

Cinie Louw: Linguist, missionary and theologian

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Abstract

As part of a growing scholarly interest in the history of women in the field of linguistics the life of Cinie Louw (1872–1935), a missionary in Mashonaland, is revisited. The focus is her groundbreaking work in the fields of linguistics, Bible translation and theological interpretation. Her contribution is revisited outside of the normative evaluation of women's work in the early 20th century and therefore not just as an extension of that of her male counterparts and husband.

Keywords

Cinie Louw; Mashonaland, Mission, Bible translation

Introduction

“Self wou sy nooit enige roem vir haarself toeëien nie. Sy het beskeie haar talente gebruik om haar Meester te dien.”¹

Revisiting and celebrating the 200 years of *De Kaapsche Kerk* also entails telling the stories of individuals who did groundbreaking work in different geographical areas under the auspices of this Synod. The rich missionary history of this Synod, especially in the period of the late 19th century and early 20th century, is one such example.

In this article, the life of one such a missionary, namely Francina Susanna Louw née Malan (1872–1935), or Cinie as she was known, will

1 Hendrik Frederik Johannes Mulder: *Die Aandeel van die Sendelinge van die NG Kerk aan Bybelvertaling*. (Pretoria. Nagraadse Diploma in Teologie, 1983), 66. (“For herself she did not claim any honour. She used her talents to humbly serve her Master”)

be remembered. Cinie lived in an age where the lives of women were often merely seen as the extension of that of their husbands and where their histories are written from the perspective of that relationship. In what follows her life will be revisited as more than an addendum to that of her husband eerw. A.A. Louw² and his calling by focusing on her own particular contribution to the history of the Mashonaland mission.

Although Cinie was more well-known than her female peers because of her achievements and family relations (she was the sister of D.F. Malan, a South African Prime minister) her legacy still needs to be retrieved in detail by using other angles of research. Within the proposed parameters of this article attention will be given to her contribution in the field of linguistics and Bible translation, as well as reflecting on the possibility of calling her a theologian.³

Why Cinie?

“Deze is een van de warmste dagen die ik nog in Mashonaland heb beleefd, en om mij een weinig te verkoelen zit ik op den vloer van onze kleine zitkamer en schrijft op mijn schoot.”⁴

Cinie Louw is probably one of the few South African women of her time that has a “Wikipedia” page. It reads as follows:

Francina Susanna Louw née Malan, known as Cinie Louw (1872–1935) was a South African missionary and linguist working in South

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- 2 Eerwaarde A.A. Louw did not fully complete his ministerial studies at the University of Stellenbosch because of health reasons and was trained as a missionary at the Huguenot College. His immense contribution to mission and Bible translation was however later recognised and he was bestowed the title of *dominee*. In this article he will be named eerw. A.A. Louw or just A.A. Louw throughout. He is also not to be confused with his son Dr A.A. Louw jnr. who also participated in the translation work that was done in Mashonaland.
 - 3 Within the broader history of the Reformed faith in South Africa women as trained theologians and ordained minister is a very recent phenomenon. The General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church made the decision in October 1990 that women can be ordained as ministers.
 - 4 *De Zendingbode*, Deel VII, no 64, March 1897. (“This is one of the warmest days that I have experienced in Mashonaland, and to cool myself a bit I am sitting on the floor of our small sitting room and writing on my lap”)

Rhodesia. The linguist Clement Martyn Doke praised her *Manual of the Chikaranga Language* (1915) as the “best grammatical sketch of any Mashonaland language hitherto published.”⁵

There is a growing scholarly interest in the work of women in the field of linguistics. In their introduction to *Women in the History of Linguistics*⁶ Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Helena Sanson motivate their retrieval of women who were prominent in different cultures and countries in the work of linguistics but who have been neglected in the writing of history. They critically engage with and appropriate the concepts that Gerda Lerner introduced in her essay entitled “Placing women in history: Definitions and Challenges”.⁷

Lerner shies away from a history that treats women as victims of oppression: “The true history of women is the history of their ongoing functioning in that male-defined world, *on their own terms*.”⁸ Writing in the early days of the so-called “women’s history” as an independent field of study she already notices that the question of oppression is “a tool of limited usefulness to the historian”.⁹

The history of women in linguistics is “in its infancy”, and therefore Ayres-Bennet & Sanson aim “to fill this long-standing gap and, to paraphrase Lerner, contribute to a true history of the role of women in the history of linguistics on their own terms, challenging categories and concepts devised for male-dominated accounts and expanding the field of enquiry.”¹⁰ This entails the exploration in a detailed and systematic way the contribution and works of women as linguists in the European and non-European traditions as a whole.”¹¹ It is in this volume that Cinie is also found as a case example of somebody whose linguistic work has not been fully researched outside of

5 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francina_Susanna_Louw (retrieved 6 June 2024)

6 Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Helena Sanson (eds.), *Women in the History of Linguistics* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020).

7 Gerda Lerner: “Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges”, *Feminist Studies*, Vol.3, no. 1/2 (1975): 5-14.

8 Lerner: *Placing Women*, 6.

9 Lerner: *Placing Women*, 6.

10 Ayers-Bennet & Sanson: *Women in Linguistics*, 2.

11 Ayers-Bennet & Sanson, 2.

its basic contours. As with other women discussed in their book, the term “linguist” is used to include contributions outside of institutionalised and traditional frameworks because many women, like Cinie, were not trained linguists.

These women’s contributions were not always in the more institutional side of the discipline, but rather “within less public and clearly domestic environments”.¹² Helena Pasch elaborates further by describing African linguistics as a “relatively young academic discipline”.¹³ The examples she gives are of missionaries like Sigismund Koelle (1854) and travelers like George Schweinfurth (1873) or Jan Czekanowski (1924).¹⁴ In her discussion the South African historian already recognises that the work done by missionaries in places like Malawi, Zimbabwe and Nigeria under the auspices of the Dutch Reformed Church still needs to be recognised and told. In the Archives of the Dutch Reformed Church at Stellenbosch many such examples can be found which invite further research.

Pasch identifies two domains where women in the 20th century began to play a role with regard to African languages, namely academia and Christian missions in Africa.¹⁵ Her example of a woman in the domain of mission is Cinie Louw who she names Cinie de Louw [sic]. She is grouped with other remarkable women who made African languages accessible and available.

Cinie as missionary

“Mooi en slim, en iemand wat net so maklik ’n skaap uitmekaar kon sny as ’n meetkundeprobleem oplos.”¹⁶

12 Ayers-Bennet & Sanson, 3.

13 Helena Pasch: “European women and the description and teaching of African languages,” in Wendy Ayers-Bennet & Helena Sanson (eds). *Women in the History of Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2020), 487-508; 487.

14 Helena Pasch: *European women*, 488.

15 Pasch, 488.

16 J.M. Cronje: *Aan God die Dank*. Deel 2. (N.G. Kerkboekhandel, Transvaal. Pretoria. 1981), 95. (“Beautiful and intelligent, somebody who can cut up a sheep just as well as solve a geometry problem”)

Francina Susanna Malan grew up in Riebeek-Wes. There are multiple sources that focus on her early love for learning and her adamant choice that she wanted to go to school with her brothers (one of whom is D.F. Malan, as was mentioned above). She was in the same class as another well-known prime minister namely Jan Smuts and was described as his intellectual equal. Cinie studied to become a teacher at Huguenot College, where she also studied Mathematics and Latin. She wanted to go to the mission field although her parents did not want her to go on her own.¹⁷

Her path crossed with that of Andrew Louw, a missionary in Mashonaland, whom she married in 1894, after corresponding since 1892. Andrew was 29 years old, single and alone and was looking for a companion. His two brothers at the Kweekskool at Stellenbosch wrote to him and suggested that he make the acquaintance with a pretty and intelligent teacher namely Cinie Malan.¹⁸ Cinie was described as beautiful, clever and as seen in the quote above, good at maths as well as domestic chores. Marrying A.A. Louw she fulfilled her wish and went to the mission field. She joined her husband at Morgenster, a mission station near Fort Victoria and was quickly drawn into this multi-faceted role.¹⁹

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries women in the mission field had much more agency than their female counterparts within the Cape Colony of the day. At Morgenster Cinie was expected to give classes to girls and organise health services.²⁰ Her interest lay in mathematics but shortly after her arrival in Morgenster she becomes more interested in language.²¹ With time she became fluent in the local language of Karanga.²²

17 Cronje: *Aan God die Dank*, 96; Lindie Korf “Behind Every Man: D.F. Malan and the Women in his Life, 1874-1959” in *South African Historical Journal* 60.3 (2008): 399-402.

18 Cronje: *Aan God die Dank*, 95.

19 For more on the Morgenster mission, see W.J. van der Merwe: *Sendinggenade in Mashonaland* (NG Kerk Uitgewers. Kaapstad)

20 Pasch: *European Women*, 506.

21 Cronje: *Aan God die Dank*, 97.

22 Different references to this language found in sources (Karanga, Chikaranga, Vakaranga). Cinie herself explains it as follows in the introduction to her Manual (1915) “Chikaranga is the language spoken by the natives of Mashonaland, Southern Rhodesia. It is known by different names in different parts of the country” She names *Chimanyika*, *Chindau*, *Chikaranga*. The Chikaranga/Karanga was spoken by the Vakaranga people.

The Protestant missionaries identified the translation of the Bible as a core missionary activity. The Word-centered theology within the Reformed tradition, proclaimed that everybody must have access to the life-giving Word in their own language. Eerw. A.A. Louw himself was very passionate about the work of translating:

Immers de voornaamste sleutel van de deur van het hart van den mensch is zijn moeder-taal, die hy verstaat, waarin hij denkt, en aan de diepste gewaarwordinge van zijne siel uitdrukking geeft.²³

The fact that he was at one stage tasked with this as his sole responsibility also elicited comment from the Rev. R. Kilgar of *The British and Foreign Bible Society* in a letter to him:

We are very interested to notice that your Board have relieved you from all other duties except the general superintendence of the Mission, so that you may be able to devote more time to translation work. This is a recognition of the fundamental character of Bible translation which we are always glad when Missionary Societies recognize. After all, the man who puts a Bible into the language of the people is doing more to build up the future of the Church in that district than many years of what is often called in a particularly narrow spirit, evangelistic work.²⁴

At Morgenster Cinie became his co-worker in making the translating of the Bible in the vernacular of Karanga a reality, with the New Testament printed in 1919. The Old Testament was also translated by them into Karanga, but because of a decision to have the Bible in a unified dialect the whole Bible was only published after their son A.A. Louw jnr. joined their mission and the Old Testament was translated into United Shona and the New Testament revised. This was an elaborate enterprise of Father, Mother and Son.²⁵

23 Hendrik Frederik Johannes Mulder: *Die Aandeel van die Sendelinge van die NG Kerk aan Bybelvertaling*. (Pretoria. Nagraadse Diploma in Teologie, 1983), 56. (“The foremost key to the door of the heart of humans is his [sic] mother tongue, that he understands and in which he thinks, and gives voice to the deepest perceptions of his soul”)

24 Rev R Kilgar – A.A Louw, 19 April 1917 [NGKSAA, KS 901]

25 Mulder: *Die aandeel van die sendelinge*, 64.

Cinie was also the author and editor of a Church Magazine *Munyai waShe* (The King's Messenger) and translated 210 hymns into Karanga and helped the personnel to learn the local language.²⁶ Her husband, after her death, also refers to books she wrote for the school of mothers to uplift women and children.²⁷

In this atmosphere of the mission station at Morgenster Cinie immersed herself in this new language. In the Mission Newsletter and *De Zendingbode*,²⁸ one reads correspondence of the day-to-day life on the mission field and the difficulties surrounding health, converts, wars etc.

We also get glimpses of how she taught herself this new language, especially with the help of the local people, for example from a woman named Mamwura who lives at station with her husband and two children who helped the Louws around the house:

is zij mij een groote hulp in het aanleeren der taal. Zij gebruikt zooveel nieuwe woorden, en ik heb plan een klein zakboekje te houden waarin ik woorden, die ik niet tevoren gehoord heb, kan neerschrijven.

In the same letter she refers to “Mr. Louw” who was busy with the translation of the Gospel of Mark and has already most of the miracles and parables ready.²⁹ With time she became his full partner in these translation endeavours. Her letters sketch a world where there was a constant interplay of teaching and learning to speak:

Laura, our evangelist Lukas' daughter, who used to live with us long ago, and afterwards taught in the school, is here again and is a great help to Miss v Collier. She reads and speaks Dutch well, and

26 Pasch: *European Women*, 506.

27 *Enige besonderhede omtrent Wyle Mev AA Louw Sr*, written by A.A. Louw [NGKSAA, PPV 145]

28 In 1878 the Huguenot Mission Society was started for students at the Huguenot Seminary in Wellington and other supporters of mission. From its inception the Society send out an informal newsletter from time to time to interested parties. From 1886 a monthly printed Mission News Letter became the official newsletter of the Huguenot Mission Society, which was followed in 1888 with the Dutch Version, *De Zendingbode*.

29 *De Zendingbode*: Deel VII, no 64, March 1897 (“... it is of great help in the learning of the language. She uses so many new words and I have plan of keeping a pocket book in which I can write down words that I have never heard before”)

translates into Tshikaranga just beautifully. If Mr. Louw and Dr. Helm happen both to be away she also translates for Mr. Malan in the Sunday services, and it could not be done better.³⁰

Her daily journey of becoming familiar with the language of those around her did not however stop at learning a language as a useful tool for her missionary work, it rather became a far more in-depth interest. Cinie became a linguist in her own right.

Cinie as linguist

“How is it possible that your wife who is such a good housewife ... manages to be a scientific woman at the same time”³¹

It was Cinie’s work in the field of specialised linguistics that brought her into correspondence with many other people. In reading her correspondence to missionaries of other denominations, to the *British and Foreign Bible Society* as well as well-known linguists and scholars in South Africa and abroad one recognises that she took the understanding of the language seriously as well as the creating of tools to promote Bible translation and the writing of other religious literature.

Her linguistic activities fell into two parts. The first was the translation of the Bible and other evangelical tools as well as her *Manual* (Grammar) that was an extension of this activity. The second was her work as part of a government commission that was tasked to create an orthography for a Unified Shona, which will be referred to later in the article.

Cinie’s *Manual of the Chikaranga Language* (CS Louw), was published in 1915.³² This Manual or Grammar included grammatical descriptions, exercises and conversational sentences to help missionaries and colonial officers to learn the language.³³

30 *Mission Newsletter*, June 1900.

31 *Enige besonderhede omtrent Wyle Mev AA Louw Sr*, written by A.A. Louw [NGKSAA, PPV 145]

32 C.S. Louw. *A Manual of the Chikaranga Language* (Philpot & Collins. Bulawayo, 1915) [NGKSAA, Ref 299]

33 Pasch: *European Women*, 506

It is not clear when she started out with this comprehensive project but in correspondence between the Dutch writer J.F. van Oordt of Cape Town and her husband in 1907 it seems not to be so far from completion. Van Oordt actively encouraged her (via her husband) to have it published.³⁴

Het zij mij echter vergund eenige aanmerkingen te maken. Ten eerste is het werk van Mevrouw Louw zoo uitmuntend en interessant geschreven dat ik het waag een beroep te doen op haar, om “haar licht niet onder een korenmaat te verbergen”. In ander woorden, ik beschouw het van het hoogste belang voor de goede zaak van Zuid-Afrika, zoowel als van de wetenschap, dat uwe echtgenootte stappen nemen ter uitgave van dit belangrijke werk.

In the same letter he sets out to give possible routes for financing such a publication through the mission channels or the *British and Foreign Bible Agency* and that he himself would look for funds.

In alle geval, zal ik niet rusten voor ik Mevrouw Louw zoover gekregen heb dat het een of ander plan worde gemaakte tot uitgave van dit werkelijk goed boekje³⁵

As is seen above this momentous undertaking was published in 1915 and was positively received. The *Natal Mercury*³⁶ published a review in which her book is called a “Comprehensive Work” in which the “language is dealt with in the fullest manner, equal to any ordinary textbook of the English language”.

Mrs Louw does not claim that her vocabulary is a dictionary, but from a glance through it we do not note many omissions, and we should say that the vocabulary will be all the lexicon that the ordinary man will ever need.

34 J. F van Oordt – A.A Louw, 11 April 1907 [NGKSAA, KS 907/1] (“Grant me to make some comments. First, the work of Mrs Louw is written so excellently and interesting that I want do dare to make a call upon her ‘not to hide her light under a bushel’. In other words I see this in light of the good cause of South Africa and science that your spouse takes step in order to publish this work”).

35 J. F van Oordt – A.A Louw, 11 April 1907 [NGKSAA, KS 907/1] (“In any case I will not rest before I get Mrs Louw to make one or other plan for the publishing of this truly good book”).

36 *Natal Mercury*, Saturday 19 February 1916 [NGKSAA, KS 907].

The review in *The Natal Mercury* further describes it as a book that “ethnologists and etymologists” will delight in.

During her years at Morgenster, Cinie with her growing interest in the study of linguistics, took the initiative to correspond widely with other linguists regarding elements of Bible translation, her grammar and the creation of an orthography for these newly written dialects. She had a broad base of influence.

Her work was especially appreciated by fellow missionaries in other geographical areas, who also struggled with aspects of translation and the learning of a new language. This appreciation can be seen in the letter of Dr Hetherwick of the Blantyre mission to eerw. A.A. Louw:³⁷

Tell Mrs that I have followed her advise in the recent new edition of my Nyanja manual and have added a new section with useful phrases for people who do not care to use the grammar to learn from ...

Rev G. Wilder from the *American Board Mission* thanked Cinie from the Chikore Mission Station for a copy of the Grammar that she sent to him:

It is very interesting to remember that the first grammar to be published in any of these local dialects was Mrs Springer’s Chinyika Grammar, and now this most pretentious work in the language is this Grammar, the work of another lady Mrs. Louw. Well, we men folk will not be jealous and are only proud that our lady missionaries are doing so much and such fine work in the language field, work so important in the work of bringing the people to a knowledge of divine things.³⁸

Eddie H. Greely (Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church) jokingly commented to her husband:³⁹

... the more I read it, the better I like it. It is certainly gotten out in fine shape, and the copious notes seem to cover nearly if not all

37 Dr Hetherwick– A.A Louw, 8 April 1914 [NGKSAA, KS 901].

38 Rev Wilder – Mrs Louw, 23 March 1916. [NGKSAA, KS 901].

39 Greely – A.A Louw, 30 May 1916. [NGKSAA, KS 901].

needed helps. It is a great credit to the author, who I suppose is MRS LOUW.⁴⁰

Through the years Cinie corresponded with linguists on an international level regarding her Grammar and Bible translation, and also later regarding her work on the Language Commission that was tasked to form a unified Shona dialect.

Her correspondents included the School of Oriental Studies in London,⁴¹ and Rev M.J. Elliott of The Philological Society in London, who wrote her a letter asking for a copy of her Grammar.⁴² He heard of it via his daughter who visited Cape Town. In these correspondences Cinie is clearly regarded as an expert and peer. He invited her to give a paper which she declined because of the time-consuming work of revising translations.

Much of Cinie's later correspondence with experts in the linguistic field is from 1928 onwards where her work was focused on the position given to her by the then government of South Rhodesia. The government wanted to finalise an orthography for a Unified Shona that could be used in the whole of the country, especially for educational purposes and set up a Language Commission. Cinie was asked to be part of this Commission together with Dr Clement Doke of the University of Witwatersrand, Father Barnes (English Church) and Father Burbridge (Roman Catholic).⁴³

In lieu of her role on this Committee detailed correspondence of the minutiae of linguistic and orthographic jargon is found. There were letters to and from amongst others Werner Eiselen (Prof of Bantu languages at the University of Stellenbosch), Prof Meinhof (a German linguist, known for his study of African languages), and Prof Westermann (International Institute of African Languages & Cultures, London).

40 A.A. Louw answers a correspondence from Rev. R. Kilgar on 19 April 1917 with regards to the Manual, as following: "In reply to your enquiry as to a "Manual of Chikaranga" by C.S. Louw, I am privileged to say that my wife, and faithful co-translator of the Scriptures, is the Author." [NGKSAA, KS 901]

41 [NGKSAA KS 907/1, October 1917].

42 Elliott– C.S Louw, July 1919 [NGKSAA, KS 907].

43 Detailed correspondences pertaining to the planned activities of this Committee is found in KS 907/2 [NGKSAA].

These letters pertained to very practical and linguistic issues, as can be seen in some of the following examples:

Dear Mrs Louw. At your request I have asked Prof. Meinhof to advise you in connection with a Karanga orthography suitable for all literature in this language ... the above proposals are not to be looked upon as hard and fast system, which forbids any alternative solution. We would merely impress upon you the necessity of building up your orthography by the simplest means and of avoiding any symbols which might tend to make reading difficult for Karanga children and the printing expensive.⁴⁴

And from the *International Institute of African Languages & Cultures* in London:

Dear Madam,

At the request of Professor Westermann I beg to enclose herewith a copy of the Report on the orthography of Chikaranga, which he hopes will be of use to you. He asks me to say that he will very glad to hear from you again and to discuss any further points that may arise.⁴⁵

Dr Doke of the University of Witwatersrand who was also asked to be on the language Commission would have travelled to Southern Rhodesia in 1929. Cinie wrote a letter to him sharing her correspondence with Prof Meinhof and Dr Eiselen. She also shares her questions and their replies with Dr Doke.⁴⁶

In her correspondence with Father Barnes, her fellow on the Commission, the seriousness with which she looked at the task is evident.⁴⁷

To my mind we should seek to produce a comprehensive orthography for the group of dialects or languages, with symbols for the maximum, not the minimum, of sounds peculiar to the whole group. This is another reason why the velars should be represented

44 Prof Eiselen– C.S Louw, August 1928.[NGKSAA, KS 907]

45 Westermann– C.S Louw, 4 October 1928 [NGKSAA, KS 907]

46 C.S Louw - Doke, 29 January 1929. [NGKSAA, KS 907]

47 C.S Louw - Barnes, 6 May 1929. [NGKSAA, KS 907]

adequately and by their own symbols. A child in any one of the three or four dialects would then learn the whole comprehensive alphabet, whether the sounds are all found in his own dialect or not, and so be able to read the books from the different language areas. In writing books, or in their own schools, the Missionaries would then use the symbols which apply to their own dialect only, and those which are common to all.

The work of the Language Commission was seen as a success as seen in this letter from Prof Westermann to Father Barnes at St Augustine's Mission at Penhalonga.⁴⁸

I have in my various visits to Africa seen what it means to unite several dialects into one for purposes of literature, and I can only congratulate you most heartily on the complete success your Committee has achieved.

The detailed correspondence filled with linguistic jargon between these scholars is one aspect of research on the linguistic endeavors that missionaries engaged with in a very professional manner that still invites further consideration. The DRC Archives is truly a treasure for further research on this matter.⁴⁹

The work of the Commission, however, was not only received favourably but was also met with critique. The political atmosphere of Zimbabwe in these times was also wary of European influence. The atmosphere in this country can be picked up in the article of Cripps in the *Rhodesian Methodist*. Cripps quotes the South African writer Sol Plaatje who said:

If the Government is willing to subsidize, at the Native expense, the proposed hybridization of Bantu languages, to please a group of white literary enthusiasts, what is there to prevent another set of Europeans coming forward and scrapping every Bantu book in favour of another white man's notion of the Native language and spelling?

48 Westermann – Barnes, 10 March 1930. [NGKSAA, KS 907]

49 An example is [KS 917] that is filled with detailed orthographic notes, comments and letters.

Cripps hopes that young Africans from Mashonaland would say something of

that version of the dialects of Mashonaland arbitrarily unified and stubbornly superimposed wherewith a tiny would-be scientific European group has recently provided them ... As a convinced believer in an Africa for Africans, I appeal to my fellow-believers, whether African or European, against this new white man's language devised for African dwellers in Mashonaland, a lingo which has one feature at least pen to very serious objection indeed – its employment of a freak-symbol alphabet”⁵⁰

In the correspondence between members of Language Committee and other documents it is picked up that the orthography that “added” letters to the Roman alphabet was not always received positively by the native speakers and that concessions had to be made. Linguistic endeavors like this one that Cinie participated in tread the fragile spaces of colonial expansion and local dialects, where all the role players had good arguments for their own perspectives on these processes.

Cinie as theologian

“... en hul taal was ongeschreven en moest opgeheven worden en een grammatika hebben, en de Bijbel moes vertaald worden”⁵¹

As a missionary with the main aim of bringing people into the Christian faith, Cinie with her linguistic abilities had a good understanding of the theological implications of translations. She took the initiative to correspond on issues in translation that she found problematic, especially regarding the translation of the word “God”. This issue was near to her heart. In letters from 1907, and especially 1915 and 1916 one can follow the logic of her thoughts, and her opinion over against that of some other missionaries and translators.

50 Arthur. S. Crisps, “A White Man's Native Language (For Mashonaland)” in *The Rhodesian Methodist*, 1932, [NGKSAA, KS 907]

51 *Verslag van de Jaarvergadering van de Vrouwen Zending Bond, 11-15 September 1912, Stellenbosch* [“... and their language was unwritten and had to be uplifted and a grammar formed, and the Bible had to be translated”]

Already in 1907 in a correspondence with Van Oordt, he writes that he finds it “banje jammer” (very sad) that missionaries use the word *Modzimo* for God.⁵² In his opinion *Modzimo* in the imagination (*denkbeeld*) of the local people refers to a spirit in a “heathen” way and can even be a bad Spirit that has to be appeased by sacrifices. He opts for the word *Muali* and gives a lengthy motivation.

Cinie corresponded with A.R Kemp who was a missionary amongst the Zulus. From his letter we can deduce that she questioned him with regard to his translation of “God” in the Zulu language.⁵³

In reading his paraphrasing and his answers to her letter we find her inquisitive mind trying to figure out the way forward in her own translation work. Cinie asked Kemp: “What is the origin of the word we use in Zulu for the Supreme Being, and how did it become to be used?”; what was his objections to adopting the native name for their Great Spirit as Creator? She also asked about the writing of proper names, and as to the use of the plural personal form for the Persons of the Trinity. The correspondence was of a detailed intellectual character between peers. Kemps ends his letter with comment that he is interested to hear when her grammar is being published and will be printed in the book market and that he is keen to get a copy.

In correspondence from Rev R. Kilgar (London) and Rev Geo Lowe (Johannesburg) of the *British and Foreign Bible Society* with regards to Bible translations, one can deduce the importance for Cinie her queries regarding the translation of the word “God” was important for her. Lowe wrote as an intermediary between Rev Kilgar and Cinie and it seems it was after a Mission Conference was held:

I understand that Dr. Kilgar has written to you directly in reply to the enquiries you asked me to make ... and I realise that the result of the discussion on the term GOD will bring you some measure of disappointment.⁵⁴

52 JF van Oordt- CS Louw [NGKSAA, KS 907]

53 AR Kemp – CS Louw, 11 April 1914 [NGKSAA, KS 901]

54 G Lowe – CS Louw, 8 September 1915 [NGKSAA, KS 901]

Lowe shares that he was an advocate of an entirely new term that would “dissociated in the native mind from any impure ideas”. He recognised that the Conference has resulted in some measure of disappointment to herself and the mission. Lowe reflects to her what high standing her husband (A.A. Louw) had and how beloved he is by many, even going so far as to relate “some of us may perhaps touch the hem of his garment ... but we can never hope to occupy the throne which he fills in the hearts of all those who were brought into contact with him at the Conference.”⁵⁵ Was this a way to soften the fact that they did not agree with her argument?

It is in light of this communication of Geo Lowe that the earlier letter of Rev Kilgar is to be understood:

Mr Lowe tells me that you have laid before him several questions with regard to the word for “God”.

As an old translator myself I have special sympathy with you in your difficulties.

After all what we must endeavour to find is such a word for “God” as will eventually, if not at once, convey the thought of a personal God to Whom we can apply the name of Father; but it is often after many generations that the higher thoughts become part of the word. The best illustration of this is the Greek word *theos* [written by hand] which only after Christ and St. Paul got filled out with those highest ideas which we now associate with the word. Most missionaries have followed St. Paul in thus using a non-Christian word, and leaving it to the teaching of the Holy Spirit to fill out the higher ideas. In noted the article in “The International Review of Missions” on “The Gospel to Primitive Peoples” to which you refer. Sometimes it is inevitable to use a foreign word with a native prefix, but most missionaries only use this as a last resort.⁵⁶

He ends his letter by asking her to keep to the consensus decision:

Perhaps you will think that I am merely offering advice when I suggest that if at all possible, you might graciously concede in order

55 G.Lowe – CS Louw, 8 September 1915 [NGKSAA, KS 901]

56 Kilgar – CS Louw, 31 July 1915 [NGKSAA, KS 901]

to retain perfect harmony; but I do so feeling the responsibility which lies upon me as Editorial Superintendent, and recognising the magnificent work which you and your colleagues have done in connexion with the translation of the Bible.

In Cinie's handwriting (without a date) there are notes that contains her own argument for a specific translation of God.⁵⁷ There are an English and Afrikaans copy. In order to appreciate her logic and theological and linguistic insights this will be shared in detail. The question she asks is "*Mgari* or *Mudzima*?"

Her objections to using the *Mgari* to express word God are following [the underlining of words reflects that of her handwriting in the original document]:

For the word "God" as used in the Bible, we do not want a proper name, but a class word, a common noun; which could include all worship beings or objects. (therefore not equivalent for Jehova but Elohim, Deus, Theos)

Now *Mgari* is the name for a particular heathen deity or supreme Being, it is no class word, which could be applied to all gods.

Cinie then gives some examples in English to motivate her point. Her second objection is:

The Christianised nations of the Bible did not take the name of the heathen Supreme Being or Great God for the true God. If they did, we would have had "Zeus" used in the Greek New Testament" (or Jupiter in Latin) ... instead of the common terms "Theos" and "Deus", used for all their gods alike.

So also "*Mudsimu*" is the class name for the gods (great and small) of the Vakaranga. Neither did the more modern Christian nations use the former heathen name for the "God" of their religion. Nor has this been done among the Christianised Bantu tribes South of the Zambezi, or amongst most of the animistic peoples, I believe.

57 [NGKSAA, KS 917]

Cinie refers to the work of Rev Albertus Kruyt and what he wrote in the reports of the Edinburg Conference in 1910.

when we tried to teach the people who God is, calling him by their name, they generally contradicted us, saying that their god was not such as we described, and they proved this by telling stories from their own mythology.

Therefore, as missionaries they were obliged to find a new word for “God”. She shares that in her experience talking about *Mğari* to the Vakaranga in the Victoria district they will say: “We know all about Mgari better than you. We must tell you about him. What you say about the true God does not apply to Mğari. He lives in a cave in the Matopos, and is a deceiver, how can he represent your God?”

Her third point of argument is that:

By adding the attributes of the true God of the Bible to those of the heathen conception of the Supreme Being of Creation is to create a half-heathen worship, like that of the Samaritans of old.

Cinie wanted a new God to be preached not “an improved edition” and just add to what they already now about *Mğari*. She gives example that Paul preached to the Athenians not about their “own Lord Zeus”, but the unknown “Theos”.

Her fourth point is that if *Mğari* would be made a class name she can already foresee already, e.g. “The Lord your God is God of Gods” – “The Lord your Mğari is the Mğari of Mğaris”. She motivates her preference for *midsimu* or *vadsimu*, this is their gods from whom they expect protection and they sacrifice to. For Cinie this is “an excellent point of contact” for the new religion for the preaching of the “unknown god”. The Mukaranga has many gods – the missionary brings to him the mudzimu who stands alone, above his own “midsimu”.

“Already he has a “midsimu” different in rank and influence – now the missionary introduces to him the true “midsimu”, the one hitherto unknown to him, higher than them all – the god of gods.”

Cinie admits that “If the word “Midsimu” should be considered inadequate to express the greatness of the true God, I would frankly admit that such

is the case, but the same argument may be brought against any of the names used for “God” in any other language”. As example she reminds that Baal and Astarte were also called Elohim. She does not regard the fact that *Midsimu* as in the first place the spirit of an ancestor as a theological difficulty, referring to the work of Werner, Duffy MacDonald and Dr Hetherwick. For her “this idea of God being the “great ancestor” is by no means foreign to the Bible itself” as in seen in Acts 17:29 and Luke 3:38:

there seems to me no better point of contact for the great truth of the indwelling of the God in the heart, than their belief in the “Midsumu” taking possession of the relatives, who fires himself up entirely to the power and control of the spirit of a deceased ancestor.

It is unclear when she wrote this argument but in the report of the Conference Commission for the year ending March 1916, point XII of the notes relate that the Commission opted for *Mğari*:

De groote meerderheid syn ten gunste van Mğari n. 4 tegen I ongeveer. Anderen zyn voor de eene naam zoowel als de andere.⁵⁸

The above is a glimpse into the active mind of a woman who was able to integrate linguistic and theological questions within her vocation as a missionary. The scope of this article does not lend itself to the further investigation of her theologically freighted linguistic insights, which is a trajectory that invites research for the future.

Honors and legacy

In keeping with the celebration of the far-flung work that was initiated by *De Kaapsche Kerk*, Cinie is an example of a woman who made the missionary work of the Dutch Reformed Church visible not just in the geographical area of Southern Africa but also abroad.

Cinie and her husband A.A. Louw became Honorary Life Governors of the *British and Foreign Bible Society*.⁵⁹ Her work was recognised with financial

58 We read in a report “Van de Konferentie Commissie Voor’t Jaar eindigende 31 Maart 2016”: (XII) Mğari-Mudsimu [KS 918]

59 Rev Arthur Wilkenson – Rev & Mrs A.A. Louw, 16 April 1934 [NGKSAA, KS 901]

help regarding typewriter and printer from the Phelps-Stokes Fund and the Carnegie Corporation of America.⁶⁰

Her son A.A Louw jnr. who joined them in their translating endeavor and was responsible for the revision and final publication of the Unified Shona Bible reacted to a letter from the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. On 16 September 1953 the General Missionary Secretary wrote to ds WA Landman of the decision that

Op die gepaste wyse die dank en waardering van die Moederkerk sal ontvang vir die reus aandeel wat hulle gehad het in die vertaling van die Bybel in die taal van die Vakaranga,⁶¹

Andre Louw jr. answered that they just need to change the wording to “... vir die vertaling van die Bybel in Chikaranga en in Verenigde Shona” with a side note that he finds that writers and orators do not always understand the difference between the translation done by his Father and Mother in Chikaranga and his in United Shona.⁶²

Cinie Louw died of cancer after long and painful suffering. Crowds were at her funeral and letters of condolences streamed in for her husband and remaining family. There were also articles honoring her life in different newspapers in South Rhodesia as well as in South Africa. A few things stand out in these tributes. First, according to the conventions of the day, Cinie was never called by name. She was “Mev. (Ds.) A.A. Louw, Suster van Dr. Malan”⁶³ en “Wyle Mev. Ds. A.A Louw”⁶⁴. Secondly that she was recognised for both her person and her talents. Her linguistic abilities were recognised but also that she was a person that everybody felt at home with

Wat my meeste getref het, as ek by haar aan huis was, was haar vriendelikheid. Sy het ’n mens nooit laat voel dat sy die gade is van

60 [NGKSSA, PPV 145]

61 [NGKSAA, KS 901] [*To receive thanks and appreciation in a fitting way from the Mother Church for the great contribution they made to the translation of the Bible in Vakaranga*]

62 [NGKSAA, KS 901] [*for the translation in Vakaranga and Unified Shona*]

63 *Die Burger*, 28 Junie 1935

64 *Die Kerkbode*, 24 Julie 1935

die hoof van die Sending nie. Sy was so natuurlik en 'n mens het dadelik tuis gevoel in haar huis.⁶⁵

As Harold “Swift” of the Ugandan Protectorate wrote:

Throughout Southern Rhodesia, as well as further afield, Mrs Louw's name was held in the greatest possible esteem, for it was the name of one who had achieved so much by following an aim unswervingly, and that aim, I take it, was to dedicate her outstanding linguistic talents to ensure that the Karanga Bible would be worthily translated, and hence that its rich message would be made available for the Africans to whom you had jointly devoted your lives. Her achievement will always be a monument to such devotion, to her tenacity of purposes.⁶⁶

Cinie Louw was a multifaceted woman. Her sharp intellect and energy can be marveled at if one looks at the many notebooks with her handwriting painstakingly writing out the Bible text in Karanga.⁶⁷ Her curiosity and eagerness to learn and navigate an academic discipline, which she was not schooled in, in such a manner is truly remarkable. In her life we find the story of a missionary whose linguistic abilities and theological insight opened up worlds of reading for the people of Mashonaland and beyond.

According to her husband the Huguenot Seminary wanted to bestow on her the title of Doctor but it was not within their rights to do so at that time:

Daar was sprake by die Hugenote Seminary om haar die Doktors titel te gee as hulle maar net die reg had. In plaats daarvan is aan haar 'n Diploma van erkenning gegee vir wat vir die Sending gedoen het.⁶⁸

Maybe it is not too late?

65 *Die Kerkbode*, 28 Augustus 1935. [*What struck me most was her kindness. She was a person that never made me feel that she was the spouse of the head of Mission. She was so natural and one felt immediately at home in her house.*]

66 Director of Education of Uganda Protectorate, Kampala, 26 Jan 1936 [NGKSAA, PPV 145]

67 [NGKSAA, KS 902, 903, 904] contains handwritten notebooks and [KS 905, 906] typewritten translations.

68 Enige besonderhede omtrent Wyle Mev AA Louw Sr, written by A.A. Louw [NGKSAA, PPV 145]