A war of words: Dutch pro-Boer propaganda and the South African war (1899-1902)

Kuitenbrouwer, J.J.V.

Citation for published version (APA):
Part I: Principles of propaganda (1880-1899)

Chapter 2: ‘Blacks, Boers and British’. South Africa in Dutch literature

The (re-)discovery of the Boers by the Dutch public at the end of the nineteenth century was accompanied by a great increase of the number of publications about South Africa that appeared in the Netherlands.¹ Many authors from that time were well aware that they stood in a long literary tradition dating back to the journal that Jan van Riebeeck kept after landing at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652.² But this had been quite different during the greatest part of the century. After the handover of the Cape Colony to the British in 1806, the production of books about South Africa dwindled and in general those that were published were quite negative about the Boers. The interest in the Boer republics after the Transvaal War brought about a radical change: not only did the number of publications about South Africa grow, but the tone about the ‘cousins’ in that part of the world became far more positive. Dutch Africana included many genres, such as travelogues, memoirs, ethnographic studies, novels, children’s books, poetry, history and journalism. In addition, the authors had many different backgrounds, which affected their views on the situation. People who had lived in South Africa were often influenced by their personal experiences and their political allegiances. But not all authors were familiar with the local situation. There were even writers who had never set foot in the region and took their information from what they read about the country and its inhabitants.

Literary scholars, both in the Netherlands and South Africa, have written interesting studies about Dutch Africana. These books have been used as guides for this chapter, which does not aim to give a complete overview of this corpus, but provide an outline of some of the themes that it featured. Before the Second World War, academics such as G. Besselaar and Elizabeth Conradie pioneered the field, describing the literature up until the early twentieth century. Both of them were of Afrikaner descent and their work should be considered in the light of the development of Afrikaans as a separate language, which they saw as a desirable and logical development.³ More recently, some authors have argued along similar lines, describing language as an important feature of Afrikaner nationalism, and a means to preserve

¹ Schutte, *Nederlandse publicaties over Zuid-Afrika*, 9-10. Schutte has calculated that the number of publications (books and articles) went up from an average of 4 per year in the period 1806-1880, to 14 in the period 1885-1895 and, after a peak of 50 in 1896 as result of the Jameson Raid, to 25 in 1897 and 1898.
² It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that Van Riebeeck’s journal was rediscovered in the Cape archives and published, but at the end of the century it had achieved an iconic status. Van der Ledden, *Jan van Riebeeck tussen wal en schip*, 37. For a reappraisal of this source cf. Jansen, ‘Eva, wat sê hulle?’.
³ Besselaar, *Zuid-Afrika in de letterkunde*; Conradie, *Hollandse skrywers uit Suid-Afrika* II. Conradie’s second book appeared posthumously and was edited by Anna de Villiers.
its identity against foreign (English) influences. Other literary scholars, such as Siegfried Huigen, Wilfred Jonckheere and Ena Jansen, critically re-appraised earlier work, describing a more complex and less univocal process that shaped Afrikaans.

One central theme in Dutch publications about South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century was the dynamic relation between Dutch as it was written and spoken in the Netherlands and the development of Afrikaans. Some authors emphasise the differences, but Huigen points out that the literary circles of the Netherlands and the Afrikaners in South Africa were closely intertwined at least until 1925, when Afrikaans became an official language. The primary sources I have used for this chapter, which is about the period between the Transvaal War and the South African War, support that view. There was certainly awareness of the tensions between the emerging Afrikaner movement and the literary establishment in the Netherlands, but it was often hard for contemporaries to categorise them and distinguish between these groups, particularly in the context of the rivalry with the English language in South Africa. This indicates that, although the contents were highly biased and there was a variety of different views in the Netherlands about this subject, the debate about South Africa was linked to the political situation there and was fed by the channels of information that were being set up in the period between 1880 and 1899.

As a result, another important topic in Dutch-South African literature from that period was the so-called ‘race question’: the relationship between different ethnic and cultural groups in that part of the world. During the nineteenth century the region which is now South Africa was an intricate battleground where conflicts took place between several ethnic groups, both black and white. At the beginning of the century, the Zulus under King Shaka and the Matabele under King Moselekatse pushed down from the north into present-day KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Gauteng during the Mfecane. From the 1830s, Boer pioneers left the Cape Colony during the Great Trek and waged many wars with African ‘tribes’ in those regions before establishing their own republics there. Then from the 1870s, the British began expanding their colonial territory northwards from the Cape during the Scramble for Africa, clashing both with the Boers and black Africans.

Although it was certainly no fixed outcome, by the end of the nineteenth century it became clear that colonists of either British or Dutch descent would dominate the region. It can therefore be argued that the South African War, which was the largest of the conflicts, was fundamentally about the question, as to which of these two groups of white settlers would prevail and shape the colonial order. It should be borne in mind, however, that many of the views that were put forward in pro-Boer propaganda during the South African War were

---

4 Steyn, *Tuiste in eie taal; Zietsman, Die taal is gans die volk.*

5 Huigen, *De weg naar Monomopata; Jonckheere, Van Mafeking tot Robbeneiland; Jansen and Jonckheere, Boer en Brit.*

6 Huigen, *De weg naar Monomopata,* 13-14 and 17-18.

already evident in Dutch publications about South Africa before 1899. To contemporaries, such issues did not only have to do with the ‘hard’ tools of power such as military force and capital, but also with less tangible aspects, such as national identity, cultural heritage and, last but not least, language. At the time, the British and the Boers were commonly referred to as two ‘white races’, which indicates that the meaning of race in South Africa was not only tied up with skin colour, but also had a strong cultural component.

Nonetheless, relations between black and white played a large role in the debate about which form of colonial rule was best for South Africa. Although black people were increasingly marginalised throughout the nineteenth century, the rise of white settler supremacy did not lead to a great demographical decrease of the non-Western population, as happened in other areas that many Europeans emigrated to, such as Australia, Canada and the United States of America; in fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century the black majority outnumbered the white minority by approximately four to one. Contemporaries were aware of these figures, and there was a constant fear amongst the white colonists that the black majority would seriously imperil social order and was even capable of destroying it. Therefore, at the time the attitude towards ‘natives’ or ‘kaffers’, as black people were referred to in respectively English and Dutch sources, was perceived as one of the most important rupture points between the British and the Boers.

The following pages will not be so much about the historical realities of these complex processes, but the way in which they were depicted in Dutch literature about South Africa between 1880 and 1899. It was argued in the previous chapter that the Dutch emigrants who went to South Africa, and particularly to the Transvaal, served as mediators between the Boer republics and the public in Europe during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This chapter will analyse the writings that were disseminated via this network. Many of these publications were available both in the Netherlands and South Africa, where several Dutch publishers set up branches. In this way, accounts of South African history written by Dutchmen became part of the Afrikaner canon, while literary critics in the Netherlands became acquainted with early texts written in Afrikaans. Because of the complex interaction the contents of this literature were not monolithic. Authors did not shy away from mentioning the differences between people from the Netherlands and their ‘cousins’ in the republics and although their opinions about the Boers were far more positive than in the decades before, there was a certainly still a lot of ambivalence.

To complicate matters, there was also a direct link between Dutch Africana and publications about South Africa written in English. Propagandists who supported the

---

9 In 1911, the white population of the Union of South Africa was around 1,25 million and the black population 5 million. Marks, ‘*Southern Africa*’, 547.
expansion of the British Empire in that region wrote several notorious accounts about the Boers in which they were portrayed as backward and cruel oppressors who were not capable of responsible government. These views were reflected in the coverage of South African affairs by the British press during the 1890s, which was increasingly influenced by reports from correspondents who were associated with pro-expansionist pressure groups such as the South African League (SAL) and the Imperial South Africa Association (ISAA). Dutch authors saw such writings as an imminent threat to the existence of the Boer republics and therefore thought it important to publish alternative accounts of South African history, to lend legitimacy to Boer claims to independence. There were also English-speaking publicists who criticised the propagandistic onslaught on the republics, however, and these were quite popular with Dutch authors, who cited their work extensively. This shows that, aside from the complex relations between people from the Netherlands and the Afrikaners, there was also interaction with the English cultural sphere, which was rather ambiguous too.

This survey of South Africa in Dutch literature at the end of the nineteenth century is intended to place this diverse corpus in its historical context. To a large extent the contents were shaped by the channels of information between the Netherlands and South Africa as described in the previous chapter. The very existence of this network was the result of an alliance between different groups that supported independence of the Boer republics for a variety of reasons. Although their views on specific topics differed significantly, their publications generally supported the existence of an independent Dutch entity in South Africa and reflected on the relations between the different ethnic groups in that region: in short the racial triangle of ‘Blacks, Boers and British’. This highlights the fact that this kind of literature did not stand by itself, but was clearly related to the development of colonial rule in that part of the world. On the following pages, this relationship will be further explored.

Adventurers and armchair scholars

In many ways the Transvaal War of 1880-1881 was a turning point in public perception of the Afrikaners in the Netherlands. Before that period there had only been limited interest in the fate of the Boers. Only a few publications a year appeared on South Africa, mostly by travellers or other people who had been there. In general, their opinions of the Boers were quite negative. Several of the few settlers who went to South Africa before 1880 wrote home to complain that their dreams had fallen into pieces: apart from practical problems they encountered, such as high prices and low wages, they considered the Boers to be backward,  

---

11 Porter, ‘Sir Alfred Milner and the Press, 1897-1899’; Mackenzie, Propaganda and Empire, 153; Thompson, ‘Imperial Propaganda during the South African War’. Simon Potter has shown that the relationship between the press and politicians who supported expansion was not unproblematic however. Potter, News and the British World, 36-55.

hostile to outsiders and abusive towards black people. More criticism was expressed in the writings of British missionaries, who also accused the Boers of mistreating black Africans in addition to allegations that they inhibited the spread of Christianity. These English texts became available in the Netherlands, where several were translated into Dutch and used as a source for pamphlets.13

In the 1870s, some of the Hollander administrators who had come to the SAR still published negative accounts of the Boers. These men had been recruited by President François Burgers (1872-1877), who was an outspoken reformer. This Afrikaner, who had been born in the Cape and who studied in the Netherlands at the University of Utrecht, had far-reaching plans for the future of the republic. Many people in the Transvaal were distrustful of these schemes, much to the chagrin of the progressive Hollander. In 1879, two years after the temporary annexation of the SAR by the British, one of them, Burger’s secretary T.M. Tromp, published his memoirs in which he described the Boer character as follows, thereby probably summing up the general opinion of them in the Netherlands before 1880: ‘In addition to being cowardly, they are false, hypocritical, prone to perjury, unreasonable, inhospitable, lazy, dirty and ungrateful.’14 However, public opinion changed rapidly after Tromp’s work appeared. Burgers’s image was tarnished following allegations that he had made a deal with the British; he had allegedly resigned as president and promised not to return to the Transvaal in exchange for a pension and a large farm in the Cape Colony.15 Meanwhile, others in the Transvaal became increasingly dissatisfied with the situation, which resulted in the war that made them so popular in the Netherlands and that led to a reappraisal of the Boer character by the Dutch.

After 1881, several publications appeared, written by Dutchman who had lived in South Africa before the annexation, that indicated this shift. Although they were far less dismissive than Tromp’s account, they did vary in tone, which can be explained by the personal experiences of the authors with the Boers. One of the most influential of these books was by Frans Lion Cachet, a Calvinist minister who arrived in the region in 1858 and worked in Natal and the SAR. Throughout his career he was known as a polemist and during a stay in the Netherlands in the 1870s, he established contacts with the Protestant leader Abraham Kuyper whose newspaper, De Standaard, he used as platform.16 His most famous work, a bulky history of the Afrikaner people up till the end of annexation, called De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, was widely read outside Calvinist circles and played a large role in the shift in

13 Schutte, Nederland en de Afrikaners, 15-16.
15 Van Koppen, De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw, 60-61.
16 Ibidem, 56-62. Lion Cachet was in the Netherlands between 1873 and 1875 after which he went to Transvaal for another 5 years. He returned to the Netherlands in 1880.
public opinion in the Netherlands in favour of the Boers. Lion Cachet did acknowledge that he wrote from a personal point of view; to give a negative description of the Boers was impossible for him, ‘by the nature of the matter’. Some aspects of the book were not uncontroversial, such as his open praise for orthodox Boer leaders and all-out attack on Burgers, who had been quite popular amongst Liberals.

This points to there being a direct link between Lion Cachet’s opinions about South Africa and his Calvinist principles, something which has been argued by Chris van Koppen. Also the alliance with Kuyper, who was one of the few to praise De worstelstrijd as an ‘objective’ account, suggests this. However, the idea that Calvinism had a large impact on the Boer character was certainly not a prerogative of the Anti-Revolutionary Party and the idea was generally shared by writers of the day. Moreover, Lion Cachet seems to have derived much authority from the fact that he had lived in Africa for so long. This can clearly be detected in his description of the Boers. Apart from his belief that divine providence had favoured the Afrikaners, he also praised their racial qualities, such as their ‘stubbornness’, which had enabled them to hold out against British tyranny, secure dominance over the black population and establish civilisation in the wilderness of the African interior. This shows that Lion Cachet not only made propaganda for the Boer cause out of religious conviction, but that he was also genuinely interested in the ‘race question’ in South Africa. And so, while Kuyper lost touch with the Boers in the 1880s, Lion Cachet continued his influential propaganda campaign, with articles in De Standaard and sermons throughout the country. He died while on the job, preparing to lead a prayer meeting against the South African War in the town of Bergen-op-Zoom in November 1899. The following year the third edition of his famous book appeared posthumously.

Several Liberal writers were less outspoken in their praise for the Boers than Lion Cachet. A good example of this are the memoirs of E.J.P. Jorissen, one of the Hollanders who were recruited by Burgers, but who remained in service of the SAR after his previous employer had left the political arena. His book, which appeared after his return to the Netherlands in 1897, was considered to be an authoritative source on the events before, during and after the Transvaal War in which he acted as a negotiator. Jorissen, who had a background as a philosopher and liberal minister, became the state attorney without any

17 The struggle of the Transvalers. Besselaar, Zuid-Afrika in de letterkunde, 64-65; Conradie, Hollandse skrywers II, 362-366; Schutte, Nederland en de Afrikaners, 52; M. Kuitenbrouwer, Nederland en de opkomst, 118-119; Van Koppen, De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw, 62-63.
18 ‘uit de aard der zaken’. Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 7.
19 Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 4-5, footnote; Bosman, Dr. George Mc. Call Theal, 121; Conradie, Hollandse skrywers II, 365.
20 Van Koppen, De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw, 59-61.
21 Ibidem, 61-63.
22 ‘taaiheid’. Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 28 and 40-41.
23 Van Koppen, De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw, 163-164.
previous experience in that field. In his somewhat conceited memoirs, Jorissen hinted that his lack of political experience was no problem and that his capacities had been much appreciated by both Burgers and the orthodox Boers. In fact, he was asked by Kruger and Joubert to help them formulate their protests against the annexation and he was also a member of several deputations that negotiated with the British during the turbulent period up to 1881. Contemporaries were therefore most interested in his description of the negotiations because they considered it to be a valuable account of an insider.

Jorissen was not modest about his accomplishments, which points to the controversy that surrounded his career in the SAR. His apparent arrogance was often mentioned as one of the reasons why he was not popular with the Transvalers. In several passages in his monograph he claimed to have been the mastermind behind the restoration of independence, which, so he complained, was not always fully recognised by his new compatriots. Moreover, Jorissen’s outward support for the Krugerite fraction in the SAR was ambivalent, to say the least, considering his opinions on the president. Jorissen himself emphasised that, despite the fact that they had fundamentally different views, there was a mutual respect between him and Kruger that ensured a good working relation. This did not stop him, however, from writing a somewhat disdainful passage in which he described the old Boer as a simple and unworldly man with the outlook on life of a Calvinist from the sixteenth century. ‘In his eyes, the sun revolves around the earth.’ In addition to these taunts, Jorissen was known for his involvement in various political controversies in the Transvaal, which caused contemporaries to question his dedication to the Boer cause. This view appeared to be supported by the fact that after his return to the Netherlands, he spent his days in obscurity and, unlike many other Hollanders who had returned from the republics, did not join the propaganda campaign against the South African War.

Another genre of Dutch publications were travelogues about South Africa and these too contained varied accounts of the Boers. One of the most notorious of these was by the explorer Daniël Veth, who in 1884 went to Umpata in South-West Africa to examine the possibility of founding a Dutch colony there. The expedition was a complete failure and Veth died of fever. Before his death, he wrote an account of his findings, which were extremely negative, particularly about the Boer pioneers in the region, whom he bitterly described as

---

24 Jorissen, *Transvaalsche herinneringen*, 7-9. In 1884, Jorissen had already written a pamphlet in which he gave an account of the negotiations between the Boers and the British. It formed the basis for his book from 1897, supplemented with personal observations that were too sensitive to include in the 1880s and with what happened in the 1880s and 1890s, including his controversial dismissal.
27 Cf. Jorissen, *Transvaalsche herinneringen*, 72-73. He even claimed to have coined the motto: ‘Afrika voor den Afrikaner!’ This phrase is usually attributed to Kruger. Ibidem, 144.
29 Rompel, ‘Dr. E.J.P. Jorissen’, 165.
‘idle, greedy, rude and coarse’.30

Visitors who suffered less during their journeys produced more positive views of the Boers. The businessman H.P.N. Muller, who later became consul-general of the OFS in the Netherlands, travelled from Mozambique to the Cape in the late 1880s and his travelogue appeared in 1889. Muller was also known for his work as ethnographer and the volume contains many extensive, yet vivid descriptions of the various people he encountered: Boers, British and blacks.31 Although he was far better disposed towards the Dutch element in South Africa than Veth, his descriptions of the Afrikaners he encountered did vary in tone. With patriotic pride Muller emphasised the influence of the Dutch East India Company on the institutions in the Cape and the Boer republics, such as language, law and architecture.32 Passages about less developed parts of the Transvaal, however, contain amusing observations of Boers living on the Highveldt, whom he thought rather peculiar, with a childlike sweet tooth and bad table manners.33

The publisher J.A. Wormser also wrote down his impressions after an eight-month business trip throughout South Africa in 1896 and 1897. He was more explicitly positive about the Boer lifestyle, which undoubtedly had to do with his Protestant background. He praised them for possessing a perfect mix of fear of God and love for freedom, which in his eyes made them an example to Christians in the Netherlands.34 However, Wormser’s elated views on the Afrikaners probably also had much to do with the political situation in South Africa, because he travelled there during the aftermath of the turbulent Jameson Raid. The author made no secret of his admiration for the men who stopped the British invasion, whom he praised for their patriotism and excellent skills on the battlefield.35

Not every Dutch author who wrote about South Africa had actually been there, but such people were nonetheless influential in the dissemination of knowledge about the region. An important figure in this respect was the professor of philosophy in Amsterdam, C.B. Spruyt, who was the secretary of the NZAV between 1884 and 1897, in which capacity he wrote many articles on South Africa. Henk te Velde regards Spruyt as a clear example of an armchair scholar, who projected his views on South Africa and the Boers in order to cope with the domestic political situation in the Netherlands at that time.36 It is true that Spruyt never set foot in Southern Africa and in some ways he seems to have idealised the Boers in an

30 ‘lui, gulzig, onbeschoft en onbehouden’. Quoted in: M. Kuitenbrouwer, Nederland en de opkomst, 126.
31 For example cf. Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 13-24, 43 and 107-109. In 1894, Muller received his PhD from the University of Giessen (Germany) on an ethnographical study of the Limpopo region. Schutte, ‘Muller, Hendrik Pieter Nicolaas (1859-1941)’.
32 Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 118-122 and 376-378.
35 Wormser, Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria, 108.
36 Te Velde, Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef, 98 and 101-102.
attempt to cure the ills of modern society, which becomes apparent in his introduction to a collection of his essays on South Africa from 1897. He explicitly hailed the calm and steadfast character of the Boers in the Transvaal as an antidote to the apparent ‘fevered excitement’ in Europe during the confusing days of the fin-de-siècle.\textsuperscript{37}

But this view on Spruyt’s work disregards the fact that he was well-positioned in the network between the Netherlands and the Boer republics and as such was an important propagandist for the ideal of stamverwantschap. He was well-informed about the publications that appeared about South Africa at that time and his articles, several of which appeared in the prestigious literary magazine De Gids, cited them extensively. In 1891, for example, he published a long review of Muller’s travelogue in which he praised the book as an important contribution to the knowledge about South Africa in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{38} Moreover, as a member of the executive committee of the NZAV, he corresponded regularly with prominent figures in the SAR, such as Nicolaas Mansvelt, whom he greatly admired.\textsuperscript{39} The respect was mutual, as is shown in an obituary by Mansvelt after Spruyt died in 1901. The deceased was praised as a relentless activist for the dissemination of the Dutch language in South Africa and, although the author did not agree with all of his views, also for his thorough knowledge of the region.\textsuperscript{40}

Not all the publications on South Africa by Dutch authors were as highbrow as Spruyt’s. Martin Bossenbroek has rightly pointed out that it is hard to draw distinctions between high and low culture in the depiction of South Africa.\textsuperscript{41} Several people that were connected to the network surrounding the NZAV and the Hollanders in the SAR actively tried to make a link with popular culture. One of them was the geographer H. Blink, a member of the NZAV in The Hague.\textsuperscript{42} In 1889, he published a short overview of South Africa in which he sketched the region’s history from Van Riebeeck onwards and gave a description of the situation in the Transvaal. In the introduction, he mentioned that he drew most of his information from well-known authors like George McCall Theal, Spruyt and Lion Cachet.\textsuperscript{43} The executive

\textsuperscript{37} ‘ziekelijke opgewondenheid’. Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, vi; Te Velde, Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef, 101.
\textsuperscript{39} Conradie, Hollandse skrywers, 151-152.
\textsuperscript{40} Mansvelt, In memoriam: prof. dr. C. Bellaar Spruyt; Mansvelt, De betrekkingen tusschen Nederland en Zuid-Afrika, 158-159. Mansvelt was a known Calvinist, while Spruyt was an outspoken Liberal, but this seems not to have mattered to either of them. There was also praise for Spruyt by the Protestant pro-Boer organisation CNBC. Voor de Boeren, Orgaan der Vereeniging: Het Christelijk Nationaal Boeren-Comité, no. 1 (4 May 1900), 5.
\textsuperscript{41} Bossenbroek, Holland op zijn breedst, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{42} ZA, NZAV Jaarverslag 1900, 132; NZAV Jaarverslag 1901, 131.
\textsuperscript{43} Blink, Transvaal en omliggende landen, 5-17. Cf. Te Velde, Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef, 77. The work of Theal will be discussed later in this chapter.
committee of the NZAV welcomed it as a useful booklet and recommended it to future emigrants, who did not have access to these sources. Blink was also the editor of the popular magazine *Vragen van den Dag* that regularly contained articles about South Africa and during the South African War published a special issue about the historical background of the conflict.

In other ways too, information and images of South Africa were made available to the general public. This is illustrated by Wormser's travelogue, which was turned into an evening full of entertainment for a crowd of 3,000 people in Amsterdam. The vivid lecture in which he recounted his experiences was accompanied by lanternslide projections of beautiful landscapes and heroic Boers. The audience also enthusiastically sang along to the patriotic ballads that were performed. Muller’s book also had noticeable sensationalist aspects. The Afrikaner literary critic Besselaar thought that his account of a shipwreck near Durban – based on a true story – was very appealing. The pictures of a voluptuous naked Zulu girl that are scattered throughout the book, however, could not carry his approval and he thought it was ‘no picturebook for a Dutch nursery’. Nevertheless, Muller’s travel account was turned into an adventure book for schoolchildren – needless to say without the titillating images. One teacher was of the opinion that the text contained so many instructive descriptions of the land.

45 Cutting from a newspaper describing a meeting in Amsterdam organised by Patrimonium, not dated. HDC, collection Wormser, 258, doos 15.
and the people that he adapted it into an inspiring story of a young man who is shipwrecked near Durban, travels throughout South Africa during the upheaval of the Transvaal War, settles as a cartwright in Pretoria and marries a local Afrikaner girl.47

This mix of fact and fiction is typical for many books about South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. The most famous writer of pro-Boer adventure books in the Netherlands was Louwrens Penning (1854-1927).48 In his autobiography he described how he wanted to emigrate to the Transvaal in the early 1880s and, although the tears in his mother’s eyes stopped him from leaving, that he never lost his devotion to the Boer cause.49 His two brothers did settle in South Africa and, until his death in the 1920s, they kept in regular contact via letters, which provided him with material for his books. In addition, he was well acquainted with Dutch Africana.50 His first books appeared after the Jameson Raid, which infuriated him so much that – after he had taken a cold shower to regain his composure – he decided to do his bit for the pro-Boer movement.51 As a result he wrote a series of three historical novels about the Great Trek, the annexation of the Transvaal and the raid itself. The chapters of these books alternately told stories of fictional characters and provided descriptions of events that actually took place, making it a form of popular history. Penning made few references to the sources he used, but the few times he did so prove that he drew his information from well-known publications.52 Jacques van der Elst has argued that in this respect Penning’s books largely reflected contemporary biases in the Netherlands.53 There was, however, also contemporary scepticism about Penning’s early work and the famous Lion Cachet even warned him that he would make a caricature out of the Boers because he did not have personal experience of South Africa. Nonetheless, Penning himself thought his connections were sufficient to provide him with enough knowledge and he continued writing – with huge success.54

This illustrates how there was a distinct overlap between publications in the Netherlands and South Africa. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Dutch public had access to several sources from which they could draw information about the Boers. Accounts of emigrants and travellers naturally had a certain degree of authority, because they wrote about their own experiences. There were also authors who had never been to South Africa, but nonetheless became known as specialists because of their connection with the channels of information from the republics. In this way, a heterogeneous corpus of literature came into being, which is

47 Gerraets, Dijkstra’s ondervindingen in Zuid-Afrika.
48 Jonckheere, Van Mafeking naar Robbeneiland, 46-54.
49 Penning, Uit mijn leven, 134-135.
50 Van der Elst, ‘Die Anglo-Boereoorlog: ’n vertekende beeld vanuit die vreemde’, 150.
51 Penning, Uit mijn Leven, 136.
52 In De helden van Zuid-Afrika, about the Great Trek, he refers to a work by Pieter Harting, founder of the NZAV and to De worstelstrijd der Transvalers by Lion Cachet. Penning, De helden van Zuid-Afrika, 58, 163 and 198.
54 Penning, Uit mijn Leven, 137-138.
also reflected in the variety of views that emerged from it. The following section will explore
such ambivalences, looking at accounts describing the history of the Dutch-speaking people in
South Africa and their relations with their ‘kinsmen’ in the Netherlands.

**The ambivalences of stamverwantschap**

Although their opinions did differ significantly, there was one certainty for all Dutch authors
who wrote about this topic: the history of South Africa started with Van Riebeeck’s landing in
1652. The white colonists near Cape Town, it was argued, developed into the Afrikaner
people. It was acknowledged that non-Dutch blood was mixed in because of the arrival of
Huguenot settlers from France and also German colonists, who were recruited by the Dutch
East India Company. In 1902, the historian H.T. Colenbrander did extensive research in the
Company’s archives in The Hague and argued that about 50% of the Boers in the republics
had Dutch ancestry, 27% German and 17% French. From these figures he drew the
conclusion that the Boers were a ‘new race’ because Dutch blood was blended significantly
with ‘foreign’ elements. He emphasised that this miscegenation mainly occurred amongst
white peoples and that less than 1% of the Afrikaners had coloured forefathers.

There seems to have been widespread agreement in the Netherlands on this point and
many authors asserted that the Boers were an independent ethnic group, while racially akin at
the same time. Still, there were different views as to what degree these foreign influences had
affected the ‘Dutchness’ of the Afrikaners. Looking at the surnames of influential Boers, for
example, many people noted that French Huguenots left a substantial mark. Lion Cachet was
of the opinion that the ‘short-temperedness’ of the Afrikaners was another French legacy.
Nevertheless, he described how the Huguenots voluntarily assimilated to Dutch rule at the
Cape, an opinion that was shared by Muller. Colenbrander too stressed that their historical
influence had often been overemphasised, particularly in Britain. ‘It seems that people over
there preferred to be embarrassed by the “chivalrous” Frenchman than the coarse
Dutchman.’

Contemporaries did not consider genetic make-up to be the only factor that was relevant
to the relationship between the Boers and the Dutch; they also noted how the colonial context
played a role in the unique development of the inhabitants of the republics. It was not denied
that there were already tensions between the Netherlands and the colonists in the Cape during

---

55 Colenbrander, *De afkomst der Boeren*, 7. Colenbrander took the situation in 1806 as a benchmark, because he
argued that the genetic make-up of the Boer had not changed since then. In 1971 J.A. Heese published his
findings on the genealogy of the Afrikaners, which differed significantly, arguing that 36% of the Afrikaners
had Dutch ancestry, 35% German, 14% French and 7% coloured. Heese, *Die herkoms*, 21.
56 ‘nieuw ras’. Ibidem, 123.
57 Ibidem, 121.
58 ‘opvliegendheid’. Lion Cachet, *De worstelstrijd der Transvalers*, 419.
60 ‘Men scheen daar liever door den “ridderlijken” Franschman, dan door de botte Hollander beschaamd.’
Colenbrander, *De afkomst der Boeren*, 9.
the eighteenth century, caused by trade restrictions and corruption amongst officials of the Dutch East India Company. Lion Cachet explicitly noted that this was a reason for Afrikaners to move away from the area around Cape Town, and to settle in the Graaff-Reinet district.\textsuperscript{61} He argued that this strategy of trekking to avoid metropolitan meddling played an essential role in the nineteenth century history of the Boers, during which they constantly tried to avoid British interference.\textsuperscript{62}

This urge for freedom and independence was partly seen as a Dutch trait. In many sources, the struggle of the Boers against the British Empire was linked to the war of independence by the Dutch against the Spanish that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In reference to the pre-modern freedom fighters, the Boers were known as ‘the gueux of the nineteenth century’.\textsuperscript{63} In addition, it was thought that the increasing isolation of the Boers who went inland meant that they preserved several characteristics that the first colonists brought with them from seventeenth century Holland, of which a deep-rooted faith in the word of God was probably the most well-known. There were many differences between Liberal and Protestant observers in the Netherlands and how they valued the staunch Calvinism of the Boers, but they did agree that the Dutch Authorised Version of the Bible, which was written in seventeenth century Dutch, was the most important book for them and one of the most tangible legacies from the Netherlands in South Africa.\textsuperscript{64}

Despite these markers of Dutch identity, many observers noted how frontier life had led to a growing gap between people in the Netherlands and the Boers. The struggle for existence during the journeys into the interior and the confrontations there with wild animals and ‘savage’ black Africans supposedly hardened the pioneers. Lion Cachet’s vivid descriptions of these so-called \textit{Voortrekkers} are exemplary. In the ox-wagon camps, or \textit{laagers}, everybody joined the daily effort of preparing food and other essentials, only taking time off to pray and to read the Bible.\textsuperscript{65} In a fictitious paragraph, he crawled into the skin of a Boer, standing on top of the Drakensberg, overlooking the majestic landscapes of Southern Africa, which emphasised the spiritual link of the Boers with the land they colonised.\textsuperscript{66} Spruyt was sceptical about Lion Cachet’s assumption that the pioneers were living the life as described in Genesis. He nevertheless characterised the lifestyle of the \textit{Voortrekkers} as ‘patriarchal’ and thought it

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 23-27.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibidem, 28.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} ‘de geuzen van de negentiende eeuw’. For examples cf. Fruin, \textit{A word from Holland on the Transvaal question}, 14; Spruyt, \textit{Afrikaners en Nederlanders}, 95-99. In secondary literature cf. Schutte, \textit{Nederland en de Afrikaners}, 40; M. Kuitenbrouwer, \textit{Nederland en de opkomst}, 119; Te Velde, \textit{Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef}, 77; Van Koppen, \textit{De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw}, 61-62. This analogy was also made in several English sources, for example the influential work by George McCall Theal. Cf. Bosman, \textit{Dr. George Mc Call Theal}, 124-125. Gueux, the French word for ‘beggars’, was used to refer to the Dutch rebels who opposed Spanish rule.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Cf. Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 407 and Wormser, \textit{Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria}, 137; and Muller, \textit{Zuid-Afrika}, 109.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 115-117.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Ibidem, 159-161.
\end{itemize}
continued to influence the nature of daily life of the republics.\textsuperscript{67} In this way, an elevated and heroic image came about concerning the Grote Trek and the foundation of the republics.

One noticeable aspect is that such heroism drew strongly on notions of gender in which particular qualities of each sex were celebrated. Men were mainly praised for their physical qualities and courage, which they needed to survive in the ‘wilderness’ of South Africa. Wormser characterised the male \textit{Voortrekkers} as ‘the real Boers; broadly shouldered, long bearded, rounded straight fellows, who bring forth a breed as brave and stout as they are themselves’\textsuperscript{68} Their favorite past-time, so many authors thought, was hunting, which explained their excellent shooting and riding skills, which boys already learned during early childhood.\textsuperscript{69}

Boer women were considered at least as heroic as the men, but in their own way. In his description of the Great Trek, Lion Cachet noted how they were not spared the hardships of frontier life, for instance suffering attacks from black Africans.\textsuperscript{70} Moreover, they played an essential role in organising the \textit{laager}, taking care of the household when the men were out hunting or scouting.\textsuperscript{71} During battles, women were occupied by nursing the wounded, casting bullets, and there were even stories of women who handled rifles themselves.\textsuperscript{72} But the Boer women were mostly admired for their patriotism. At critical moments in the history of their people, such as after the attack by the Zulus in 1838 and the Transvaal War, they convinced their husbands and sons to go out and fight.\textsuperscript{73} The retired army officer J.H. Rovers, who had been in the Transvaal in 1881, argued that in this way women guarded the moral integrity of the Boers in the ‘wilderness’ of the South African interior.\textsuperscript{74}

Consequently, the simple lifestyle of the Boers was considered to be intertwined with the nuclear family, which was reflected in the political culture of the republics. In descriptions of the Transvaal, it was noted that administration was small-scaled and decentralised, which made it a communal concern for all Boer citizens and ensured good social order.\textsuperscript{75} In the Transvaal Parliament, the \textit{Volksraad}, the president acted as a \textit{primus inter paribus}, a true father of the nation, which illustrated the informal nature of the political system.\textsuperscript{76} Both

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{68} ‘de rechte Boeren; breedgeschouderde, langbebaarde, ronde rechte kerels, die een geslacht voortbrengen zoo stout en flink als ze zelf zijn’. Wormser, \textit{Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria}, 108.
\textsuperscript{69} Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 427; Spruyt, \textit{Engeland en Transvaal}, 8; Rovers, \textit{De Transvalers en hunnen heldhaftige vrouwen}, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{71} Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 115-117.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibidem, 140-141, 181 and 428; Rovers, \textit{De Transvalers en hunnen heldhaftige vrouwen}, 15.
\textsuperscript{73} For women during war against Dingane cf. Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 192-193 and 212-213. For women during the Transvaal War cf. Andriessen, ‘De Vrouwen’, 77-78; Rovers, \textit{De Transvalers en hunnen heldhaftige vrouwen}, 17. In chapters 5 and 6 the depiction of women during the South African War will be treated.
\textsuperscript{74} Rovers, \textit{De Transvalers en hunnen heldhaftige vrouwen}, 15-16.
\textsuperscript{75} Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 428-429; Muller, \textit{Zuid-Afrika}, 178.
\textsuperscript{76} Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 207-209 and 297-299.
Muller and Wormser described how easy it was to approach Kruger, who sat on his porch every morning, willing to talk to anyone who passed by.\footnote{Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 172; Wormser, Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria, 128.}

Despite the praise for the simple lifestyle of the Boers, observers from the Netherlands also saw disadvantages. Some were of a rather practical nature. Housing, for example, was considered to be downright primitive. Wormser complained extensively about the low standard of accommodation in Pretoria and other towns, where hotels provided no clean towels, had lousy service, and served awful food.\footnote{Wormser, Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria, 117-124.} Staying at a farm in the Transvaal, Muller noted with disgust how his hosts – father, mother and son – washed their faces and feet with water from the same bowl. ‘The people here certainly possess many virtues, but not really that of cleanliness.’\footnote{‘Vele deugden bezit de bevolking hier zeker, maar niet in hooge mate die der zindelijkheid.’ Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 110. For poor hygiene cf. Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 348-349.}

Another problematic feature of the Boer character was perceived to be their pugnaciousness and their strong partisan tendencies. During the early history of the SAR there were many internal conflicts, which even led to an armed conflict between different fractions of Voortrekkers. This political strife, which was intertwined with ecclesiastical issues, was generally considered to be a black page in the history of the Transvaal. Lion Cachet, who as a Calvinist minister and polemist was deeply involved in these matters, did not find it opportune to mention them in his account of Boer history, because he did not want to stir up painful memories.\footnote{Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 289-290.} Jorissen also mentioned party rivalry as one of the weak spots of the SAR, but, aside from some bitter comments about his own dismissal, did not describe in any detail the political feuds that took place in the 1880s and early 1890s, which he witnessed from close by.\footnote{Jorissen, Transvaalsche herinneringen, 20-21.}

It was noted, however, that the internal bickering was nothing compared to the distrust towards external intervention that the Boer had developed during the Great Trek and which had led to a degree of isolation.\footnote{Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 436.} These qualities, that had protected them from meddling by the British, also halted progress and alienated them from the modern world, several authors noted. Muller was explicitly worried about the underdeveloped state institutions of the Transvaal. In his view the gold boom of the late 1880s had propelled the archaic Boers into the age of high capitalism, which caused great social problems. He therefore noted with satisfaction that Kruger had been so wise as to appoint Hollanders to help him reorganise the state.\footnote{Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 172.} In general, commentators thought the lack of a good education system in the Transvaal was particularly dangerous because it made the Boers, many of whom were illiterate, vulnerable and such authors often mentioned that it was in this field that emigrants
from the Netherlands could contribute most significantly.84

Despite the tempting prospects, people who were interested in emigrating were extensively warned not to take it too lightly. It was often noted how Dutch emigrants in the past had given the Netherlands a bad reputation in South Africa. Considering the mistrustful nature of the Boers, it was generally stressed that emigrants to the Transvaal had to be well-behaved, because vices like alcohol abuse, swearing and arrogance were frowned upon. And if they were not religious themselves, they had to at least show respect for the church. Moreover, emigrants had to be educated and experienced professionals who were motivated to contribute to the well-being of the Dutch race.85 Despite these warnings, hate against *Hollanders* was a sensitive issue in Dutch sources, more so because it was tied up with internal rivalry in the SAR between the Kruger government and the opposition. It seems that most authors wanted to avoid controversy and did not express their personal views on such matters. There was one exception though: as will be examined in the following section, S.J. Du Toit, who was known as the main opponent of *Hollander* influence, was widely derided by critics in the Netherlands.

In Dutch publications about South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, both the similarities and the differences between the *Hollanders* and the Boers were mentioned. Looking at the genealogy of the Boers, their Dutch descent was apparent, but authors also pointed out the influence of French blood. Likewise, many writers thought that the history of the Great Trek showed that the Boers possessed markers of Dutch identity such as an urge for independence and freedom. On the other hand, they pointed out that the pioneering life had developed some peculiar traits in the Boer character. Some of these, such as their outdoor skills and patriotism, were applauded, whereas others, such as stubbornness and partisanship, were lamented. These ambivalences show that the image of the Boers in the Netherlands was not univocal, but they should also not be overemphasised. In the light of the colonial competition between the two ‘white races’ in South Africa, the British and Dutch, many of the ambivalences seemed to fall away. Most of authors who have been discussed put forward the ideal of an independent Dutch South Africa and called upon their audience to contribute to achieving that goal. Racial unity, in the form of *stamverwantschap*, was considered the best panacea for the expanding British Empire. One issue in which these considerations were paramount was the language question, which will be discussed next.

---


The language question

For contemporaries, language was closely linked to the political context. At the end of the nineteenth century it seemed, depending on the viewpoints of individual authors, as if Dutch was either on the rise or under pressure in different parts of the globe. It was noted, for example, how in the USA emigrants from the Netherlands had lost knowledge of their mother tongue; this was a sign that they had completely assimilated to American society and it was accepted as a fait accompli.86 The situation in Belgium, where the Flemish campaigned to get Dutch recognised as an official language with the same status as French, was considered to be more contentious.87 At the end of the nineteenth century, however, the struggle for the Dutch language was considered to be the most urgent in South Africa because it was linked to the question as to whether British or Dutch influence would dominate in that region. In this respect it should be considered to be a crucial aspect of the development of two different white identities in the region and as such it played an important role in colonial politics. This was also a concern to the British and there was great anxiety amongst administrators during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the Afrikaners would not assimilate to their rule because they kept their own language.88

At the same time, observers on the Dutch side were afraid that English cultural influence would swamp the republics and destroy their independence. The law from 1825 in which English was proclaimed to be the only official language of the Cape was mentioned as an early example of this hostile attitude.89 For contemporaries, the struggle for colonial dominance between the Boers and the British, was therefore not only fought out on the battlefield, but also in the press, in books and in classrooms. This sense of cultural strife was clearly shared by the protagonists of stamverwantschap in the Netherlands, and the sources about this topic contain many allusions to war. In 1896 Muller, for example, called upon teachers to go to South Africa and help the Boers to preserve their identity: ‘In fact, the struggle for the language is a struggle for the race.’90 Like other aspects of the relations between the Netherlands and the Afrikaners, there were many different views on this matter and various strategies were developed to counter English influences and British colonial influence. At times this led to great tensions between different groups of Dutch-speaking people.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Afrikaners at the Cape started to organise themselves in order to promote emancipation of the Dutch language in that colony. This can

86 Te Winkel, Het Nederlandsch in Noord-Amerika en Zuid-Afrika, 4-9.
87 Fredericq, De toekomst van den Nederlandschen stam, 4-6 and 13-14; Te Winkel, De Nederlandsche taal in Zuid-Afrika, 3.
89 Te Winkel, Het Nederlandsch in Noord-Amerika en Zuid-Afrika, 23.
90 ‘Inderdaad, de strijd voor de taal is de strijd voor het ras.’ Muller, De Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 48.
well be considered to be the start of the process that led to the establishment of Afrikaans as an official language in 1925. A radical thinker from this so-called Taalbeweging (Language Movement) was Revd. S.J. du Toit. In 1876 he founded the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners (Society of True Afrikaners), an organisation that promoted the development of Afrikaans as a written language, with its own spelling and grammar. At that time, Du Toit was known as the most prominent opponent of Hollander influence in the SAR, where he became superindentent for education after the annexation had ended. One of his most notorious polemics was with Jorissen, who was fired as state attorney in 1883, something which the Hollander himself thought to be the result of a campaign against him in the press and the Volksraad, orchestrated by his opponent. This incident made Du Toit increasingly unpopular in the Netherlands. In addition, he caused much controversy as a member of the Transvaal deputation that visited the Netherlands in 1884, and he was alienated from many people that had admired him at first, such as Kuyper. When he left the SAR in 1890 after a fall-out with other members of the Kruger government, Du Toit was accused of dancing to the tune of Cecil Rhodes in many Dutch publications.

One Afrikaner from the Cape in whom people from the Netherlands put more trust was Jan Hofmeyr, the founder of the Afrikaner Bond (1881). This political organisation came into being during the aftermath of the Transvaal War and campaigned with success for the recognition of Dutch as an official language in the Parliament and courts of the Cape. Although English was still dominant in daily life, this was generally seen as the greatest success of the Afrikaners in the colony. Hofmeyr also seemed to be better disposed towards Hoog-Hollandsch than Du Toit. In 1890 and 1897, conferences were organised by the Taalbond, a branch of the Afrikaner Bond to discuss the development of a local form of Dutch in South Africa. In general this organisation was considered quite conciliatory towards influences of High Dutch, something that was appreciated in the Netherlands. But Hofmeyr’s initial political alliance with Rhodes, who became prime minister of the Cape in 1890, was frowned upon and it was widely believed that he had been charmed by the charismatic empire-builder. It was only after the Jameson Raid that the two men drifted apart, which gave many people in the Netherlands hope that all white Dutch-speaking inhabitants of

---

91 Conradie, Hollandse skrywers II, xxv.
92 Conradie has argued that he was not opposed to cultural influence from the Netherlands. Ibidem, 83-95. Cf. Schutte, Nederland en de Afrikaners, 125-126. Du Toit’s reputation in the Netherlands was very poor, however.
93 Jorissen, Transvaalsche herinneringen, 126-130. Despite his anger, Jorissen continued to work in the SAR as a lawyer and was made high court judge in 1890, after Du Toit had fallen from grace. He considered this to be a full rehabilitation. Cf. Conradie, Hollandse skrywers II, 339; Schutte, Nederland en de Afrikaners, 125-126.
94 Schutte, Nederland en de Afrikaners, 177-180; Van Koppen, De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw, 119-132 and 135-137.
95 M. Kuitenbrouwer, Nederland en de opkomst, 173.
96 Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 377; Te Winkel, Het Nederlandsch in Noord-Amerika en Zuid-Afrika, 60.
South Africa would form a united front against British imperial expansion. Nevertheless, there remained a measure of distrust of Afrikaner nationalists in the Cape.

Critics in the Netherlands were more optimistic about the development of Dutch in the two Boer republics, where both the Bible and official documents, the two main pillars of society, were written in High Dutch, which to contemporaries emphasised their independence from British rule. But there were also concerns. The OFS in particular was seen as a potential weak spot in the front line against English culture. Muller described how British settlers played quite an important role in the intellectual life of the republic and dominated education. Although the headmaster of the prestigious Grey College in Bloemfontein, J. Brill, was Dutch, the school had been founded with a grant from the former high commissioner of the Cape after whom it was named. Despite these problems, the subsequent Presidents J.H. Brand, F.W. Reitz and M.T. Steyn were seen as people who upheld the Dutch element and resisted British pressure.

Notwithstanding these hopeful developments in the OFS, the SAR was generally considered to be a more important bulwark of Dutch influence. Initially there had been concerns about the educational reforms initiated by Du Toit, whose policies to attract teachers from the Cape were considered as a way for English to get in at the backdoor as these men and women could barely speak Dutch themselves. The appointment of the Hollander Nicolaas Mansvelt as superintendent of education in 1890 was therefore welcomed as a great improvement. In practically all publications that appeared in the Netherlands on this subject, Mansvelt was described as a great mediator, because he had been in South Africa from 1874 and at the same time kept strong ties with his mother country. Under his guidance, the schools in the Transvaal were reformed and he attracted teachers from the Netherlands to ensure a solid curriculum of *Hoog-Hollandsch*. In eulogies of his work, Mansvelt’s great belligerence for the Dutch language was admired. Wormser, for example, emphasised how important this was for the future of the Dutch influence in the light of British cultural expansion.

May the Afrikaner people understand, the sooner the better, that the England, that

---

100 Wormser, *Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria*, 92.
can be driven away using Henri-Martins [sic] rifles, is a hundred times less dangerous than the English influences, that men like Dr Mansvelt have devoted their lives to combating.  

The development of Afrikaans was not only considered by people in the Netherlands to be a distant process. There are clear indications that several publications by Afrikaner nationalists were read and discussed by Dutch intellectuals. Hofmeyr’s magazine Ons Land was available and probably also Di Patriot, edited by Du Toit. Writers in South Africa with roots in the Netherlands such as J.F. Van Oordt, better known under his pseudonym d’Arbez, and Jan Lion Cachet (brother of Frans) contributed extensively to these magazines and experimented with new forms of spelling. This highlights the fact that it is hard to make a distinction between literary circles of the Netherlands and South Africa around the turn of the twentieth century. Early literature in (haphazard) Afrikaans spelling mainly consisted of poetry and heroic stories about the past, mainly the Great Trek and related events.  

Besselaar has argued that poetry was the post popular genre in Afrikaans in the Netherlands. One of the most prolific authors of that time was Francis Willem Reitz (1844-1934). Originally born in the Cape Colony, he had a long political career in the Boer republics. In the 1870s he was appointed as high court judge in the OFS and in 1889 became president of that republic. Ill health forced him to retire in 1895, but in 1898 he succeeded Leyds as secretary of state in the Transvaal, a post that he would occupy until the end of the South African War. Apart from his political achievements, which earned him the reputation of being a good patriot whose policies benefited the Dutch element in South Africa, Reitz was also known as a dedicated poet. In 1888, he edited a volume with fifty selected poems from Di Patriot, several of which were written by himself. A second, extended, edition, which was published in 1897 by Wormser, contained sixty-two. The topics ranged from doggerel about daily life in South Africa to emotionally charged verses about the struggle between the Boers and the British, and particularly the Transvaal War. Other Afrikaners were also inspired by this conflict and wrote victory songs and patriotic ballads. Another politicised issue was the struggle to promote the Dutch language in the Cape and the clear and present danger of
English at schools. These literary products were welcomed as examples of true patriotism by critics in the Netherlands.  

While there was appreciation for some aspects of nascent Afrikaner nationalism, there were also concerns about the disparity between the official written language – Hoog-Hollandsch – and the popular language spoken in daily life – Afrikaans. Several linguists in the Netherlands described how, over time, the vernacular of the Afrikaners had changed under the influence of other languages introduced by French Huguenots at the Cape and Malaysian slaves who had been brought from Asia by the Dutch East India Company. As has been mentioned, Du Toit’s efforts to develop Afrikaans into a language in its own right, was frowned upon by many people. The professor of linguistics, Jan te Winkel, was one of his most outspoken critics. He considered Afrikaans as an amusing dialect, like Flemish or Amsterdam slang, but if it was to become a separate language, he predicted, it could never hold out against English in South Africa. ‘He [Du Toit] could arouse some sort of literary life amongst Hottentots with it [Afrikaans], [but] civilised people would turn away from it.’

Most commentators from the Netherlands were not as blunt as Te Winkel, but it was a commonly held idea that the development of Dutch in South Africa should be closely linked to Hoog-Hollandsch. This was the premise of Mansvelt’s education policy that was very popular amongst Dutch authors who wrote about it. However, Mansvelt himself had experienced the reluctance amongst Afrikaners to learn Hoog-Hollandsch, he told an audience of prominent pedagogues in a speech after his return to the Netherlands in 1900. He recalled how, while lecturing at Stellenbosch, he had to work hard to win over his students by giving animated classes which eventually aroused their interest in the Dutch language. In the SAR he also tried to sugarcoat his policies by supporting the establishment of bookshops so that Transvalers could discover for themselves how much beautiful literature there was in Dutch.

Another method to promote Dutch amongst Afrikaners was considered to be the

---

112 Besselaar, *Zuid-Afrika in de letterkunde*, 140. During the South African War many schools gave performances during which children recited Afrikaner songs. Also the Transvaal anthem, which was written by the Dutch Catherine F. van Rees in 1875, was widely known amongst the Dutch public. Kloppers, „Alles zal rech kom!”, 76-77; M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 187.
114 ‘Onder de Hottentotten zou hij er een soort van litterair leven mee kunnen wekken, de beschaafden zouden er zich van afkeeren.’ Te Winkel, *De Nederlandsche taal in Zuid-Afrika*, 9-10.
117 Ibidem, 511. Still, Mansvelt was considered a hardliner by many of his critics. Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 139-140.
simplification of the language conventions. Mansvelt complained about the difficult spelling and grammar rules of High Dutch that made it unpopular with students in the Cape, who preferred English because it was considered to be far easier.\textsuperscript{118} He found many likeminded people amongst Afrikaners in the \textit{Taalbond}, of which he himself was also a member. People like professor P.J.G. de Vos from Cape Town argued in favour of language reforms and simplification of the rules and tried to persuade the literary establishment in the Netherlands of the necessity of these measures.\textsuperscript{119} In the SAR, the \textit{Hollander} journalist Frans Engelenburg was an enthusiastic supporter of such ideas and he introduced simplified spelling in his newspaper \textit{De Volksstem}.\textsuperscript{120} In 1897 he wrote an article for \textit{De Gids} to mobilise support for these initiatives in the Netherlands. He complained about rigid linguists who wanted to keep the grammar pure, which complicated the use of the language as a unifying agent amongst people of Dutch descent in South Africa. Failure to do so led to the danger that ‘the growth of the Dutch language in this part of the world is greatly harmed’.\textsuperscript{121}

These proposals were met with some positive response in the Netherlands and were discussed by intellectuals. There was a lobby group called the \textit{Vereeniging tot vereenvoudiging van onze schrijftaal}, which called for the reform of Dutch spelling and grammar using a model developed by R.A. Kollewijn. As has been mentioned, several influential figures from the pro-Boer movement, such as J.P. Moltzer and H.J. Emous, were members this organisation.\textsuperscript{122} Even a purist like Te Winkel, who was outspokenly conservative in this matter, acted as a spokesman for a group of Afrikaners and Dutchmen who wrote a letter in which they presented several proposals for possible reforms to a conference about the Dutch language in Dordrecht. Although Te Winkel did not support these plans, he found it important to discuss them, because he did not think spelling rules should come between the Dutch and the Afrikaners.

We feel ourselves to be one with the South African, because we know he is blood of our blood, because his ancestors went out from our country, because his character is closer to ours than that of any other people, because we understand what he writes in his own language, even though we have not consciously learned it, because we understand him completely when he comes to us and greets us as his brother in his own words.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{118} Mansvelt, ‘De Hollansche taal’, 509.
\textsuperscript{119} Winkel, \textit{De Nederlandsche taal in Zuid-Afrika}, 12. Wormser, who attended the first conference about language simplification in Cape Town (January 1897), noted that there were not many attendants though. Wormser, \textit{Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria}, 202-204.
\textsuperscript{120} Wallach, \textit{Die Volmaakte ,,Gentleman”}, 29.
\textsuperscript{122} Cf. chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{123} ‘Wij gevoelen ons één met den Zuid-Afrikaan, omdat wij weten, dat hij bloed is van ons bloed, omdat zijn voorgeslacht is uitgegaan van ons land, omdat zijn karakter nader staat tot het onze dan van eenig ander volk,
Despite this apparent goodwill, no official reforms of the Dutch language took place around 1900.\footnote{Cf. chapter 7.} As was the case with many initiatives that were undertaken by the protagonists of \textit{Stamverwantschap}, these plans failed to be realised and at times the debate was quite heated. But there was more to it. It has been argued in this section that the language question should be seen as part of the overarching struggle for colonial dominance in South Africa. In the light of the competition with British influence, many of these ambiguities faded to the background and according to some contemporary authors it was better that practical considerations did override grammatical principles in order to make Dutch a viable language in South Africa. Literature was also an important factor in the colonial question in other ways. Many English books about South Africa that were published during the second half of the nineteenth century were extremely negative about the two republics and argued that the Boers were not capable of responsible government. In the Netherlands such publications were seen as harmful and several authors thought it necessary to put forward alternative views on South Africa to counter such allegations. On the other hand, texts by English-speaking writers with more positive ideas about the Boers were embraced and served as a source of inspiration. This shows that Dutch literary critics not only reflected on sources about South Africa that were written in their own language, but also on those written in English.

**Dutch views on English Africana**

In many publications it was stressed that the development of Dutch influence in Southern Africa was not uncontested. In this sense, pro-Boer propaganda can be considered to be a direct reaction to what was seen as a British onslaught on the republics in the context of the expansion of their empire. One of the dangers was considered to be the ongoing media campaign by certain groups that wanted to discredit the Boers in Europe and legitimise expansionist policies in South Africa. One such group that was seen as an exponent of ‘perfidious Albion’ were British missionaries, particularly those from the London Missionary Society (LMS), who were active in the region from the first decade of the nineteenth century. Their leaders, such as Dr Phillips and Reverend Van der Kemp accused the Boers of mistreating black people and using them as slaves. They sent such reports to the government in London and these allegations reached the wider public via the humanitarian lobby groups based at Exeter Hall. These texts were also available in the Netherlands and contributed to the negative perception of Boers before 1880.\footnote{Schutte, \textit{Nederland en de Afrikaners}, 15-16.}
After the Transvaal War, opinion on these sources changed dramatically, which was reflected in several publications by authors from different political currents, such as P.J. Veth, Robert Fruin (both Liberals), Lion Cachet and Abraham Kuyper (both Protestants). These men accused British missionaries of tarnishing the Boers’ reputation with false stories about cruelties committed against black people. In this connection, one of the men who had a particularly bad reputation amongst Boer supporters in the Netherlands at the end of the nineteenth century was David Livingstone. Lion Cachet asserted that the legendary missionary/explorer, who died in 1873, had despised the Voortrekkers and had systematically spread lies about them, which to him showed how ‘small a great man can be’. It was said that much of Livingstone’s resentment was aroused during an expedition by a Transvaal commando against chief Setyeli (1852). He accused the Boers of plundering his home while he was absent, using Setyeli as an eyewitness. According to the Boers, however, it were Setyeli and his men who had plundered the settlement and lied about it. After textual evidence became available that supported the Boers, Livingstone was posthumously scorned on this point in numerous Dutch publications.

In addition, certain British policymakers were considered to act out of Machiavellian motives. These men were accused of deliberately spreading untruths about the Boers in order to legitimise their plans for imperial expansion in Southern Africa. The archetype of this group was Theophilus Shepstone, the man who was considered to be the mastermind behind the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877. One of the principle reasons for intervention that he mentioned to the government in London was that the republic was a failed state on the verge of collapse. He claimed that the Transvaal was about to be invaded by the Pedi ‘tribe’, who would destroy the white population living there. Several Dutch authors were of the opinion that Shepstone was well-acquainted with the situation, which they thought to be far less dramatic, and that he had deliberately given an incorrect account so that he would get the go-ahead to proceed with the annexation.

the Transvaal kept slaves cf. Veth, Onze Transvaalsche broeders, 21-38 and 61-62. P.J. Veth was the father of Daniël Veth, who, as mentioned before in this chapter, died during an expedition to Angola. After the death of his son in 1884, Veth largely retired from public life and did not publish about South Africa anymore. Van der Velde, Een Indische liefde, 300-301.

126 Veth, Onze Transvaalsche broeders; Fruin, A Word from Holland; Lion Cachet, De Worstelstrijd der Transvalers; Address to the Members of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Societies. The Address was officially published by the Transvaal deputation that visited London in 1883-1884, but Schutte argues that Kuyper wrote it. Schutte De Vrije Universiteit I, 50-52.

127 ‘hoe klein een groot man kan zijn’. Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 111.

128 George McCall Theal provided documents that supported the Boer version of this story, which was taken over by authors in the Netherlands. Theal, History of the Boers, 337-338; Bosman, Dr. George McCall Theal, 84. For contemporary references to this source cf. Spruyt, ‘De exodus der Boeren’, 168-170; idem, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 18-25; Wormser, ‘Petrus Jacobus Jourbert’, 41-86, 51. For authors who used different sources cf. Veth, Onze Transvaalsche broeders, 56-60; Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 413.

129 Cf. Jorissen, Transvaalsche herinneringen, 23-33 and Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 459-461. Jorissen thought Foreign Secretary Lord Canarvon and High Commissioner Sir Bartle Frere ordered Shepstone, who acted out of what he thought best for South Africa, to provide them with skewed information. In
But even after the British occupation of the Transvaal had ended, it was noted how this ‘sordid’ and ‘corrupt’ diplomacy continued. Imperialists from the 1890s, including the likes of Cecil Rhodes, Alfred Milner and Joseph Chamberlain, were seen as the main protagonists of a plot to destroy the independent Boer republics and establish a South African federation under the aegis of the British.\textsuperscript{130} It was argued that these men influenced the press coverage of South Africa and many people in the Netherlands thought that they wilfully manipulated the public in Britain in order to generate more support for their plans. The Rhodes conglomerate owned many influential newspapers and Milner and Chamberlain were deeply involved in propagandist organisations like the Imperial South Africa Association (ISAA) and the South African League (SAL). In the Netherlands, the journalist Charles Boissevain was the most prolific author to write about the ‘corruption’ of the British press in South African affairs. It was a recurring theme in his commentaries in his newspaper \textit{Het Algemeen Handelsblad}.\textsuperscript{131} In the run-up to the South African War and during it he also wrote several pamphlets in English in which he expressed the hope that the British people would cast off the lies of the imperialist press and would pressurise the government into a policy shift.\textsuperscript{132}

Notwithstanding these examples, it should not be forgotten that there was genuine respect for British politics too at the end of the nineteenth century. Prominent Dutch opinion-makers, particularly of Calvinist creed, admired the venerable statesman William Gladstone, who was seen as a strong leader and as the embodiment of Christian morality in politics.\textsuperscript{133} Much of his popularity amongst pro-Boers seems to have been derived from his standpoints on the South African question, which was perceived as the antithesis of jingoism. During the famous Midlothian speeches in the run-up to the 1880 elections, he explicitly condemned the annexation of the Transvaal and although initially he had been reluctant to give in to the demands of the Boer deputation when he became prime minister, it was thought by many that Gladstone ensured the rapid British retreat after the battle of Majuba Hill.\textsuperscript{134}

Likewise, there was much praise for authors who were against the annexation policy in the early 1880s. Sometimes it was an isolated excerpt that was referred to, such as a passage from J.A. Froude’s \textit{Oceana}, in which he asserted that the Afrikaners in the Cape were oppressed by the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that this was the contrast, Lion Cachet thought Shepstone manipulated the policymakers.

\textsuperscript{130} Boissevain, \textit{Van dag tot dag}, 129.
\textsuperscript{131} Several articles in: Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{133} Van Koppen, \textit{De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw}, 18-19; Te Velde, \textit{Stijlen van leiderschap}, 59.
\textsuperscript{134} Cf. Te Velde, \textit{Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef}, 70; and M. Kuitenbrouwer, \textit{Nederland en de opkomst}, 120.

M. Kuitenbrouwer argues that there was significant resentment against Gladstone in 1881. However, he does not make it clear whether that was against his person as such or against British policy in general. For an example of an instance where Gladstone’s personality was praised, but the policy of his government criticised, cf. Veth, \textit{Onze Transvaalsche broeders}, 79-80.
reason for the *Voortrekkers* to leave the colony.\(^{135}\) On the other hand, parts of the book, in which Froude expressed the hope that the Boers would become loyal subjects of the British Crown, were not mentioned.\(^{136}\) Other authors, such as the former editor of the *Natal Witness*, Reginald Stratham, who wrote several books and many articles about South Africa, were appreciated for their entire oeuvre, in which they argued that the republics had a definite right to existence.\(^{137}\) He and also the Liberal MP G.B. Clark, who wrote several pro-Boer pamphlets and acted as consul-general for the SAR in London between 1884 and 1892, kept in contact with Boer supporters in Europe during the years that followed, even during the South African War.\(^{138}\)

Other British authors that opposed the imperialist policy in South Africa had a more problematic relationship with the pro-Boer movement. J.A. Hobson, for instance, certainly cannot be seen as an admirer of Kruger and he even described Leyds as an ‘evil genius’ behind the polarisation between the Boers and the British.\(^{139}\) Although Hobson’s arguments concerning the jingoist conspiracy were widely known in the Netherlands, particularly through Boissevain’s writings, no reference can be found to his criticism on the propaganda campaign by the republics and it seems that the contact between the English journalist and pro-Boer organisations was limited.\(^{140}\) William Stead was another publicist who openly took sides against the British politics of expansion in South Africa. Remarkably, he was a great admirer of Rhodes, but after the Jameson Raid he became radically opposed to the increasing pressure on the republics. In his eyes, the British element in South Africa would not be able to withstand the combined forces of a pan-Afrikaner movement, which shows that for him dominance of the Anglo-Saxon race remained the main goal.\(^{141}\) Despite these considerations, he stood in close contact with several pro-Boer leaders, such as Leyds and co-ordinated the translations of several Dutch pamphlets into English and *vice versa*.\(^{142}\) Looking at the

---


\(^{138}\) For example, cf. correspondence in: Leyds archive Pretoria. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 86, 315, 318, 324, 327 and 811.

\(^{139}\) Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, 33 and 74.

\(^{140}\) There is some evidence in the archives I have used that indicates that there was some contact between Dutch pro-Boers and Hobson, but this seems to have been limited. In one letter to Boissevain (which was probably written in the summer of 1901), Hobson mentioned that he had stayed with the Dutch journalist. J.A. Hobson to C. Boissevain, not dated. GAA, collection C. Boissevain, toegangsnummer 394, inventarisnummers 457-494. There are also indications that Hobson received material from the ANV press office, although he used middlemen in order to conceal his ties with this prominent pro-Boer organisation. C. Thieme to F. Rompel, 16 March 1901. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 811; [F. Rompel] to C. de Wilde, 26 April 1902. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 818.


contents of his writings it appears that Stead’s protests were more vocal than Hobson’s and that he did not shy away from populism, declaring ‘War against the War’. This sensationalism made him controversial in Great Britain, but popular in the Netherlands where he was praised for his efforts to make his compatriots see the wrongs of the imperialist policy in South Africa. Decades later, he was still remembered in a Dutch textbook as ‘the conscience of his people’ during the South African War.

The most influential English-speaking author for pro-Boers in the Netherlands was the historian George McCall Theal (1837-1919). Theal was born in Canada and arrived in the Cape in 1859, where he had an adventurous career as journalist, teacher, diamond digger and finally administrator for the native affairs department. On his journeys throughout the colony he studied the languages and habits of different black communities, about which he wrote his first books. At the end of the 1870s he became increasingly interested in the archives at Cape Town. Meanwhile, Theal started writing on the history of South Africa, which resulted in a huge oeuvre. The History of South Africa is known as his magnum opus which he continuously revised from the late 1880s to his death. During the 1890s he was known as the most prominent historian in South Africa and as such Rhodes provided him with funds to do research in European archives to find material about the colonial history of South Africa. Despite these close connections with the Cape administration, Theal himself claimed that he was an ‘objective’ historian because, as an outsider, he only rendered a factual account.

Christopher Saunders has argued that Theal’s views on South Africa are nonetheless characterised by a clear narrative, which is the racial superiority of white settlers over the black majority. Theal called for harmony between the colonists in Africa, both of Dutch and British descent, to face the black menace threatening them. He was also against metropolitan meddling by both the imperial government and humanitarians who, in his eyes, threatened the unity of the two ‘white races’ in their policies. Despite Theal’s explicit criticism of British imperial expansion and his pro-Dutch views, he himself cannot be

---

146 Bosman, Dr. George McCall Theal, 7-8 and 35-40; Saunders, The Making of the South African Past, 13-15.
147 It is hard to get a good overview of Theal’s exact bibliography. Christopher Saunders asserts that eleven volumes of the History appeared throughout Theal’s life. Saunders, The Making of the South African Past, 16.
148 Bosman and Besselaar only mention five volumes that appeared during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Besselaar, Zuid-Afrika in de letterkunde, 115; Bosman, Dr. George McCall Theal, 44. I have not used later editions for this chapter because Theal revised his work continuously and thus went beyond the scope of this chapter.
149 Besselaar, Zuid-Afrika in de letterkunde, 115; Bosman, Dr. George McCall Theal, 48-52.
150 Bosman, Dr. George McCall Theal, 119; Saunders, The Making of the South African Past, 22.
considered to be an Afrikaner historian, according to Saunders.\textsuperscript{151} This did not prevent his work from being appropriated by contemporary pro-Boers, however. In the 1930s, the Afrikaner Izaak Bosman wrote a doctoral thesis about Theal at the University of Amsterdam, which still reflected many of these ideas. Bosman argued that the historian had much sympathy for the Afrikaner people and their lifestyle.\textsuperscript{152} In addition, Theal took their side on the important issue of relations between black and white and argued that segregation was better than pretentious and naïve theories about the equality of races, as advocated by British policymakers.\textsuperscript{153} The combination of Theal’s descent, his thorough knowledge of South Africa and apparent pro-Boer views, made his work an ideal source for the propagandists of \textit{stamverwantschap} in the Netherlands because it lent their arguments scholarly weight and an aura of objectivity. In many Dutch publications about the history of South Africa, his books were mentioned as the most authoritative publications available on this topic.\textsuperscript{154} Theal was even asked by the NZAV to write a textbook about South African history that could be used in Transvaal schools, but the historian declined because he was too busy.\textsuperscript{155}

Just as the image of the Boers in Dutch publications was not univocal, nor was there a monolithic view on British involvement in South Africa. Certain groups, such as missionaries and statesmen, were seen as agents of imperialism who deliberately slandered the Boers in order to legitimise their expansionist plans. Nonetheless, there was also genuine appreciation for those who were considered to be adversaries of such ruthless empire-building and who showed respect for the territorial integrity of the republics. Theal’s work in particular became influential amongst Dutch-speaking authors, both in South Africa and in the Netherlands. His research attributed to the creation of a vision on the colonial past in which the ‘race issue’ was considered the dominant \textit{leitmotiv}. In pro-Boer literature, two themes from this history were highlighted: firstly the so-called ‘native’ question, and secondly the increasing pressure by the British Empire on the republics. The depiction of these two issues, which were intertwined in the view of contemporaries, will be discussed on the remaining pages of this chapter.

**The ‘native’ question**

The British takeover of the Cape in 1806 was considered to be the beginning of the struggle for dominance in South Africa. Dutch authors did not deny the tensions between the Dutch

\textsuperscript{151} Ibidem, 25.

\textsuperscript{152} Bosman, \textit{Dr. George McCall Theal}, 120-129.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibidem, 139-143.

\textsuperscript{154} For example, cf. Lion Cachet, \textit{De worstelstrijd der Transvalers}, 315 footnote; Blink, \textit{Transvaal en omliggende landen}, 5; Aitton, \textit{Geschiedenis van Zuid-Afrika}, x; Spruyt, \textit{Afrikaners en Nederlanders}, 92; Spruyt, ‘The case for the Boers’, 61; Spruyt, \textit{Engeland en Transvaal}. Also Dutch authors in South Africa, like Van Oordt, were inspired by Theal. Conradie, \textit{Hollandse skrywers} II, 180; Huigen, \textit{De weg naar Monomopata}, 104.

\textsuperscript{155} Aitton, \textit{Geschiedenis van Zuid-Afrika}, x. After Theal declined, D. Aitton, who had been a teacher in the OFS, was asked to write the textbook. Although Aitton did do some research himself, his work mainly was inspired by Theal. Theal’s \textit{History of South Africa} was translated in Dutch with support of the NZAV. Theal, \textit{De geschiedenis van Zuid-Afrika}.
East India Company and the Afrikaner colonists, but the new British rulers, it was argued, were far more intrusive. In general, the main point of rupture between the two white groups in the Cape was considered to be the ‘native’ question, or how to treat black subjects. In this view, the Afrikaners considered themselves to be inherently superior to the coloured inhabitants of the Cape, the Hottentots (Khoikhoi), who were seen as exceptionally backward creatures. Although they were considered to be a little more developed, the Bantus of the interior were also depicted as uncivilised children. It was argued that the colonist’s view was shaped during centuries of experience in South Africa and had been reinforced during conflicts that had taken place during the Great Trek. Feelings of white racial superiority were therefore considered to be of fundamental importance to both Afrikaner nationalists at the Cape and the Boers in the republics.

By contrast, it was mentioned how the British had less consistent attitudes towards the coloureds. On the one hand, groups such as the LMS preached equality between the races and managed to persuade the government in London to implement legislation that provided Hottentots with the same political rights as white people. At the same time, the imperial hunger for land resulted in great conflicts between the British and black ‘tribes’ living on the borders of the empire.

Authors in the Netherlands believed that Boer attitudes towards black people were the most sensible. In addition Theal, who wrote much about ethnography, expressed his scepticism about the idea that black people could develop rapidly. Several authors were therefore of the opinion that the seemingly backward Boers had modern ideas about the ‘native’ question, backed by scientific evidence, which was more effective than the hypocritical ‘love for negroes’ of British humanitarians. This attitude of racial superiority, based on historical experience and what was thought to be common sense, made Afrikaners the most suitable colonisers in the eyes of pro-Boers in the Netherlands. Some of them even thought them to be a race of white ‘aristocrats’.

To contemporary writers, the nineteenth-century history of South Africa revealed that the

---

156 Theal noted how the Afrikaners were racially closely linked to the British, but this could not prevent the growing resentment about bad colonial government. Theal, History of the Boers, 59-60; Spruyt, Engeland en Transvaal, 6.
157 Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 39 and 395-397; Theal, History of the Boers, 357; Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 49-50; Wormser, Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria, 217-218; Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 10-13 and 52-56; Spruyt, Engeland en Transvaal, 22.
158 Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 45, 55-73 and 126-127; Theal, History of South Africa I, 343-348; Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 185-186; Wormser, Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria, 216; Spruyt, ‘The Case of the Boers’, 63; Spruyt, Engeland en Transvaal, 14-16 and 28.
159 Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 85-86, 462-463 and 558-559; Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 248 and 335-336; Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 25-30; Spruyt, ‘The Case for the Boers’, 68.
160 Theal, History of the Boers, 21; Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 18.
162 Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 6; Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 10 and 18.
differences of opinion on the ‘native’ question had become the most important rupture point between the Afrikaners and the British after the transfer of power in 1806. In many ways, the new administration favoured black people over the white population, it was argued. One notorious incident took place in 1815 when an Afrikaner was put on trial after he had flogged his coloured servants in the Graaff-Reinet region. The local white population there was already disgruntled with the British regime and this indictment led to a revolt. Lion Cachet and Theal wrote that this escalation was partly the work of some local hotheads, but both condemned the brutal response by the British authorities. Five rebels were condemned to death at Slachtersnek and when the gallows from which they were hanged collapsed, did not receive mercy, even though the attending crowd considered it to be a sign that God did not want the execution to happen.\(^{163}\)

In the decades that followed, tensions rose in the outlying regions of the Cape, where black ‘tribes’ such as the Xhosa attacked farms of Afrikaner settlers. Initially, the British undertook expeditions to restore order, but under pressure from the missionary lobby, such expeditions were ceased. At the same time, Afrikaners complained that they were disarmed so that they could not defend themselves against gangs who stole cattle, destroyed farms and killed farmers.\(^{164}\) For many, the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1834 was the last straw. In principle, the pro-Boer authors were not so much against this measure, emphasising that it was supported by the Afrikaners, who even proposed plans for gradual abolition. What they did condemn was the rash way in which it was implemented by the administration, so that farmers did not get a chance to secure enough labour. Moreover, the system for financial compensation was inadequate and the Afrikaners only received a fraction


of the sum they were entitled to, they complained. In pro-Boer literature it was asserted that these factors caused the Afrikaners to leave the Cape and embark on the Great Trek in 1836. Lion Cachet added another reason:

the sixth sense of the Boers. […] But with the conviction, conscious or unconscious: We Afrikaners must trek, so that Africa can be civilised and the heathen nations won for Christianity: if we do not trek, South Africa will not become civilised.166

The Voortrekkers went north and east looking for places to settle. At the beginning of the century the Zulus and Matabeles had invaded these lands, conquering the local population and killing scores of people. In the eyes of late-nineteenth-century authors, the upheaval during the Mfecane lent legitimacy to the Boers occupying the land. It was argued that they had been in South Africa longer than the black newcomers who had invaded from the north. Moreover,

165 Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 73-79; Theal, History of South Africa I, 409-425; Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 184; Aitton, Geschiedenis van Zuid-Afrika, 211-213; Wormser, Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria, 215. 
much of the land had been depopulated and there for the taking, because it could be considered to be unoccupied. Finally, many of those who had been conquered were said to have asked the Boers to chase away the cruel kings that oppressed them. Nonetheless, the advent of the Boers in these lands resulted in violent confrontations with the Zulus and Matabeles. In descriptions of these wars, their leaders, Dingane and Moselekatse, were portrayed as cruel and cunning men who wanted to obliterate their white opponents. The most notorious incident was the so-called ‘treason’ of the Zulus in Natal, where a deputation of the Boers was killed during a ritual dance. This was followed by attacks on *laagers*, during which women and children were not spared. Many publications described with much gusto how the Boers regrouped and sent out an expedition that wiped out the Zulu army at the battle of Blood River. Likewise, Moselekatse and his men were also defeated on the battlefield and retreated northwards.

Pro-Boer authors who wrote about these wars believed that such violence was legitimate and that the *Voortrekkers* had won the land fairly, paying for it with their own blood and that of their loved ones. Eventually, the Boers settled in the interior, where they founded the Transvaal and the OFS, which were officially recognised by the British in the treaties of Zandrivier (1852) and Bloemfontein (1854). In these documents the ‘native’ question featured prominently. The Boers promised that they would not allow slavery in their republics, while the British promised not to interfere in black and white relations north of the Orange River, including a ban on the arms trade. Despite these conventions, the British were repeatedly accused of meddling in the conflicts that took place between the Boers and surrounding ‘tribes’. Cape administrators were blamed for siding with black chiefs in land disputes if it benefitted them. Moreover, the British were accused of using black troops during several armed confrontations with the Boers and the governments of the republics complained repeatedly about the supply of firearms to black people. This latter point in particular was considered to be a scandal, because it caused white rule in the region to be threatened. Spruyt described how coloured people in South Africa were ‘numerous as the sand of the sea and fertile as rabbits’ and he was afraid that they would engulf and destroy colonial settlements if they had the chance.

---


At the end of the nineteenth century, the history of the ‘native’ question was also used to defend the Boers against ongoing accusations of cruelty against the black population of the republics. It was often emphasised that there was no slavery in the Transvaal, as was suggested in many English texts about South Africa. Also the numerous expeditions that were undertaken by the Boers against surrounding ‘tribes’ were perfectly justifiable according Dutch authors, because the republics had every right to defend their territorial integrity. Moreover, these wars were of a limited scale, only meant to punish warmongering kings in order to prevent conflicts in the future. This was contrasted with the British expeditions of that time, which were portrayed as being the result of a ruthless desire for expansion. This led to enormous bloodbaths, such as during the Zulu War (1879) and the First Matabele War (1893). The latter conflict in particular, conducted by Rhodes’s BSAC under command of the infamous L.S. Jameson, became known for the excessive use of violence and some Dutch observers even saw it as a ‘war of extermination’.

In addition, it was stressed how the effects of the Boer policy of segregation had been beneficial, for both whites and blacks. Travellers noted how well-behaved coloured people in the republics were, compared to those in the British colonies. This was considered of paramount importance, given the mobilisation of labour. Muller wrote extensively about what he thought to be the innate laziness of black people, which made strict discipline from their white masters a necessity. Another threat to social order was considered to be the insatiable sexuality of black people. Authors generally emphasised that Afrikaners, both in the Cape and the republics, condemned all intimacy with people with a different skin colour. European settlers who recently arrived in Africa were considered to be much more lax in their morals. As a result, a breed of half-castes came into being at the Cape, who were seen as pitiful creatures, caught between civilisation and barbarity. For contemporaries, a more threatening aspect of this kind of frivolity was that black people in the British territories became unruly. Wormser described the rape of white women by black men, which in his eyes was an abhorrence, as the ‘curse of Natal’.

---

176 Muller, *Zuid-Afrika*, 113-114. Despite Muller’s assertion that Afrikaners would never touch a black woman, of which he approved, his travelogue contains several photos of a naked Zulu girl and a long passage in which he expresses his own sexual attraction to a coloured girl. *Ibidem*, 235-241.
In the depiction of the history of the ‘native’ question, late-nineteenth century Dutch authors clearly juxtaposed the ways in which the British and the Boers dealt with the issue. The former were accused of hypocrisy and inconsistency, which was due to their lust for expansion, it was argued. Depending on their own short-term interests they were either too soft or too harsh towards the black population, which led to social disorder and terrible bloodbaths respectively. By contrast, at the end of the nineteenth century the Boers were generally praised for their strict but just treatment of black people. Their strong belief in white superiority, it was argued, constituted the reason why they had left the Cape and founded their own republics. To contemporaries, this view on the ‘native’ question legitimised the existence of an independent Dutch entity in the region, because the Boers had done more to promote ‘civilisation’ than their rivals. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, British imperialists tried to undermine the republics in order to expand their sphere of influence. During the 1880s and 1890s, Dutch contemporaries were increasingly alarmed by this menace and tried to expose it in their publications.

The Uitlander question

A recurring theme in pro-Boer literature was the host of political and legal tricks by British statesmen to expand their control over the Boers. The annexation of Natal (1842) and the Kimberley diamond fields (1872) were seen as early examples, but the most flagrant incursion was considered to be the annexation of the Transvaal (1877). In the two most authoritative Dutch accounts of this episode, by Lion Cachet and Jorissen, it was emphasised that the British reasons for annexation were false and that Shepstone had manipulated President Burgers.  

Initially the Boers, under the leadership of Kruger and Joubert, tried to restore independence through negotiations, which the two authors interpreted differently. Jorissen thought that the people of the Transvaal were not unified enough to muster armed opposition against the British.  

Lion Cachet saw the reluctance to fight as a typical characteristic of the Boer lifestyle. According to him, they were forced by the British to take up arms for the cause of ‘freedom and justice’.  

Nevertheless, both authors agreed that the arrogance of British statesmen led to the escalation of the conflict. Time after time, cunning diplomats like High Commissioner Bartle Frere dodged the demand for independence put forward by the Boers, believing they could easily outwit the simple people of the Transvaal.  

In the eyes of the pro-Boers the war of 1880-1881 proved that British arrogance was inappropriate. The famous battle at Majuba Hill, where a small commando repelled the British army, was considered exemplary of this. Lion Cachet (and many others with him) thought that it showed that the

---

178 Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 459-485; Jorissen, Transvaalsche herinneringen, 23-33.  
179 Jorissen, Transvaalsche herinneringen, 21-22.  
180 ‘vrijheid en recht’. Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 28 and 488.  
181 Ibidem, 505-506; Jorissen, Transvaalsche herinneringen, 19-20.
Boers were not inferior to the British in any way.182

After Majuba, the Gladstone government decided to cease hostilities and to restore a form of independence in the SAR. In the peace treaty of 1881, this was called ‘suzerainty’, which meant that the British claimed a form of paramount authority over the republic, as well as the right to intervene in foreign and ‘native’ affairs. In 1884, the treaty was revised and although the word suzerainty was not removed from the text, the possibilities for interfering in the SAR administration were scaled back. This compromise led to tensions during the following decades, however. Jorissen, who was a prominent negotiator in 1881, was quite sceptical about the role of Transvalers in this matter and he did not think they cared much about the exact meaning of the treaties.183 By contrast, other specialists on the Dutch side, such as professor of international law J. de Louter, argued that the SAR had regained full independence, with the 1884 convention.184

Nevertheless, in the run-up to the South African War the Salisbury government, in the person of Joseph Chamberlain, asserted that Britain still had a form of suzerainty over the Transvaal. In the eyes of Dutch contemporaries, the renewed interest of the British in the SAR was linked to the discovery of vast gold deposits on its territory in 1886. This further aroused the greed of the imperialists, so it was thought, and British capitalists and statesmen tried everything they could to gain control over the mines. One particular threat caused by the gold boom was perceived to be the huge influx of white immigrants who came to the mines, the majority of whom were of British descent: these were the so-called Uitlanders. Johannesburg, a town that was founded to accommodate miners, became a symbol of this menace. It was described as a den of iniquity, where vices such as prostitution and alcohol abuse were widespread. The Boer government, however, was applauded for doing a good job of isolating these depravities, so that the population outside Johannesburg would not be affected.185 But there were graver problems with this group of foreigners. Although he travelled in the SAR barely two years after the discovery of gold, Muller already noted how the Uitlanders were dangerous because they had come to the SAR in great numbers and so threatened to outnumber the Boer population, which would make them politically dominant. This meant that the SAR’s hard-won independence was at stake, because it was likely that the Uitlander leaders would forge close ties with the British colonies.186

The SAR government therefore undertook measures to restrict the political influence of immigrants by extending from two to fourteen years the period before which they were allowed full citizens’ rights, including the vote. To compensate for this, a toothless second chamber was installed in the Volksraad, that was reserved for Uitlanders. These measures, in

182 Lion Cachet, De worstelstrijd der Transvalers, 538.
183 Jorissen, Transvaalsche herinneringen, 84-85 and 113.
184 De Louter, La Question du Transvaal, 8-12; Leyds, The First Annexation of the Transvaal, 334-346.
185 Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 144; Wormser, Van Amsterdam naar Pretoria, 160-162.
186 Muller, Zuid-Afrika, 114-115.
addition to the secondary status of the English language in schools and the existence of state monopolies, gave rise to grievances that were expressed by leading Uitlanders, united as the Reform Committee. The Dutch language press in the SAR severely criticised this group and similar opinions were expressed in pro-Boer literature in the Netherlands.  Generally, Dutch observers thought that the Kruger government did a good job in managing the rapid modernisation of the Transvaal and thought it legitimate to limit British influence.  It was also asserted that the Reform Committee did not represent the general Uitlander population, who only came to the SAR to make money and did not care about whether they were ruled by the Boers or the British.  In addition, the Uitlander leaders were accused of manipulating the press and forging petitions to create the impression that their viewpoints were widely supported.  This sort of agitation was considered to be a serious danger, because it increased the division between the British and Dutch elements in South Africa and authors even argued that these feelings were a form of ‘racial hatred’.

In addition to these internal troubles, a second threat lurked outside the borders of the republics: Cecil Rhodes. This man was considered to be the embodiment of imperialism, combining high capitalism with a sense of superiority of the British race. Several Dutch authors admired him and his energetic efforts to dominate Southern Africa. He not only tried to achieve this through the relentless amalgamation of mining companies and territorial expansion, but also by spreading English culture through institutions like the University of Cape Town.  Others were more cynical and described Rhodes as a wolf in sheep’s clothing and ‘the Napoleon of South Africa’.  Despite these differences in tone, observers agreed that Rhodes’s rampant expansionism was a threat to Boer independence and hoped that the republics, particularly the Transvaal, would be able to stop this onslaught. In this sense, Kruger was described as the antithesis of the Rhodes doctrine.

Many authors thought that the stubborn Boer resistance forced Rhodes to adopt more radical measures. The most notorious example became the Jameson Raid, an invasion of 600 Rhodesian police officers, which was supposed to trigger a revolt amongst the Uitlanders in Johannesburg. The expedition ended in failure when the column was intercepted by a Boer commando and surrendered on New Year’s Day of 1896. In the Netherlands, the ‘invasion by Buccaneers of the Transvaal’ was seen as a confirmation of the unscrupulous methods of the

187 Schutte, Nederland en de Afrikaners, 122-141.
188 Andriessen, Jameson’s rooftocht gerechtvaardigd?; Louter, La Question du Transvaal, 16; Muller, De Zuid-Afrikaansche, 43-44.
189 Muller, De Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 45; Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 64-65.
190 Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 63-64; Andriessen, Jameson’s rooftocht gerechtvaardigd?, 4.
193 Van Gogh, Weestaat den Rhodesgeest, 15 and 22.
British to gain dominance in the region. Although there was no hard evidence for it, Rhodes was widely regarded as the main instigator of this plot. On the other hand, the swift and decisive response of the Boers was praised as a great victory that renewed trust in the Transvalers and their ability to defend themselves. The aftermath of the raid was considered to be even more typical. As a show of good faith, Kruger extradited Jameson and his men to Great Britain to be tried there. Even the Uitlander leaders, guilty of high treason, were let off with light sentences. Several commentators in the Netherlands thought this to be a prime example of the kindheartedness of the Boers. By contrast, they described the British attitude in this matter as utterly corrupt and petty. Jameson did face trial, but received a light sentence and was released soon after, which for many was a sign that his actions were widely approved in Britain. Moreover, the results of a parliamentary inquiry into the role of Rhodes in the matter were swept under the carpet, which gave rise to the speculation that not only he had been involved in the conspiracy, but also senior members of government such as Chamberlain.

The Jameson Raid further deepened the crisis between the British and the Boers. The Kruger government started preparing for large-scale war, importing vast quantities of arms and ammunition. Also, the ties between the SAR and the OFS were strengthened and President Steyn pledged to help the Transvalers in time of need. Even the Afrikaners in the Cape seemed to be better disposed towards the republics. Engelenburg saw this as a positive development. If the Dutch element in South Africa were to unite, he argued in an article that appeared in the Netherlands shortly after the Jameson Raid, surely they could withstand the British Empire. Meanwhile, it was noted with great concern how the British imperial elites continued their machinations. In South Africa, Rhodes was forced into the background after the defeat of Jameson, but he was soon replaced by others. The most prominent of these was Alfred Milner, who became high commissioner in the Cape in 1897. He took up the Uitlander grievances and with the help of journalists in Johannesburg, communicated these grievances to Britain via the press in order to mobilise public support for a possible war with the Boers. Likewise, Chamberlain continued his campaign. Boissevain considered the death of Gladstone in 1898 to be indicative of the state of mind of the British public, which in his eyes

195 ‘inval van Boekaniers in de Transvaal’. Quoted in: M. Kuitenbrouwer, Nederland en de opkomst, 176. Cf. Andriessen, Jameson’s roofloot gerechtvaardigd?, 2; Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 132-140; Spruyt, Engeland en Transvaal, 40-43. In 1899, a play appeared in which it was described how a meeting chaired by Rhodes decided to execute the raid. ‘Antibull’, De inval in Transvaal of de ware grieven der Uitlanders.
196 Jorissen, Transvaalsche herinneringen, 135-142. As high court judge, Jorissen was closely involved in this matter.
197 Spruyt, Afrikaners en Nederlanders, 133; Andriessen, Jameson’s roofloot gerechtvaardigd?, 2; Spruyt, Engeland en Transvaal, 4. There was also praise for British opinion-makers who protested against the failure of the parliamentary inquiry. A speech by the Liberal MP Sir William Harcourt, was translated, for example. Harcourt, Een banierdrager der gerechtigheid.
was captured by a hysterical form of jingoism. Many authors in the Netherlands were therefore not surprised when war started in October 1899; indeed, they had been writing about the antagonism between the ‘two white races’ in South Africa for nearly two decades.

Conclusion
On the previous pages, it has been shown how information about the South African question was appropriated in Dutch literature at the end of the nineteenth century. It is important to remember that there were different sources available, written by different groups of authors. To begin with, there were the accounts of emigrants and travellers from the Netherlands who wrote about their personal experiences in South Africa. There were also authors who had never set foot there, but were closely connected with the information channels that had been set up from the 1880s onwards. Although in hindsight their opinions might seem inauthentic, such authors played a large role in the knowledge formation about and popularisation of South Africa in the Netherlands. In addition, not all sources were written in the same language. Writings in early forms of Afrikaans were available in the Netherlands and seriously discussed, but these linguistic experiments were not uncontroversial. In addition, publications about South Africa in English were also known. The majority of works in this latter category were rejected as ‘slander’ that was aimed at discrediting the Boer cause and supporting British expansion. There were, however, also authors writing in English who openly supported the republics. Their work, and particularly that of the historian George McCall Theal, was welcomed by Dutch authors as an ‘objective’ analysis of the situation in South Africa and as such became quite influential.

Just as the range of sources varied considerably, their contents were heterogeneous as well. Although ‘kinship’ between the Boers and people from the Netherlands was a prevalent theme on the pages of many Dutch publications after the Transvaal War, differences between them were mentioned explicitly, which indicates that there were clear ambivalences. On the one hand there was admiration for the simple lifestyle of the Boers in the republics, but on the other hand they were considered to be ill equipped to face the challenges of the modern world. However, such ambiguities largely fell away when looking at the overall picture of South Africa and the question as to which ‘white race’ should become the dominant colonial power in the region. To contemporaries language and cultural heritage were of vital importance in this connection. Although there were different opinions as to how to achieve this, it was considered imperative that the Dutch language in South Africa be strengthened in order to withstand the rising influence of English and to retain the independence of the Boer republics. But literary products were considered of interest for other reasons too. During the 1880s and 1890s, a vision on South African history emerged that served to lend legitimacy to the

existence of an independent Dutch entity in that region and to oppose British imperialist expansion. The Boers were portrayed as heroic and gallant pioneers who brought European ‘civilisation’ to the interior of Africa and subdued the black majority there in order to ‘develop’ the region. By contrast, the British were depicted as arrogant, selfish empire-builders, who did not care about anything but their own interests and who achieved their goals by whichever means necessary.

This shows how the literary depiction of South Africa did not stand on its own, but was related to the political situation in the region. Dutch contemporaries believed their rendering of the colonial past to be an effective weapon for defending the independence of the Boer republics. The lines of communication between the Netherlands and South Africa were vital in this exchange. On the one hand much material became available to the Dutch public about the republics and their history. On the other hand publishing houses from the Netherlands established branches in South Africa in order to circulate their publications so that the Boers, who had a limited cultural infrastructure, could take advantage of them. The views on the colonial question, although biased, were therefore not merely the product of overenthusiastic Dutch nationalists who projected their ideals on the wider world, but should rather be seen in the context of modern imperialism. The connection with the writings of British authors added another complicating factor, because the way in which these were valued depended on how they commented on the situation in South Africa. Critical remarks in Dutch sources therefore cannot simply be interpreted as the result of chauvinistic anti-English sentiments.

It has been argued in the past two chapters that, from the very beginning, propaganda was the most important feature of the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands, because it was considered by contemporaries to be an important instrument for shaping the colonial future of South Africa. When tensions arose during the 1890s, such questions became more urgent and Dutch commentators felt that they had to speak out against the increasing pressure by the British Empire on the Boer republics. When war started in 1899, it was seen as a direct result of the antagonism between the Boers and the British that had been present for almost a century, and which had been the subject of studies from the 1880s onwards. In many ways, the propaganda campaign during the South African War, which will be discussed in the next four chapters, showed a clear continuity with the depiction of the colonial past that had emerged in the previous period.