

## ***Introduction: Print Culture in Southern Africa***

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Research into print culture studies in Africa has largely been dominated by histories of how European missionaries, colonial administrators and traders brought the book and literacy to Africa, by what Isabel Hofmeyr describes as ‘the idea of the imperial gift’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Africa has been marginalised within the discipline of book history, and has been either omitted or assigned only the briefest mention in the major book history companions, dictionaries and readers, while histories of British publishers routinely overlook their profitable enterprises in Africa.<sup>2</sup> As a result, a number of gaps and silences remain. This collection addresses some important issues that have been widely neglected; the focus here is on black southern African writing, publishing and readerships, in contrast with the often white-dominated narrative of print culture, even within African scholarship. Print culture holds important implications for questions of identity, nationality and colonial or postcolonial politics, and, as David Johnson states, there is a need for close attention to ‘how “print, text and book cultures” have functioned and continue to function within South Africa’s vastly unequal political economy’.<sup>3</sup>

Drawing together interdisciplinary research and diverse methodologies, this journal special issue encompasses a range of perspectives, including literary studies, anthropology, publishing studies, the history of the book, art history and information science. Many of the articles are based on previously unexamined archives and collections, for example authors’, publishers’ and state archives as well as oral history research. They are, thus, evidence-based

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\* We would like to acknowledge the excellent support of the *JSAS* editorial board in the publication of this special issue, and our particular thanks go to Dennis Walder, the in-house editor of this volume, for his extensive help and constructive advice at every stage.

<sup>1</sup> I. Hofmeyr, ‘The Globe in the Text: Towards a Transnational History of the Book’ *African Studies* 64: 1 (July 2005), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> See C. Davis and D. Johnson (eds), *The Book in Africa: Critical Debates* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1-6.

<sup>3</sup> D. Johnson, ‘Review of Andrew van der Vlies (ed.), *Print, Text and Book Cultures in South Africa*’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 3 (2014), pp. 641-3.

histories that uncover previously unacknowledged or unheard voices and that counter the anecdotal nature of much research on African publishing and print culture.<sup>4</sup>

This work has its origins in the British Academy project ‘Print Culture and Publishing in South Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’ (2012-16), based at Oxford Brookes University and the University of Pretoria, and led by the guest editors of this volume. This project promoted research into the emergence and constitution of reading publics in the country, the trans-regional networks of print, and the impact of the transnational book trade. A programme of colloquia and seminars in the UK and South Africa brought together international scholars from both regions, as fora for multi-disciplinary research. Many of the articles in this issue are based on papers presented in the final three conferences of the project: Print Culture and Colonisation in Africa at the University of Cape Town (May 2015), The Annual Book History and Print Culture Seminar at the University of Pretoria (May 2016), and the Print Culture and Publishing in Africa’ colloquium at Oxford Brookes University (September 2016).

This issue is organised around three closely-related themes. Firstly, it presents original research into the formation of reading publics and the impact of reading cultures, uncovering obscure but important reading communities and circuits of book distribution and reception. A second theme is the relationship between print and politics. Given the inequalities resulting from colonial, apartheid and more recent forms of governance, there is a particular focus on the networks of power: how control over the production and circulation of printed books has shaped literary and cultural development, how it has regulated access to publishing platforms, and the collusion among education departments and publishing monopolies. The third theme is transnational print culture, and the role of publishers as agents and gatekeepers, with particular attention to how the economic, ideological and political control exercised by publishers in Europe and America has shaped literature and society in southern Africa. With respect to each of these themes, the articles contribute to current debates and provide an overview of emerging trends in African print culture studies.

### ***Reading Communities and Circuits***

The proclamation of a free press in 1829, the abolition of slavery in 1834, and the granting of representative government in 1853 validated Enlightenment ideas and liberal values in early

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<sup>4</sup> See E. Le Roux, ‘Book History in the African World: The State of the Discipline’, *Book History*, 15 (2012), pp. 248–251.

to mid-nineteenth century Cape Town. Yet little is known about their reception and circulation, or their material traces.<sup>5</sup> Archie Dick uses a wide range of primary sources to throw light on the formation of reading publics and reading cultures at the Cape. The works of Enlightenment authors were read in Dutch, English, French, and German, facilitated by the transnational print networks that serviced readers, bookshops, and libraries.

Archie Dick's article reveals some of the methodological challenges of investigating these multilingual reading cultures. In addition to Dutch and German books, English-language reprints produced cheaply in Ireland and shipped to the Cape included Enlightenment authors, who were listed in the Genadendal Library catalogue of 1824. But pamphlets carrying extracts from some of these authors were also translated into Dutch and printed on local missionary presses for distribution. They probably had a stronger impact on non-elite readers in the countryside, although this still needs to be verified. The debate about compensation between slave owners and those who supported abolition raises the challenge of interpreting Enlightenment texts. For example, the Dutch and English issues of *De Zuid Afrikaan* used quotations about private property from John Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government* to defend slave owners' views about compensation. Slaves were known to hire people to read the newspapers to keep themselves informed of the latest developments. How they interpreted Locke's ideas as a result of the public reading and group discussion that ensued would be interesting, but would require further examination. Despite these limitations, the evidence marshalled in Dick's article demonstrates that the Enlightenment ideas and liberal values that inspired democratic developments were known to both educated and common readers at the Cape.

In her article, Hlonipha Mokoena also addresses the challenges of probing reading impact and interpretation. Emphasising the multilingual dimension of the Cape's early reading cultures, she identifies Magma Fuze's book *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona* and Fuze's articles in the Zulu-English bilingual newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal* as sites where mission convert readers or *amakholwa* could re-imagine the Zulu diaspora by reconstructing their stories of origins, migrations, and history. As with the missionaries themselves, newly-literate Zulu readers had to grapple with the meanings of words in

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<sup>5</sup> See A.L. Dick, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012); A.L. Dick, 'Book history, Library History and South Africa's Reading Culture', *South African Historical Journal*, 55 (2006), pp. 33-45.

different languages, and with translations of the Bible. As a result of language and hermeneutic uncertainties the *amakholwa* wrote about their dispersal in ways that were similar to the migration of the Jews. Dick and Mokoena's articles deepen our understanding of the range, impact, and interpretive techniques at work in nineteenth century South Africa's reading cultures.

### ***The Politics of Print***

Khwezi Mkhize revisits the role of John Tengo Jabavu and the constitution of black citizenship in the colonial public sphere in the late nineteenth century. Like Mokoena, Mkhize examines how black identity could be constituted within the pages of an influential newspaper, in this case Jabavu's *Imvo Zabantsundu* ('Native Opinion'). Drawing upon a broad body of work on the 'black Victorians', Mkhize argues that the black intelligentsia had to find their place in relation to 'the textual order that defined the British settlement in the Cape colony', and that a significant site of such identity formation could be found in the pages of *Imvo*. This elite group had to straddle and negotiate a number of contradictory positions, including the tensions between Englishness and a South African identity, decisions about the medium of communication – in this case, English or Zulu – and the contradictions of liberalism. While liberals prided themselves on their universality, Mkhize shows that in historically specific situations this ideology was used to exclude various groups of people and to disavow imperial responsibility towards British colonial subjects. Drawing extensively on extracts from *Imvo* as well as previously unexamined letters by Jabavu and a biography written by his son, Don Davidson Jabavu, Mkhize seeks to re-inscribe black agency in defining their own identities and place in Victorian colonial society. His work also raises interesting questions about how applicable Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community' is to colonial contexts, in which identities and loyalties were often contradictory and even fractured, and to cases where the shared readership is a very small group of people.

Beth le Roux also examines contestations over the control of the publishing process, but in a different context. Shifting the frame to the apartheid period of the mid-1970s, she considers the publishing experience of a debut female author, Miriam Tlali, with a liberal-oppositional publishing house, Ravan Press. Tlali's account of her relationship with Ravan has been described in very negative terms. Le Roux sets out the accepted narrative of Tlali's publishing experience, as detailed in a number of author interviews, against seemingly contradictory evidence emerging from the publisher's archives, contemporary reviews, and oral interviews with other key agents. Important issues of gatekeeping and access to print

culture are raised; while Ravan Press had very little access to capital or mainstream book trade networks, they still held a certain amount of power in making publishing decisions. The broader context of relationships between white publishers and black authors is considered. Le Roux's paper also raises questions about the methods used to write literary history. She notes that the problems of reliability associated with historical sources are important when tracing literary and publishing histories. In particular, she argues that the discourse of authenticity, in which the author's view is seen as somehow more true and less filtered by commercial motives than the publisher's, is problematic, and that an attempt should be made to capture a greater diversity of voices and views.

### ***Transnational Publishing Histories***

The transnational book trade is examined in the final four articles, which focus on the cultural, political and economic impact of mission publishing and commercial publishing in Southern Africa from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, with reference to specific author and publisher case studies. These shed light on the publishing networks operating in Southern Africa and the interventions of these publishers as intermediaries, gatekeepers and book designers.

Lize Kriel's study of the typographic design and publication of Carl Hoffmann's writing by the Berlin Missionary Society identifies transnational publishing models that were quite distinct from the 'transnational textual citizenship' defined by Isabel Hofmeyr in relation to British Protestant mission publishing in 19<sup>th</sup> century Africa.<sup>6</sup> With reference to Hoffmann's career as author and printer and his 'ethnographic harvesting of folktales', later published by the Berlin Missionary Society for the German mission market, Kriel shows that the books were targeted at what Shafquat Towheed terms a racially and geographically 'segregated readership':<sup>7</sup> specific books were designed and published for African Christians and others, characterised by the distinctive Fraktur typeface that contributed to their exclusive 'Germanness', being directed specifically to German readers in both Europe and Africa.

Corinne Sandwith's paratextual history of the various editions of Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* analyses the mutating form of the book 'on its journey through time and space': as

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<sup>6</sup> I. Hofmeyr, 'The Globe in the Text', p. 98

<sup>7</sup> S. Towheed, 'Two Paradigms of Literary Production: The Production, Circulation and Legal Status of Rudyard Kipling's Departmental Ditties and Indian Railway Library Texts', in Robert Fraser and Mary Hammond (eds), *Books without Borders, Vol. II, Perspectives from South Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 133.

mission text, British colonial text, French colonial text and postcolonial text, each edition offering a different interpretation of the book, and each ascribing a different genre categorisation. Charting its history from the first Sesotho edition in 1925, published by the Morija Sesuto Book Depot in Basutoland (now Lesotho), to its subsequent translations and publications in Britain and France, Sandwith's investigation provides new insights into the influence of literary power-relations on the constitution of African literature. Her evidence problematises Gérard Genette's view of paratext as a 'threshold of interpretation',<sup>8</sup> providing instead accounts of African readers responding to *Chaka* in ways that were not invited by the book's paratext, and she also counters Genette's assumption of authorial control over a book's material form, revealing instead that Mofolo was entirely 'absent from the editorial and publishing processes and the enunciations of the paratext'.

Caroline Davis's case study of Bessie Head's turbulent encounters with publishers and literary agents during the publication of *A Question of Power* in 1973 provides insights into the conditions of transnational literary production for African women in this period. With reference to new and formerly overlooked archival records, Davis recounts how Head struggled to gain either recognition or financial remuneration in the publication of this novel, and she argues that the author encountered a subtle form of literary exclusion, what Bourdieu terms a 'negative symbolic coefficient', by which she was relegated to a second-rate position in the literary hierarchy at each stage of the publishing and review processes.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, she claims that the paratexts of the original London and New York editions of the novel led to Head being branded a mad African woman writer, a marketing label that she greatly resented. Head's fierce battles and fraught dealings with many of her publishers and literary agents have previously been attributed to her volatile and fragile mental state, but this article argues that they can be interpreted as her response to severe difficulties in forging a literary career. This attention to the unequal power relationships inherent in African literary publishing, especially of women authors, echoes the focus of Le Roux's article on Miriam Tlali.

The changing profile of Penguin Books in Africa during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the subject of Alistair McCleery's article. Beginning with Penguin's original ventures in West Africa in the post-second world war period, when the region was predominantly regarded as a sales outlet for Penguin and Pelican books published in London, he goes on to chart the

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<sup>8</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* Trans. Richard Nice (Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 93.

establishment of the paternalistic West African series in the 1950s that aimed to guide Africans towards self-improvement and self-rule. By contrast, the Penguin African Library, established in 1961 under Ronald Segal's editorship, was a far more radical venture, publishing texts that were a key part of the anti-apartheid and anti-colonial struggles of Southern Africa, despite frequently being banned in South Africa. McCleery demonstrates that as a trade publisher, distributing its books through book shops, Penguin Books' business model in Africa was initially strikingly different from other major British educational publishing firms, which were reliant on the African school book market. However, after Penguin's merger with the educational publisher Pearson Longman in 1970, the company changed direction rapidly, resulting in the closure of the Penguin African Library in 1975. Presenting new archival research, this study evaluates how Penguin balanced ideological, commercial, and political pressures, and shows, as Phaswane Mpe attests, the significance of transnational interchange in providing a means of publication to authors and texts which would otherwise be censored in their own countries.<sup>10</sup>

Interrogating existing theories and models for understanding national and transnational print culture in Southern Africa, these four case studies point to some of the complexities of international publishing, demonstrating that while European-African literary partnerships and publishing ventures were in many respects highly productive, they also reveal the existence of striking inequalities in the transnational cultural and literary industry, manifested in the asymmetrical relationships between African authors and their European and American publishers, and even in the books' paratexts.

## **Conclusion**

The articles in this collection provide new approaches to national and international print culture in Southern Africa, using empirical and archive-based evidence to investigate the development of reading communities and the constitution of public spheres, the role of print in shaping religious and political identities, and the impact of trans-regional publishing interactions on African literature and culture. Challenging disciplinary boundaries and methodological frameworks, this work reveals how Southern African literature and culture has been shaped by the material processes of textual production, circulation and reception. Indeed, these articles shed light on the historical and entrenched disparities in print culture –

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<sup>10</sup> P. Mpe, 'The Role of the Heinemann African Writers Series in the Development and Promotion of African Literature', *African Studies*, 58 (1999), pp. 105-122.

racial, linguistic, gender-based and geographical – and in so doing help explain some of the present inequalities in global knowledge access and production.