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# **Translating Anne Frank in South Africa**

**Lina Spies**

**Lina Spies** was born on 6 March 1939 in Harrismith in the Northeast Free State, where she completed her school studies. In 1958 she started her studies at the University of Stellenbosch, and completed her Master's degree in 1963. From 1968 to 1970 she studied at the Free University (VU) in Amsterdam in Dutch Language and Literature and obtained a Master's degree with a thesis on the Dutch poet Martinus Nijhoff. At the end of these studies she acquired the title of 'doctorandus'. In March of 1982 she obtained her D.Litt. (Doctor Litterarum) at the University of Pretoria with a dissertation on D. J. Opperman. Lina Spies lectured at the University of Port Elizabeth, the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Pretoria. From 1987 to 1999 she was Professor at the University of Stellenbosch in Afrikaans and Dutch Literature. She has published nine poetry collections: *Digby Vergenoeg* (1971); *Winterhawe* (1973); *Dagreis* (1976); *Oorstaanson* (1982); *Van sjofar tot sjalom* (1987); *Hiermaals* (1992); *Die skaduwee van die son* (1998); *Duskant die einders* (2004) and *Tydlose gety* (2010). She received the Eugène Marais award of the South African Academy for Science and Art, as well as the Ingrid Jonker award for *Digby Vergenoeg*. She was also awarded the Prize for Translation of the South African Academy for Science and Art in 2011 for her translation of the diary of Anne Frank into Afrikaans, *Die Agterhuis (The Secret Annex)*, from the original Dutch as source text.

## Translating Anne Frank in South Africa

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The theme of the Holocaust Conference in which I had the privilege to participate, “Holocaust Scholarship: Personal Trajectories and Professional Interpretations”, is a direct reference to the way I felt, thought and wrote about Anne Frank; a lifelong involvement which eventually led to my translation of her diary into Afrikaans.

My association with the diary started in 1961, when, as a fourth-year student at the University of Stellenbosch, I saw the film *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the script of which was based on the stage adaptation by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Far more engrossing and moving than the film, was the diary itself, which I bought in a later publication of the original Dutch edition of 1947 at the bookshop HAUM (Hollands-Afrikaanse Uitgewersmaatskappy) in Stellenbosch. The diary, as well as the extensive daily coverage in *Die Burger* of the prosecution of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, also in 1961, provided the stimulus for my poem “Vir Anne Frank van *Het Achterhuis*” (“To Anne Frank of *Het Achterhuis*”), the first poem I wrote that met with unreserved approval of my mentor and professor, the foremost Afrikaans poet Dirk Opperman:

They remember the gas chambers, Auschwitz,  
ashes, transported unseen through lonely rivers,  
the girl in her Sabbath dress  
flung down death’s well,  
the woman realising with sexless certainty  
that from her cursed blood a child shall  
never find the new, free world...

But in the *Achterhuis* it was  
all too human: Mrs. Van Daan,  
irritable-anxious, bored-arrogant,  
and a mother’s subtle revolt,  
because her daughter loved the father more...

And there you had to learn to understand  
your young awakening – alone.  
To what avail was all your femininity?

You had to share the very last refuge  
for the safety of yet another Jew –  
dentist Dussel, your unwanted roommate.

Then you turned to him –  
like you torn from his youth to a tiny attic room.  
The blue beyond a smutty pane and curtained window  
shone brightly in his eyes...  
but nature tolerates no substitute –  
you weighed, and found too light.  
So Peter had to stroke Mouschi once again  
and you seasons confused, found consolation  
in one dream of peonies and blue grape hyacinths.

More than Jew or Christian you understood  
that the human spirit shall overcome if  
you can rejoice in your daily potato meal.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lina Spies, “Vir Anne Frank van *Het Achterhuis*,” *Digby Vergenoeg* (Human & Rousseau, 1971), trans. Titia Brantsma-Van Wulfften Palthe. The original Afrikaans is as follows:

Hulle onthou die gaskamers, Auschwitz,  
as van lyke, onsigbaar vervoer deur eensame riviere,  
die meisie in haar sabbatrok  
wat in die dodeput afstort,  
die vrou wat met sekslose sekerheid besef  
uit haar vervloekte bloed sal ’n kind  
die nuwe, vrye wêreld nooit weer vind ...

Maar in die Agterhuis was veel  
menslikheid: Mevrouw Van Daan,  
prikkelbaar-bevrees, vervelig-verwaand,  
’n moeder se subtiel verset,  
omdat haar kind die vader liever het ...

En tog moes jy jou jong  
ontwaking leer verstaan – alleen.  
En wat het al jou vroulikheid gebaat?  
Jy moes die laaste toevlug deel  
vir nog ’n Jood se veiligheid –  
tandarts Dussel jou ongewenste kamermaat.

Toe het jy jou na hom gekeer  
– soos jy uit sy jeug geruk tot in ’n solderkamertjie.  
Blou agter ’n beroekte ruit en ’n gordynde raam  
het helder in sy oë kom leef ...  
maar die natuur verdra geen surrogaat –  
jy het geweeg, te lig bevind. Weer  
moes Peter maar vir Mouschi streel  
en vir ’n troos het jy seisoenverward  
pinksterrose en bloudruifies in een droom verbeel.

Two sides of the dreadful reality of the Holocaust provided me with the contrast and paradox by way of which I constructed the poem: on the one hand the atrocities of the Nazis of which I became aware through the Eichmann Trial and, on the other hand, the complex cohabitation of eight people in total isolation and secrecy as I came to know it from the diary. Personal relationships inevitably became strained and heavy demands were made on all eight occupants of the annexe, Otto and Edith Frank and their two daughters, Margot and Anne as well as Hermann and Auguste van Pels and their son Peter, and the dentist, Fritz Pfeffer.<sup>2</sup> As the reader of my own poem, I now read into my version of the net of complex human relationships in which Anne was caught up in the hideout, her painstaking attainment and preservation of an own identity.

My poem also shows in the images used to depict Anne that I shifted the emphasis from her conflicting emotions, regarding the seven other occupants of the annexe, to her inner strength and overwhelming optimism. In so doing I ran the risk of presenting an idealised image of her, detracting from the multi-faceted nature of her personality. At that time I was still unaware of the Anne Frank cult which transformed her into the most idealised and falsified icon from a period of horror and devastation, belonging to the worst in human history. Bearing in mind that my poem depicts the persecution of the Jews as the underlying reality of life in the secret annexe, I trust that I did not contribute to the Anne Frank cult, which fortunately did not exist when I wrote my poem.

The question which involuntarily occurs is why so much time elapsed between the writing of my poem on Anne Frank and the subsequent translation of her diary. The obvious answer is that after completing my studies and obtaining a Master's degree, I became lecturer in Afrikaans and Dutch literature, which made it inevitable that my ideal to translate the diary shifted to the background of an academic career with its distinctive demands. One very fortunate aspect of the postponement of fulfilling that ideal was that I was granted a scholarship for two years' study in Dutch literature and language at the Free University of Amsterdam. It gave me a good command of Dutch as a written and spoken language, as well as an intimate knowledge of the Dutch culture. But of far greater importance to prepare me as translator of Anne's diary was that I, as is customary for Dutch students, rented a room from a Jewish woman who was an Auschwitz survivor. She never spoke much of what she

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Meer as Jood of Christen het jy geweet  
die mens se gees oorwin as hy  
elke dag sy aartappels met vreugde eet.

<sup>2</sup> Lee, Carol Ann, *Het verborgen leven van Otto Frank*, trans. from the English by Bab Westerveld (Amsterdam: Balans, 2002).

had experienced in that extermination camp, except for remarks which are indelibly imprinted in my memory, like the number on her arm by which she, a highly intelligent and attractive woman, was stigmatised as a member of a “subhuman species”.

During the period of forty five years between my writing of the poem about Anne Frank in 1961, and the translation of her diary which I started in 2006, I read all the articles, biographies and memoirs that were published about her and of people close to her, in particular her father, which had been brought to my attention. Reading about Anne meant reading about the Holocaust. My involvement with the Holocaust was highly exceptional in the Afrikaner community in South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. After the Second World War and the coming to power of the Nationalist Party in 1948 with its policy of racial segregation, South Africa became an isolated country. According to Eva Hoffman, the 1950s was a period of a stony silence enjoined on the Holocaust: “This was the height of the ‘latency period’, which seemed to come on all regions of the world, as if on cue. After the initial responses of shock and recognition, the Holocaust ceased to be a subject of public discussion or much cultural attention”.<sup>3</sup> She consequently identifies the 1970s as the period of “growing or returning awareness of the Shoah”, due to the “books, films, (and) widely watched television shows that began to appear with regularity”.<sup>4</sup>

While reading Hoffman I began to understand for the first time why I had learned so little from my Dutch landlady about her experiences as a victim of the Holocaust. I lived with her between 1968 and 1970; a period during which the awareness of the Holocaust had not yet dawned on the world and during which the survivors were not eager to talk about their pain, afraid that it would not be received with much understanding. The reasons why a realisation of the Holocaust took much longer than the 1970s to affect the South African consciousness, in particular that of the Afrikaans-speaking community, are manifold. The reluctance of the Afrikaner to acknowledge the atrocities of the Nazis originated from their deep-seated anti-British feelings because of the Anglo-Boer War which unfortunately also led to their pro-German attitude. In the 1970s the criticism against South Africa because of apartheid became so vehement that defence of their country became a mission. This also meant that they denied the glaring fact that racial segregation is essentially also racial prejudice; which at its worst can lead to genocide of which the Holocaust is the extreme example.

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<sup>3</sup> Eva Hoffman, *After such knowledge: A Meditation on Aftermath of the Holocaust* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), 84.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

In the meantime South Africa has become a democracy and is accepted by the international community, largely because of the venerated Nelson Mandela's role in the peaceful transition of political power. In 1994 the exhibition "Anne Frank in the World" was brought to the country. This undeniably contributed to the fact that Anne Frank is currently most likely just as widely known in South Africa as the writer of the most famous of preserved war diaries as she is in the rest of the world. Sadly enough the diary itself too often remains unread. On 5 April 1944, Anne wrote in her diary: "I *know* I can write... Unless you write yourself, you can't know how wonderful it is; I always used to bemoan the fact that I couldn't draw, but now I'm overjoyed that at least I can write... I want to go on living even after my death! And that's why I'm so grateful to God for having given me this gift, which I can use to develop myself and to express all that's inside me!"<sup>5</sup> Thus Anne's wish for some kind of immortality has been realised, but it would undoubtedly have upset her that her after-life is largely that of a cult figure and not of a writer.

At present this widespread and well-known cult is written and reflected upon critically. I am in the fortunate position that I also have access to the texts written in Dutch. Probably the most recent publication that appeared in April 2012 is by David Barnouw who was head of the Anne Frank Collection of the Netherlands State of War Documentation (NIOD). The title, *Het fenomeen Anne Frank* ("The phenomenon, Anne Frank") suggests that he has not only given an overview of the publication history of the diary, the establishment of the Anne Frank Foundation in Amsterdam and the Anne Frank Fund in Basel, but also investigated the cult figure, Anne Frank, in detail.

What Barnouw writes about the Anne who comes to life in the Hollywood film, sheds a special light on the cult figure Anne Frank. For the film role of Anne the film director and producer George Stevens was in search of an unknown amateur who, in his own words, possessed the following attributes: "The girl who will give life to Anne, must be a loveable, ordinary child, the type of child around whom every man and woman will want to wrap an arm protectively".<sup>6</sup> How far this image deviates from the Anne of the diary I only realised recently while I was watching the DVD of the film; not as a naïve viewer, but with the critical sense that I had developed in the meantime.

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Frank, *The diary of a young girl*, trans. from the Dutch by Susan Massoty (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 246-47. Later versions consulted by the author include: Anne Frank, *De dagboeken van Anne Frank: Critical edition* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2001); Anne Frank, *Het Achterhuis: Dagboekbrieven 12 juni 1942 – 1 Augustus 1944* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> David Barnouw, *Het fenomeen Anne Frank* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2012), 78.

The American author Cynthia Ozick writes a strident article in *The New Yorker* entitled “Who owns Anne Frank?” against this false image of Anne. Ozick lays the blame squarely on the stage adaptation and film script by Goodrich and Hackett. Anne is portrayed, she claims, as a lively, cheeky “all-American girl” and she concludes: “The passionately contemplative child, brooding on concrete evil, was made into an emblem of evasion”.<sup>7</sup> In the film, however, one never sees the “lively cheeky girl”; only a gentle, rather introverted, loving “American girl” that George Stevens wanted Millie Perkins to portray. Although Ozick is correct in emphasising the contemplative, introvert side of Anne’s character, Anne also manifests herself in her diary as an extrovert who can be cheeky and self-centred in her relationships with the other occupants of the annexe.

The greatest value of Ozick’s article is that she justly points out that the “*diary* of Anne Frank” is not the “*biography* of Anne Frank”.<sup>8</sup> The missing ending of her biography is that after the arrest on 4 August 1944, Anne’s final journey took her to the transit camp Westerbork in Drente, from there to Auschwitz, where she escaped the gas chambers and ended in Bergen-Belsen, where she died – a victim, ultimately of the calculated murder that, in essence, was the Holocaust. This missing ending, according to Ozick, is the reason why “the story of Anne in the fifty years since *The diary of a young girl* was first published has been bowdlerized, distorted, transmuted, traduced, reduced; it has been infantilized, Americanized, homogenized, sentimentalized; falsified, kitschified, and, in fact, blatantly and arrogantly denied”.<sup>9</sup>

In her study, written independently of Ozick, the Dutch feminist scholar Denise de Costa,<sup>10</sup> also points out that Anne, the diarist who knows and writes about the terrible fate that Jews in the world outside the secret annexe are subjected to, is not fully portrayed in the play, particularly her reflective nature: She is familiar with contradicting feelings of love and hate, grapples with fears of arrest and deportation and fights against feelings of depression caused by her knowledge of the terror in the outside world. De Costa concludes: “This ‘Anne of the diaries’ is a rich, complex personality”.<sup>11</sup>

As a twenty-one year old student in language and literature with ambitions to become a writer, I was naturally struck by the fact that Anne Frank’s search of an own identity was also closely linked to a growing sense of her writing talent and the accompanying dream to

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<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Ozick, “Who owns Anne Frank?” *The New Yorker*, 6 October 1997, 85.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Denise De Costa, *Anne Frank en Etty Hillesum: spiritualiteit, schrijverschap, seksualiteit* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1996), 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



become a writer. The gift that pleased Anne most on her thirteenth birthday on 12 June 1942, was a bound, blank book with a red checked cover which she decided would become her personal diary. At first she was uncertain how to go about keeping a diary, but she soon decided that her diary entries would be in the form of letters to an imaginary friend, whom she called Kitty. All too soon, Kitty became the indispensable confidante of the Anne in hiding. In the annexe writing changed from a pastime to a calling and, to a large extent, her whole life.

The medium of the writer is the spoken language that he refines to a sensitive tool of expression of that which he wishes to articulate. Inevitably, Anne, the writer, explores her identity in the language in which she can express herself most adequately, which is Dutch. On 11 April 1944, she writes that during the previous Sunday night, when they were terrified by a burglary, she was prepared to die:

I'd gladly have given my life for my country. But now, now that I've been spared, my first wish after the war is to become a Dutch citizen. I love the Dutch, I love this country, I love the language, and I want to work here. And even if I have to write to the Queen herself, I won't give up until I've reached my goal!<sup>12</sup>

But in the same long letter to Kitty, Anne also writes about her Jewish identity, which she cannot escape, and, in fact, does not wish to escape:

We can never be just Dutch, or just English, or whatever, we will always be Jews as well. And we'll have to keep on being Jews, but then, we'll want to be.<sup>13</sup>

I had the feeling that the diary waited for me to be translated into Afrikaans, but of course it is no answer to the question why it took so long for the diary to be translated into Afrikaans, a language so closely related to Anne's beloved Dutch language. As a result of the already mentioned resistance of Afrikaners to acknowledging the Holocaust, publishers could have considered it a risk to have Anne Frank's diary translated and published in Afrikaans; as the writer was the face of the six million who were exterminated by the Nazis. But there is a simpler and more obvious answer to the question why an Afrikaans translation of the diary was so long overdue, namely that 'after all, we can all read English' and the English translation was always available in bookshops as well as in libraries. Nevertheless, in 1982 the diary again became available in the original Dutch when the 'Lae Lande'-reeks ('Low

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<sup>12</sup> Frank, *The diary of a young girl*, 259.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Countries' series) was published by Human & Rousseau. Koos Human, who took the initiative for the publication of the 'Low Countries' series expressed his disappointment that *Het Achterhuis* had never been prescribed for schools. He presumed correctly that the diary of Anne Frank had passed by most young Afrikaans-speaking readers. However, the implication of Human's remark is also that he regarded Anne Frank's diary as foremost a youth book, meant for high school pupils.

To decide if his opinion is just, one has to take the nature of a diary and specifically Anne's diary, into account. A diary can be considered an "ego document", presently a general term for texts such as the letter, the diary, the autobiography and memoirs. The term was coined by Jacques Presser, professor of History at the University of Amsterdam.<sup>14</sup> Ego documents are intrinsically ambivalent, being on the one hand historical resources as in Presser's opinion and on the other hand they qualify as literary texts if they give proof of indisputable literary value. Proof of the literary merit of Anne's diary is the way in which she portrays life in hiding, not shunning the description of the grim circumstances, but also with a humorous view of the situation. With great insight she also writes of her accelerated development as a teen-ager to maturity in those abnormal circumstances. Anne's diary is the account of a puberty as well as a testimony of the Holocaust. As such it is a book that can be read by people of all ages. That Afrikaans-speaking South Africans are so unfamiliar with this exceptional diary and, resulting from that, ignorant about the Holocaust itself, was, apart from my own passionate desire, an incentive to translate *Het Achterhuis* into Afrikaans.

In order to realise this ideal, I made contact with David Barnouw who referred me to Liepman Publishers in Zürich who had the translation rights for the diary of Anne Frank. This was in 2004. I asked a Dutch colleague at the University of Nijmegen whether he would be prepared to recommend me to Liepman as a translator. It was no problem to obtain the translation rights; on the contrary, the publisher, Eva Kornalik, was delighted that someone at last turned up to translate the diary into Afrikaans. In conclusion, she says in her letter of 6 July 2004:

Please do let us know about the progress you made finding a suitable publisher. Maybe you will be luckier than we have been so far – you know the publishing scene in South Africa better than we do, although we represent André Brink and many South African authors.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Presser, "Joden en dagboeken," in: M.C. Brands and H.W. von der Dunk en H.H. Zwager (eds.): *Ego-documenten: een bijzondere genre van historische bronnen* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1970), 77.

<sup>15</sup> Eva Kornalik, Personal Communication with the Author, 6 July 2004.

I wrongly assumed that my publisher, Human & Rousseau, who up to that time had never refused any intended publication of mine, and who published my eight volumes of poetry, would immediately be willing to publish my translation. After Human & Rousseau had initially intimated to Liepman in August 2004, that they would be willing to publish my translation, they changed their minds very soon afterwards and informed me by letter. I was indignant. Shortly afterwards, at a conference on Netherlandic Studies held at the University of North-West in Potchefstroom from 22 to 25 September, I read a paper on the diary. I mentioned that Human & Rousseau was not willing to publish an Afrikaans translation of the diary of Anne Frank. My audience was stunned, especially the Dutch participants in the conference. The general opinion that it was scandalous that the most well-known diary from the Second World War was not translated in Afrikaans became literary gossip which eventually reached Nicol Stassen, the manager of Protea, a very enterprising publishing house. He approached me and declared himself willing to publish the translation. I was ecstatic, and for eight months, with rare intermissions, dedicated myself daily to translating Anne's diary.

The only serious translation problems that I encountered were Anne's entries about her experiences as a teen-ager attending school: her class mates and their mutual companionship and fun and her relationship with her teachers. However, these experiences were not discussed very often. Underlying the experiences and views about which Anne Frank wrote in the hide-out was a universal theme requiring mature expression in appropriate language. De Costa correctly describes this theme as "the human condition": the fate of the human being to be alone and never to be able to completely fill the emptiness inside.<sup>16</sup> Regarding Anne's style of writing, my point of departure was that she wrote excellent Dutch and that I would translate as closely as possible to the original text. Fortunately, my opinion of Anne's Dutch is confirmed by Denise de Costa who refers to "Anne Frank's passion for writing and her excellent command of the Dutch language."<sup>17</sup>

While I was busy with the translation, my attention was completely absorbed by the diary and I did not consider how it would be received by the Afrikaans reading public; consequently I was overwhelmed by the reception it had in the Afrikaans media. Not only in advertising, but also in reviews, Anne's diary was enthusiastically welcomed and discussed with great insight. From start to finish the emphasis fell on the content and significance of the diary, while the Afrikaans of my translation was applauded. The heading of the review in

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<sup>16</sup> De Costa, *Anne Frank en Ety Hillesum*, 103.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

*Beeld* was: “Classical narrative in finest Afrikaans.”<sup>18</sup> In his review in *Die Burger*, Daniel Hugo wrote in this regard: “In her well-researched introduction Lina Spies points to the fact that Anne does not use typical teen-age language, but that she wrote in outstanding, mature Dutch. In her translation she intentionally gives an Afrikaans equivalent thereof.”<sup>19</sup> However, exactly the same argument used by neo-Nazis to deny the authenticity of the diary, namely the “too mature” use of language, came in useful for an Afrikaner to launch a vicious attack on me and on the diary.

In April 2009, I was invited to talk about *Die Agterhuis* in Bethlehem in the Eastern Free State. The interview that my hostess, Marita Burger, conducted with me, was published in *Die Volksblad*.<sup>20</sup> With reference to the interview, a certain Ludwig Rode wrote a letter under the heading, “‘Holocaust’ van die Boervolk was erger” (“‘Holocaust’ of the Boer nation was worse”).<sup>21</sup> By way of introduction he said, “It is important to view the Anne Frank diary and the so-called Holocaust with a new perspective and new facts.” He proceeded: “There is enough evidence today that Anne’s diary is literary fraud. A twelve year-old girl can indeed write a diary, but is definitely not capable of the writing style and language usage in this book.” The diary that Anne did not keep as a twelve year-old, but as someone in hiding, between the ages of thirteen and almost fifteen years, is the “book” that Rode calls a “n roman” (“a novel”) and that he obviously had never read. Furthermore he appeals to the well-known anti-Semitic Swedish paper *Fria Ord* and to the French Robert Faurisson whose negations have been convincingly refuted. The crux of the matter to me is that Rode’s letter is an example of the negation of Anne’s diary that leads to the negation of the Holocaust as has repeatedly emerged in different countries since the fifties.<sup>22</sup> It is a deeply disturbing phenomenon.

As a literary woman and poet, I soon learnt never to defend myself in the public media. But, of course, the authenticity of the Holocaust, of which Anne for many had become the face, once again had to be factually and unequivocally confirmed in contradiction to Rode. The confirmation came from, among others, I. Hellman, chairperson of the Jewish Board of Deputies of the Free State and the Northern Cape, and from Henia Bryer, a survivor of the camps. But, as an Afrikaner, I was most thankful for a letter from Prof André Wessels of the History Department of the Free State University because as a

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<sup>18</sup> *Beeld*, 22 August 2008.

<sup>19</sup> *Die Burger*, 23 June 2008.

<sup>20</sup> *Die Volksblad*, 26 April 2009.

<sup>21</sup> *Die Volksblad*, 2 May 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Barnouw, *Het fenomeen Anne Frank*, 91.

fellow Afrikaner he quashed Rode's letter for the unsettling and untruthful negation of one of the most abominable events in the history of mankind, "Holocaust: Ontkenning is ontstellend" ("Holocaust: Negation is unsettling").<sup>23</sup> He was not the only Afrikaner who wrote. From California Willie Kruger wrote that Rode's letter in a Bloemfontein newspaper is a slap in the face of the Jewish and Afrikaans-speaking families who live in Bloemfontein. J.P.C. van den Berg wrote: "Suffering undergone in any war should never become a competition about who had it worse".<sup>24</sup> With those words he settled the unfortunate comparison between the suffering of Boer women and children in the British Concentration Camps and the Holocaust, as Wessels and Hellman had also done. Helman wrote: "It is not in any way my intent to play down the tragic death of so many Boer women and their children (as well as thousands of black people) in the British Concentration Camps. It has, understandably, left deep scars on the psyche of the Afrikaner nation."<sup>25</sup>

I would like to believe that the deniers of the Holocaust amongst Afrikaners are a small minority, as it indeed appeared to be from *Die Volksblad* polemic. The Holocaust is at present compulsory learning material in secondary schools. On the countless occasions that I have spoken about the diary of Anne Frank, mostly at reading clubs for women, I only experienced openness and empathy. That brings me to the question whether the resistance amongst Afrikaners, especially the younger generation, to the diary of Anne Frank and the Anne Frank House has yet been overcome. That it existed, cannot be denied.

A book that provides evidence of how strong the resistance was, is *Anne in 't voorbijgaan* ("Anne in the passing") that contains anonymous inscriptions, collected from that which people wrote in the visitors' book at the Anne Frank House.<sup>26</sup> It dates from 1982 so that it necessarily covers the seventies with its strong anti-apartheid movements. In contrast to the numerous German inscriptions that vary from pronouncements of deep feelings of guilt to the well-known ironical justification "Wir haben es nie gewusst" ("We never knew"), there are only a few inscriptions from South Africans. One reads as follows: "A great display but ... keep your foundation out of South Africa and worry about your own problems".<sup>27</sup> Another South African gives expression to a similar attitude in vulgar language in a hysterical tone: 'Please don't talk about South Africa if you don't know what it is about. Because you are all shits. The lot of you Dutchmen.' From these quotations it becomes clear

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<sup>23</sup> *Die Volksblad*, 6 May 2009.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Anne in 't voorbijgaan: Emoties, gedachten en verwachtingen rondom het huis en het Dagboek van Anne Frank* (Amsterdam: Keesing Boeken, 1982).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

that the reason for the resistance to the Anne Frank House and Anne's diary was the fact that Anne was seen as a symbol against the anti-apartheid movement. Barnouw writes: "Visitors to the Anne Frank House hardly received any commentary about Anne Frank, but were more and more often confronted with exhibitions about racial discrimination and injustice in the present."<sup>28</sup> Barnouw concluded: "In the course of the sixties and seventies Anne Frank has become conspicuously more than the girl of the diary or the play."<sup>29</sup>

In South Africa she has become anglicised to the extent that her name is consistently pronounced in English while the Afrikaans pronunciation is glaringly obvious, seeing that it is exactly the same as in Dutch and German. As an "all-English girl" Anne has become an anti-apartheid symbol in South Africa, and as such has played no role in the Afrikaner's realisation that the race-based policy of the government he supported was a violation of human dignity; on the contrary, it just strengthened his resistance to admitting that apartheid was wrong. To me it is a painful embarrassment to read inscriptions like those I quoted from the visitors' book in the Anne Frank House. Fortunately this book dates from the 1970s.<sup>30</sup> Since the publication of my translation, I visited the Anne Frank house twice, and could see for myself that the exhibition was no longer associated to any political propaganda, for instance in the form of a filmed interview with a South African refugee on the installed television. I was deeply moved when I first visited the Anne Frank House in November 1968, and on that occasion encountered nothing that caused any embarrassment. On my two recent visits I experienced a deep gratitude that in the shop of that famous museum the Afrikaans translation of Anne Frank's diary, *Die Agterhuis*, can now take its place amongst all the available translations of the more than sixty that appeared since the first publication of *Het Achterhuis*, in the original Dutch, in 1947.

In the first instance Anne's diary is a personal document with great emotional appeal. In so far as it makes a political stand, it is against the dehumanisation of people which leads to their destruction and thereby also to the destruction of their talents. This was the fate of six million of whom Anne was one. But her voice could not be silenced. Of this voice Ernst Schnabel says in conclusion to his book about Anne, *Spur eines Kindes (Anne Frank: A portrait in Courage)*:

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<sup>28</sup> Barnouw, *Het fenomeen Anne Frank*, 121.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Frank, *Het Achterhuis: Dagboekbrieven 12 juni 1942 – 1 augustus 1944* (Amsterdam: Contact, 1972).

Thus her voice was preserved out of the millions that were silenced, this voice no louder than a child's whisper. It tells how those millions lived, spoke, ate, and slept, and it has outlasted the shouts of the murderers and soared above the voices of time.<sup>31</sup>

My translation was the fulfilment of a personal ideal and not a political stand. But one of the slogans of the feminist movement in the United States in the 1970s was 'The personal is political'. In the last instance my translation was thus a political deed, especially on account of my comprehensive introduction in which I summarise the impact of Anne's posthumous writings as follows:

"It is true that Anne's voice touched and inspired people, but it is equally true that she made them aware of the wrong; that she confessed love in the face of hatred and the goodness of man in the face of evil."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ernst Schnabel, *Anne Frank: A Portrait in Courage*, trans. from the German by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harbrace Paperback, 1958), 181.

<sup>32</sup> Anne Frank, *Die Agterhuis: Dagboekbriewe 12 Junie 1942 – 1 Augustus 1944*, trans. by Lina Spies (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2008), 26.



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