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## On Publishing Diversity in South Africa and the United Kingdom

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Cécile COTTENET

## On Publishing Diversity in South Africa and the United Kingdom

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Cécile COTTENET

## On Publishing Diversity in South Africa and the United Kingdom

1 The following essays in this special feature were originally presented in 2012 at an international conference on “Race, Ethnicity and Publishing” organized by the Laboratoire d’Etudes et de Recherche sur le Monde Anglophone (Aix-Marseille Université) and sponsored by the McNeil Center for Early American Studies (University of Pennsylvania). As co-organizers and scholars in American Literature and American Studies, Sophie Vallas and I had certainly not anticipated the international scope of the excellent contributions we were given to hear in Aix that Spring, nor could we have hoped for a more genuine and fruitful dialogue over the questions of publishing in the English-speaking world. The following contributions intersect with, and develop, issues of interest to scholars attempting to bridge the fields of African American studies and publishing.<sup>1</sup> Without falling prey to unsavory U.S. imperialism, it should be noted that the essays to some extent connect with U.S. political and economic situations—in the field of multicultural children’s book publishing (Laura Atkins) and concerning the influence of the Black Power movement in the 1960s (Philippa Ireland)—as well as with American print culture scholarship, most notably in reference to John K. Young’s seminal study of the Black writer/ white publisher dialectic.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it seemed appropriate in this introduction to suggest possible parallels with United States book history when they occurred. Yet as we shall see, and as Beth le Roux noted in her 2012 bibliographic and historiographical survey, “the assumptions and models of Western book history cannot be applied unaltered in an African context” (262).

### Diversity matters

2 As Paul Gilroy asserts, “The imperial and colonial past continues to shape political life in the overdeveloped-but-no-longer-imperial countries” (Gilroy 2), to which one might add that a colonial history necessarily impacts cultural and economic life as well. If this is true of Britain, it is presumably all the more so of formerly colonized countries such as South Africa. Considering South African histories both under apartheid and in the democratic period, as well as publishing strategies in the U.K. both during the liberation decade of the 1960s and the age of multiculturalism, we cannot fail to see the different conceptions of “minority” at work in South African, England and Wales. The statistics issued from the 2011 Census for both the U.K. and South Africa highlight the degree of disconnection between numerical minorities and cultural minorities: while figures show that in Wales and England, the largest population group remained overwhelmingly white, comprising 86% of the total population,<sup>3</sup> for the same period statistics for South Africa classified 79.2 % of the population as Black, 11.4% as Coloured/ and /or Asian and Indian, and less than 10% (8.9%) as White.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while the numerical and cultural minorities (BME – Black and minority ethnic) overlap in the U.K., in South Africa numerical majority and dominant cultural models do not, which, as Beth le Roux concludes, further complicates our – Western-centered—understanding of “minority publishing” and renders even more striking the particular dynamics of black writer/ white publisher.

3 The notion of diversity encompasses the problematic concepts of race and ethnicity, understood from a constructionist perspective as social and historical constructs, and not as essentialized groups or categories. The porosity and shifting nature of these categories, and the role of segregationist policies in the racial and/ or ethnic “division” of nations, is attested in both the U.K. and South Africa. The transformations of the New Beacon Books catalogue examined by Philippa Ireland are symptomatic of the “ethnic turn” in social sciences of the late 1960s and 1970s, as the publisher’s list developed from mostly Caribbean literature by Caribbean writers, set in the Caribbean context in the 1960s, to an emphasis on the Black British experience in the 1980s. As for South Africa, while “classification on the basis of ethnic

labels” had “been the rule” since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hamilton 30), apartheid clearly divided the nation along racial lines, and the assumptions made by several scholars that post-apartheid politics would diminish racial solidarity and foreground ethnicity as the central divide do not seem wholly warranted. As stated by Yonatan Tesfaye Fessha in *Ethnic Diversity and Federalism: Constitution Making in South African and Ethiopia*, the ANC’s victory in the election of 1994, and the urgent need to build a common national identity have rather seemed to downplay the ethnic factor.<sup>5</sup> In terms of demographics, the South African population can be described as being made up of four “racial groups,” also referred to as “population groups” – the Black African, the White, the Colored, the Indian or Asian– and 10 ethnic segments.

4 The post-apartheid regime’s commitment to non-racialism, and the 1996 constitution’s preliminary recognition of the nation’s diversity have not erased the need to name and classify.<sup>6</sup> The struggles over ethnic identity are inherent in the debates over language, which as described in both Jana Möller’s and Beth le Roux’s essays are—fundamentally—debates over ethnicity. Language is not only an identity marker, it is also a cultural marker and as sociolinguist Joshua Fishman has noted, “The language and ethnicity link is strongest where it is energized by collective grievances between apparently contrasted collectivities, particularly when the linkage is fostered by leaders who can arouse language convictions in connection with the mobilization of potential followers.”(Fishman 161)

### **Publishing history: what it does, what it can do**

5 The contributions purport to shed light on the complex negotiations involved in the representation of ethnic and racial diversity from the perspective of book history and more specifically, publishing history. In its most recent developments, scholars in this field of study have emphasized the idea that publishing is mediation, a process whereby books are made, marketed, distributed and read. Notwithstanding the different approaches within this field of study – quantitative, material, sociological...—they must of necessity take into account a vast array of forces—economic, sociological or political—that shape the publishing field and articulate author/ publisher relations, the production methods, marketing and distribution of books, as well as the consumer/ buyer and reader of books. Since the 1990s, scholars have, in quite a consensual fashion, adopted the phrase ‘print culture’, which allows for a more global understanding of textual production, and not merely books, as part of social and communication structures, encompassing printing history or questions of bookselling. Publishing history, then, can be seen as one—central—component of print Culture.

6 Publishing history as it is practiced today has built on several scholarly, academic and transnational disciplines, beginning in the late 1950s. Indeed, print culture studies stem from a plural, sociological and historical French tradition, drawing as Robert Darnton did in the 1980s on Robert Escarpit’s 1958 *Sociologie de la littérature* which explored the ways in which literature functions as a social institution, and, later, on Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of the field of cultural production. Bourdieu’s influential concept examines the structuration of the field by specific institutions, while questioning the very process of attributing value to books, per instance through the consecrating function of the publisher’s imprint, or literary prizes.<sup>7</sup> The other French historical tradition, best represented by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L’apparition du livre* (1958), and the four-volume *Histoire de l’édition française* (1982-1986) under the editorship of H-J. Martin, Roger Chartier and Jean-Pierre Vivet, exemplified the influence of quantitative and social history as practiced in the 1960s. The Anglo-American tradition derives from the New Bibliography as practiced by Donald F. McKenzie,<sup>8</sup> who emphasized the degree to which the text is constrained and given deeper meaning by the very material form of the book or support wherein it is “enshrined,”as for example through ways in which a text is laid out and printed on a page. In the 1980s and early 1990s, heeding the call for more attention to be paid to the materiality of texts, textual scholar Jerome McGann<sup>9</sup> in turn has contributed to the ordering of the seemingly chaotic interdisciplinarity of book history. Pointing to the socialization of texts, McGann reminds us that the interpretation of texts always depends on the material constraints—type, margins, paper...—of the book, or what French critic Gérard Genette has described under the term

paratext.<sup>10</sup> Re-entering the debate on the “intentional fallacy” raised by bibliographers and textual editors, McGann, like McKenzie, also underscored the role of non-authorial agents, including editors and publishers, in the building of “thickness” of texts, which should be considered at least almost as essential as the plural intentions of the author to the meaning of texts.

7 Thus, book historians see books as “products of social processes” (Suarez 152), of an economic environment, constrained by both the field in which they are produced, distributed and read, and their material aspects. Books authored by cultural minorities, published by culturally dominant institutions, by definition represent some of the most significantly “constrained” products. Hence it is my belief that book history has much to contribute to minority studies.

8 Partly due to its long interaction with bibliographic scholarship, and to the persistent vision of the predominance of orality in African cultures, which both obliterated the presence of texts and seemed to preclude any form of engagement with written archives, book history has long been concerned only with Western literary canons. Recent efforts to diversify the objects in this scholarly field are highly commendable: the mutual exchange between African American studies, textual scholarship and print culture is forcefully articulated in the collection edited by George Hutchinson and John Kevin Young (2013), as in the collection of essays on *Early African American Print Culture* (2012) that strives to explore non-canonical texts and places an emphasis on the “culture of reprinting,” while re-defining the very nature of African American print culture. Claire Parfait has offered insights into what book history can contribute to African American studies, in particular allowing new and refined consideration of the circulation and sales figures of the body of slave narratives in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that appears to belie general assumptions about the popularity of the genre with US publishers (Cossu-Beaumont and Parfait).

9 Earlier still, the machinery of the postcolonial literary market was—provocatively—deconstructed in 2001 by Graham Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic; Marketing the Margins*. Postulating the premise that postcolonial studies have capitalized on, and commodified, marginality, real or imagined, Huggan sought to examine the strategies developed by postcolonial writers to contend with the realities of “metropolitan economic dominance” (viii) of the Western publishing establishment, addressing W.E.B. DuBois’ notion of the “double consciousness” of writers faced with a dual readership, African and Western. His chapter on the marketing of the cultural other in African English-language literature foregrounds the role played by the almost inescapable anthropological and exoticizing gaze of the Western “tourist” reader, while reminding us that this “gaze,” sustained by the very marketing of the books by European publishers, has long been integrated as part of the authors’ own strategies. As Laura Atkins writes, assumptions and “institutional perceptions of buyers’ sociological and cultural identities, and expectations about how to reach these buyers, all have a major impact on publishing decisions. This also perpetuates deeper cultural and power dynamics.” Huggan’s summary of the marketing approach for the famous African Writers Series published by Heinemann, often “showing symptoms of controlling imperial gaze” (52), dangerously playing “up the anthropological dimensions of literary texts,” thereby doing “little to correct stereotypical views of a romantic Africa of ‘primitive,’ even primordial, tribal existence” (53), provides an interesting – albeit obviously accusatory– example of what paratextual analysis can bring to the study of postcolonial literature.

10 In *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007; 2011) Sarah Brouillette further questioned the self-fashioning of the postcolonial author-figure, subtly dismissing the blunt complicit instrumentalization of their own exoticism by the authors. She also qualifies Huggan’s accusatory stand on the Western market reader, which she perceives as more mythical than historical. Drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of the field of cultural production and moving beyond the sociologist’s conception—grounded in 19<sup>th</sup> century elaboration of cultural fields—of the romantic and ideally autonomous writer, Brouillette contends that the market for postcolonial literature has historically developed “in tandem with general market expansion in the publishing industry” (3), which necessarily affects the positioning of the author in relation

to this – in their case – predominantly Anglo-American industry. This factor should therefore not be neglected in the study of postcolonial author/ publisher relations.

- 11 These two groundbreaking works have since been followed by other remarkable studies, exemplifying the interest in the literary postcolonial marketplace.<sup>11</sup> Another viewpoint is provided by Elizabeth le Roux’s (2013) essay on the state of book history in Africa, which gives ample evidence of the scholarship that has developed on Africa, with South Africa and Nigeria being the most studied countries on the continent. It also points to the gaps that should be addressed more systematically and perhaps more in-depth: publisher profiles, including local publishers, comparative and transnational studies, as well as quantitative data on the publishing industry throughout the continent; it also underlines the lack of attention paid to the material aspects of books, and to the “distribution channels, publicity and marketing, pricing, readership, and impact” (250). As suggested previously, while Beth le Roux acknowledges the growing influence of theoretical models of book history on formerly descriptive narratives of African print cultures in the last ten years, she also cautions against the indiscriminate importation or imposition of assumptions made by book historians about European or North American practices. This is particularly striking with reference to the consumption of texts in African countries, where the practices of reading differ from those in the West: while there, solitary and silent reading is quite commonly observed, African readers have long engaged with print through orality, for instance reading newspapers aloud to groups. Furthermore, the preferred genres also vary, as readers do not seek escapism, often preferring self-help books to fiction. “The symbolic capital attached to books may thus be somewhat different from that found in the West” (262). More importantly, le Roux’s essay is a reminder of how book history intersects with other scholarly fields and can help to challenge and correct cultural stereotypes:

In the African context, too, studies of book history reveal inconsistencies in the received wisdom of an apparently linear shift from orality to literacy and then to print. In various places on the continent...orality was not superseded by but continued in parallel with literacy, while scribal practices continued alongside print. (This has not stopped various scholars from depicting Africa as a land without writing and without history—a “bookless society”—focusing on its oral traditions to the detriment of literacy.) (249)

## Highlights and organization

- 12 In the hope that I may refrain from imposing such Western assumptions, I wish to highlight some issues that run throughout the four essays, which all consider, either indirectly or forthrightly, the imbalance of the ethnic or black author/ white publisher dynamics. The essays outline and probe the workings of specific fields of cultural production, shedding light on the institutions that structure these fields: from foreign, multinational publishers to university presses in South Africa (Möller and le Roux), “black publishers” in Britain between the 1960s and the 1980s (Ireland), editors as driving forces and cultural gatekeepers (le Roux, Atkins), to book fairs and reviewers. The latter partake in the consecrating or canonizing process which is also at stake in Jana Möller, Beth le Roux, Philippa Ireland and Laura Atkins’s case studies. The packaging of publishers’ series, as in the case of the Bantu Treasury Series, is certainly one of the most effective canonizing factors – which wholly validates D.F. McKenzie’s well-known claim that “forms effect meaning.” School board selections, as suggested by Jana Möller, are another such undeniable factor in the consecration of authors. Finally, the fundamental question of diversity representation—in terms of author profiles, content, or languages—is inseparable from a reflection on readerships: who is being primarily targeted by the publishers? Do the latter envisage crossover readerships? To what extent does the figure of the intended reader, be they BME, indigenous African or white, shape the text? How does an author negotiate with the persistent stereotypes ingrained in the public?
- 13 The essays are organized thematically and geographically. The first two contributions, on South African publishing, foreground the specific linguistic divide in South Africa, while the next two essays focus on “minority publishing” in the U.K., from a diachronic perspective, moving from the 1960s through the 1980s to the contemporary period. Thus arranged, the

feature is given a chiasmic structure, from a general survey (Möller) providing an introduction to the context of South African publishing, followed by case studies of three specific publishers, Wits University Press (le Roux), New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture (Ireland), and finally a larger transatlantic and contemporary perspective on multicultural children's publishing. The essays combine different methodological approaches, yet all are resolutely grounded in publishing history.

14 Relying on bibliometrics, Jana Möller's survey of post-apartheid South African publishing lays an emphasis on publishing as a business, stressing the specificities of a market that is dominated by educational publishers. The lack of titles in African languages had been noted as early as the 1930s and 1940s by South African librarians working within the highly segregated system, although these languages were not as yet officially recognized in the country.<sup>12</sup> As Jana Möller aims to demonstrate the hiatus between the Constitution's pledge to actively promote multilingualism, and the actual situation of book publishing in indigenous African languages, it also questions assumptions about reading cultures and the value of books in a nation where access to book culture is contingent on economic status and on literacy. Although in Africa, "the limited ability to read and write has not necessarily prevented engagement with textual culture" (le Roux 262), the question remains as to *how* one engages with this culture, greatly shaped by education and the conception of books as "educational tools." Ultimately, Jana Möller points to the role of literature, and books, in the process of unification and nation building.

15 With its focus on the case study of the Bantu Treasury Series published by Wits University Press, Beth le Roux confirms Jana Möller's observations, as she reveals that the predominance of the schoolbook market, limited readership, scarcity of publishing channels for African-language texts and the dependence on white publishers were already constitutive of South African publishing between the 1930s and 1970s. Her paratextual analysis of the series further vindicates John Spiers's claim that, internationally, "The series . . . has been a national and an international agent of intellectual and cultural exchange. It has been responsible for serial transmission – of texts and of cultural values and production, consciousness and preference, structures and agencies." (Spiers 11) In effect, Beth le Roux suggests that the evolution of the material packaging of the books has indeed transformed the value of the texts, first identifying them as low-cost textbooks, before helping to categorize them as "African-language publishing." This is in no small part due to the "driving force" behind the books, and the original series editor truly stands out as an essential mediator and shaper of cultural values. His own brand of paternalism, exemplified in his tampering with the orthography of African languages in the texts selected for publication, can be compared with Heinemann series editor Alan Hill, who for G. Huggan, sometimes expressed primitivistic views of Africa even as he clamored the "corrective role" of the African Writers Series (Huggan 52-53). Moreover, it is not entirely dissimilar to the exoticist tendencies displayed by some white publishers of the Harlem Renaissance in 1920s America.<sup>13</sup>

16 While Beth le Roux identifies the failure of Black independent publishing ventures in the 1980s in the South African context, Philippa Ireland concentrates on precisely the success of two such ventures in Britain. Spanning the period between the 1960s and the 1980s and largely based on unpublished interviews with the founders of New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture, this third essay recontextualizes the founding and evolution of these houses and attests that, contrary to South Africa where the 1960s had seen the decline of the New African Movement and could be dubbed "the decade of black silence" (le Roux), the 1960s in Britain were clearly a "decade of black emergence." The racial politics of the period and the eminently and avowed political *raison d'être* of the two publishers are clearly stated. Still, although Rastafarianism in the Caribbean and the transatlantic diffusion of the Black Power movement proved favorable to the creation of black publishing houses, Philippa Ireland takes care to remind her readers that British interest in black publishing had roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> Strikingly, the marketing strategies of those houses, with their definite D.I.Y. flavor, are to some extent reminiscent of older practices among black authors, which have recently been resurrected by contemporary self-published *street lit* authors and black imprints: deprived of the conventional channels

of book promotion, neglected by established critics, such minority publishers had no other choice than to resort to word-of-mouth and alternative marketing methods. Examining the historical marketing channels of African American texts, Susanne B. Dietzel has shown that non-conventional venues—parties, beauty-salons, barber shops, pool halls or churches have since the 19<sup>th</sup> century been exploited by self-published authors and minority publishers.

17 Self-publishing is envisaged by Laura Atkins as one of the alternatives to the constraints of mainstream children's publishing. This final contribution, both the testimony of an editor, and a scholarly analysis of the multicultural contemporary children's publishing scene in the U.K., is shaped by a transatlantic perspective. Laura Atkins reflects on the colored author/white publisher relationship after an honest probing into her own shortcomings and cultural assumptions as editor, highlighting once again the role of editors and publishers as cultural gatekeepers and taste-makers. With childhood studies currently blossoming in several parts of the world, it is worth noting that the publication of children's books in a multicultural society inherently raises questions, not only of the means whereby to represent diversity, but also of the particular target audience: how do authors and editors manage to find the balance between tokenism, simplistic representations and the handling of complex issues such as racism? As in the other three contributions, this essay foregrounds the role of readers in shaping content: for whom are these books intended? Is crossover readership merely an ideal, or a reality?

18 I hope that these essays will further demonstrate the vitality of publishing history, and book history more generally, and the extent to which it can contribute to other scholarly disciplines such as ethnic and racial minority studies. Ultimately, what I feel is being established in this special feature, is that publishing is, quintessentially, political...

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## Notes

1 I am particularly indebted to Sarah Brouillette (Carleton University, Ottawa) and Mélanie Joseph-Vilain (Université de Bourgogne, Dijon) for their insights into the postcolonial marketplace and South African literary scene.

2 See John K. Young, *Black Writers, White Publishers: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth-Century African American Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).

3 2011 Census, available at <http://www.ons.gov.U.K./ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-ethnicity.html>.

4 [http://www.statssa.gov.za/Census2011/Products/Census\\_2011\\_Census\\_in\\_brief.pdf](http://www.statssa.gov.za/Census2011/Products/Census_2011_Census_in_brief.pdf).

5 While Donald Horowitz had advanced that ethnicity would become central in South African politics after Apartheid, and A Lipjhart asserted that the South African state was “characterized by a multiple division of ethnic groups”, Fesha qualifies these claims. See Arend Lipjhart, *Power sharing in South Africa* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1985); Donald L. Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

6 The preamble to the South African 1996 Constitution strikes an echo with the U.S. *Pluribus Unum*: “We, the people of South Africa, [...] believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.” (Preamble to the Constitution of South Africa, available at <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96preamble.htm>, accessed June 29, 2013).

7 See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), and *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Seuil: 1992); in translation, Susan Emanuel, trans., *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

8 See Donald F. McKenzie, *The Panizzi Lectures, 1985: Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London: British Library, 1986).

9 See Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

10 Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987); in translation, Jane E. Lewin, trans., *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

11 As noted in Sarah Brouillette (ix), see for example Andrew van der Vlies, *South African Textual Cultures: White, Black, Read All Over* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); Robert Fraser, *Book History Through Postcolonial Eyes: Rewriting the Script* (London: Routledge, 2008); Gail Low, *Publishing the Postcolonial: Anglophone West African and Caribbean Writing in the U.K. 1948-1968* (London: Routledge, 2010); several essays are also included in Robert Fraser and Mary Hammond, ed. *Books Without Borders, volume 1: The Cross-National Dimension in Print Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

12 On this issue within South African libraries, see Maxine K. Rochester, “The Carnegie Corporation and South Africa: Non-European Library Services,” *Libraries and Culture* (Winter 1999): 27-51. This article interestingly points to a transatlantic USA/ South Africa connection, focusing on the financial and organizational aid provided by the Carnegie Corporation in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of particular note is the “logical” assumption of US librarians and philanthropists that “what had been popular with African Americans in the United States was. . .suitable for these libraries” (41).

13 For more on the white gaze of American publishers in the 1920s and 1930s, see George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1997); Charles Weldon Johnson, [1929] “Negro Authors and White Publishers,” ed. Sondra K. Wilson, *The Crisis Reader* (New York: Random House, 1999), pp. 263-266; Michael Soto, “Jean Toomer and Horace Liveright; or, A New Negro Gets 'into the Swing of It',” ed. Geneviève Fabre, Michel Feith, *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 162-187.

14 Scholars of slavery will no doubt be reminded of the problematic publishing in 1773 of the first black poetess, Phillis Wheatley, with the help of British antislavery networks.

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