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Dutch Dialogues with Afrikaners: The Netherlands and the Cultural Boycott Against the Apartheid Regime in the 1980s

Vincent Jurg and Vincent Kuitenbrouwer

In 1987, the Dutch writer Willem Frederik Hermans (1921–1995) gave a lecture at the cultural centre *De Balie* in Amsterdam. This event was quite extraordinary in two ways. First, the city council had declared Hermans a persona non grata in Amsterdam the previous year, and he had consciously decided to ignore its ruling. Second, Hermans's lecture was interrupted soon after he had started by a bomb threat. After the police searched the building without finding anything, Hermans resumed his talk, but the incident shook him severely.[1] Both the hostile attitude of the city officials and the bomb scare were prompted by a trip that Hermans had made to South Africa in 1983. There was a great outcry over the trip in the Dutch media that year, as a number of opinion-makers accused Hermans of ignoring the UN General Assembly's call for a cultural boycott of South Africa. They also vilified Hermans for several statements he had made,

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which many saw as proof of his sympathy for the apartheid regime. This chapter takes the Dutch media's polemics against Hermans's South African trip as a case study to reflect on the wider nature of the Dutch attitudes towards South Africa and, particularly, the notion of a cultural boycott in the late apartheid era.

At first sight, the media's intense outcry over Hermans's trip seems to show that the public widely supported the anti-apartheid movement in the Netherlands. In his extensive study of the history of Dutch anti-apartheid organisations, Roeland Muskens argues that they conducted the Netherlands' most successful Third World solidarity movement and that because of their work in the 1970s and 1980s 'a large part of the Dutch population felt connected with what was happening in South Africa'.[2] Because of its remarkable size, the Dutch anti-apartheid movement was a prominent node in the transnational network of Western sister organisations that formed, in Håkan Thörn's words, 'a global civil society'.[3] In line with Thörn's assessment, Barbara Henkes argues that 'the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the Netherlands was part of a global process of democratisation, secularisation, decolonisation, and a growing interest in human rights and respect for Black Power in the second half of the twentieth century'.[4] In contrast, Muskens considers the movement's mobilisation of grassroots support a national phenomenon.[5] We shall argue that the Dutch public debate over apartheid engaged with transnational idealism and action strategies, and, at the same time, it was affected by national factors arising from the Netherlands' and South Africa's shared history, which went back to the colonial age.

This shared history raises questions about the nature of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement and the relationships between colonial and post-colonial thought. Generally, historians see the history of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement in the context of the late twentieth century when, according to many, the public embraced progressive values, particularly anti-racism.[6] This view echoes the attitude of left-wing progressives in the 1970s that the Netherlands was a 'model country' (*gidsland*) in terms of Third World issues.[7] In recent years, a number of authors have criticised this view. One of the most important is the cultural scholar Gloria Wekker, who coined the term 'white innocence' in arguing that the progressive self-image of the Dutch obscures persisting patterns of racial exclusion caused by the 'cultural archive' of colonialism.[8] Wekker does not address the anti-apartheid movement in her book, but Muskens notes, in passing, that it is remarkable that all of the leading activists in the main

organisations were 'white' and suggests that researchers should try to explain what is a curious feature for a movement that was committed to anti-racism.[9] Though we do not offer that explanation for this issue either, we do note the prominence of white voices in the debate we analyse. This seems to have been a key feature of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement, and it suggests that the movement was influenced by the 'cultural archive' of colonialism to which Wekker has drawn attention.

The discussion of the cultural boycott clearly illustrates the multi-levelled character of the Dutch debate that was the outcome of the geographical and historical entanglements of the Netherlands mentioned above. The boycott was conceived in Great Britain in the 1950s, and debates in the United Nations' General Assembly gave the idea international momentum that resulted in the adopting of a resolution in 1981.[10] Dutch anti-apartheid organisations embraced the initiative and energetically lobbied for the imposition of a cultural boycott of South Africa. Although the movement created a lot of noise around the issue, as the polemics against Hermans's visit to South Africa illustrate, it achieved only limited results. The explanation is largely that the Dutch government did not sign the UN's boycott resolution, for its policy was to avoid official sanctions as much as possible. Muskens argues that in this way Dutch anti-apartheid organisations failed to translate broad public and political support for their cause into a significant influence on policy. As we show in the first section, their failure can be explained in terms of the history that the Netherlands and South Africa shared, which fostered a sense that the Dutch and the Afrikaners had a special relationship that originated in the colonial age.

In the second section, we analyse the media debate over Hermans's visit to South Africa in 1983 on the basis of material collected from the Dutch online newspaper databank Delpher.[11] An n-gram model shows various peaks in occurrences of the keyword *culturele boycot* ('cultural boycott'), one of which is around the time of Hermans's visit in 1983, which shows its importance in the public debate (see Fig. 1.).

After analysing the fierce polemics that followed Hermans's remarks on the political situation in South Africa as a largely national phenomenon, we turn to the debate over the cultural boycott, which transcended national considerations. We argue on the basis of that debate's general features that it included certain tropes about the kinship between the Dutch and Afrikaners from an earlier time. In this way, the public debate

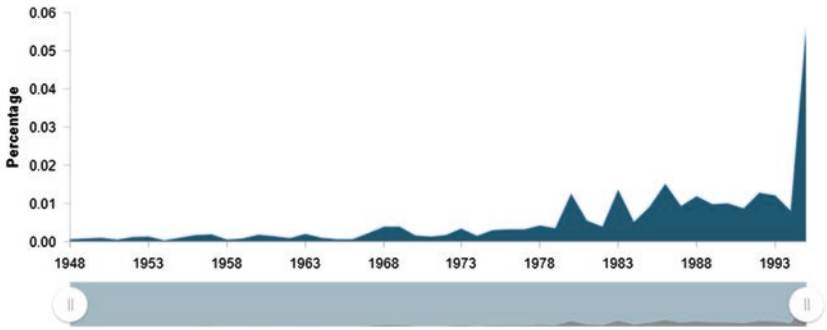

Fig. 1 N-gram graph of the term *culturele boycot* in digitalised Dutch newspapers. (Source: www.delpher.nl)

in the Netherlands over the cultural boycott of South Africa was a dialogue with the Afrikaners.

The Cultural Boycott of South Africa in a Dutch Historical Perspective

The initiative for a cultural boycott to pressure the apartheid regime originated in an international context. In 1969, the General Assembly of the United Nations called to isolate South Africa politically, economically and culturally, and in 1974, it passed an official resolution to that effect. In the early 1980s, the resolution received a further impulse, in the context of the UN year of sanctions against South Africa in 1982, when the UN created a Cultural Register to record the names of artists who performed in South Africa, beginning in 1983.[12] In Great Britain, where activists had been discussing a cultural boycott since the 1950s, these steps had far-reaching consequences. For one, the influential actors' union Equity, which counted also many musicians amongst its members, decided to impose fines for members who performed in South Africa.[13] The union focussed on the Sun City resort, built by hotelier Sol Kerzner in the apartheid-created homeland, Bophuthatswana, and called for putting Queen and Elton John, who had both played there, on the Cultural Register. Subsequently these artists promised never to perform in South Africa again and the measures were dropped.[14] The boycott was widely accepted in principle, but there was disagreement over a blanket boycott,

which would cut all cultural ties with South Africa, and a selective boycott, which would permit cultural contact that supported the anti-apartheid movement.[15] In Great Britain, the discussion reached its climax in 1986 when Paul Simon, an outspoken critic of apartheid, released the *Graceland* album, which he had recorded with black artists from South Africa.[16]

In the Netherlands, the discussion in the 1980s about boycotting South Africa occurred against the background of these international precedents. The main anti-apartheid organisations, the Anti-Apartheid Beweging Nederland (AABN) and the Komité Zuidelijk Afrika (KZA), considered the UN's cultural boycott and the installation of the Cultural Register useful to their cause. In 1982, the KZA set up the Stichting VN-jaar voor de sancties tegen Zuid-Afrika (Foundation UN-year for the sanctions against South Africa) to raise public awareness of the cultural boycott in the Netherlands.[17] In the years that followed, the Stichting applauded Equity's actions against Elton John and Queen, arguing that the Cultural Register, which it called a 'black list', was effective at preventing such famous artists from going to South Africa.[18] Although no Dutch artists ever played (or were invited) at Sun City, several singers, for example, the pop singer Hein 'Heintje' Simons and the opera singer Elly Ameling, planned to tour South Africa. Both artists received telegrams from the Stichting VN-jaar informing them that it had requested the UN to add their names to the Cultural Register.[19] These actions against these artists received far less media attention than the controversies in Great Britain about world-famous pop-stars, which suggests that the cultural boycott had less public effect in the Netherlands than in Great Britain. The biggest public outcry about violating the cultural boycott was over the South African visit of Willem Frederik Hermans, an elderly novelist. To understand it, one must understand the historical ties between the Dutch and the Afrikaners.

The relationship between Dutch and Afrikaners intensified in 1880 because of the Transvaal War. The general population in the Netherlands supported the inhabitants of the Boer republic in their fight against the British Empire,[20] and many opinion-makers claimed that the Dutch shared a kinship, which they called *Stamverwantschap*, with the Afrikaners.[21] Their arguments were eclectic. Some premised cultural and historical ties. They hailed the Afrikaners as the descendants of West European colonists who had begun to settle on the Cape in the seventeenth century. Some stressed the Dutch attitude towards liberty and described the Great Trek of the 1830s as the escape of freedom-loving pioneers from the tyranny of the British Empire. Importantly, the language of the Transvaal and Orange

Free State in the late nineteenth century was 'High Dutch', making it one of the few places outside the Netherlands and its colonies where the language was an official medium. In addition to historical and lingual ties, the notion of *Stamverwantschap* had a strong racial aspect. Various late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Dutch sources on South Africa have a strong sense that the white minority should rule the black majority, which fit the wider contemporary colonial discourse in the Netherlands. Moreover, some argued that the 'Dutch race' was better equipped than the British to 'civilise' South Africa. Inspired by the ideal of *Stamverwantschap*, several thousand well-educated Dutchmen emigrated to Transvaal to help make it a modern state. However, their 'kinsmen' in South Africa did not always welcome them and often considered them arrogant.

Several scholars who study the remnants of the idea of *Stamverwantschap* in the twentieth century have pointed out that a complex pattern emerges, with apparent discontinuities but also with continuities. The annexation of the Boer republics by the British Empire after the South African War (1899–1902) cooled Dutch enthusiasm for the Afrikaners. But the appeal of its underlying ideals continued, as later literature shows. Until the 1960s, Dutch school children read South African adventure stories with Afrikaner heroes.[22] At first sight, much changed in the wake of the Second World War. After the trauma of the Nazi occupation, 'racism' became a tainted word. And the equally traumatic decolonisation of Indonesia in the late 1940s initiated a sea change in thinking about colonialism; progressive opinion-makers and politicians increasingly saw the country's colonial past as shameful.[23] At the same time, the election victory of the National Party in 1948 put South Africa on a new course. Some in the Dutch press expressed shock over the election result and criticised the openly racist apartheid laws, which some pundits compared to the Nazis' persecution of Jews.[24]

Public disapproval of South Africa's increasing segregation under the Afrikaner regime did not mean that the old feelings of kinship disappeared. In many ways, the two countries grew closer in the 1950s. In part, this was because of an increase in emigration from the Netherlands to South Africa, which both governments supported.[25] Also, the signing of a bilateral cultural treaty in 1951 officially acknowledged the relationship of Dutch and Afrikaans (which had been recognised as a separate language in 1925). The treaty aimed at strengthening ties between the two countries by promoting exchanges and collaborations of students, researchers and media.[26]

The Dutch government remained at a distance from these programmes, handing their implementation to the pro-Afrikaner Nederlands Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging (NZAV).[27] The NZAV publicly disapproved of the apartheid laws, but it argued that the most effective way to change them was to start a 'critical dialogue' by increasing cultural ties to South Africa.[28]

As the Dutch public outcry against apartheid grew after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, *Stamverwantschap* became more and more controversial. In the decade that followed, several new anti-apartheid organisations began to mobilise Dutch public opinion against apartheid by calling for the isolation of South Africa, for example, with a consumer boycott of Outspan oranges.[29] In the mid-1970s, anti-apartheid organisations secured government funding from the ruling left-wing coalition with which they built a strong grassroots movement that reached out to the Dutch public. However, their effect on government policy was limited. Public pressure on the government to impose sanctions, including a cultural boycott, grew after the murder of Steve Biko in 1977. In response, the left-wing government suspended the cultural treaty, and the new right-wing government revoked it in 1981. These measures angered the apartheid regime and dismayed members of the NZAV, who lamented that the situation would lead to growing 'cultural differences' between the Dutch and Afrikaners.[30] But in effect, the impact of the end of the cultural treaty was quite limited, as it merely took away some financial stimuli and did not prevent Dutch figureheads from visiting South Africa. Despite the pressure of the strong anti-apartheid lobby and members of Parliament, the Dutch government refused to sign the UN resolution calling for a cultural boycott. And it imposed no other sanctions on South Africa.[31] In this context, the appeal for a cultural boycott of South Africa in the Netherlands was completely moral and had no legal implications for those who ignored it.

The official Dutch reluctance to sever ties with South Africa shows an ongoing sense of *Stamverwantschap*. In the mid-1980s, the Minister of Foreign Affairs formulated a 'two-track policy' that aimed at both 'increasing the international political and economic pressure on the South African government' and, at the same time, 'supporting social developments which are meant to peacefully change South Africa in a meaningful way'. Though the government never used the term 'critical dialogue', these words show that people at the highest levels of government believed that the Dutch should stay in contact with the Afrikaners to help them reform.[32] Some members of anti-apartheid organisations, especially Christians, also

continued to believe in Dutch-Afrikaner kinship.[33] The historian Gerrit Schutte, who himself was a leading member of the NZAV in the 1980s, has provocatively characterised the sense of historical responsibility for South Africa that many Dutch felt as a form of 'cultural imperialism'.[34] His view is exaggerated, for the Netherlands made no systematic attempt to influence South Africa in that era. But Schutte has also argued that many Dutch felt a special affinity for South Africa and, just as during the South African War, saw the opposition to apartheid as a struggle of right against wrong.[35]

The message that apartheid—and racism—was an evil that had to be combatted became a trope in Dutch literature in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Poets were especially active in the anti-apartheid movement. Wilfred Jonckheere has noted that their texts mainly expressed a condemnation of the apartheid regime, for which reason he has characterised it as 'a dialogue with the Afrikaners', whom they saw as 'old fashioned and provincially narrow-minded'.[36] One of the most outspoken publications was an essay by Hilbert Kuik, who visited South Africa in 1969, entitled 'Black Does Not Exist' (*Zwart bestaat niet*). In it, Kuik sneered at Afrikaners as 'outsiders in an alien world' (*wereldvreemden in een vreemde wereld*) who were interested only in their 'own people … and their own culture'.[37]

In contrast, there was warm attention for dissident writers from South Africa amongst Dutch men and women in literary circles who were active in anti-apartheid organisations and wrote in magazines and newsletters affiliated to these groups. In these publications, which did not reach large audiences, they reflected on the work of black and coloured authors, such as Bessie Head, Mazisi Kunene, Alex La Guma, Lewis Nkosi and Sipho Sepamla, whose work was banned in South Africa. However, white Afrikaner writers who opposed apartheid, such as Breyten Breytenbach and André Brink, became much more famous in the Netherlands and regularly contributed to Dutch mainstream media.[38] In light of the historical background, apartheid was an emotionally charged subject in Dutch literature, which explains why the Dutch debate over the cultural boycott of South Africa focussed on high literature rather than pop culture. For a writer like Hermans, who was known for his love of polemic, this provided an opportunity to stir controversy.

The Cultural Boycott and the Polemics Against Hermans

Aside from a short story from 1965, Hermans did not write about South Africa. Still, he readily accepted the invitation of the publishing house Human & Rousseau, which had published his major novels with annotations in Afrikaans, to make a four-week lecture tour of South Africa's main universities in March 1983. Muskens has argued that Hermans's motivation was 'mere provocation'.[39] That was undoubtedly one factor, but it cannot be the full explanation for his decision. After a thoughtful reading of his oeuvre, the historian Ronald Havenaar has suggested that Hermans, who had a deeply fraught relationship with the Dutch colonial past, was moved by a deeper motivation. In several novels, Hermans portrayed the decolonisation of Indonesia as a great loss for the Netherlands, and he cared little about the remnants of the Dutch empire in the Caribbean, 'the last bits of tropical Netherlands', as he disparagingly called them. However, Hermans was greatly interested in Holland's cultural ties with South Africa, which were founded on the old sense of 'lingual and historical kinship' that Dutch society after the 1960s was quickly losing.[40] He had moved to Paris in the 1970s to flee the progressive ideals of many Dutch writers, and the tour of South Africa seemed to him a way to relive the grandeur of Dutch culture in the colonial age. Hermans was aware of the tour's potential for controversy, for he and his mixed-race Surinamese wife Emmy decided against her accompanying him for fear of the propaganda the apartheid regime might make of her presence.[41] However, Hermans was not averse to causing controversy at home and he made several inflammatory statements in the Dutch press about the political situation in South Africa.

Hennie Serfontein, an Afrikaner in South Africa who explicitly criticised the apartheid regime in the 1980s, wrote the most interesting article to appear in the Dutch press during Hermans's tour. South Africa often denied Dutch journalists visas, but Serfontein worked for media outlets in the Netherlands like the newspaper *Trouw* and the television and radio broadcaster IKON.[42] Though a vocal opponent of apartheid, Serfontein opposed the cultural boycott. Ten days before Hermans arrived, he had written in an article in *Trouw* based on interviews with South African writers and academics that anti-apartheid activists, including the writer André Brink, opposed the boycott, for it blocked white South Africans' exposure to 'new ideas'. According to Brink, 'attempting to change views is one of

the most effective ways to bring about change. Keeping ideas away will only worsen the situation instead of improving it. A cultural boycott is shallow and impractical.' Serfontein also wrote that many Afrikaners thought the Dutch stance was 'arrogant', echoing the sentiments of the Boers a century before. Moreover, he argued that Hermans could not be a racist as his wife was from Suriname. And he stressed that Hermans was going to lecture at universities that were open to 'coloureds', contrary to the widespread rumour that only whites would be allowed to attend his lectures.[43]

In light of these sentiments, it is likely that Serfontein sought in Hermans an ally against the cultural boycott, but his attempt to work with him backfired. In Serfontein's interview with him for *Trouw*, Hermans did call the boycott 'repulsive and insane' and said that the Dutch did not have the right to 'mingle' in the affairs of other countries. However, he also commented on South African politics. He stated that though apartheid was 'not nice', the principle of 'one man, one vote' in South Africa would mean 'the end of the country', though he did not explain how. In addition, Hermans attacked progressive anti-racist intellectuals in the Netherlands and stated that the Netherlands' multicultural society was a failure. Referring to post-colonial immigration from Indonesia in the 1950s, he argued that non-Western ethnic groups 'should have been segregated' to prevent social tensions. One could have known from the 'mixing of races' in South Africa and the United States that this would be 'a disaster', according to Hermans.[44]

The interview in *Trouw* was the turning point in the public debate over Hermans's tour. Before its publication, only a few newspapers had published editorials and opinion pieces on the trip, most notably the Communist *De Waarheid* and the right-wing *De Telegraaf*.[45] Afterwards, more newspapers became involved, and fuming anti-apartheid activists, mostly members of the Stichting VN-jaar, launched a fierce polemic against Hermans. They published a statement accusing the writer of supporting 'a system that discriminated against people on the basis of the colour of their skin' and ridiculing his remarks against racial mixing, given that he had a Surinamese wife.[46] In a more personal letter to the editors of *Trouw*, the chairperson of the Stichting VN-jaar, A.H. van den Heuvel, expressed himself even more furiously. He condemned Hermans's 'dangerous twaddle', calling him a 'lackey of a police state' and Serfontein an 'idiot'. He also denounced 'liberal' white South Africans for using Hermans's visit as an opportunity to speak out against the cultural

boycott.[47] Van den Heuvel's intensity underlines the emotions that South Africa raised in Dutch literary circles.

After returning from South Africa, Hermans continued to give interviews in which he stated his views on apartheid, intensifying the controversy. On 13 April 1983, the writer Adriaan van Dis's televised interview with Hermans generated a new round of controversy. Though a vocal critic of the apartheid regime, Van Dis, who was fluent in Afrikaans and had studied at Stellenbosch University in 1973, was ambivalent about South Africa and the Afrikaners,[48] which made his relationship with the Dutch anti-apartheid movement complicated and in some ways problematic.[49] Throughout the interview, Van Dis expressed his love-hate relationship with the Afrikaners. Early on, he described the Afrikaners 'in jest' as 'a sort of white tribe in Africa: an isolated, quite isolated community'.[50] Later, Hermans said that Afrikaans was a complex and highly evolved language, to which Van Dis replied in Afrikaans *ek weet* ('I know').[51] Hermans was visibly annoyed with these frivolities about South African culture, but their real clash was over the political situation in South Africa.

The pattern of the interview was similar to that of Serfontein's, which started off neutrally but ended highly agitated. Van Dis first provoked Hermans by asking him about his motives in making his South African trip, which he suggested was a 'conditioned reflex' as no 'sane person' in the Netherlands would visit the home of apartheid. Answering politely, Hermans spoke of his 'humble intentions', which had nothing to do with politics. As a former geography professor, he was interested in South Africa's geography, and being a 'simple novelist' he had been 'honoured' by Human & Rousseau's invitation to lecture there. He claimed that the Afrikaners who read his books were part of an 'advanced cultural elite' that rejected apartheid[52] and said that Dutch media were 'biased' in their reports of South Africa. Later in the interview, Hermans complained about the coverage of his trip in the Dutch press, claiming that the journalists to whom he had spoken, including Serfontein whom he called a 'liar', had misquoted him; for example, he had never said that he objected to 'racial mixing'.

By this point, the tone of the interview had changed after the conversation had turned to the 'petty apartheid' (the segregation laws affecting daily life of black South Africans). Hermans downplayed several apartheid laws, arguing, for example, that interracial marriage was only illegal in theory, 'except for Communists, of course'. When Van Dis asked him if he did not feel the need to speak out against apartheid, he replied that he did

not think it was necessary to 'state the obvious'.[53] Eventually Hermans acknowledged that petty apartheid was 'not nice', but he also made several statements in support of apartheid as a political project. For example, when Van Dis said that the 'one man, one vote' principle would ensure the most righteous political solution for South Africa, for the population would be able to choose how they wanted to rule their country, Hermans answered that the black majority was not capable of forming a peaceful government:

It can be argued that it [the black population] has no intention at all. [Gasps from the audience]. The black population, what are you talking about? What are you talking about? There are seven tribes, at least, and those have seven different intentions. Do you not know that in Rhodesia [*sic*] the Shona are exterminating the Matabele [*sic*]. [Van Dis interrupts] What would you think will happen in South Africa [Van Dis interrupts] when the white policeman is gone?[54]

In these remarks, Hermans reproduced several tropes of the apartheid regime to legitimise its rule, but the interview had already descended into such chaos that Van Dis could not formulate a coherent counter-argument. Seizing the initiative, Hermans shifted the conversation to his favourite target, Dutch progressives, whom he criticised for their hypocrisy towards immigrants from Indonesia.

The explosive interview did not go unnoticed in the Dutch media. Most of the reactions acknowledged the entertainment value of the interview but condemned many of Hermans's statements. The day after the interview, Frits van Veen, a journalist for *de Volkskrant*, wrote in an ironic commentary that many people had probably enjoyed Hermans's performance as a television spectacle but had probably not really understood what they had heard. For if they had, they would have realised how completely outlandish Hermans's statements, such as his downplaying of apartheid as 'not nice', were. Van Veen sarcastically proposed that Hermans be 'sentenced to a life-long stay in his Dutch tribal land'.[55]

Although people continued to discuss Hermans in the weeks, and indeed the years, after his notorious interview with Van Dis, the focus of the debate moved to the usefulness of the cultural boycott. This meant that opponents of a cultural boycott, who were not always as outspoken as Hermans, joined the discussion. One group of journalists condemned Hermans's statements about apartheid, but pointed out that the cultural boycott had few implications in the Netherlands. For example, Harry van Wijnen, the editor of *Het Parool*, wrote that many people 'misunderstood'

the revoking of the cultural treaty in 1981, believing that it was the boycott. However, even though the government no longer promoted cultural and academic ties with South Africa, it did not prohibit individuals from visiting South Africa.[56] In this article, Van Wijnen did not pick a side against or in favour of apartheid; rather, he questioned the legal meaning of the cultural boycott. But that raised questions of international law, which transcended the strictly national character of the Hermans controversy.

Also in other ways, the debate touched upon issues in the international debate about the cultural boycott. Dissident Afrikaner writers mingled in the Dutch debate over the cultural boycott, arguing that it would not improve the situation in South Africa, or would even be counterproductive. Referring to these authors, Hans Ester, a lecturer in South African culture at Nijmegen University, wrote that both Hermans and boycott advocates had 'stereotypical' views of South Africa and did not know the country well enough to say anything meaningful about it. According to Ester, the latter's judgements of South Africa were too often based on emotion, and the former gave 'stereotypical' answers to 'commonplace' questions.[57] Like white South African dissident writers, he doubted the effectiveness of a cultural boycott. Instead, the Netherlands should have 'flooded' South Africa with progressive ideas, a strategy that Serfontein and Brink had also proposed.[58]

Other South African dissident writers did support a cultural boycott in principle, but they struggled with the question what form it should take. One of these was the poet Breyten Breytenbach, who many Dutch writers saw as a martyr after his arrest by the apartheid regime in 1975.[59] Breytenbach engaged with the Hermans controversy in a speech to the Dutch branch of the writers' organisation PEN, which the *NRC Handelsblad* newspaper published.[60] He condemned Hermans's trip to South Africa on moral grounds but said that it had hardly been noticed 'outside of the bubble of Afrikaner academia' and South African authorities had probably been unaware of it. So, Dutch critics of Hermans exaggerated the importance of the trip, which was hardly worth mentioning in terms of cultural exchange.

On the question of a cultural boycott, Breytenbach supported 'the suspension of all cultural ties and every exchange between the Netherlands and institutions that are official, unofficial or tolerated by the South African government', for he opposed the principle of 'keeping the channels open in order to influence the thoughts and behaviour of racists'.

However, he thought that a total cultural boycott would be 'politically stupid'. He called for the forging of 'new bonds to strengthen the real voices of resistance in the country'. Thus, Breytenbach advocated a particular interpretation of a selective cultural boycott over a total boycott. He argued that the Dutch should not waste time thinking about how to flood South Africa with progressive ideas in order to modernise the apartheid regime. They should help the resistance to overthrow the regime.

This idea became the main force behind Culture in Another South Africa (CASA), a music festival in December 1987, subsidised by the city of Amsterdam and organised by the AABN, that featured South African musicians opposed to apartheid.[61] CASA was a new tactic for the AABN. Previously, it had called for a total boycott of South African products and art. In 1987, the festival showcased South African art, in accord with Breytenbach's ideas about a selective boycott. The festival's combination of local government sponsorship (Amsterdam paid for much of the fl. 2,000,000 budget) and commercial success (most theatres hosting CASA events were sold out) supports Muskens's claim that by the late 1980s the Dutch favoured a selective boycott over a total one.[62]

However, in 1986, a year before the festival, there was another flare-up in the Dutch boycott debate. Again, it involved Hermans, who was added to the UN's Cultural Register on the request of the KZA. Subsequently, Amsterdam's city council ruled that people on the 'black list' were not welcome in the city, and the mayor declared him a persona non grata. The symbolic declaration could not prevent Hermans from visiting Amsterdam, as he did on several occasions. For example, he attended the opening of a photography exhibition that he had curated at the prestigious Stedelijk Museum in September 1986, prompting calls to boycott the museum.[63]

In the wake of the new controversy, the *NRC Handelsblad* newspaper published an interview with Barbara Masekela, the ANC's cultural secretary and a main contact for Western boycott movements, who was in the Netherlands in November 1986.[64] She was one of the few black people, if not the only one, to comment on the Hermans case in Dutch newspapers. Asked by *NRC*'s interviewer about the controversy, she said that the ANC did not chose to decide who could and could not go to South Africa. Moreover, critics' argument that Hermans had reinforced attitudes of white South Africans was baseless, for the students of the universities where Hermans lectured were progressive Afrikaners. If Hermans had wanted to change something, he should have spoken to the far-right Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) organisation, she remarked. She

also rejected the idea of many in the Netherlands that Dutch intellectuals could change the thinking of pro-apartheid Afrikaners by entering into dialogue with them.

If you start thinking like that, everybody thinks he can contribute to a change in mentality … There will be requests for exceptions constantly. That doesn't work, if we leave the door open, a flood of people will come in and that will undermine the boycott. That is why a cultural boycott has to be total.[65]

Conclusion

The fact that Masekela commented on the Hermans case, in a statement about the cultural boycott, three and a half years after the writer's trip to South Africa shows us that he was still an issue in the Dutch public debate over the boycott. On the one hand, this debate was a part of the transnational 'global civil society' of anti-apartheid activists. The idea of a cultural boycott of South Africa had emerged in Great Britain, and it, was formally adopted in a resolution of the UN's General Assembly, resulting in the Cultural Register. Primary sources also reveal the engagement with international issues in that several Dutch opinion-makers referred to the high-profile controversies around the visits of British and American pop stars to South Africa. Finally, the participation of several South Africans in the Dutch debate shows that it was not purely national. Rather, the Dutch debate over whether the boycott should be selective or total is comparable to the British debate over Paul Simon's *Graceland* album.

On the other hand, the fact that the Dutch debate did not focus on a pop artist but on an elderly novelist indicates that it also differed from the discussions in other countries. We have argued that to understand its peculiarities one has to consider the historical ties between the Netherlands and South Africa and, particularly, the *Stamverwantschap* that the Dutch felt for the Afrikaners, that go back to the end of the nineteenth century. Firstly, these sentiments explain why the Dutch government did not impose any official boycott of South Africa, which entailed that the appeal for a cultural boycott by anti-apartheid activists was a moral statement without any legal consequences. In addition, the feeling of *Stamverwantschap* was part of a wider 'cultural archive' of colonialism in the Netherlands. For many Dutch, *Stamverwantschap* was based on the close relationship between Dutch and Afrikaans, and it produced a rich literary tradition in which many writers reflected on their relationships

with South Africa. Although most Dutch writers in the late twentieth century vilified the Afrikaners for their 'backward' views, Wilfred Jonckheere has pointed out the continuities that their work had with earlier literature.

For Hermans, who held traditional ideas about linguistic and cultural kinship, progressive Dutch writers' attitudes towards South Africa was one of the reasons to visit the country in 1983. Although he repeatedly stated that the purpose of his lecture tour was strictly cultural, he made it clear in several interviews that he agreed with the system as a whole. Although these statements did not have any legal consequences they caused an uproar in the Dutch media in 1983. When it died down, the public debate shifted to the question of whether a cultural boycott of South Africa should be implemented. The public debate did not result in any new measures and the idea of a cultural boycott continued to be informal. As an echo of the older notion of kinship, the Dutch seemed to think that they should keep in touch with South African dissidents. This was the idea behind the CASA festival. In the meantime, Hermans served as a scapegoat as was shown by the emotional reactions to visits to Amsterdam in 1986 and 1987. On the latter occasion, he was even the target of a bomb threat, as we mentioned at the beginning of this contribution.

Hermans swore to never set foot in the Dutch capital again, but after the city council repealed the decision to declare him persona non grata in 1993 he returned to present a new novel.[66] With Nelson Mandela no longer in prison and apartheid all but abandoned, the time had come for the city council to rethink its position on the issue of a cultural boycott. On first sight, this might seem like a logical conclusion to the Dutch anti-apartheid movement, for as apartheid disappeared so did the public outcry against it. However, we have argued that the Netherlands and South Africa had had a shared history since the late nineteenth century. Although the Dutch anti-apartheid movement had wide public appeal in the last decades of the twentieth century, the sense that the Dutch had a special relation with the Afrikaners in light of that history is clearly present in primary sources from the period. In Jonckheere's words, the Dutch anti-apartheid movement was part of an ongoing 'dialogue with the Afrikaners'. This insight can help us to understand the transnational connections and the national peculiarities of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement.

Notes

1. Ronald Havenaar, *Muizenhol. Nederland volgens Willem Frederik Hermans* (Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot, 2003), 49.
2. Roeland Muskens, "Aan de goede kant. Een geschiedenis van de Nederlandse anti-apartheidsbeweging 1960–1990" (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2013), 315. Available via UvA Dare, accessed October 1, 2019, https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=25a0eedd-82bc-4f08-af77-74e3335763ba
3. Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); see also: Wouter Marchand, "In navolging van de grote 'Grensoverschrijder'. Jan Buskens, John Collins en de vroege anti-apartheidsbeweging als onderdeel van een global civil society, 1956–1965," in *Maar we wisten ons door de Heer geroepen. Kerk en apartheid in transnationaal perspectief,* eds. Caspar Dullemond, Barbara Henkesa and James Kennedy (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2017), 23–42.
4. Barbara Henkes, "Shifting Identifications in Dutch-South African Migration Policies (1910–1961)," *South African Historical Journal* 68, no. 4 (2016): 668.
5. Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 19–22.
6. Ibid., 342.
7. Alfred Pijpers, *Europese politiek in Nederlands vaarwater: kronieken en commentaar* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005), 33.
8. Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence. Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2016).
9. Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 12; 154–6.
10. Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 62.
11. See official Delpher website, accessed December 23, 2019, https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten
12. Detlef Siegfried, "Aporias of the Cultural Boycott. Anti-Apartheid Movement, ANC and the Conflict Surrounding Paul Simon's Album Graceland, 1985–1988," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 13, no. 2 (2016):1–26; 5; Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 135.
13. Michael Drewett, "The Cultural Boycott Against Apartheid South Africa. A Case of Defensible Censorship?" in *Popular Music Censorship in Africa*, eds. Martin Cloonan and Michael Drewett (Routledge: London/New York, 2006), 24; 28; Rob Skinner, "The Moral Foundations of British Anti-Apartheid Activism, 1946–1960," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 412.
14. Drewett, "Cultural Boycott," 27.

15. Ibid., 25.
16. Siegfried, "Aporias of the Cultural Boycott," 11–13; 15.
17. Sietse Bosgra, "Webdossier Nederland tegen apartheid, jaren 1980 (1)," accessed December 23, 2019, http://archive.niza.nl/detail_page.phtml?&username=guest@niza.nl&password=9999&groups=NIZA&workgroup=&&text10=80erjaren1&nav=n2i
18. Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 145.
19. Willem Otterspeer, *De zanger van de wrok. Biografie deel II (1953–1995)* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2015), 783.
20. This paragraph is based on Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, *War of Words. Dutch Pro-Boer Propaganda and the South African War* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), chapters 1 and 2.
21. *Verwantschap* means kinship. The word *stam* can be interpreted either as 'tree', a metaphor for the Dutch people, who sprouted new branches in various parts of the world, or as 'tribe', which suggests the presence of biological racism in the Netherlands. For further discussion, see Barbara Henkes, "Stamverwantschap and the Imagination of a White, Transnational Community. The 1952 Celebrations of the Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary in the Netherlands and South Africa," in *Imagining Communities. Historical Reflections on the Process of Community Formation,* eds. Gemma Blok, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer and Claire Weeda (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 176–7.
22. Wilfred Jonckheere, *Van Mafeking tot Robbeneiland. Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse literatuur 1896–1996* (Nijmegen: Van Tilt, 1999), 96.
23. Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking van de derde wereld. Beeldvorming en beleid in Nederland, 1950–1990* (Den Haag: SDU, 1994), 248–50.
24. Ibid., 213–4.
25. Henkes, "Shifting Identifications"; Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking*, 215.
26. Sophia van der Watt, "Die opsegging van die kultuurverdrag Nederland/Suid-Afrika: 'n kritiese ontleding" (MA diss., University of the Orange Free State, 1992), 31.
27. Wayne Hendricks, "Die betrekkinge tussen Nederland en Suid-Afrika, 1946–1961" (PhD diss., University of the West Cape, 1984), 74–7.
28. Gerrit Schutte, *De roeping ten aanzien van het oude broedervolk. Nederland en Zuid-Afrika, 1960–1990* (Amsterdam: NZAV, 1993), 33.
29. Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 69–70.
30. Schutte, *De roeping,* 52–5.
31. Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking*, 224; Stefan de Boer, *Van Sharpeville tot Soweto. Nederlands regeringsbeleid ten aanzien van apartheid, 1960–1977* (Den Haag: SDU, 1999), 403–5.
32. Schutte, *De roeping*, 45–6.
33. Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking*, 229.

34. Gerrit Schutte, "Geschiedenis Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse betrekkingen. Stamverwantschap als imperialisme," in *Apartheid, Anti-apartheid, Post-apartheid. Terugblik en evaluatie,* ed. Wim Couwenberg (Budel: Damon, 2008), 19. Compare with Henkes, "Shifting Identifications", 668–9.
35. Gerrit Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners: adhesie en aversie* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1986), 205.
36. Jonckheere, *Van Mafeking*, 181.
37. Quoted in: ibid.
38. Jonckheere, *Van Mafeking*, 210.
39. Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 144.
40. Havenaar, *Muizenhol*, 44–8.
41. Sonja Barend, ed., *De honderd beste tv-interviews* (Amsterdam: De Leeuw, 2011), 48.
42. Anli Serfontein, "Onze man in Zuid-Afrika," *2Doc* (Hilversum: IKON), November 10, 2015, https://www.npostart.nl/2doc/10-11-2015/VPWON_1247114
43. Hennie Serfontein, "Anti-apartheidsmensen tegen culturele boycot. Zuidafrikanen vinden geestelijke isolatie vernietigend voor hun land," *Trouw*, March 14, 1983.
44. Hennie Serfontein, "W.F. Hermans op bezoek in Zuid-Afrika. Apartheid enige oplossing, mits menselijk toegepast," *Trouw*, March 8, 1983.
45. Elsbeth Etty, "De smakeloze ironie van W.F. Hermans," *De Waarheid*, March 5, 1983; "W.F. Hermans tilt niet zwaar aan ophef over reis Z.-Afrika," *De Telegraaf*, March 4, 1983.
46. "Hermans ziet wel wat in 'menselijke' apartheid," *Het Vrije Volk*, March 9, 1983.
47. A.H. van den Heuvel, "Gevaarlijke borrelpraat," *Trouw*, March 26, 1983.
48. Jonckheere analyses this ambivalence in the 1990 travel narrative *Het beloofde land* (the promised land). Jonckheere, *Van Mafeking*, 195.
49. Jonckheere, *Van Mafeking*, 194; Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 114.
50. Barend, *De honderd beste*, 47.
51. 'Hier is… Adriaan van Dis', minute 4:00, accessed December 23, 2019, https://zoeken.beeldengeluid.nl/program/urn:vme:default:program:2101608040029492731?q=Van+Dis+AND+Hermans
52. Barend, *De honderd beste*, 46.
53. Ibid., 51.
54. Ibid., 61–2.
55. Frits van Veen, "Hermans' ideeën over apartheid van het betere huiskamerniveau," *De Volkskrant*, April 14, 1983.
56. Harry van Wijnen, "W.F. Hermans had weer gelijk," *Het Parool*, April 13, 1983.

57. Hans Ester, "Een strijdkreet met nuance schijnt niet te klinken," *Trouw*, April 23, 1983.
58. Hennie Serfontein, "Anti-apartheidsmensen tegen culturele boycot. Zuidafrikanen vinden geestelijke isolatie vernietigend voor hun land," *Trouw*, March 14, 1983.
59. Jonckheere, *Van Mafeking*, 171–9.
60. Breyten Breytenbach, "Nieuwe banden smeden om werkelijke stemmen van verzet te laten horen. Culturele boycot Zuid-Afrika een nobele zaak," *NRC Handelsblad*, April 11, 1983.
61. Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 153.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 144.
64. Siegfried, "Aporias of the Cultural Boycott," 9.
65. Martin Sommer, "Barbara Masekela. Boycot van Zuid-Afrika moet totaal zijn," *NRC Handelsblad*, November 6, 1986.
66. Muskens, "Aan de goede kant," 144; Frenk Der Nederlanden, "W.F. Hermans is weer welkom," *Het Parool*, January 16, 1993.

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