means recognizing why some stories have been privileged over others, and engaging in the ongoing exercise of making space for unheard stories — in other words, politicizing the personal, and recovering the personal from the political.

28 Putuma, *Collective Amnesia*, 11.

Appellations and Politics

Nkule Mabaso

When I was approached by the editors of the present volume, they invited me to consider 'what happens to how we understand the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH), its history and its collections, when we start looking at it with a critical, decolonizing lens.' They suggested to me to look into a specific work of art by South African born, Amsterdam-based artist, Ruan Hoffmann: to investigate its artistic reference to a particular anti-apartheid protest action directed at the institutions housed in the Keizersgracht 141 building (notably the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging*, Netherlands South African Association, NZAV) that took place in 1984. I found it intriguing that the editors stated in their initial invitation that it was not clear whether Hoffmann 'named a work of art in reference to this event [...] or (if) he made the work in response to the political act.' This ambiguity, and the need for its clarification became the starting point of my text. This starting point did not offer many lines of inquiry to explore, given that a supplied newspaper article seemed to be the only concrete source linking both the artwork, called '*Actie Boekenstorm 1984*' ('Action Book Charge 1984') and the political act of protest targeted at the ZAH that took place in 1984.

In this text I look at the relationship between the title given to a work of art and the work of art itself, as well as the referential politics evoked in the process. My goal is to consider the political implications of the naming of an artwork after a historical event when the work itself bears no relationship to the event. The text developed through questions posed to the artist about how he came

to name the artwork and how he became aware of the historical event.

In addition to having spoken with the artist, the journalist who wrote about the artwork was also approached with an invitation to recall his encounter with the artists that lead to the newspaper article. The newspaper article and photograph remain as the historical record of the work, because, according to the artist, the artwork itself was 'lost'.¹ Further, the text attempts to work through the intersection of art and politics in relation to the artwork under study. Emails from the artist, however, make it abundantly clear that there is no intended relationship between the historical event and the artwork. In this text, I explore the fictional connection between the artwork and the political action, and how the arbitrary association creates a peculiar moment of conflation between the artist's own convictions, the social permeability and porosity of (his own) whiteness in the Dutch context, and the use of history as reference material. This conflation imbues not only the artwork but also the artist with a particular political sensibility. In the concluding paragraph I reflect on this porosity as homologous to the state of archives in general, of the ZAH in particular and the fallibility of revisionist reconstructions of the past.

Side A

Ruan Hoffmann, a white artist, born in South Africa in 1971, and working with ceramic earthenware, initially resided as visiting artist in the Thami Mnyele studio in

1 The 'loss' of the artwork is a narrative of its own, and not included here for brevity of this contribution.

Amsterdam in the period April-June 2010.² In August-September 2013 he returned once more as resident. It is in this second period that the artwork '*Actie Boekenstorm 1984*' and the newspaper article with its ominous title '*Dark forces at work in Amsterdam*' for the *Mail & Guardian* in South Africa, written by the London-based freelance journalist, Jeremy Kuper, emerged.

Email exchange between Nkule Mabaso
and Jeremy Kuper, November 2022

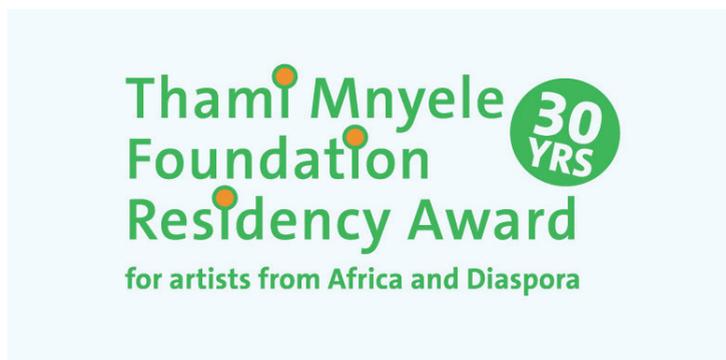
Question one of two: How did you come to meet Ruan and develop the interview, was this in person, mediated through an institution or persons?

Jeremy Kuper: The interview was devised by me with the *Mail & Guardian* Arts Editor Matthew Krause and mediated by Pauline Burmann of the Thami Mnyele institute (sic). This is an artists' residency in Amsterdam named after a late ANC freedom fighter. I travelled to Amsterdam in person where I interviewed and photographed Ruan in the studio at work and spoke to Pauline Burmann about the centre and the residency. That is my recollection. But with regards to the connection to the '*Actie Boekenstorm*

2 <https://thami-mnyele.nl/> Established in 1990, the Thami Mnyele Foundation has been running a unique three-month artists-in-residence program in Amsterdam since 1992. The Foundation is named in commemoration of the South African artist and freedom fighter Thami Mnyele who died as a result of his actions as member of the MEDU group. His visit to Amsterdam in the 1980s inspired Dutch artists, politicians and people interested in culture exchange to set up an artists-in-residence program. The main objective of the Foundation is to advance cultural exchange between artists from Africa and the diaspora, the Netherlands and Amsterdam in particular.

1984', apartheid and Holland this is something which developed in conversation with Ruan and afterwards.

Over the thirty days that I spent at the Thami MnyeLe studio in January 2023 for a research project of my own, I mulled over the marked difference of traversing the same space Hoffmann did ten years earlier. Besides a brief visit to the artist in his studio located in the attic of his home, I engaged with Thami MnyeLe Foundation chairperson, Pauline Burmann, at her home, where she also runs the platform *African Arts and Theory*. There we searched for the work in the records and later encountered a video recording featuring the work from 2013.



Logo of the Thami MnyeLe Foundation

In two video clips taken in 2013, totalling 4'40", Pauline Burmann responds to seeing the work in progress as it hangs on the walls of the Thami MnyeLe studio where Hoffmann was the artist in residence. The camera is focused on Hoffmann as he provides clarifying responses to the elements that Burmann points out about the work. The interaction is shot on a cell phone held by Burmann and comes across as spontaneous and unscripted.



Screenshot at 01'54" of videoclip 1. Filmed by Pauline Burmann, 2013, Amsterdam. In this section of the clip Hoffmann describes the orientation of the works, the middle being upside down as a method to work expediently across the surface of the substrate. After Burmann points out that this makes the triptych interesting, Hoffmann indicates that this was not the initial orientation of the work.³



Screenshot at 02'59" of video clip 1. Filmed by Pauline Burmann, 2013, Amsterdam. The artist standing next to the work. In this section of the video, Hoffmann describes the activities of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement to be as distant from himself 'as the moon landing', due to his young age in the 1980s.

3 Video clip 1, provided by Pauline Burmann, chairperson of the Thami Mnyele Foundation. Editors' note: These images are redacted because Hoffmann explicitly refused permission to include photographs of himself and the artworks illustrating this essay in this volume.

In these clips, Hoffmann gives a description of the physical aspects of producing the work. At the same time, he distances himself from a reading of the work having any direct association with the political event; he aims instead to convey fluidity and ambiguity about the artwork's final meaning. After prompts from Burmann, Hoffmann alludes to having just recently learnt of the protest action against the ZAH in 1984 and recalls that he noted the reference behind one of the paintings to keep it for later recollection.

This sentiment is consistent with the tone and content in my email correspondence at the beginning of November 2022 and the in-person conversation in January 2023 with the artist, during which Hoffman continues this gesture of resisting the reading of the work as being about or based on the 1984 protest action and acknowledges only passing knowledge of the political event:

Dear Nkule,

I thought I should clarify before you start intensive research about the South Africa house [sic, ZAH] and the politics around this incident which only sparked my interest in the wilful destruction of knowledge.

What happened at South Africa house in 1984 only registered as something during a dinner with Bart Luirink and Lies Ros when I was at the Thami Mnye Foundation in 2013. They were both involved with the Anti-Apartheid Organisation/related organisations and the ZAH action was only mentioned in relation to a conversation about Islamist insurgents retreating from Timbuktu earlier in 2013 and setting fire to the library of the Ahmad Babu Institute.

At this dinner party I also heard of the existence of the South Africa House for the first time, so I had no real interest in what it stood/stands for and whether this action was justified or not. I would have been just as shocked if a B-grade porn collection was thrown into the water by zealots.

My sole interest was the destruction and preservation of knowledge and then this image of books/ideas being dredged out of the water, which I found a compelling image.

Best wishes,
Ruan Hoffmann

The work's title that produces an arbitrary relationship between the artwork and the protest action creates a bizarre moment of conflation of the artwork with the political event and imbues the artist potentially with a particular political sensibility, which seems to have made Hoffmann anxious. This link between artwork and historical event moves any possible understanding of the artwork closer to something else still, not mentioned in the video and not mentioned in the newspaper article: an anti-censorship stance. Hoffmann's resistance to have his work connected to the anti-apartheid movement performs a set of evasions, in which all acts of iconoclasm/biblioclasm are cast as equally vile and all books as deserving of protections. At the same time, he imagines himself as politically neutral — free from any implications of complicity with apartheid affordances. His wording in the above email suggests a disregard for the harms done by apartheid that elicited the 1984 protest action.

In our correspondence Hoffmann relays the relational moment of how he came to know about the 1984 anti-apartheid protest action, and this aspect drew me

back to the newspaper article. In one section, Hoffmann reflects on his work — as based loosely on a city map of Amsterdam and shaped into the figure of an 'automaton' — and Dutch society. Evoking a comparison by John Steinbeck of the city as a robot, Hoffmann explains:

'In Dutch there's a word, *maatschappij* [which in Afrikaans means a firm or a business], but here it means the society. It is like a machine and it functions like a machine.' [...] He (Hoffmann) wondered whether the famous Dutch tolerance is perhaps only toleration. 'That is also part of the *maatschappij*'— you're either in or you're out.⁴

Further in the article Hoffmann seems to be making an articulation about a persistently white social body corpus: one in which he, as a white man on his bicycle navigating the city, is not phenotypically marked as different nor distinguished as outsider. It would only be through personal encounters at intimate proximity that his belonging to the '*maatschappij*' may be questioned on the basis of perceived cultural differences. In this case potential cultural differences are explained to be the result of Dutch settler colonialism in South Africa, while the artist's non-phenotypically marked presence in the Netherlands moves the question of (his) belonging to the '*maatschappij*' beyond *racial* logics.⁵

There is a crisis with regard to Representation.
They are looking for Meaning as if it was a thing.
As if it was a girl, required to take her panties off

4 Jeremy Kuper, 'Dark forces at work in Amsterdam', *The Mail & Guardian*, 9 September 2013. <https://mg.co.za/article/2013-09-19-dark-forces-at-work-in-amsterdam/>.

5 The reader should retain the observation that the forms in the artworks appear humanoid, masculine and black in coloration and initial observation does not read as a map but simply as fragmentation.

as if she would want to do so, as soon as
the true interpreter comes along.
As if there was something to take off.⁶

Marlene Dumas's poem cited here cautions against the urge to impose a single (authoritative) meaning onto artworks and is suspicious of the desire to read works of art and have them stand as representation of anything other than themselves. If we take the slippages produced by all the above intersections of relations, and the ambivalence of Hoffmann to fix the meaning of the work, we clearly see the trouble that may result when we look towards



Newspaper clipping about the 1984 act of activism, taken from the front page of the newspaper *De Volkskrant*, 20 January 1984. The original caption reads "Een actievoerder gooit folders, voorlichtingsmateriaal en boeken van de Nederlands-Zuidafrikaans (sic) Vereniging in de gracht" ('An activist throws leaflets, information material, and books of the Netherlands South African Association (NZAV) into the canal', ZAH Bibliotheek, Knipselmap 'De Overval 19 januari 1984', p. 3).

6 Marlene Dumas, 'The Artwork as Misunderstanding'. Originally published in Dutch as 'Het kunstwerk als misverstand' in *Individu: Duiding, verboden verbindingen + twijfelachtige verbanden*, (Antwerp: ICC, 1991) and included in Marlene Dumas and Mariuccia Casadio, *Sweet Nothings. Notes and Texts* (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriessse and De Balie Publishers, 1998).

artworks for historical facts. This brings to mind Greg Peterson's paper from 2006 entitled 'Titles, Labels, and Names: A House of Mirrors'.⁷ In this paper, Peterson presents an 'explication of this maze of disjointed relationships among images, their appellations, and the theories espoused by various artists, art critics, art historians'⁸ and uses literary theory to navigate the unsettled debate of whether the titles of artworks are un/important to the analysis of the artwork. What is very clear is that attempts at stabilisation any readings are not only resisted and thwarted, but the interpretation of the artwork will shift with each request for disclosure.

Side B

If we accept that Hoffmann's work is not about the 1984 act of activism, we may agree to divorce the artwork from its supposed title ('*Actie Boekenstorm* 1984'). Then the work could be read as a subjective exploration into in/visibilities that camouflage white subjectivity beyond geographical situatedness. In the chapter 'The matter of whiteness', British professor of film studies, Richard Dyer, sets out to make whiteness strange and points out that there are '[...] enormous variations of power amongst white people, to do with class, gender and other factors [...]'⁹ — geography is also one of them. Whiteness in South Africa is neither invisible nor non-raced, the reference to 'white subjectivity' here is to point to the felt particularity of Hoffmann, as migrant and foreigner in the Dutch context.

The connection between Hoffmann's refusal, his whiteness, and his position in Dutch society lies in how

7 Greg Petersen, 'Titles, Labels, and Names: A House of Mirrors', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 40, no. 2 (2006): 29–44.

8 Peterson, 29.

9 Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 2017, 2nd edition), 9.

his whiteness conceals the nuanced way he decides to navigate the discussion with me and associated political complexities. Hoffmann's resistance to engage with associations evoked in the appellation of the artwork marks a move towards a future-based survival possibility for his political realignment and therefore presents political fluidity in what he is trying to achieve. Political fluidity is not inherently negative, as it reflects a willingness to reconsider and adjust perspectives rather than adhering to fixed ideologies. Without casting a fast judgment on the person of the artist, and recognizing the material and discursive complexity — grounded in the condemnation of apartheid — within which the artworks and its title were produced, the aspect of political fluidity here then refers to the perceived reluctance/resistance to have his



A photograph taken of the pavement in front of the ZAH after the act of activism. Activists have painted the word 'apartheid' on the pavement. This photo is glued onto a card stating '*We lijden met u mee...!*' ('We suffer with you...!'), signed B. Evenhuis, editor-in-chief of the *Arnhemse Courant*, no date, and part of a collection of clippings about the event. Photographer unknown, date unknown (ZAH Bibliotheek, Knipselmap 'De Overval' 19 januari 1984', p. 57)

work associated with this anti-apartheid activist action. This reluctance suggests either a lack of being able or wanting to take a principled position against an abhorrent and unjust system, while benefiting by being 'in residence' in space created in memory to the anti-apartheid activist, Thami Mnye.

Since the artwork is not in the collection of the ZAH, it would be instructive to return to the political act itself: what mandate does the ZAH in Amsterdam set for itself in the face of violent legacies and the heritage of settler violence in South Africa?

The act of activism that took place on 19 January 1984 is described by Sief Veltkamp-Visser, former administrator and former director of the ZAH as the '*beruchtste*' ('most infamous') of a series of activist actions targeted against the ZAH and as the act that caused most damage.¹⁰ In her history of Afrikaans in Amsterdam she describes the event as follows:

Op die dag drong een groep van 80 gemaskeerde jongeren, die zich 'Amsterdammers tegen Apartheid' noemden, het pand binnen en richtten veel, vaak onherstelbare, schade aan, vooral aan de bibliotheek. Boeken werden uit de kasten gerukt en besmeurd met verf en olie; andere boeken, waaronder kostbare Africana en in Zuid-Afrika verboden anti-apartheidsboeken, werden met armenvol in de gracht gegooid.

Tweehonderd boeken werden weliswaar later door duikers uit het water gehaald, maar liepen aanzienlijke waterschade op. Een deel van

10 Sief Veltkamp-Visser, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam: De Geschiedenis van de Leerstoel Afrikaanse Taal en Letterkunde aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam en het Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut (1932–2016)* (Amsterdam: Stichting Zuid-Afrikahuis Nederland, 2018), 255.

de kaartenbakken met cataloguskaarten werd vernield. Door dit laatste was het moeilijk precies vast te stellen hoeveel en welke boeken verloren waren gegaan.¹¹

Besides having targeted the symbol of apartheid in the heart of Amsterdam, the action also became part of a public discussion that resisted formulations of what was tolerated (apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism) and negotiated instead who gets to represent certain issues (the anti-apartheid movement on behalf of the repressed population of South Africa), how these actions were performed, and how they are recalled/historicized. And as much as the incident is one directed towards a moment of international solidarity, it sharply focused the spotlight on the contemporaneous entanglements of persistent settler coloniality of the Dutch elsewhere (in South Africa in this case), and the dispersed nature of institutional structures that buttress its continuity (such as the NZAV at the ZAH). Settler coloniality persists in post-apartheid South Africa and has not yet reached an endpoint because the material and ideological manifestations of colonialism and apartheid remain entrenched. So, if the ZAH really desires to commit to consistent, critical introspection above a revisionist interiority for its future, it needs to be transparent about on whose behalf it acts on, to whom it is accountable, and to what end it holds its custodial objects.

11 Veltkamp-Visser, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam*, 255–256. Translation: 'On that day, a group of 80 masked youths, calling themselves 'Amsterdammers against Apartheid', entered the building and caused much, often irreparable, damage, especially to the library. Books were torn from the shelves and smeared with paint and oil; other books, including precious Africana and anti-apartheid books prohibited in South Africa, were thrown into the canal by armfuls. Although two hundred books were later retrieved from the water by divers, they suffered significant water damage. A portion of the card catalogs with catalog cards was destroyed. Due to this, it was difficult to precisely determine how many and which books had been lost.'

By Hoffmann's admission, the artwork, '*Actie Boekenstorm* 1984', does not take a position in relation to the issues that aroused the Dutch anti-apartheid activists to undertake action against the institutions housed in the ZAH in 1984. And by the admission of the ZAH the work 'was never in possession of the ZAH, [...] and never part of its collection. [...] It never had anything to do with the House: it wasn't commissioned by any of the institutions in the house, etc.'¹² Any attempt to associate the artwork with the activist events is then simply an opportunistic hijacking of the historical event.

This arbitrary association between work and event gave birth to my contribution to this collection of texts, but obfuscates an actual evaluation of the ZAH and how it intends to engage with the heritage and legacies of settler violence of its founding. The central rationale of my being invited to write the text '[...]' was because we were intrigued by a reference that there once was a work of art that referred to the activist event, and we wanted to know what the relationship between the artwork and the event was — how and why the artist decided to refer to that event of 1984.¹³

At best, the confusion around the link between the work and the ZAH suggests a state of internal institutional disarray that goes beyond the loss of library catalogue cards. I raise this implication of obfuscation and disarray, precisely because the artwork under discussion points away from a real evaluation of the institution at hand. Given the nature of my invitation, it is my observation that the real opportunity is lost to truly be introspective and consider the current constitution of the archive itself, to consider really the institution actual mechanism, gains, and losses etc. Rather than seeking to find

12 This clarification is provided by the editors in draft of the text at the end of October 2023.

13 This clarification is provided by the editors in draft of the text at the end of October 2023.

answers to the question of the link between the artwork and the ZAH, the ZAH would, at best, benefit from inviting a looking through its policies, and reflections on how reconstitution of the archive has been performed, impact of categorisation and recategorization of colonial and settler-society era collections and objects.

At worst, the ZAH would run the risk of performing a rather meaningless revisionism directed at virtue signalling if they would fail to focus on the actual grievances that aroused the Dutch anti-apartheid activists to undertake the action. This kind of signalling subsumes the activist anti-apartheid criticism at the time, and co-opts it as an institutional footnote, rather than taking it as a critical point of archive intervention.

Beyond the Ethical Choice: Decolonizing the Zuid-Afrikahuis through an Eighteenth Century Text

Tycho Maas

One of many noteworthy books in the Zuid-Afrikahuis (South Africa House, ZAH) library is Jan de Marre's *Bespiegelingen over Godswysheid in 't bestier der schepselen en Eerkroon voor de Caab de Goede Hoop* (*Reflections on God's Sovereign Guidance and Control, and A Crown of Glory for the Cape of Good Hope*, 1746). Published roughly a century after the founding of the Cape of Good Hope settlement for the VOC by Jan van Riebeeck, it breaks with the dominant, pejorative European discourse about the Cape of that time. For De Marre, the Cape is proof of God's omnipresence. More than that, De Marre instills in its reader an awareness of conceptual biases of European worldviews. Today, more particularly, De Marre invites a pensive reflection on the continued colonial power imbalance in Western knowledge systems. In this paper, I draw on De Marre to suggest ways of decolonizing the ZAH collections. In his fundamental awareness of Western knowledge systems in relation to the Cape, De Marre constitutes an absent presence of consequence for the ZAH library.

European attitudes to the African
subcontinent

Bespiegelingen over Godswysheid in 't bestier der schepselen en Eerkroon voor de Caab de Goede Hoop may appear inconspicuous at first. Its author, Jan de Marre (1696–1763), may have been well-known during

his time for reworking his experiences as a VOC captain on the East Indies trade route into epics and plays once back in Amsterdam. But since the nineteenth century he has remained a relatively unknown figure — and the book itself is only modestly sized. Indeed, the ZAH library is home to publications on the Cape of Good Hope that are more sizeable and better-known today, such as Olfert Dapper's *Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten* (*Descriptions of African Lands*, 1668) and Peter Kolb's *Naaukeurige en uitvoerige beschryving van de Kaap de Goede Hoop* (*A Detailed and Elaborate Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 1727).



Cover of De Marre's *Bespiegelingen over Gods wysheid* (ZAH Bibliotheek, Jan de Marre. *Bespiegelingen over Gods wysheid in 't bestier der schepselen, en eerkroon voor de Caab de Goede Hoop*. Amsterdam, Adriaan Wor en de erve G. Onder de Linden, 1746).

In the ZAH a wide scope of early accounts about the Cape need not surprise us. For large parts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the popularity of books that reported on 'newly discovered' lands and peoples can hardly be underestimated. Overseas explorations continued to bring home knowledge of distant parts of the world that until then no European had yet seen in person. The

descriptions about non-European peoples that formed a key element of them were set up around a common set of motifs. The opening gambit of Olfert Dapper's 1668 book on the Cape's Indigenous peoples starts thus: '*s lants inboorlingen, die by d'onzen, om hunne belemmerheit en wanhebbelijckheit van tale, met den naem van Hottentoos of Hottentots gemeenlijk bekent zijn, en zonder eenige wetten van Godtsdienst leven.*' ('The native inhabitants of this land are commonly known to our countrymen as Hottentoos or Hottentots, because their language is so clumsy and difficult, and they live without any laws of religion'). While the tropes reflect what 'civil' Europe saw as its cornerstones, their clichéd elaborations — expressed as a negation of the self-image — are indicative of the European outward gaze. An observed lack of language, (Christian) religion and (Roman-based) law was readily interpreted as an absence of civility and warranted that non-European peoples rank between man and beasts. Books that confirmed or built on this image, found an eager readership among both academics and laymen.

The Cape came to carry the full burden of this tradition. In the Christian evolutionary model that provided the underlying logic of this worldview, the inhabitants of the southern extremity of the African continent were surmised to be furthest removed from the Christian centers of origin in both space and time. Noting this reasoning, J.M. Coetzee famously maintained that knowledge about the Cape's Indigenous peoples in the colonial era did not actually advance, because the question *why* they should rank below the civil, Christian state was never asked: 'Nowhere in the great echo chamber of the Discourse [sic] of the Cape is a voice raised to ask whether the life of the Hottentot may not be a version of life before the Fall'.¹

1 J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing. On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 18.

It has since been shown that an alternative discourse did in fact exist. In the wake of the first European rounding of the Cape in the 1480s by the Portuguese, the Table Mountain peninsula came to represent a terrestrial paradise by virtue of its unique natural beauty. The inhabitants, it was conceded, accordingly lived in a state of positive (rather than negative) primitivism. Yet, in these competing European attitudes to the African subcontinent, Coetzee's concept of the echo chamber captures the vast majority of European early modern descriptions about the Cape's peoples with painful accuracy. This includes the travel accounts by Dutchmen in the ZAH collections — with Jan de Marre as a notable exception.

Facing the ethical choice

Admittedly, De Marre does not ask the very question that Coetzee finds missing. In fact, the Cape's Indigenous peoples are notably absent in De Marre's book. This in itself provides a break away from the dominant tradition of accounts about the Cape, and raises the question what discourse De Marre develops around the peninsula instead.

Bespiegelingen over Godswysheid in 't bestier der schepselen en Eerkroon voor de Caab de Goede Hoop is actually two epics in one. The first, *Bespiegelingen*, recounts of a sailor who journeys from Europe via the Americas to the Cape. He is a stubborn, self-made man who trusts Europe's recent advancements in the natural sciences to explain the unfamiliar phenomena of the world, such as unknown lands. Yet when a storm hits his ship just before reaching the Cape, he prays and humbles himself in the face of God. He then makes it to shore safely. *Eerkroon*, the remaining half of De Marre's book, shifts to topographical poetry that captures the Cape's

natural riches in lush, bountiful descriptions.² Indeed, *Eerkroon* implies that the sailor's place of rescue was no coincidence. As De Marre's peers admitted in their opening praises, the Cape is the very best demonstration of '*den bybel der Nature*' (the bible of Nature). By focusing on the Cape, De Marre delivered the finest proof of '*Gods eer en albestiering*' ('God's glory and sovereign rule') — proof of God's omnipresence.

Rather than scrutinizing the perceived primitivism of Indigenous peoples, De Marre's story of the sailor and the Cape serve as a vessel for critical reflection on the tension between religion and science that had been building in Europe in an effort to explain the nature of the universe. Science and religion were increasingly becoming mutually exclusive ways for this, each staking a particular claim to 'Truth'. In one of many examples, De Marre admits that a compass finds its bearing through an invisible magnetic axis that runs between the earth's north and south pole. Yet, he asserts, this discovery by mankind is not coincidental: throughout the ages, humanity has progressively mastered the tools given to it to appreciate that there is meaning in every part of the universe — known as the 'Divine order of things'. While no rational argument for the existence of a 'Divine order' may be available, at the same time, there is also no rational argument that disproves it. The fact that humanity cannot grasp His order merely confirms its place in it.

The axiom of scientific research, conversely, has always been that one theory holds true unless disproven. Thus, in science, 'Truth' is infinitely deferred. De Marre admits that overseas journeys of exploration yield exciting discoveries that further develop tools like the compass, which in turn spark the development of natural sciences

2 Siegfried Huigen, *De weg naar Monomotapa. Nederlandse representaties van geografische, historische en sociale werkelijkheden in Zuid-Afrika* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996).

like geography, astronomy, and physics. Yet his concern, indeed, is that this unbridled pursuit of knowledge ('*on-bezonnen drift der Kennis*') is to blame for peoples' diminishing trust in the divine order of the universe. But why, De Marre rhetorically asks, would mankind haughtily question its place in the divine order, and abandon it for infinities of insecurity? Drawing on the 'Eerkroon' of the Cape, De Marre asks his reader:

Wat eerkroon denkt ge dat uw' schedel sieren zal?
U, die uzelf vermoeit, om 't weiflend blind Geval,
Ten spyt der Waarheid, op een' valsens troon te zetten;
Gods magt betwist [...] (VI.119)

What crown will glorify your head?
You weary yourself, seeking to falsely throne
Blind and wavering Chance rather than divine Truth;
You contest God's power.

By means of the figure of the sailor, De Marre proposes a profoundly different angle to approach the matter of viewing the Cape. René Descartes (1596–1650), the French philosopher who spent much of his life in the Dutch Republic, argued that the schism between the natural sciences and the existence of (a) God puts an all-important choice in the hands of individual man. This has since become known as 'the ethical choice'.³ In presenting the ethical choice to his reader, De Marre not merely sidesteps the echo chamber of the Cape, but invites his contemporary readership to take a step back and consider a choice they each face in viewing the world and, notably, the Cape.

3 De Marre explains in his preface that *Bespiegelingen* takes inspiration from Vondel's *Bespiegelingen van Godt en Godtsdienst* (Reflections about God and Religion, 1662). Vondel, too, engages with Descartes and presents a reasoned defence for the existence of God in the form of a theory of knowledge, explicitly aimed against those who doubt this.

For De Marre, ultimately, there is no choice. The Cape that nourishes the sailor after the storm *is* God's gift, the earthly paradise, the place, indeed, where God's omnipresence shows itself in unchallenged authenticity. 'The Sailor' is Europe's early modern Everyman, whose prolonged separation from Europe has put the elusive charm of the natural sciences into perspective. And, arguably, the Cape has supported this rekindling of a Christian fire, rather than threatening it.

Today, De Marre reminds us that there is a choice in the way we organize knowledge and in the way we establish 'Truth' about the world around us. In its reflection on the place that Christianity and science hold in Europe's self-image and outward gaze, De Marre's book forms an absent presence in the ZAH collections and, more generally, in early modern Dutch books on the Cape. De Marre offers us a looking glass with which to scrutinize the principles of knowledge that underpin the founding of the ZAH library, the organization of its collections and indeed, the (Western) concept of the library as an archive of knowledge. Like De Marre's sailor was pulled out of his familiar environment to face the ethical choice, decolonization today firstly involves taking a step back to confront the unconscious 'givens' of extant categorizations of knowledge.

The library inside out

Libraries are great archives of written heritage and record keeping, and their infrastructures are helpful markers in determining categorizations of knowledge. In the words of the French literary critic and philosopher Jacques Derrida, an archive's physical, historical *origin* is intertwined with the *authority* that it institutes and the *social*

order that it exercises at a later time.⁴ Events at the ZAH in 1984 bitterly illustrate this. As anti-apartheid protesters dumped library books into the Amsterdam canals, the ZAH stressed its avowed neutrality as a knowledge institute with the declared aim to remain neutral so that people could inform themselves about apartheid and related issues. To be neutral, however, is not the same as



Traces of the activists' actions inside the ZAH, 19 January 1984. Photographer unknown (ZAH, Beeldbank, Zuid-Afrikahuis, Map 175-e, 'Overval bibliotheek Suid Afrikaans Instituut, 19 januari 1984').

being impartial. Indeed, given the library's history and the continued presence of a distinctly white, European heritage, the protesters deemed its neutrality as just another example of the ZAH's complicity with the apartheid regime. The ZAH's problem as a Western knowledge institute, then, was not simply that it enforced particular ways of presenting knowledge about the world. Unlike knowledge institutes such as universities, which also attracted

4 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

protests and criticism, at the ZAH such challenges were typically dismissed or ignored. In other words, the ZAH's authority allowed it to continue to emanate the fiction of its constructed, selective image of a social order.⁵

The shelving of early modern travel books in the ZAH shows how De Marre was drawn into the knowledge system that he himself reflects upon. Needless to say that initially, during the library's founding decades following the Transvaal Rebellion (or Anglo-Transvaal war, 1880–1881) and the South African War (1899–1902), the sections on Cape history, anthropology and geography as well as the religious section were populated by white, European authors among whom Kolb, Dapper, and De Marre.⁶ Importantly, De Marre was not included by virtue of his revisionism. Missionaries to overseas territories in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century inherited from earlier centuries an effort to expand the Christianosphere: a common saying — and a telling metaphor — was that a land as bountiful as the Cape, promised a healthy harvest of souls. The power-imbalance of European settlers to Indigenous peoples was authoritatively carried forward under the professorship for Afrikaans literature and language that was installed by one of the precursors of the ZAH, namely *Stichting Leerstoel* in 1933 and by the founding of its dedicated library in 1939. The presence of De Marre's book in the library thus first and foremost represents the library's history — rather than the eighteenth-century critical reflection of the very foundation of this worldview that it offers.

5 Gayatri Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985): 247–272.

6 The book collection of the *Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging* (Netherlands South African Association, NZAV) from the years 1880–1920 forms the cradle of the ZAH library. See for example the *Catalogus van de verzameling A. Welcker* and the *Catalogus van de Zuid-Afrikaansche bibliotheek der Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Vereeniging onder beheer der Z.-Afrik. Voorschotkas*, both of which are in the library of the ZAH.

Derrida stresses that a library's *origin* cannot be altered, and that a library's accountability lies in the use of its *authority* to reflect a *social order* in the present. If the 1984 events demonstrated an apparent conflict in interpreting this at the time, the formal end of apartheid in 1994 provided another admonishment of the necessity to broaden the ZAH library collections in order to service a potentially wider audience. While such efforts finally came underway in the twenty-first century, they however risked to perpetuate colonization (after formal decolonization). A reshelving and relabelling of books — which is not the same as broadening a collection or efforts undertaken to make collections available to broader audiences — addressed the *authority of individual* books. Such reshelving and relabelling left untouched the familiar Western knowledge structures among which, ultimately, the library as Western archive.

If the purpose of decolonization is to make visible the colonial power structures in society and to prevent their perpetuation, then the ZAH library must take position against *authority* as 'a form of control'.⁷ To break away from 'the [colonial] archive [as] the key to the ideology of white power',⁸ a postcolonial awareness about colonial knowledge and power structures is not enough: their interrogation, however much necessary, must be followed by a sustained effort at breaking them. While postcolonialism may focus on a recovery of marginalized Indigenous voices and on unmuting previously suppressed narratives, the recognition of *Keti Koti* as a national holiday in the Netherlands, for example, was criticized as merely *including* (if not appropriating) 'the Other' into a fundamentally Western calendar. Ultimately, decolonizing the ZAH library involves taking a step back

7 Simon Gikandi, 'Rethinking the Archive of Enslavement', *Early American Literature* 50, no. 1 (2005): 92.

8 Gikandi, 92.

to first understand and next dismantle the underlying concepts of knowledge which permeate Western world-views and determine many power structures globally today. The question then becomes where the prerequisite *authority* and *social order* of a decolonial 'library' would be located.

A hybrid borderland as decolonial knowledge

Decolonial thinking demands 'disobedience' regarding knowledge systems because it 'strives to delink itself from the imposed dichotomies articulated in the West [...]. It exists in the borderland and on the borderlines of the principles of Western epistemology, of knowing and knowledge-making'.⁹ In De Marre, the sailor travelled to these borderlands, the boundaries of the known world, in fact mirroring De Marre's experiences aboard VOC ships on the East Indies trade route. Ultimately, in the encounter of European and non-European (not: 'Other') knowledge systems, a hybrid borderland may be produced. When we envisage the decolonial ZAH library in terms of a hybrid borderland, this requires that ZAH artefacts are accessible from outside frameworks of (post)colonial antagonism.

A hybrid borderland need not be confined to a physical location such as the seventeenth century Amsterdam canal house that currently houses the ZAH collections. An online digital infrastructure is particularly suited as a space for different global communities to use 'their agency to define and communicate their perspectives without interference from the archival institutions that have the

9 Walter Mignolo, 'Coloniality is far from over, and so must be decoloniality', *Afterall* 43 (2017): 42.

records in custody'.¹⁰ Indeed, given that the current location of the ZAH library carries connotations of (post)colonial power imbalances, the decolonial 'library' may choose to gain momentum in a digital infrastructural framework.

Concretely, a decolonial digital space (not: 'library') contains digital copies of artefacts. The nature of artefacts can be material (books, arts, objects) or immaterial (songs, dances, ritual performances). Artefacts can be historical or inspired by today's creative media and can be contributed by anyone, be they known as 'Other' or 'self' in the formerly (post)colonial paradigm. Artefacts may illustrate the enduring influence of excluding voices as well as a postcolonial focus on their recovery. Importantly, the decolonial space is a space where the former 'center' must not always already speak or apologize but where its contribution to the hybrid borderland notably also lies in its capacity to listen to different interpretations of artefacts.

The collections should be open-access and self-regulated by the decolonial community rather than curated and shaped from an institutional center. The decolonial community should be open to any user globally because, as Homi Bhabha reminds us, the consequences of 'the sentence of [colonial] history — subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement' are indeed not confined to particular areas on the globe.¹¹ In turn, the ZAH — hosting a large collection on South Africa in Europe — can be expected to contribute substantial parts of its archive to the digital space and should be encouraged to contribute funds towards its foundation. Such involvement however rules out epistemological ties of the space to the ZAH and rules out the grouping of individual artefacts into familiar archival categories of knowledge — like Dapper and Kolb

10 Charles Jeurgens and Michael Karabinos, 'Paradoxes of curating colonial memory', *Archival Science* 20 (2020): 217.

11 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Londen: Routledge, 1994), 245.

on one virtual 'shelf' with geography and anthropology, and De Marre with religious books on another. As the decolonial community contributes artefacts, comments on them, draws relations between them, and seeks engagement between its members, the interpretation and meaning of individual artefacts and the decolonial space will develop. Ultimately, a decolonial collection is one that undergoes live, continuous, and indefinite renegotiation.

Envoi

A decolonial 'library' may take inspiration from hybrid borderlands. It may only be appropriate for the ZAH to contemplate the form of a digital hybrid borderland for its collections given that the home of Dutch-South African relations is an *international* affair, where the critical scrutiny of the *inter*, the in-between space, 'carries the burden of the meaning of culture'.¹²

De Marre demonstrated a fundamental awareness of knowledge systems at a foundational time in colonial history. In inviting us to take a step back and consider the fundamental pervasiveness of colonial power relations and Western knowledge structures today, De Marre constitutes an absent presence of consequence for the ZAH in helping to pave the road to decolonialism.

12 Bhabha, 56.

Authors' Biographies

Manon Braat is an art historian based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She has worked as a freelance curator for several Dutch art institutions and collaborated intensively with socially and politically engaged artists from all over the world, who focus in their practice on themes around issues of decoloniality, social justice and ecology in relation to power inequality. South Africa has her special interest and together with South African curator Nkule Mabaso she curated *Tell Freedom: 15 South African Artists* for Kunsthal KAdE in Amersvoort (the Netherlands) in 2018. Since April 2019, Manon works as curator of contemporary art for Museum Arnhem (Netherlands).

Marian Counihan is a philosopher and works as assistant professor at the University College of University of Groningen (the Netherlands). She is originally from Johannesburg (South Africa). Her academic work focuses on interdisciplinary topics in philosophy of the city such as active citizenship in contexts of diversity, and she teaches courses on urban studies, epistemology, and philosophy of science. Marian worked extensively outside of academia in the field of policy development and programming on internationalization and diversity policies and inclusive city-making programmes.

Pieter du Plessis is a PhD candidate based at Maastricht University (the Netherlands). His research interests include the critical study of whiteness, cultural heritage, belonging and global coloniality in the context of historical and contemporary Dutch-South African relations. His PhD research focuses on the construction of Dutch whiteness in relation to other forms of whiteness through the case study of the Zuid-Afrikahuis in Amsterdam,

the Netherlands. Pieter has a background in social and cultural anthropology, gender studies and sociology, and obtained degrees at the University of Cape Town (South Africa), Universiteit Utrecht (the Netherlands) and Universidad de Granada (Spain).

Barbara Henkes is a historian. She works as a Research Associate at the History Department at the University of Groningen (the Netherlands) and as a freelance publicist. Her research focuses on forms of social and political inclusion and exclusion in modern history. Her work is driven by the question of how personal and collective memories of repression and violence permeate contemporary societies. Oral Histories and Life Writing form a major part of her work. This is also reflected in her publications such as *Negotiating Racial Politics in the Family. Transnational Histories Touched by National Socialism and Apartheid* (2020) and public histories on *Sporen van het slavernijverleden (Traces of the Slavery Past)* in Groningen (2016, revisited 4th edition 2024) and Fryslân (Friesland) (2021).

Ronelda Sonnet Kamfer is a South African-born poet and novelist. She has published four poetry collections and a novel. Her work has been translated into Dutch, French, Modern Greek, Italian and English. She has a MA in Creative Writing from Rhodes University (South Africa). Her novel, *Kompoun* will appear in May 2024 in the Netherlands and has been translated into Dutch by poet, Alfred Schaffer. Kamfer is currently working on a fifth poetry collection and a second novel.

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer is senior lecturer of History of International Relations at the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands). He is specialized in nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperial history and has a special interest in colonial media networks. He currently works on

Dutch international radio-broadcasting in the late colonial period and the era of decolonization. Recent publications include: with S. Potter et al., *The Wireless World. Global Histories of International Radio Broadcasting* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2022); 'Radio as a Tool of Empire. Intercontinental Broadcasting from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies in the 1920s and 1930s', *Itinerario*, vol. 40:1 (2016) 83-103.

Bart Luirink is a journalist and writer. He is a former Johannesburg (South Africa) correspondent for Dutch media *NOS*, *VPRO*, *Vrij Nederland*, *Haagse Post*, *Nieuwe Revu*, *Zuidoost Pers*. He was editor-in-chief of *ZAM Magazine* (www.zammagazine.com), a platform of African (investigative) journalism, arts & opinion. Luirink published several books: *Zingende Pijnbomen, een kroniek van Amsterdam, Zuid-Afrika* (2007), *Puur Goud, andere verhalen uit Zuid-Afrika* (2010) and *Homosexuality in Africa, a Disturbing Love* (2016), amongst others.

Tycho Maas is assistant professor of Early modern textual culture at Utrecht University (the Netherlands) and extraordinary researcher at North-West University (South Africa). He is a scholar with a profound dedication to the nexus of the Low Countries, South Africa, and the Ancient World. He works with sixteenth to eighteenth century Dutch texts from overseas, turning the outward gaze back to Europe. Focal topics include colonialism, religious discourse, and classical antiquity. Afrikaans literature can count on his warm attention. Maas is editor at *Armada. Journal of World Literature* and at literatuurgeschiedenis.org.

Nkule Mabaso is a researcher at HDK-Valand, University of Gothenburg (Sweden) and director of Natal Collective, an independent production company active internationally in the research and presentation of creative and cultural

Africana contemporary art and politics. Mabaso's practice is collaborative with her research interests centering around theorizing and articulating nuanced aesthetic questions from African Feminist vantage points. Recent publication projects include editing *Climate: Our Right to Breathe* (K Verlag, 2022), together with Hiuwai Chu, Meagan Down, Pablo Martínez, and Corina Oprea.

André Paijmans holds an LL.M degree in law from the Vrije Universiteit (Amsterdam, the Netherlands). In 2020 he graduated cum laude in art and cultural sciences (MA) at the Open University (the Netherlands). For his master thesis on the networks of the Dutch journalist, Johan Visscher, and their role in the political developments in South Africa from 1909 to 1923, he received the thesis prize from the Zuid-Afrikahuis in 2022. He is interested in (post)colonialism, state and nation building, and sports history. He regularly publishes on these topics. He is currently working on a biography about Johan Visscher. He is a board member of the De Sportwereld Foundation. This foundation focuses on sport history research.

Nathan Trantraal has written three poetry collections (*Chokers en Survivors*, *Alles het niet kom wôd*, *Oolog*) and one anthology of essays (*Wit issie 'n colour nie*). In 2019 he translated Jason Reynolds' *Long way Down* into Kaaps (*Langpad onnetoe*), written a drama (*Wit isse colour*) and a teleplay (*Delilah*). He writes a bi-weekly column for *Rapport* ('Sypaadjies'). Trantraal has illustrated four graphic novels (*Stormkaap*, *Coloureds*, *Crossroads* and *All Rise*). He's worked as a cartoonist for *The Cape Times* ('The Richenbaums'), *The Cape Argus* ('Urban Tribe') and *Rapport* ('Ruthie'). His comic art has been exhibited in Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Cape Town. He worked with his partner, Ronelda S. Kamfer on a series called *Portraits* for the South African newspaper, *Vrye Weekblad* about the ordinary lives of South Africans

during the Corona Virus pandemic. He currently works as an illustrator for *Vrye Weekblad*. He is an editor reviewer and freelance book cover designer. His poetry has been translated into French and Modern Greek. Nathan holds an MA in Creative Writing from Rhodes University (South Africa). His new graphic novel will be released early 2024 by Kwela Publishers.

Margriet van der Waal is a cultural studies scholar and holds the endowed chair of South African literature, culture, and history at the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands) on behalf of the Zuid-Afrikahuis Netherlands Foundation. She is also associate professor at the University of Groningen (the Netherlands), where she is Director of Studies and teaches in the European Studies Erasmus Mundus Master programme *Euroculture*. Her research focuses on the cultural dimensions of political claim-making in postcolonial contexts and how cultural imaginaries form part of the public sphere. Recently she co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of European Studies* on the 'making' of Europe through cultural heritage.

Christi van der Westhuizen is an author, academic, political analyst and award-winning media columnist. She works as an associate professor at the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD), Nelson Mandela University (South Africa), and was a Visiting Professor at the Research Centre Global Dynamics, Leipzig University (Germany), in 2022-2023. Her two monographs are: *White Power & the Rise and Fall of the National Party* (2007) and *Sitting Pretty: White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa* (2017). Her most recent book as co-editor is the *Routledge International Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness* (2022).

Farren van Wyk was born in South Africa and partly raised in the Netherlands. She holds a BA in Photography

and an MA in Cultural & Visual Anthropology. She has a truly dual perspective on both her home countries, which is visible in her work. The Dutch participation in colonialism, the slave trade and apartheid in South Africa is her heritage that she tries to grapple with through photography. Van Wyk was the first recipient of the PH Museum Women Photographers Grant of 2022 and her work has been exhibited by Photo Vogue, with the Black Archives, and Photoville in New York.

Annex 1
List of publications published by the
Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut (Amsterdam)
between 1991–2018

Bakker, Mewes Jans, A.H. Huussens en S.B. I. Veltkamp Visser, *Dagboek en brieven van Mewes Jans Bakker (1764–1824): een Friese zendeling aan de zuidpunt van Afrika* (Amsterdam, 1991).

Berg, K.F. van den en G.J. Schutte, *Beste ouders! Brieven uit de Transvaal van Karel van den Berg 1896–1900* (Amsterdam, 1999).

Ester, Hans, *Land onder die suidersterre: opstellen, voordrachten, gesprekken en recensies over de Zuidafrikaanse letterkunde* (Amsterdam, 1993).

Ester, Hans, *Elisabeth Eybers: poëzie tussen twee werelden* (Amsterdam, 1995, SAI pamflet-reeks nummer 3).

Ester, Hans en Jan Arnoldus van Leuvensteijn (red.), *Afrikaans in een veranderende context: taalkundige en letterkundige aspecten* (Amsterdam, 1995).

Geyl, Pieter, Pieter van Hees, en Arie Willemsen, *Geyl in Zuid-Afrika: verslag van de lezingentournee langs universiteiten in Zuid-Afrika, juli-december 1937* (Amsterdam, 2000).

Graaf, B.J.H. de, *De mythe van de stamverwantschap: Nederland en de Afrikaners, 1902–1930* (Amsterdam, 1993).

Graaff, B.J.H. de, *Apartheid: een aanzet tot begripsbepaling* (Amsterdam, 2000).

Jansen, Ena, Riet de Jong-Goossens en Gerrit Oliver (red.), *My ma se ma se ma se ma: Zuid-Afrikaanse families in verhalen* (Amsterdam, 2008, SAI pamflet-reeks nummer 8¹).

Liebrechts, Peter, Olf Praamstra en Wium van Zyl (red.), *Zo ver en zo dichtbij: literaire betrekkingen tussen Nederland en Zuid-Afrika* (Amsterdam, 2013).

Meurs, Martin van, *J.C. Smuts: staatsman, holist, generaal* (Amsterdam, 1997).

Ree, Susan van der, *Caleidoscoop: een bibliografisch overzicht van literatuur uit Zuid-Afrika in Nederlandse vertaling* (Amsterdam, 1996).

Renting, R.A.D., *Van Dorkwerd naar Transvaal: het verhaal van Bartus en Izebrand van Til. Een historisch-genealogisch onderzoek naar een emigratie en haar gevolgen* (Amsterdam, 1994, SAI pamflet-reeks nummer 2).

Schutte, G.J., *De roeping ten aanzien van het oude broedervolk: Nederland en Zuid-Afrika, 1960-1990* (Amsterdam, 1993, SAI pamflet-reeks nummer 1).

Schutte, G.J., *De Boerenoorlog na honderd jaar: opstellen over het veranderende beeld van de Anglo-Boerenoorlog (1899-1902)* (Amsterdam, 1997, SAI pamflet reeks nummer 4).

Schutte, G.J., *De zonen van Magato (Mokgatle Thethe, kgosi der Bafokeng) in Delft: een geschiedenis uit de Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse betrekkingen, 1887-1890* (Amsterdam, 2007, SAI pamflet reeks nummer 7).

Schutte, G. J., *Van Amsterdam naar Krugersdorp en weer terug: P.J. Kloppers (1848–1912), schoolmeester en schrijver* (Amsterdam, 2007, SAI pamflet-reeks nummer 6).

Schutte, G.S., *Stamverwantschap onder druk: de betrekkingen tussen Nederland en Zuid-Afrika, 1940–1947* (Amsterdam, 2011).

Schutte, G.S., *Op de zolders van de Keizersgracht: Nederlands– Zuid-Afrikaanse geschiedenissen* (Amsterdam, 2014, SAI pamflet reeks-nummer 8¹).

Veltkamp-Visser, Sief, *Afrikaans in Amsterdam: de geschiedenis van de Leerstoel Afrikaanse taal en letterkunde aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam en het Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut (1932–2016)* (Amsterdam, 2018).

Vries, A.H. de, *Kort vertel: aspecte van die Afrikaanse kortverhaal* (Amsterdam, 1998, SAI pamflet reeks-nummer 5).

Waard-Bijlsma, J.C. de, *Zuid-Afrika in geografisch perspectief* (Amsterdam, 1994).

Waard-Bijlsma, J.C. en F. de Waard, *Thuis in de Mauritsstraat: een huis voor Zuid-Afrikaanse studenten in Utrecht* (Amsterdam, 2010).

1 Both texts by Jansen (2008) and Schutte (2014) are listed as number 8 in the SAI pamflet reeks (SAI Pamphlet series).

