

**Book Hunger and the Political Economy of the  
South African Booktrade: Structural and Policy  
Constraints on the Production and Distribution of  
Academic Books**

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## Abstract

While 'book hunger' in Third World societies was regarded by a 'first generation' of theorists, working in the modernization/diffusion of innovation paradigm, as a *cause* of underdevelopment (and thus requiring the correction of problems relating to the undersupply of books to Third World countries by means of book aid policies, transfer of expertise and technology, and development of modern (western) publishing and distribution procedures and infrastructures), a 'second generation' of theorists working in the dependency/disassociation paradigm responded by insisting that 'book hunger' was an *effect* of the underdevelopment of peripheral economies, and a symptom of the debilitating cultural effects of the global economic order, with its skewed international distribution of knowledge, resources and capital. In recent approaches to the topic of 'book hunger' (which are wary of the sweeping dichotomies of dependency theory), 'book hunger' serves to describe a chronic shortage of books which results from complex structural inequities and antagonisms, from the distorting effects of global rationalization, as well as from local economic arrangements and policy mechanisms which do not adequately meet the knowledge and information needs of competing local cultural formations. 'Book hunger' is seen to derive from a range of causes, and to produce a range of effects, which correspond to the varying needs, resources, and conditions operative in - and the cultural media and knowledge infrastructures available within - specific societies. Obviously, 'book hunger' is rooted to a considerable degree in the specific historical configurations and socioeconomic circumstances of specific countries. An understanding of complex, globally-interlinked socio-cultural, political and economic structures and practices is thus crucial to understanding 'book hunger' in South Africa. A survey of global and local environments within which scholarly books are produced and circulated - including South African distribution systems and knowledge dissemination networks - makes it possible to sketch an approach to South Africa's own 'book hunger' which is sensitive to the complexity and the specificity of conditions in the local booktrade, and which is able to contribute to the complex debates on local knowledge infrastructures, strategies for book development and new forms of distribution which are now beginning to take place in South Africa.

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# INTRODUCTION

In February 1991, the Conference on Publishing in the Third World began at the Rockefeller Foundation's conference centre in Bellagio, Italy.<sup>1</sup> During the proceedings, speakers described a crisis in book publishing in Africa. Hans Zell of the African Book Collective (ABC) observed that "a viable publishing industry, one that can produce books on a scale matching local needs, is still a dream in most parts of the continent" [Zell 1992: 65]. The reasons for this "grave book famine in Africa" [66] were largely economic - "past corrupt regimes, capital flight, devastating years of drought and famine", as well as crippling debt repayments and currency devaluations, meant that in Africa "there are precious few resources for buying books", and consequently "few indigenous publishers have been able to meet the challenges of the book shortages caused by the economic crisis" [65]. Other contributions also stressed the "overwhelming adversity" of the socioeconomic environment within which Third World publishing enterprises operate [Minowa 1992: 56]. Underlying the sense of crisis - anxiety about the consequences of under-investment in publishing and other cultural media, alarm at the cultural implications of endemic economic failure in Africa - was a pervasive acknowledgement that book development strategies undertaken since decolonisation had failed to deliver broad-based access to books and reading material, supported by thriving autonomous publishing industries and efficient delivery mechanisms, to the people of Africa. The final report of the conference, entitled "Crisis in Third World Publishing: Recommendations for Action", observes that since Ronald Barker and Robert Escarpit "identified a 'book hunger' in the Third World and called for a program to encourage book development", many Third World countries have continued to "suffer from a severe lack of reading materials", to the extent that "some African nations are in danger of becoming virtually bookless societies" [Altbach 1992: 413].<sup>2</sup> Eva Rathgeber pointed out that the "litany of problems" facing Third World publishing industries which contributors debated at this conference were as familiar and "well documented" as they were "daunting". Problems ranging from "the non-existence of 'the reading habit,' the stranglehold of transnational publishers over profitable educational markets, the almost insurmountable difficulties of under-capitalisation, limited supplies of paper, ink, film, and other necessary inputs, high government tariffs on paper and books, to nonexistent or poor distribution infrastructures" [Rathgeber 1992: 77], have been addressed repeatedly at Unesco conferences and book development strategy sessions during the 1970s and 1980s.

Over the past two decades, several international organizations, and many individuals, have suggested long-term measures that would favour local production of books and aid the setting up of truly autonomous publishing enterprises, which would be run without government interference or pressure and which could exist without subsidies. There have been numerous conferences and meetings in Africa on publishing and book development, preceded by fine opening speeches by government ministers stressing the importance of books in national development, and concluding with pious resolutions. In the current discussions on the grave book famine in Africa, it has been repeatedly and quite rightly stressed that book donations alone should not be seen as the long term solution to shortage, and that it is vital for indigenous publishers to be supported. Yet very few African governments have taken positive and decisive action to support their own book industries, certainly not in the private sector. The book industries and libraries continue to take a back seat in the pursuit of national development. [Zell 1992: 66]

In characterizing conditions in the African booktrade as a “famine” which has resulted from a national development strategy that failed to support book development, Zell ascribes African ‘book hunger’ to the wider failure of government in Africa. While this explanation certainly has resonances in South Africa - ruled for decades by a government which actively restricted the dissemination of books and learning through censorship and repression - it cannot stand alone as the reason for the long-standing failure of the ‘development community’ to address the persistent problem of under-resourced book industries in Africa. Since there is no indigenous reading tradition or history of using written orthographies in Africa, corresponding traditions of reception and book usage have been established relatively recently; have been restricted to elites in many countries; and have not been sufficiently disseminated to the masses of people in ways which allow for innovative and locally-adapted patterns of usage. The creation and sustenance of autonomous book publishing industries in decolonised African countries is contingent, on the one hand, on the *systematic* elaboration of viable local knowledge networks and publishing capabilities on an economically viable basis, serving markets and showing sufficient returns on investment to justify the resources they consume. On the other hand, the development of autonomous book publishing capabilities is impossible without a large enough local community of readers and users, whose cultural life-world and material conditions should be enhanced by the availability of books. This tension between the need for cultural autonomy (which means that any society or cultural grouping must produce widely-available knowledge and find the means to sustain the elaboration of specific cultural meanings and identities through broad popular access to communication channels and information sources) and the need for economic sustainability (which demands that the flow of knowledge, ideas and information must be constrained and that access to cultural and informational resources must be restricted to those who can pay) is a central theme of this study.

In Third World nations, the development of an autonomous booktrade requires that books become available to people who never previously had access to, or uses for, books and reading materials; and it requires that this new access should be accompanied by the elaboration of local practices of using books and knowledge in locally relevant and beneficial ways. This amounts to a profound shift in patterns of communication and



knowledge coordination - which are specific to local cultural formations - and thus demands cultural as well as economic transformation of an entire population's access to and usage of information, knowledge, books and other media. Given the failure of book development in Africa, it is appropriate to ask to what extent 'book hunger' can be described as a consequence of distortions in *local* knowledge distribution systems - in the cultural and communicative infrastructures upon which book industries depend in specific societies - rather than as a phenomena which affects all developing countries more or less equally, and which expresses a 'natural lack of development' in Third World societies. The term 'book hunger' describes a shortage of adequate reading material, or a lack of access to a diversity of books in African and other Third World countries, which derives from deep-rooted structural defects - economic, social, cultural and political. These imbalances in local knowledge systems derive from a history of colonialism and decolonisation - from years of crisis caused by the manner in which colonised territories have been integrated into the global economic system - and from subsequent crises of governance which have afflicted Africa in the decades after decolonisation began. Since there are great differences between Third World countries, even within regions, in respect of their histories, economic systems and socio-political antagonisms, it would seem that the development of local knowledge infrastructures and publishing capabilities depends to a great extent on the initiatives taken from within specific societies, and that universal developmental perspectives are doomed to failure because they fail to take such crucial differences into account.

In considering the relationship between 'book hunger' in South Africa and the political economy of the South African booktrade, this study must firstly address perspectives on the role of books in 'national development' which have influenced book development strategies in Third World countries over the past several decades. From the beginning of the post-war era, interest in book development - as a central component of development programmes initiated in many recently decolonised countries - was stimulated by the attention accorded book publishing by Unesco. Unesco's constitution promoted "the free flow of ideas by word and image" and sought to "give the people of all countries access to the printed and published materials produced by any of them". While Unesco first gave priority to developing mass media in developing and war-devastated countries, it began to promote books specifically in the 1950s and 1960s. Unesco's new emphasis on the printed word as a key means by which the transfer of knowledge, ideas, processes and skills from industrialized to underdeveloped countries could be effected, reflected a "growing realisation that striking advances in printing, publishing and distribution techniques, including the rise of the paperback, had made books one of the 'mass media' with unrivalled potentialities". This awareness was given prominence in Unesco publications like Robert Escarpit's *The Book Revolution* (issued in 1966), which "was published in a dozen languages and which itself became a kind of revolutionary manifesto in favour of books." [Behrstock 1989: 55]<sup>3</sup> Other Unesco publications on the role of books in addressing the legacy of colonialism followed. Ronald Barker's study of the

deficiencies of the booktrade in developing countries, entitled *Books for All*, and a later collaboration between Barker and Escarpit, entitled *The Book Hunger* [1973], characterised developing countries as suffering from widespread book shortages - in school, universities and libraries as well as in the streets, where few bookshops could be found - in a world which was producing books and knowledge at an unprecedented and accelerating rate. This publication created an awareness of the need for indigenous publishing initiatives and provoked efforts to promote the spread of books and printed material to those areas of the globe still denied access to them.<sup>4</sup> Barker and Escarpit's approach to book hunger set the tone in subsequent Unesco's policy deliberations on issues of Third World development. In their view, book publishing had experienced an unprecedented global boom in the 1950s and 1960s, due to cheap, high quality printing technologies, mass marketing techniques, more rapid delivery and dissemination capacities, and the birth of the paperback. Yet massive sectors of the world's population remained illiterate and beyond the reach of existing delivery mechanisms, and only a disproportionately small privileged sector of the world's population could be said to have sufficient access to books and book services such as libraries and bookshops. This 'book gap' was in turn seen as a significant *cause* of underdevelopment in Third World societies; insufficient access to books meant that whole societies were starved of ideas and innovation, and deprived of crucial knowledge transfers that were regarded as increasingly central to modernisation and development activities. Only a 'reading culture' could survive in the emerging socioeconomic order, which was characterised by continual innovation, shrinking distances, increasing complexity and dependence on technological processes. The original understanding that arose under the label of 'book hunger' was thus one that stressed the centrality of books in the work of development. If books and literacy could be more widely distributed in under-developed societies, they would serve to disseminate skills, information and ideas, opening up such societies to modernisation. The mass transfer of technological applications and knowledge, and of ideas and values, from developed to underdeveloped regions could be accomplished through books [Barker and Escarpit 1973].

This 'developmentalist' perspective was in turn criticised in much of the work done on development and media during the late 1960s and 1970s. Scholars produced critiques of the increasingly important role of transnational (or multinational) economic activity in global markets, stressing the increasing dependency of Third World economies on transnational corporations (TNCs). 'Dependency theory' paid particular attention to inequities in the global economic order that arose after the Second World War, pointing out how the rise of a globalised system of trade, knowledge, capital, and information exchange - dominated by institutions and agreements devised in the interests of wealthy and industrialised countries - has weakened the position of decolonised and underdeveloped countries in the global economy. Developmentalist approaches working in the modernisation paradigm placed their faith in knowledge transfers to peripheral societies - in the 'diffusion' of behavioural patterns, media, products, information

applications and formats to (mainly urban) elites, which had the effect of reorienting their lifestyles, consumption patterns, informational universes and communicative behaviour patterns. This 'missionary' perspective was passionate about the advantages that small, peripheral societies could gain from adopting western cultural media and modes of knowledge transmissions, and emphasized the benefits of books to such societies in terms of exposure to innovation, broadened access to knowledge and information, and reinvigorated cultural references and debates. Scholars working in the area of dependency theory, however, argued that though peripheral elites may become consumers of (mainly western) cultural media and books, and also producers of information, the patterns of consumption and communication introduced into peripheral societies in the process would be predominantly oriented to the needs of central markets, and would enhance the information and communication resources of the centre while doing little to enrich the informational universes of peripheral societies - even destroying the local cultural practice and dramaturgy of fragile societies which could not easily assimilate western practices without permanent damage to their social cohesion and way of life. 'Missionary' development reproduced the practices and thought-systems which characterised dominant technological and cultural media in underdeveloped societies, which were defined as 'underdeveloped' in terms of their lack of such media. In consequence, knowledge exchanges begin to take place between *periphery* and *centre*, rather than between cultural sub-groups and classes *within* peripheral societies. Dependency theory argued that the destruction of peripheral communicative infrastructures (as 'inefficient', 'redundant' or 'primitive') served to bring peripheral societies into subordination to the requirements of the information- and culture-producing industries of the central powers. The kind of communication fostered by modernising elites is said to be oriented to the written word, to systematic tasks, to control - and thus dismissive of oral knowledge and of specific cultural practice and localised experience. But dependency theory resorted to the national state as a central planning mechanism in the battle against the multinationals and the global system - and thus also privileged elites in development and in the communicative activities seen as central to development.

More recent developmental initiatives have aimed to correct this emphasis on elites by stressing participatory and democratic communicative procedures, insisting on 'grass roots' formations and on the necessity of incorporating orality, local cultural practice, and local knowledge, in the elaboration of knowledge dissemination networks and publishing industries. However, many initiatives which fall within the parameters of the 'grass roots' approach to development are dependent on donors or government funding, and have yet to secure independent funding or financing arrangements; they have yet to develop significant infrastructures to serve non-formal or inaccessible markets, or to expand the size of their markets and so make them economically viable; and they are hamstrung by the centralised, bureaucratic, authoritarian, monopolistic nature of local knowledge infrastructures, as well as by lack of access to capital. Robert White [1990], in discussing these successive "generations" of development theory (the 'modernization'

paradigm, the 'dependency paradigm', the 'grass roots' development paradigm), suggests that "a fourth generation" has arisen. This paradigm emphasizes a policy framework "that fosters political-economic and socio-cultural negotiation and integration" and "sees the formation of a common national culture as the basis for national development"[24]. Such an approach is particularly aware of the role played both by cultural media and by cultural dramaturgy in fostering communication structures which facilitate self-development initiatives. It does not emphasize books and literacy as central features of development, but includes them among a variety of formats and media which can be adapted to foster public communication and to coordinate the needs and priorities of a diversity of sub-groups and formations.

The "Crisis in Third World Publishing: Recommendations for Action" report, issued by the Bellagio Conference on Publishing in the Third World, acknowledged the deficiencies in previous book development strategies, while affirming that books "are crucial for literacy development and the maintenance of a literate society, cultural identity, and autonomy, as well as social and economic change"; that "a book society is essential for a relevant and effective educational system"; and that "books and related elements of the 'information revolution' continue to remain absolutely central to functioning in the modern world" [Altbach 1992: 415-6]. The report points out that, despite the "significant" impact of book aid policies on book development, such policies have often been "'disabling', rather than empowering", because they did not "take the broader context of private indigenous publishing into account when providing for books and book development". Textbook projects, for instance, "often have distorted publishing infrastructures and processes". The report also called for a "more integrated perspective toward book development" and for the involvement of "the indigenous private sector in policy formulation and implementation" [417]. These points were rearticulated at the Conference on Publishing for a Democratic Education in 1993, hosted by Sached Books and the National Education Crisis Committee, which stated in their conference report that resources allocated by donors should be used "to fund local publishing initiatives which meet domestic needs" rather than to donate books [Sached/NECC 1993: 180], and that as "a thriving, diverse and varied publishing industry is crucial for democracy and educational and cultural reconstruction", educational and other publishers, together with government and "all stakeholders", should "develop and support appropriate policies and structures which will foster... diversity" [178]. Such calls indicate that a 'cultural negotiations' approach has begun to influence thinking in book publishing and book development forums.

Thus while 'book hunger' was regarded by a 'first generation' of theorists, working in the modernization/diffusion of innovation paradigm, as a *cause* of underdevelopment (and correspondingly emphasized the correction of problems relating to the undersupply of books to Third World countries by means of book aid policies, transfer of expertise and technology, and development of modern (western) publishing and distribution

procedures and infrastructures), then a second generation of theorists working in the dependency/disassociation paradigm responded by insisting that 'book hunger' was an *effect* of the underdevelopment of peripheral economies, and a symptom of the debilitating cultural effects of the global economic order, with its skewed international distribution of knowledge, resources and capital. In approaches which are wary of the sweeping dichotomies of dependency theory, 'book hunger' serves to describe a chronic shortage of books which results from complex structural inequities and antagonisms, from the distorting effects of global rationalization, as well as from local economic arrangements and policy mechanisms which do not adequately meet the knowledge and information needs of competing local cultural formations. 'Book hunger' is seen to derive from a range of causes, and to produce a range of effects, which correspond to the varying needs, resources, and conditions operative in - and the cultural media and knowledge infrastructures available within - specific societies. It is not restricted to countries which suffer from the most severe shortages - such as Tanzania, for instance, which has eighty-three bookshops to serve a population of twenty-three million (with a 79% literacy rate) [Woode 1991: 37-8] - but also affects those countries which can secure only limited access to relevant and up-to-date published books and journals at prices which makes wider access an impossibility; or those which find that their research and development requirements cannot be met because the absence of a viable local publishing industry has resulted in an absence of locally produced and locally relevant knowledge. Obviously, 'book hunger' is rooted to a considerable degree in the specific historical configurations and socioeconomic circumstances of specific countries; while some developing nations, such as those in Asia, and to a lesser degree, in South America, have been able to build autonomous publishing capacities and knowledge dissemination systems since the 1960s, others have failed - particularly in Africa. The economic crisis in Africa accounts for this failure to some extent - but a more nuanced approach to the problem of 'book hunger', which takes into account the specific social, structural, political, ideological and economic circumstances which shape cultural resources and knowledge infrastructures in specific societies, is obviously necessary. This project thus proceeds from a discussion of the analytical literature on book development perspectives and activities to a consideration of both the *global* (in Chapter One) and the *local* (Chapter Two) contexts of the South African booktrade. These chapters firstly describe features of 'book hunger' which South Africa shares with other post-colonial societies, and which are certain to impact on current tasks of democratisation and reconstruction facing South African society, particularly in the areas of academic and educational books. This discussion is informed, however, by an awareness that conditions within countries grouped under the heading 'third world' vary greatly, and that conditions in the South African booktrade are in many respects unique in Africa. Secondly, they describe aspects of the unique political and economic context within which South Africa's small autonomous publishing industry has developed. In doing so, they aim to sketch an approach to South Africa's own 'book hunger' which is sensitive to the complexity and the specificity of conditions in the local booktrade, and which is able to contribute to the

complex debates on local knowledge infrastructures, strategies for book development and new forms of distribution which are now beginning to take place in South Africa (and which are further discussed in Chapter Three).

South Africa, like other African countries (though not necessarily to the same extent or in the same ways), may be characterised as 'book hungry'. It is a country with a high illiteracy rate and a tiny book market dependent on imported books, in which a small indigenous publishing industry - itself largely dependent on subsidies and fundraising efforts - struggles to survive. It is a society which has yet to assess fully the damage inflicted by systematically denying whole sectors of society access to knowledge, reading skills and books over many decades. The distribution sector of the booktrade is dominated by a single conglomerate which offers an insufficient range of titles to the public at prices which make buying books impossible for many South Africans, especially poor and marginalised people. Diversity is particularly lacking in respect of books which are appropriate to local contexts and which can serve to articulate new strategies for a society in transition.

South Africa is a country undertaking tasks of national reconstruction at a time when economic realignments, technological innovations and structural shifts in systems of production and trade across the globe are accelerating the trend towards global interdependency. In the case of small Third World countries (particularly in Africa), there is a trend toward increased dependency on the capital markets, information systems and market infrastructures of large, industrialised, late-capitalist economies. The international production and circulation of ideas and information, in which this country needs to participate as never before in its history, is structured by a system of economic and policy arrangements which is largely the creation of the industrialised nations. Participation in this system takes place on the basis of rules drawn up primarily to protect and facilitate the information flow in the richest economies. The booktrade is part of this system, and is affected by its dynamics; the kinds of books circulated in many African countries - and their quality, availability and cost - are influenced by the requirements and constraints of the international marketplace. In addition, the economies of scale required in the global 'free market' of post-1980s deregulation, concentration and conglomeration, when combined with the large capital outlays needed for new technology, rebound on small local book markets like South Africa's in the form of rising costs and a shrinking output of new titles.

While the book markets in peripheral African societies were dominated after decolonisation by large multinational publishing enterprises which kept a tight hold on lucrative institutional markets (and specifically, the educational textbook market), South Africa's educational book market has been dominated by a group of publishers closely aligned with the apartheid regime's leadership; 'indigenous' rather than 'multinational' publishers were given privileged access to South Africa's dominant institutional book

market during apartheid, so claims of market domination by foreign publishers have very little relevance in the centrally-controlled textbook commissioning system adopted in South Africa [Oliphant 1993: 99]. The rise of an 'alternative' publishing industry in South Africa, which was targeted for censorship and surveillance during apartheid, also owed much of its economic viability to the anti-apartheid movement; donors are difficult to find since the April 1994 election brought the African National Congress to power. South Africa's institutional book markets, in other words, were shaped as much by sectional interests associated with apartheid policies as by foreign multinationals; likewise, local or 'indigenous' publishing efforts have been shaped by apartheid and the struggle against it.

During the Conference on Publishing for Democratic Education in 1993, Glen Moss (of Ravan Press) argued that South African 'educational publishers' had "adopted a frighteningly narrow definition of their area" by focusing exclusively on the *educational textbook* market, "thereby replicating precisely the narrow ideology which has historically dominated successive state-linked educationalists' views." A broader definition of 'educational publishing' would embrace not only textbooks commissioned and prescribed by education departments, but also publications for adult education programmes; literacy materials; popular histories and local stories; books for libraries, reference and supplementary reading; children's books; and books, journals and monographs catering for the more specialised knowledge requirements of the tertiary sector [Moss 1993: 22]. The traditional distinctions made between *general publishing*, *educational publishing*, and *academic* or *scholarly publishing* often conceal the extent to which these different sectors of the book market are interpenetrating and mutually interdependent. The term 'general publishing' serves to describe a broad range of reading requirements which, as Glen Moss suggests, include popular educational and self-help materials as well as leisure reading materials. This market is small, owing to the high prices of books in South Africa and the lack of a 'reading habit'. The term 'educational publishing' can be extended to include not only school textbooks but also literacy and adult education materials, popular educational texts and magazines (such as *Learn and Teach*) and supplementary and informative reading materials for libraries. South Africa's market for *scholarly or academic publications* is small and dependent to a significant degree on *foreign publishers* and on *international knowledge networks*. This sector, in contrast to the institutional textbook market, lacks any kind of centrally-coordinated procurement and distribution system, and cannot depend on local publishers to supply its need for specialised academic texts. Publishers hoping to fill the demand for informational and knowledge resources in tertiary education institutions cannot depend on mass sales of textbooks and general reading materials to subsidize the relatively small print runs required for academic books. While South Africa's local 'oppositional' publishers have been active in both the academic and the general educational markets - supplying locally-produced popular history and social and political analysis, local literature, literacy materials and popular supplementary reading materials with a broadly



educational aim - their exclusion from the institutional textbook market has deprived them of the benefits of cross-subsidization, and thus precluded them from publishing specialised materials which have only limited market appeal, or which cannot produce a significant economic return, but which make important contributions to the informational and educational needs of society.

The structure of the South African institutional book market - and, in particular, the separation of textbook publishing from publishing oriented specifically toward the needs of higher education, research and development activities - is thus a decisive factor in current deficits in *local knowledge production*, which is crucial to any society which wishes to participate in the global knowledge system. Participation in this system as merely consumers of knowledge produced elsewhere inhibits the elaboration of autonomous educational and research capacities, and threatens to devalue the ability of local knowledge institutions to provide relevant education to the society it serves. Academic publishing - upon which this study focuses - comprises a crucial part of the international knowledge production and distribution system. Researchers, librarians, bibliographers, scientists, educationalists, academics and other knowledge practitioners are the 'target market' for academic publishing enterprises. Academic publishing provides such practitioners not only with specialist publications in a vast range of disciplines, but also with information and research on knowledge dissemination techniques and on features of the knowledge-producing system. This system embraces universities, research institutions, libraries, data bases and journals, which are globally linked; it comprises bodies of knowledge practitioners, specialists and academics whose work is circulated and debated globally. Academic publishing produces books which are used as the basis for courses in universities and other institutions of higher learning - tertiary-level textbooks - in addition to specialised books for use by academics.

The range of materials produced by the academic publishing sector in third world countries, however, share at least one common characteristic: they are produced primarily for the knowledge they contain, since they seldom make significant profits or succeed in gaining wide enough circulation to warrant large print runs [Altbach 1987: 35], and thus present problems to publishers in countries like South Africa which lack arrangements and resources with which to subsidize academic publishing or to promote their locally-published books on a global scale. The global nature of scholarly knowledge networks upon which successful academic publishing initiatives depend are problematic to knowledge practitioners working on the periphery of the mainstream knowledge system, in countries where lack of resources and funding for educational institutions make journal purchases and book imports problematic, for instance; or where over-dependence on books and journals produced in foreign countries has resulted in an under-emphasis on issues of local and regional culture and history; or where the use of regional languages preclude access to materials published in the dominant 'international' (predominantly European) languages used by the knowledge system. South Africa's academic



community is dependent to a large extent on imported books and journals to fill its knowledge requirements, and suffers from problems of access to international knowledge networks in similar ways to other third world countries.

The space within which local publishing and distribution practices occur in South Africa, therefore, is structured by, and enclosed within, a system of constraints which incorporates both *national* and *international* economic and policy arrangements and conditions. This study seeks to locate the practices of academic book publishers and distributors in South Africa within the wider dynamics and constraints of this system. It will seek to elaborate a political economy of the South African booktrade in this sense; by seeking explanations as to how the academic booktrade is constrained by both national and international policies and by economic forces, it will simultaneously be seeking a nuanced explanation for book hunger in South Africa. This approach assumes that it is not possible to understand book hunger without reference to the complex of social, economic, political and ideological processes which structure the production and flow of information and texts. In exploring the interrelatedness of productive processes in the local booktrade with wider issues of cultural and economic dependency, this study will seek to contribute to a sociology of publishing - a growing field of study internationally - which stresses that far-reaching changes in policies affecting book publishing, especially initiatives that attempt book development strategies, are contingent on an understanding of the role of both global and local contexts - discursive, cultural, political and economic - in shaping South Africa's production, distribution and consumption of books.

## Notes

- 1 Philip G. Altbach (ed.) (1992) *Publishing and Development in the Third World* (London, Hans Zell). This book, which emerged out of the Obor Foundation's Bellagio Conference on Publishing in the Third World (February 1991), offers contributions on the state of publishing in several Third World countries, and includes valuable chapters on African book publishing, cultural dependency, indigenous publishing, multinationals, book aid and book development. Issues affecting publishing development, such as copyright, technology, and markets, are addressed.
- 2 "Crisis in Third World Publishing: Recommendations for Action" (1991) *The African Book Publishing Record*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, 1991, pp. 7 - 8. This final report of the participants in the *Conference on Publishing in the Third World* was reproduced as Appendix 1 in Altbach (ed.) (1992) *Publishing and Development in the Third World*, pp. 413 - 419.
- 3 Julian Behrstock (1989) "Promoting Books and Readership in the Developing World", *The Need to Read*, eds. S. Gopinathan and V. Barth (Singapore: Festival of Books Singapore), p. 55. Also see Robert Escarpit (1966) *The Book Revolution* (London, Harrap). Published by UNESCO as part of their programme during the 1960s and 1970s to facilitate book development in the Third World, this book offered a valuable analysis of underdevelopment in Third World publishing.
- 4 Ronald E. Barker and Robert Escarpit (1973) *The Book Hunger* (Paris, UNESCO). This classic work first used the term "book hunger", and was very influential in drawing attention to the unequal global distribution of publishing infrastructures and access to books in the 1960s. At Unesco's Conference in Tokyo in May 1966, on the production and distribution of books in Asia, statistics described a widespread lack of adequate books and reading materials in poorer countries:

Of the total of 408,000 book titles published annually, 58 per cent were produced in nine countries representing only 21 per cent of the earth's population. In terms of numbers of copies, the same small group of countries accounted for no less than 69 per cent of the annual output of five billion books. The economically advanced countries had an annual per capita book supply 30 to 60 times greater than that of the developing countries. To put the disproportion in another way: in the major publishing countries, book supply amounted to as much as seven copies per person per year; the corresponding figure in the developing regions was but a fraction of one book. In Africa, fewer than ten countries published books of any kind.

Moreover, the conference reported that books continue to be read "only by a small percentage of the population; the lack of books in national languages hindered the spread of readership, notably to new literates... Perhaps only half of the titles published were of a strictly educational character." [Julian Behrstock 1989: 54 - 56].

## Chapter One

### THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: Book Hunger and the Global Knowledge System

The environment within which South Africa's local booktrade operates is global. This is particularly so for the trade in scholarly books, which is heavily dependent on access to imported books, international and foreign databases, bibliographic networks, research institutions, and journals. Relations of dependency which characterise the international publishing and knowledge dissemination system impact on South Africa's academic booktrade, affect the ways in which books and knowledge are delivered into the local market, and constrain the uses to which they are put in local contexts. The high cost of imported books, paper and printing technologies, the restrictions imposed by the international copyright system, and the marketing strategies of multinational publishers, are all features of an international system over which the local booktrade can exert only limited influence. Yet local economies, local cultural tradition and practice, institutionalised communication habits, patterns of cultural influence and exchange, political and class antagonisms, state and institutional policies all play important roles in the elaboration and development of local knowledge systems. The economic dominance of South Africa's mainly white plutocracy has had a profound impact on the booktrade, for instance [Machet 1993: 166], as did the anti-apartheid struggle [Joubert 1991: 13].

In looking firstly at the global environment within which the South African booktrade operates, this chapter will attempt to point out features of global dependency by which South Africa is affected in similar ways to other post-colonial, Third World societies. This exploration of aspects of the global knowledge system is underpinned by an awareness that local conditions are most often decisive in shaping the production and circulation of knowledge within societies; book publishing and dissemination industries are products of "endogenous cultural development" which cannot be created "artificially by external pressure" [Minowa 1992: 61]. Chapter Two will seek to further elaborate those features of local policy and practice which have fostered *local dependency*. The main features of the global knowledge dissemination system - the skewed distribution of resources and infrastructures, of literacy and education, and of productive capacities in favour of elites; the orientation of book markets and delivery mechanisms to favour corporate profit maximisation; and the resulting limitations on access to books for people consigned to exist outside the formal knowledge distribution system - are all characteristics of the local social, political and economic environment within which the

South African booktrade operates. Yet the South African booktrade also differs considerably from those in neighbouring countries. South Africa has access to resources which are denied to other African countries; it is characterised by different institutional and infrastructural arrangements to those African countries; and it has developed an 'indigenous' publishing industry to serve a narrow sector of the population without developing a viable mass market for books largely because of its institutionalisation of apartheid policies during the decades when most resources and efforts were expended on book development in other post-colonial African countries.

This chapter will consider the points raised by a range of scholars on the nature of the global knowledge system, focusing particularly on the terms they have used to characterise global knowledge and information flows, and their impact on third world countries, over the last several decades. It will focus particularly on the effects of the global knowledge context on local academic book production and distribution activities in third world countries, as these have been conceptualised by scholars working in the 'diffusion of innovation paradigm', the 'dependency paradigm', and the 'grass roots paradigm'. It will then move on to a discussion of 'transnational rule structures' which continue to impact on the academic booktrade in Africa and other peripheral regions.

### **1.1 Book Publishing and the Global Knowledge Context**

Altbach [1987] situates book publishing within a knowledge dissemination network<sup>1</sup> which embraces all the processes by which the 'international commodity' of knowledge [Altbach 1992: 6] is created, distributed, stored, and sold. Knowledge-producing systems - which are interlinked and increasingly international - utilise data bases, communication networks, scholarly journals, audio-visual materials such as film, video, CD Rom and hypermedia formats, and computer applications and computer-based technologies; depend on libraries, research and academic communities in addition to publishers; and operate, as educational and cultural media, within an increasingly globalised economic framework in which television, communications and other media operate competitively, seeking to exploit information resources as marketable commodities [Altbach 1987: 3]. Knowledge systems are "bounded by the physical constraints of production and distribution", such as labour, transportation and storage, capital and material costs, as well as by "the complexity of creative and scholarly networks" - such as procedures for finding and nurturing individual authors, selecting manuscripts, editing, translating, producing relevant and saleable books [4]. Socio-cultural variables such as patterns of language usage, the nature of educational systems, libraries and marketing mechanisms, rates of literacy, and the accessibility of alternative media all influence publishing, particularly educational publishing [5]. Trade policy, import-export arrangements, complex copyright obligations, issues of technology cost and adaptability, market arrangements and rates of return on capital all impact profoundly on book production and distribution activities [Altbach 1992: 3-8]. Universities and other

educational institutions and “the knowledge dissemination network are directly linked and mutually dependent” [Altbach 1987: xi]; libraries are key elements in the knowledge dissemination system [7], because the market for scholarly material is much less diverse in third world countries; research monographs and journals produced abroad are extremely expensive, and can thus often only be accessed by scholars through libraries [79].

This knowledge system is characterised by inequality; “dependency and neocolonialism” in knowledge distribution may be described as key characteristics of the system. The global and heterogeneous nature of knowledge dissemination at times conceals the extent to which it is “dominated and controlled by the large, wealthy and prestigious academic systems, publishers, and research enterprises in the major industrialised nations”. Smaller industrialised nations, and more particularly Third World countries, are peripheral to and dependent on “the central intellectual powers of the world” who produce most knowledge and control the means by which it is distributed. Furthermore, “the policies of the industrialized nations, as expressed in their foreign aid programs, copyright laws, commercial orientations, and other policies, tend to perpetuate existing inequalities.” So it is important “to understand not only the changing patterns of knowledge dissemination, but also what might be called the 'political economy of dissemination' - the patterns of control over the system and the reasons for and implications of that control” [Altbach 1987: xii-vi].

Gerald Sussman and John Lent [1991] likewise characterize the global economy as a system in which worldwide economic and cultural resources have been woven together into a nexus of interlinked trade and communication networks. The colonial trading system, which developed as demand for resources in many expanding capitalist economies swelled far beyond the capacity of the local resource base, was the genesis of an ever more integrated global economy. The emergence of information-based communication technologies, and the expanding activities of transnational corporations (TNCs) which use such technologies to “manage” global trade and information flows, has accelerated this trend toward global interdependency:

By the time commercial Chinese junks or British chartered trade company vessels plied the inlets of the Asian land masses, the Caribbean isles, or the African coastline, a vast transnational trade and investment infrastructure was already in the making, a preview of the contemporary “global supermarket.” Chinese and British trading power may have lost some steam over the centuries, their places now taken largely by U.S. and Japanese conglomerates, but the world economic system they spawned remains intact. Transnational corporate (TNC) capitalism today has gone well beyond the dreams of its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century progenitors and has integrated the strategic resources of almost every current nation-state, regardless of political and social orientation. A world production and trade map today would highlight not only resource markets, containerized transportation routes, and distribution points, but, and perhaps more important, the lines of electronic communication networks stringing together the headquarters and subcenters of economic empires of unprecedented dimensions. [Sussman and Lent 1991: ix-x]

Boyd-Barrett [1982] describes this approach to the global economy as 'totalistic'; in studying telecommunication systems, information networks, knowledge dissemination systems and mass media as instances of a global system of integrated information management dominated by TNCs and powerful state and international agencies, and by linking the integration and concentration of economic resources to the spread of communication technologies and media that greatly facilitate information control, dependency theory seeks to explain far-reaching links between widely separated and apparently autonomous economic, political and technological phenomena [176]. Furthermore, such an approach stresses the uneven nature of global interdependency, which is seen to be shaped by the policies of nation-states and TNCs, and by the dynamics of capital concentration and monopolization, to benefit the richer economies and to entrench strategic power positions. The role of the book trade in this global information network is crucial; although the production and distribution of books is often overlooked, and although books exist in a sometimes competitive relationship with other cultural and educational media, their role in spreading ideas, procedures and information is central to the global knowledge system, and they cannot be considered apart from the institutions, technological processes and information networks which play key roles in their creation too.

The knowledge dissemination system is often typified by a distinction between 'central' and 'peripheral' societies, or between erstwhile metropolitan countries and their erstwhile colonies (or between 'underdeveloped / developing / emerging economies' and 'developed / industrialised economies'). These distinctions - like popular bi-polar terms 'North/South' and 'First World/Third World' - appear repeatedly in research about the knowledge system, and serve for some to typify a key pattern of control which has functioned to reproduce relations of inequality in the post-colonial period. Initially, interest in books and book publishing for decolonised countries was expressed in developmentalist terms - that is, in terms which firstly stressed the need for books, ideas, knowledge, and education in countries which lacked development or which had been historically disadvantaged during colonialism; and which secondly addressed questions around the development of publishing, research, educational and knowledge dissemination infrastructures in underdeveloped countries. During the late 1960s and 1970s, dependency theory arose as a critique of such developmentalist attempts to address the legacy of colonialism.<sup>2</sup>

The establishment of United Nations agencies after the Second World War, particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco), gave a voice to newly emergent national states as they won their respective struggles for political decolonization; they used this voice in the decades that followed to articulate an awareness that political decolonization was an insufficient victory on its own, and that struggles for economic, cultural and intellectual autonomy were needed. Colonialism left a legacy of institutional arrangements and agencies, policy frameworks and legal systems, economic

structures, and, of course, European languages and socio-cultural mindsets, which were inevitably skewed to reflect or facilitate colonial interests, greatly complicating tasks of reconstruction which faced newly-independent states. Moreover, global distribution of resources and infrastructures, trade and financial systems, and cultural and educational media were skewed in favour of industrialised economies. The copyright system, which “controls the international flow of knowledge”, was largely devised with the interests of industrialised countries in mind; both the The Berne Convention on copyright, an agreement drawn up mostly by Western European countries, and the International Copyright Convention, which largely represents the intellectual property rights position of the United States government, are said to favour the established book industries at the expense of those in developing countries [Altbach 1992: 7; 1987: 85-112].

Multinational publishers, which initially held a position of relative advantage due to their expansion into foreign markets under favourable conditions during colonialism, continued to control large sectors of the global publishing infrastructure after decolonisation. British publishers remained enormously influential in the erstwhile British Empire, particularly in the provision of school textbooks and educational materials. Some publishers, such as Macmillan, entered monopolistic "joint ventures" with State publishing houses in Africa [Zell 1984: 177]. International arrangements continued to favour established exporters of books; British exports to Third World countries have been protected for decades by international trade restraint agreements, such as the **British Market Agreement** - according to which the global English-language market was divided between British and American publishers - and the **Net Book Agreement** - which regulated the retail prices at which listed books could be sold [Machet 1993: 166].<sup>3</sup> The former was abandoned in 1970, but played a crucial role in entrenching British multinational publishers, particularly in Southern Africa; the latter is unlikely to survive contemporary free-market pressures.

## **1.2 Books, Decolonisation and Development**

Many issues of local reconstruction and development in the decolonised territories had to be addressed internationally; the UN General Assembly and some of its agencies were an arena in which these issues were taken up during this period. In turn, interest in book development - as a central component of development programmes initiated in many recently decolonised countries - was stimulated by the attention accorded book publishing by Unesco. The Book Resolution of the General Conference of Unesco in 1964 called for a “coordinated programme” of activities to remedy the knowledge gap, or book gap, between First and Third World countries. It called for the strengthening of international co-operation in publishing and the initiation of “activities designed to promote the production and distribution of books in the developing countries”. Unesco conferences on book development were held for Asia (Tokyo in 1966<sup>4</sup>), for Africa (Accra 1968), for Latin America (Bogota 1969) and for the Arab States (Cairo 1972). Out of these

conferences emerged the view that “books should be a carefully planned and fully integrated component of each nation's development efforts”; that regional book development centres and national book development councils should be established, with state participation and government funding (including a proposal that governments should earmark a share of the national budget for book development purposes); that there should be training and research directed at building national publishing initiatives; and that planning should be undertaken and targets set [Behrstock 1989: 56-7]. These ambitious plans contained flaws which were to become apparent later; their emphasis on planning and targets, central coordination and government funding, failed to measure up to the enormous tasks of book development in decolonised countries. In the 1980s, book production in Africa actually declined slightly in the wake of debt crises and structural adjustment programmes [Rathgeber 1992: 78], and successive book conferences since 1970 have repeatedly called for further resource allocation to publishing development without success - often because pressing socio-economic demands on scarce resources in many African countries has outweighed educational and cultural development priorities, but also because the national book development strategies adopted were ill-conceived, resource-starved, inefficient or unworkable.<sup>5</sup>

For instance, the UNESCO World Conference on Books, held in London between the 7th and 11th of June, 1982, aimed to study obstacles to book development and to recommend ways of overcoming them. Its report proposed six targets for the next decade: 1) “The formulation of a national book strategy”; 2) “Recognition that book production and distribution is a vital industry for national development”; 3) “The integration of new technologies”; 4) “The creation of a reading environment in all types and at all levels of society”; 5) “The stimulation of international co-operation to build national book capacities”; 6) “An increase in the two-way flow of books across borders.” It further recommended “the establishment of properly stocked library networks, the elaboration of national laws based on international copyright conventions, the production and distribution of good quality school textbooks and children’s books in the national languages.” [Behrstock 1989: 87] <sup>6</sup> Publishers working in Africa during this period, however, noted that “very few African governments (had) taken positive and decisive action to support their own book industries, certainly not in the private sector. The book industries and libraries (continued) to take a back seat in the pursuit of national development.” Private sector publishing initiatives could not call on support from the World Bank or international lending agencies, because these agencies “usually (lent) only to governments or support state publishing operations”; yet state-aided companies were “frequently hampered by bureaucracy or inefficiency or lack of motivation”, many state publishing ventures were “ill-conceived”, projects supported by international lending agencies were (in the words of former Director of the Book Development Council, Tony Read) “simplistic in design”, and “much aid money in books or library development schemes was invested in an unplanned and uncoordinated way.” [Zell 1992: 66-7]



### 1.3 The Fallacies of 'Development'

Sussman and Lent [1991] argue that widely circulated 'developmentalist' views which gained currency after the Second World War - such as those promoted by Daniel Lerner in his work on 'modernization' - provided a 'depoliticised' rationale for the incorporation of newly independent countries into existing international economic and political agreements and alliances. Developmentalist arguments which link the spread of Western influence and western-style development to the spread of books, mass media and communication technology, and which "focused on ways of reproducing American material experience and creating stable societal institutions, linking them to the spread of commercial mass media" in Third World societies, were powerful justifications for an unprecedented effort in the 1950s and 1960s by the United States to promote the integration of Third World societies into an American sphere of political influence and to integrate Third World markets and elites into an American sphere of economic dominance [3]. The work of scholars like Lerner - whose work was rooted in studies on propaganda conducted while he was active in US psychological warfare operations during World War Two - and Ithel de Sola Pool - who believed that "where radio goes, there modernization attitudes come in" - are linked, in this view, to concerted foreign policy efforts by the United States to influence developments in the Third World [5]. During the period (the late 1950s and 1960s) in which the "foreign assistance establishment in the United States and other industrialised countries" took an interest in book development initiatives and the fostering of higher education infrastructures in Third World countries, books were seen as crucial to 'the building of elites'; during the 1970s, interest by donor agencies and foreign aid programmes declined, and the potentially valuable experience and resources which had been built up during this brief period were lost. The modernizing bias of Unesco's book development work during this period, though it reflected developmentalist thinking of the period, came increasingly to be regarded as not alert enough to the complex neocolonial legacy burdening development in poorer countries, and not responsive enough to the needs of people in such countries who were illiterate, or who lived in rural areas - but who were not members of 'modernizing elites'.

The 1950s and 1960s were dominated by the escalating cold war between the US and the Soviet Union, and by nationalist movements which arose to challenge colonialism in Third World countries. Control of strategic markets and resources, particularly those with military applications, and of strategic geographical positions in the Third World, became important, in the context of 'superpower rivalry', at the same time as the struggle for decolonization reached its final stages. Newly-independent states, now led by anti-colonial movements, threatened to counteract the influence of American and more broadly Western institutions in Third World countries; thus developmentalist arguments in favour of the spread of literacy, books, mass media and communication technology to the undeveloped world were linked to foreign policy aims [Sussman and Lent 1991: 9-10]; book aid programmes conducted by the United States Information Agency, for instance,

which were motivated not only by arguments for the crucial role played by books in transferring technical knowledge to aid 'the development process', but also by anti-communism, "assisted in the production of 9000 editions and printed 80 million copies in 51 languages" between 1950 and 1964 [Altbach 1987: 23; Benjamin 1964: 72]. American books, cultural commodities and electronic media had a role to play in the global integration of resources and populations into a western dominated international system. Likewise, book aid programmes often served the economic interests of western countries, assisting foreign publishers in gaining access to new markets which opened up in many newly independent countries in Africa as education systems expanded and development efforts there increasingly stressed the importance of books and education to development. British textbooks were "pumped into the classrooms and lecture halls of the third world" during the 1950s and 1960s, assisting in making British educational publishers which focused on tertiary publishing (such as Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, Macmillan, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Edward Arnold, Harraps and Allan and Unwin) dominant players in the tertiary book markets of the anglophone world [Norrie 1982: 140; Lewis 1990: 95]. Similarly, American publishers frequently established themselves in developing countries in which United States foreign aid programmes had been active [Altbach 1987: 23]. Dependency theory arose as a critique of 'developmentalist' perspectives, and served to bring about a more critical understanding of development and the role of books in development.

#### **1.4 Book Publishing and Dependency Theory**

Dependency theory offers explanations for persistent and growing inequality in the global economic order by observing the ways in which technologically-advanced nations exploit not only their own relative advantage in the global system, but also the relative advantage of small underdeveloped nations in respect of lower labour costs, supply of natural resources and geographical situation, often using these countries as platforms for assembly, export and distribution activities in addition to exploiting them as markets. Domestic Third World economies "have little, if any, control over the product or profit from their labor and other resources". Competition between TNCs in markets across the globe is not "atomistic competition responding to market forces", but "rather a type of medieval jousting for territorial control". TNCs who can compete globally strive to "secure a position of special privilege in entering foreign national markets". They are assisted in this by their home governments, who "adopt policies and positions that will assist their respective TNCs, and sometimes they even participate in institutional marketing" [Melody 1991: 29]:

Home governments tend to exhibit greater tolerance for increased domestic monopoly power, because it enhances the power of their resident TNCs in international markets. This can range from a reduced emphasis on the application of antitrust and anticombinelaws to the actual encouragement of domestic cartels... As oligopolistic rivalry in global markets becomes more intense, national governments are more actively attempting to manipulate the terms of international rivalry to the advantage of "their" TNCs. Thus the TNCs are

becoming more direct instruments of macroeconomic policy through R&D subsidies, tax concessions, tariff conditions, trade agreements, and other policies [Melody 1991: 31].

Melody describes the operations of transnational corporations, in seeking to dominate markets, as “indeterminate, unstable oligopoly”. Dependency theory “recognizes that buyers and sellers are not part of a unified, homogeneous market.” Relations of inequality derive from the decentered and fragmented production processes made possible in the information economy; the “location of resources, production, consumption, profit recognition, and control over continuing reallocations of resources may all be in different countries”, and “(m)any localities are dependent on a specialized production plant of a TNC used to serve markets on another continent”. Inequalities are structured to benefit the “market center”, where control is exercised, while “(p)eripheral or hinterland locations are developed primarily to serve the interests of the major centers of power by exploiting natural resources, low labor costs, or other elements of specialized, comparative advantage.” The pace and nature of national development in Third World countries is thus regulated in accordance with the strategic requirements of transnational capital. Peripheral economies carry greater risks, as “(a)pparent short-run efficiency and stability in the central markets is obtained at the expense of instability and distorted development in the outlying areas. The economy in the peripheral region bears the risk both of changes of short-run market conditions at the center and of potential loss of its specialized comparative advantage to another peripheral region.” [34-5]

Pressures to adopt new technologies and develop indigenous capabilities which enable them to compete with TNCs, accentuate rather than relieve dependency of the periphery on the centre: “if they buy into these technologies, most will be committed to a long-run dependence that will contribute to continuing short-term balance-of-payments deficits and virtually permanent constraints on their domestic economies.” [37] According to Melody, the increasing use of technology-based and information-related applications and processes has brought about fundamental and irreversible changes in the structure and functions of the economic system. The growth of “information markets” and the accompanying changes in the role of “information providers”, as part of this economic transformation, has far-reaching implications for current “conceptions of public and private information as well as property rights associated with marketable information” [28]. Producing, marketing and distributing on a global scale - which is increasingly the norm in a book trade operating within the new technological environment - benefits the largest TNCs most, whose comparative advantage in dealing with economies of scale can then be translated into market dominance. In turn, small businesses benefit less from new technologies; rather, “their range of choice is dictated by the national and global needs of the largest firms and government agencies” [28-9].

However, new technologies which offer expanded composition, reprography, printing, transmission, networking and storage capacities, as well as greater opportunities for mass marketing and distribution, are double-sided in their impacts on the booktrade in

developing countries. While the capital costs of imported technologies are prohibitive and place a further burden on foreign exchange holdings, and while such technologies are deployed by TNCs to further expand their own market reach, they nevertheless offer small indigenous publishing companies opportunities: production costs can be significantly reduced and the complexity of the production process can be greatly reduced by the use of desktop publishing techniques, for instance. DTP reduces the number of people involved in book production, and eliminates costly steps in the production process, so that camera-ready material can be produced directly from disk. Likewise, improved communication technologies make available the advantages of global access to data bases and research institutions, as well as opportunities to consult, network and coordinate in efforts to reach areas previously beyond the reach of large book distribution mechanisms; the costs of such access is falling virtually by the day. Photocopy technology has been extensively used in Third World countries, often to reproduce material illegally; advanced reprography has been used in many Third World countries to produce cheap unauthorised editions of expensive or unavailable books, or to produce 'readers' compiled from a variety of sources (sometimes translated into the vernacular, and often used in universities). The advantages offered by new technologies in this case have proved an obstacle to long-term integration of Third World countries into the international copyright regime, and may have a negative impact on the availability (and variety) of books in these countries. Aside from questions of the cost of 'new technologies', and the vexed issue of intellectual property rights and copyright practices, Third World book industries face problems of underdeveloped infrastructures, such as telephone systems capable of handling data flows - though South Africa is fortunate, in this sense, in having a relatively sophisticated telephone system, it does not yet serve the mass of the population. The international knowledge network, dominated as it is by large First World institutions and research, obviously requires a paying customer base; as information increasingly becomes a commodity, underdeveloped countries which are dependent on information produced in developed countries will have to develop ways of funding and supporting continued access to international data bases, and will require support services, training and infrastructure to support wider access [Altbach 1992: 13-4]. Altbach argues that "the new technologies are not a panacea for the Third World", since "new technologies may not make economic sense" in countries "where traditional composing and printing are well established", or where "relatively low wages combined with skills in the older technologies means that traditional composing and printing still make economic sense". Thus "the costs and benefits of technological innovation in publishing must be carefully weighed" to encompass the specific needs and potentialities in specific publishing environments [14-5]; in the longer term, technological innovation is a global phenomena, and must be accommodated by all countries which wish to be involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

As publishing in the advanced industrial countries moves very rapidly into the era of computer-assisted typesetting, photo-offset printing, perfect binding, and other innovative technologies, Third World publishers are being left far behind. The new technologies not

only permit very large printings but also enable publishers to print small quantities of a book for scholarly purposes or small audiences. They are capital intensive and labor saving. Such technologies depend, however, on high capital expenditures for the purchase of expensive equipment and on highly trained personnel and sophisticated repair and back-up capability. For these reasons, Third World countries, with a few exceptions, will not be able to leap into the post-industrial modes of production in the fields of printing and publishing. Not only is capital scarce, but the capital to purchase imported equipment must be expended in scarce foreign exchange. Service and spare parts are lacking and consequently sophisticated machines are often nonoperational for long periods. In particular, trained personnel to operate the equipment are in short supply.... The economics of Third World publishing is often based on low-paid, low-skilled labor.... The long-term implications of this technological backwardness are, however, more serious. Using new technologies, publishers in the industrialized nations eventually will reduce their costs even further, giving them an even greater competitive advantage.... Further, the new technologies mean that Third World publishing for the foreseeable future will remain dependent on the industrialized nations for equipment and techniques.... The implications of the new technologies, however, go far beyond the mechanical processes of book publishing. They touch upon the very basis of the economics of the future: the extensive use of knowledge as a resource. The development of new technologies in publishing will accelerate the use of knowledge. This in turn will allow the users of such knowledge to advance into other new technologies that will provide the foundations for future major world industries, such as electronics and computers, space technology, deep-sea and ocean technology, and genetic engineering. Without a foothold in these knowledge-based industries, the gap between the Third World and the industrialized world will continue to grow wider [Altbach, Arboleda and Gopinathan 1985: 7-8].

Herbert Schiller [1984] further observes that the growing centrality of information in global markets, and the role of technology in the transformation of traditional markets, not only extends opportunities for further profit by richer economies at the expense of poorer ones, but represents a change in “the role and character of information itself” [Schiller 1984; Masterman 1985: 15]. Information technology makes use of cultural and informational resources in ways that enhance the profits and the privileges of TNCs and of their “home countries”; in so doing, it eliminates non-profitable but socially-relevant informational universes and reconstructs global information flows to serve as instruments of profit and control.

What is now underway... is a vast extension in cultural control and domination, to say nothing of economic and political mastery. Here we are concerned with the effort to structure a new global system of authority on the basis of information control, of an order hitherto unimaginable. What has been a substantial influence, resting on familiar media flows - news, TV programmes, films, books, magazines - *is being extended to include the entire flow of information*, corporate data streams in particular [Masterman: 10].

These remarks seem to derive from an understanding of information capitalism which stresses the role of oligarchic transnational enterprises, mainly based in industrialised countries, in the increasing domination of knowledge and information flows by corporate interests, who collaborate with large government agencies in seeking to control publishing, media and communication structures in Third World countries; their aim is to integrate media resources into an “ideologically supportive informational infrastructure” for TNCs. Boyd-Barrett criticizes Schiller, and the ‘totalization’ implicit in his approach, on the grounds that his view ascribes the determination of power relations between states

- and national development within states - one-sidedly to the workings of the global information economy and the TNCs that dominate it [Boyd-Barrett 1982: 178]. Likewise, dependency theory often assumes unproblematically that the aims of TNCs are synonymous with those of the states in which they are based, and that they share similar, sometimes explicit objectives in seeking economic control of cultural and informational resources. The complex specificity of different Third World countries - the different roles played by elites in each, the different strategies each has adopted for assimilating and adapting systems, ideas and technologies (which have spread unevenly in different countries, and have been used in different ways), and the different kinds of knowledge dissemination networks and cultural media in each - is also a neglected area for dependency theorists. While such writers as Frank [1966], Furtado [1970], Dos Santos [1970], Cardoso [1973], and Evans [1979] “provided intellectual leadership in revealing the structural-functional fallacies of ‘modernization’ and its linear, ahistorical, and neocolonial assumptions about development”, they failed to pay attention to “the *internal* class dynamics of economic underdevelopment and peripheral plutocracies” [Sussman and Lent 1991: 18].

Resistance to developmentalist approaches to Third World dependency surfaced in the work of scholars and activists who argued in favour of a ‘grass-roots’ approach to media in the Third World. Scholars like Freire [1970] and Shumacher [1973] argued that cultural imperialism could only be counteracted by a new educational and developmental ethic which stressed participatory structures and an awareness of the needs of local groups. Schumacher further argued that “intermediate-scale technology should be employed as an alternative in economic development and as a way of recapturing the entrepreneurial initiative from the dominant transnational rule structures” [Melody 1991: 29] However, arguments in favour of ‘appropriate technology’ which could be used in the Third World to enable improvements in living standards without replicating the alienating effects of technology transfer, were not effective in the face of political and economic pressure to adopt technologies that would facilitate mass exploitation of resources and markets. Technology transfer was effected in the Third World in such a way as to enable TNCs and national governments alike to more easily exploit Third World markets, resources and labour, and to ensure that the balance of payments would remain tipped in favour of the industrialised nations. The use of ‘appropriate technology’ was not sufficient to counteract this historical distortion of the global economy, which ensures that while the Third World owns the bulk of strategic resources, only the First World has the informational and technological infrastructures with which to exploit and profit from them.

Altbach [1992] points out, in his contribution to a book which emerged out of the Obor Foundation’s Bellagio Conference on Publishing and Development in the Third World, that although publishing is a “key part of the development process”, the policies of Third World governments have often hindered the development of viable indigenous publishing



industries - by placing tariffs on paper, printing equipment, or imported books, or by overly bureaucratic - and often corrupt or censorious - involvement in book development planning. Book aid policies on the part of US and UN agencies have also hindered Third World publishing initiatives by flooding markets with large numbers of books without consideration for the contexts within which they will be used. In many Third World societies, populations are small and often multi-lingual, illiteracy rates are high, a reading culture is often not well established, educational systems, distribution networks and libraries serve only a tiny sector of the population, and capital, machinery and raw materials must often be imported at high cost [2-3].

While some Third World regions (particularly Asia and Latin America<sup>7</sup>) have made progress since the Unesco book development conferences of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in Africa the situation in book publishing and distribution has remained parlous, and may actually have deteriorated in the wake of structural adjustment programmes and wars of destabilisation during the 1980s. Development programmes initiated from outside by donors, international agencies and foreign aid programmes have often failed, or been counterproductive to their overt aims. Policies to develop publishing in the African and other Third World, in other words, need to pay attention to the contexts of reception within which books are used in *specific* Third World societies. There are many differences in the needs and profiles of the different regions and countries classified as "Third World"; book aid policies have often relied on subsidized books and faith in the free flow of information doctrine, naively believing that if books are made accessible, the knowledge they contain will be unproblematically transferred to those who need it. Often the results of these efforts have been increased dependency.

### **1.5 Transnational Rule Structures**

While scholars working within the 'dependency paradigm' focussed their attention on 'transnational rule structures' which restrict the capacity of third world societies to develop autonomous economic and political structures, 'grass roots' activists shifted the focus toward *internal* obstacles to participatory and sustainable development activities. In many African societies, the failure of the 'grass roots' approach to development can be ascribed to the actions of African governments, which have frequently been directed toward centralisation and the exercise of direct state control over development initiatives. For instance, state publishing houses set up after decolonisation in many African countries, which were initiated to supply their educational systems with affordable and locally-relevant educational books, were established as 'joint ventures' with multinational publishers (such as Macmillan-Boleswa, which controls textbooks markets in several African countries). Dependency theorists point to the presence of multinational publishers within the textbook commissioning and procurement systems in these countries as evidence of the persistence of external domination. However, it cannot be said that the effects produced by government-controlled publishing initiatives in such countries - the

discouragement or suppression of small local publishing and knowledge production capacities - resulted simply from the presence of multinational expertise; rather, distortions in the knowledge systems of African countries has been brought about by state policies which favour centralised textbook production for the school system over academic and general publishing, and which discouraged independent publishers from publishing critical or 'esoteric' material (in the name of 'national development priorities'). The non-participation of many African countries in knowledge production can be ascribed as much to the authoritarian nature of state policies and national development strategies as to the external constraints imposed by multinational publishers and distributors, western trade and economic policies, and copyright restrictions.

The international knowledge system is regulated by transnational agreements which favour established centres of research and powerful publishing enterprises where most knowledge production takes place, and dependency theorists have made valuable contributions in pointing out the sometimes hidden patterns of control which have shaped the nature of knowledge production and dissemination networks and which have perpetuated the peripheral status of third world publishing industries within such networks. But explorations of such patterns of control need to be accompanied by an awareness that transnational rule structures do not entirely *determine* the nature of local knowledge and publishing networks; no system of constraints, however pervasive, can be singled out as all-powerful in shaping the global knowledge system. In a contribution to the Conference on Publishing for Democratic Education, Andries Oliphant argues that "any attempt to develop a resilient and competitive local publishing industry must, of necessity, rethink received views of external domination", and that in a country in which "local publishers have operated in the time-warp of apartheid", it is "crucial to avoid the simplistic opposition and enclosures of nationalism" [Oliphant 1993: 99]. The rise of an 'Information Society', underpinned by "vast networks of information and knowledge dissemination", means that an acknowledgement of the "interplay between local, regional and international" is central to the emergence and survival of autonomous publishing enterprises in South Africa. Of course, new technological capacities and changing patterns of usage and access in the booktrade, as in other media, bring with them "new forms of power concentration and exclusivity" [99], which requires continual exchanges on how best to ameliorate the worst effects of imbalances while finding innovative local uses for imported practices and technologies in local publishing initiatives. A consideration of two significant transnational rule structures which shape the production and flow of books and information across the globe - the Net Book Agreement (NBA) and the international copyright system - may serve to illustrate this dialectic: while the global knowledge system is characterised by external constraints which hold particular disadvantages for third world knowledge production activities, peripheral knowledge industries which can mount coordinated efforts to exploit advantages offered by globalisation - which can manage a process of negotiated policy reform and redirect national and local resources toward the nurturing of grass roots skills - may go a long



way toward eliminating internal obstacles to their full participation in knowledge production and dissemination activities.

### **1.5.1 The Net Book Agreement**

The Net Book Agreement is a resale price maintenance arrangement originally adopted to protect sellers and distributors of books from potential losses on underselling titles - particularly scholarly and academic books which can expect only limited sales. It was adopted in accordance with the argument that books are 'cultural goods' and require special arrangements to ensure diversity and wide access. Because the NBA prohibited discounts on retail prices for books placed 'within the net', and because it protected booksellers and distributors from being undercut by competitors, it allowed them to stock larger numbers than they would have been able to do had they been forced to sell such books at prices set purely by demand. Because prices were stabilised by the NBA, publishers, distributors and retailers were guaranteed a fixed return and thus were protected from the instability of a 'free trade' regime. So books which could not be marketed in large quantities (specialist scholarly books, for instance) could still be stocked by booksellers, and were not subject to rising prices. Small booksellers, in particular, have benefited from this agreement, because it has enabled them to carry a larger variety of books - particularly slow-selling books which would otherwise have been uneconomical to stock in bookshops catering mainly for the general market. Although large distributors and booksellers may well have profited from this agreement because it freed them from competition and thus led to higher prices on some titles than would have been the case in a totally 'free market' regime, the NBA was devised with the awareness that booksellers were crucial to the knowledge dissemination system; that certain books were of great benefit to society although they could not be sold on a large scale; that an entirely 'free market' orientation in this area would result in the widespread non-availability of important books that could not be sold in the mass market; and that guaranteed higher returns on certain big volume titles could be used to subsidize books which sold in smaller volumes. The NBA has been under fire from a free-market perspective for some time, and has been described as a price-fixing arrangement designed to provide price stability for publishers and guaranteed margins for booksellers. Because it eliminates price competition, it results in higher retail prices and increased profits for publishers [Allan and Curwen 1991: 9-15]. It has also been argued, however, that abolition of the Net Book Agreement would cause prices to rise, rather than fall, as books with small print runs would fall victim to free-market economies of scale [Mondli waka Makhanya 1993: 22].

Howard Marvel and Stephen McCafferty [1986] define resale price maintenance (RPM) as "the practice by which manufacturers try to set not only their own wholesale prices but also the prices at which their products are offered for sale by dealers and distributors" [1074]. In arguing that RPM is primarily an "efficiency-enhancing" device rather than a

practice designed to suppress competition, they develop a theoretical efficiency-based RPM pricing model which demonstrates that RPM does not necessarily lead to higher prices when it is universally applied - they argue that "prices chosen by manufacturers under universal RPM are close to those chosen without RPM". Only when RPM is applied as a limited "fair trade" measure - in a "mixed jurisdictional setting" which allows price maintenance agreements to exist side-by-side with "free trade" pricing - does it appear "quite expensive in terms of its impact on consumer prices". The political unpopularity of RPM measures is therefore a "puzzle": "If RPM is efficiency-enhancing and if it costs consumers so little in the way of increased retail prices, why has it failed to attract substantial political support?"<sup>8</sup> They conclude that the "cross-jurisdictional" comparison of prices in a "free trade" jurisdiction with prices prevailing in a "fair trade" jurisdiction is politically "misleading"; that "casual empirical judgements as to [RPM's] effects are not a reliable basis for policy" [1094]. In other words, political judgements about the value of RPM which rely on comparisons between free trade and fair trade regimes are flawed because these separate jurisdictions aim to secure 'efficiency' in quite different ways. The political unpopularity of RPM as a policy provision is derived from an unfair comparison of the effects of divergent economic regimes.

Although the Net Book Agreement is unlikely to survive for much longer in its present form, because large British book distributors have indicated increasing dissatisfaction with the restrictions it imposes on their ability to market books competitively, it stands as an exemplification of the double-sided impact of regulatory arrangements on the booktrade. On the one hand, resale price maintenance agreements lead to higher prices (which African countries can ill afford to pay) and inhibits the 'free market' in books, allowing large multinational distributors to avoid competition from smaller and leaner bookselling operations; on the other hand, the absence of such agreements may well mean that a much less diverse selection of books can economically be carried by distributors and booksellers, and that some of the benefits of cross-subsidization may be lost, with important consequences for slow-selling or low volume titles which may be of great value to scholarly communities, or to society as a whole. In a small market such as South Africa's, resale price maintenance agreements may well be a route to follow if the local publishing industry is interested in producing local academic and scholarly books which cannot show large profits without the support of a subsidy system or a set of institutional arrangements to support 'uneconomical' knowledge production activities.

### **1.5.2 The International Copyright System**

Without question, the international copyright arrangements were drafted to protect the interests of the major publishing nations and many industrialized countries accepted copyright only when it was in their interest; copyright did not originate in a desire for the free flow of knowledge and ideas. Although recent liberalization has taken place in the regulations governing the transfer of knowledge to the Third World, the balance of power in knowledge production and dissemination still resides with the major publishing nations. The issue of international copyright is, of course, quite controversial in the Third World,

and a number of countries persist in flouting or ignoring international regulations. Most Third World nations are members of one of the international copyright treaties and, with some exceptions, generally follow their rules. However, many in the Third World feel that international copyright does not serve their best interests. This is not difficult to understand when one recognizes that many industrialised countries began to observe international copyright only when they felt it fit their particular needs. Many industrialized countries still find ways of getting around the issues of copyright when they feel this is necessary [Altbach, Arboleda and Gopinathan 1985: 6].

The international copyright system affects underdeveloped countries most of all, since they are net importers of copyrighted material and are most dependent on imported books. The complex interlocking policy arrangements of the Berne Convention on copyright - an agreement drawn up mostly by Western European countries - and the International Copyright Convention - which largely represents the intellectual property rights position of the United States government - are said to favour the established book industries of industrialised nations at the expense of developing countries [Altbach 1987: 86]. The copyright system regulates the knowledge dissemination system as an economic enterprise, limiting the uses to which information and ideas can be put, and by whom. It emphasizes the value of books as property - that is, an *economic* rather than a cultural resource - and holds in place a set of legal mechanisms for controlling the international flow of knowledge [111]. These arrangements are the products of industrialised countries - deriving from the western notion of individual labour and creativity, from the imperatives of the Industrial Revolution, from free-market, profit-driven economic reasoning - and conflict to some degree with the view that to have access to public information - which, as a non-diminishable resource and as the basis for the use of other resources, is crucial for the economic, political, social and cultural well being of society - is a fundamental human right [Plowman 1985: 31]. It has been argued, too, that copyright ensures a 'free flow of information' by ensuring economic rewards for authors and publishers; photocopying and advanced electronic reproduction capabilities that have emerged as part of the technological revolution threaten to destroy the availability of a diversity of published books. Yet developing countries are often placed at a disadvantage in copyright dealings, not only because of the costs associated with copyright, but also because the complexity of these arrangements greatly complicates the operations of small, often resource-starved publishing firms in Third World countries. Proposals that copyright should be made available to developing countries at easier terms [Woode 1991: 72] were not realised during the deliberations of the Uruguay Round of GATT, which saw the United States and European countries particularly calling for stronger enforcement of intellectual property rights and global copyright regulation as an integral part of the new international trade regime.

Copyright is another instance in which transnational rule structures can be shown to be double-sided in their impacts on peripheral book markets. On the one hand, copyright favours established knowledge industries based mainly in Western Europe and the United States because, as a property right, copyright protects the interests of those countries

which own most of the world's intellectual property. Access to intellectual property is essential to the development of sustainable knowledge industries in peripheral societies, and limits on such access which are imposed by copyright agreements may well accentuate knowledge dependency in such societies. On the other hand, copyright agreements are the only mechanisms by which peripheral knowledge industries can hope to participate in the international knowledge system as producers as well as consumers of knowledge. In several (third world) Pacific Rim and South East Asian countries, copyright piracy was rife during the 1970s and 1980s; but as knowledge transfers and sustained, government-backed research and development programmes have allowed these countries to become producers of knowledge and owners of intellectual property, the copyright system has increasingly come to be seen as protecting their interests, and piracy has declined in these countries in consequence.

Transnational rule structures of this nature, which originated under colonialism, impart advantages to multinational publishers from metropolitan countries, and this advantage impacts most on those undeveloped countries who are dependent on imported books - like South Africa's tertiary book market. In the same way, the activities of multinational publishers who operate locally, but enjoy the marketing, promotions and distribution support of a large foreign operation, militate against the development of indigenous publishing firms. Yet the lack of publishing activities in African countries is often a symptom of a variety of other political, economic and social problems. The complexity of the booktrade makes it difficult to describe African book hunger as purely the consequence of multinational domination of markets. It is necessary to consider a variety of other factors to explain the inadequate provision of published books to Africa - factors such as remoteness: 72% of the African population lives in rural areas, which are badly served by formal distribution mechanisms like schools, libraries, literacy programmes and bookshops. These areas are "untouched by either African or foreign-based firms because of a high level of illiteracy and financial constraints which are exacerbated by poor transport, distribution and a lack of a publishing infrastructure...." Illiteracy remains astonishingly high in Africa despite the abortive surge of massive literacy campaigns during the post-independence period of the late 1960s and early 1970s; in 1985, 889 million of a population of 3 203 million (over the age of 15) were illiterate, and of those, 162 million were estimated to be in Africa (54% of the population). Global illiteracy is on the decrease, but because of population growth, actual illiteracy is increasing [Unesco sources 1989, No. 2; Woode 1991: 3]. Furthermore, "(l)ocal publishing at tertiary level today, remains plagued by inadequate funding, difficulties inherent in tracing local authors because of poor bibliographic control; high costs, counter-productive government and university policies and frequently no formal acquisitions policy in the universities." [Woode 1991: 6]

In seeking to overcome the constraints of international rule structures, South Africa's publishing and knowledge industries cannot ignore patterns of dependency that

characterise the global knowledge system any more than they can ignore the distorting effects of neocolonialism and apartheid on the South African booktrade. South African publishing industries and knowledge practitioners, as well as the state, will be required to negotiate extensive policy changes as well as to consider a widespread restructuring of institutional and policy arrangements to minimize the worst effects of knowledge dependency while seeking to exploit opportunities offered to peripheral knowledge industries by globalisation and technological innovation.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See also Philip G. Altbach (1992) "Publishing and Development in the Third World: Issues and Trends for the 21st Century", *Publishing and Development in the Third World* (London, Hans Zell) pp.1 - 27.
- <sup>2</sup> See Phillip G. Altbach, (1975) "Literary Colonialism: Books in the Third World", *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 45 (May 1975), pp. 226 - 36. This article provides a view of book publication which emphasizes Third World dependence on the infrastructure and markets of an international publishing and distribution system dominated by the industrialised North. Dependency theory - which is particularly interested in the mechanisms by which industrialised First World economies reassert and perpetuate their advantage in the global system *viz á viz* developing Third World economies - forms the basis for the following works on different aspects of the global knowledge system:

J. Somavia (1976) "The Transnational Power Structure and International Information", *Development Dialogue*, No. 2, pp. 13 - 30. A source on dependency theory and on the control of information systems by Western institutions.

Gerald Sussman and John A. Lent (1991) "Introduction: Critical Perspectives on Communication and Third World Development", *Transnational Communications: Wiring the Third World* (Newbury Park, Ca., Sage), pp. 1 - 26. This source provides a useful overview of various positions in the field of dependency theory.

José J. Villamil (ed.) (1979) *Transnational Capitalism and National Development: New Perspectives on Dependence* (Sussex, Harvester Press). This book offers theoretical perspectives on the issue of Third World dependence.

Armand Mattelart (1979) *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture: The Ideological Apparatuses of Imperialism* (translated by Michael Chanan) (Brighton, Sussex, Harvester Press). Though this book does not deal exclusively with the publishing industry (it does contain sections on educational textbook production), it is a crucial text to consult in the area of dependency theory.
- <sup>3</sup> M. P. Machet (1993) "Publishing and book selling in South Africa with specific reference to the black market", *South African Journal of Library and Information Science*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (1993), p. 166:

South African bookshops or distributors could not buy a book from the SA unless there was no British edition, nor would an American publisher sell the rights of a book to a South African publisher unless it had already been turned down by British publishers.... British publishers still dominate the South African market which is a major export market .... In 1988 South Africa was the eighth most active importer of British books after the United States, Australia, West Germany, France, Canada, Japan and the Netherlands. The imports from Britain in 1988 accounted for £22 500 000 (Warwick, 1991:92).

Also see Richard Nile (1990) "Cartels, Capitalism and the Australian Booktrade", *Continuum: An Australian Journal of the Media* (Griffiths University Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Australia), Vol 4, No. 1, pp. 71 - 91. Dealing with the effects of the Net Book Agreement on book supply and pricing, this article lays out a scenario in which policy arrangements inherited from Australia's colonial past mesh with the economic power of large British (multinational) publishing companies to perpetuate the dependency of the Australian booktrade on a profit-oriented "cartel" of British publishers. Parts of his argument are relevant to the South African context.

4 The report of this conference stated that the low figures for the number of books per head in developing countries "could not be explained merely by a high illiteracy rate and low purchasing power. It was undoubtedly due, to a considerable extent, to the fact that the region depended heavily on imports, not only of books, but of the materials needed to manufacture books. Thus, internal difficulties in financing the development of the book industry, coupled with foreign currency shortages, had led to an acute book shortage. It was evident that this shortage, particularly of educational books, had very serious consequences." (Behrstock 1989: 54 - 56).

5 See Diane Woode (1991) *Publishing and Distribution: some parallels between South Africa and selected countries in Anglophone Africa* B. Bibl. (Hons.) Thesis in the Department of Library and Information Science., University of Cape Town, Cape Town, p. 6:

Several conferences on publishing in Africa, held on and in Africa, during the 1960's to the 1980's, reflect the importance that is placed on the necessity for the establishment of autonomous publishing houses, from an information control and dissemination point of view, an educational aspect and from the national development angle.... Enthusiasm rode high in the early nineteen sixties and seventies 'during the flush of international interest' in education, the various infrastructures, including textbooks, that assisted in the growth of higher education in developing countries (Altbach, 1980: 7; 61). This was replaced by some pessimism during the nineteen eighties, as 'donor fatigue' set in and publishing dropped out of fashion among aid agencies. 'Years of struggle, disappointment and failures had taken their toll' (Rathgeber, 1985: 57).

6 See *World Congress on Books, London, 7 - 11 June 1982, final report*, Proceedings of the UNESCO World Conference on Books, London, 7 - 11 June, 1982 (Paris, UNESCO).

7 Julian Behrstock (1989) "Promoting Books and Readership in the Developing World", *The Need to Read*, eds. S. Gopinathan and V. Barth (Singapore: Festival of Books Singapore), p. 58:

The Asian and Latin American centres proved to be the most successful, aided by generous funds and facilities provided by the respective host countries. Less than three years after the Asian meeting, a regional book development centre had been set up in Tokyo, later to be merged, in 1971, with the newly established Asian Cultural Centre for Unesco (ACCU). ACCU undertook (and continues to pursue) a wide range of highly practical activities. Some 20 annual training courses have been held at the impressive Tokyo headquarters, with a total of some 400 participants from all over the region. Mobile teams of internationally recruited experts are sent to Asian countries, upon request, to help them in organising national training courses based on local needs and conditions. A biennial contest is sponsored for the best illustrations of children's books produced in developing countries.

8 Marvel and McCafferty (1986), p. 1075. They argue that "several efficiency-based explanations of RPM have been advanced, including the manufacturing firm's desire to assure the provision by dealers of presale services..., its need to obtain dealer certification of product quality..., and, finally, an outlets explanation based on the purchase of locations for product distribution...." (1074 - 75)

## Chapter Two

# THE LOCAL CONTEXT

## Political and Economic Constraints in the South African Booktrade

As a erstwhile British colony, South Africa shares a context with other Anglophone African countries; the publishing environment and the westernised knowledge infrastructures which have arisen in South Africa were shaped by institutions established to meet the instrumental and strategic requirements of the metropolis. Neocolonial dependency, however, has taken a unique course in South Africa, because during the post-war period British influences waned as the Afrikaner nationalist government set out to create autonomous institutions, including an 'indigenous' Afrikaans publishing industry, to serve the requirements of the apartheid state. During the post-second world war period, local government policies have had a far greater impact on the way in which 'indigenous' publishing capabilities have developed in South Africa than the neocolonial (British-dominated) market arrangements and institutions which remain as a legacy of British imperialism in Africa; however, the continuing presence of British multinational publishers in South Africa - in a much weaker market position than in other African countries, because of their inability to obtain privileged access to lucrative institutional textbook market in South Africa - does play a role in shaping local publishing activities.

South Africa shares some strong similarities with other African countries; its publishing capacities have been constrained and damaged by government policies just as other publishing industries in Africa have been damaged by government interference. But South Africa's publishing industry also presents distinctive problems, arising out of the roles played by the peripheral elites which assumed power following the slow retreat of metropolitan government in the face of Afrikaner nationalism. South Africa's elites accumulated a range of knowledge infrastructures, libraries, research facilities and informational resources which other African countries lack; but these accumulated resources have never served more than approximately 5% of the population, and were constrained by the authoritarian management of knowledge resources within the context of a state policy that was increasingly preoccupied with 'security' and racial exclusivity. This chapter, therefore, will explore features of the local knowledge context, particularly in the areas of retail pricing and educational publishing, which have limited the options available to the book industry, and which continue to limit access to relevant, reasonably-priced scholarly books.



South Africa is still dependent on British and American books and scholarly publications in the tertiary book market, and has yet to develop an autonomous publishing industry capable of serving the needs of institutions of higher education. There is an urgent need for materials suitable for adult education and literacy campaigns too, which can only be met by local publishers working with educationalists and researchers to develop locally relevant material. But problems faced by South Africa's educational publishers - many of them 'alternative' publishers who survived the hostile market conditions and political repression of the 1980s only by virtue of subsidies and donations which are no longer available to them in many cases - are similar to other Third World, and specifically African, publishers:

Certain kinds of books, such as scholarly monographs, cannot be published in most Third World nations without a considerable subsidy. Yet it is important to publish original scholarship if a nation is to establish an independent research base. Government is inevitably involved in the economics of publishing, particularly since commercial credit is seldom available for the book industry due to the unprofitability of publishing in the Third World. It is simply impossible to obtain a rapid return on investment in most instances [Altbach, Arboleda and Gopinathan 1985: 9].

Aside from economic constraints which militate against the viable production of local educational titles in small markets, 'oppositional' educational publishers have been excluded from the institutional market in South Africa, so costs of unprofitable academic titles cannot be offset against the profits earned in producing school textbooks and other mass-marketable materials for the institutional book market. Systematic constraints to which South Africa's booktrade is subject, in similar ways to the booktrade in other African countries, include the uncomfortable fact that because "Third World economies, even in the market economies, are more government influenced than in the West, government policies concerning publishing are very important."

In many instances, these policies have been vacillating and contradictory and have actually hindered the growth of the industry. The scope of the policies is varied: regulations concerning the import of paper and ink, copyright rules, changes in the curriculum of the schools, and political and ideological constraints on what can be published are all part of the equation. Regulations concerning the import of books and the nature and scope of customs duties on books, paper, and related materials are also important for the publishing industry. In some countries, government took control of textbook publication without understanding the broader implications for the publishing industry of this action. Recently established book development councils in many nations have created forums where the publishing industry can work directly with government officials [Altbach, Arboleda and Gopinathan 1985: 8].

Scholarly publishing requires a framework which will enable publishers to perform an uneconomical task that is nevertheless crucial to the cultural autonomy and diversity of the society they serve; but government in South Africa has failed to provide such a framework, since policy frameworks have been used (in every society but uniquely in South Africa) as much to promote the state's own strategic objectives and to reward favoured state interests and alliances as it has been deployed to compensate for the losses

suffered under the conditions of a mass market-oriented, profit-driven, global economic system.

## **2.1 Background to the South African Booktrade**

The booktrade in Africa, as in many post-colonial societies, arose out of the 19th century colonial assault on oral societies; it was a side-effect of the extension of European administrative control in Africa, and it accompanied the deployment of bureaucratic and instrumental control mechanisms over the natural and human resources of subjected territories. It was associated with social, religious and educational measures aimed at securing general pacification and orderly governance in the colonies. Dependency on Europe for books, paper, and printing technologies has characterized the South African booktrade since its inception. An indigenous publishing industry may be said to have begun with the printing press founded by Johann Ritter (a German printer) at the Cape Colony in 1795; however, these and subsequent printing enterprises principally served official government and church requirements (gazettes, notices, handbills, almanacs and documents) [Peter Randall 1983: 105]. The rise of an English-language press after the British took over the Cape colony in 1806, which emerged out of a struggle (especially intense in the 1820s, and culminating in the Magna Carta of 1829) aimed at securing a degree of press freedom for colonists, may be identified as the circumscribed origin of a 'reading culture' in South Africa - circumscribed, that is, by its relations of dependency with the European colonial project, and by its dependency on European resources and technology, on European missionaries and thinkers, and on European news, knowledge and views [Hachten and Giffard 1984: 105].

Published materials directed specifically at local and indigenous people in South Africa were first produced by missionaries, who started mission schools, formulated written orthographies for indigenous languages in order to produce vernacular bibles, and founded mission presses [Kantey 1990: vi-vii; Machet 1993: 166]. Literacy, education, books, and colonial subjugation were thus linked; the lack of a 'reading culture' in South Africa, to which people involved in educational, literacy and local publishing ventures often refer today<sup>1</sup>, is rooted in this history. Woode [1991] observes that "despite vested interests, the church played a decisive and important role in the development of the book industry in Africa" by establishing schools and presses which published textbooks as well as religious works. "They played a significant role in education even though their main aims were to educate the people for their own purposes - to achieve the aims of the mother country; to provide resources for achieving the political (and economic) aims of the colonialists...." [2-3]. Machet [1993] argues that "despite the undeniable contribution made by Christian societies and publishing houses in many African countries, the literature they provided imposed an ideological and cultural perspective on the indigenous peoples... and reduced a rich and diverse oral tradition to a few centres of literary patronage.... The aim of teachers and missionaries was to Europeanize Africans and not

to provide a literature related to their needs and interests.” [Machet 1993: 167; Kantey 1990: vii; Osa 1987: 750 - 4]. The disjunction between European literacy (with its accompanying technologies and modes of knowledge transmission) and indigenous orality in South Africa has been identified as a contemporary obstacle to the development of the booktrade - it has been argued, for instance, that the manner in which literacy was introduced into Africa established a culture of instrumental reading:

The Christian ethic of reward and punishment which stressed and propagated reading for achievement, materially and spiritually, rather than for enjoyment, is still retained today and is evident in many parts of Africa, where fiction, if read at all, is frequently read for its educational or informational value [Benge, 1970:187].

In addition, published materials circulated by missionaries denigrated local practices and knowledge; stigmatisation of vernacular languages followed: “Evidence of this is seen in the urban elite, in many countries, insisting on writing and reading in English and only recently reverting to the vernacular.” [Woode 1991: 2-3]. The eurocentric and colonial nature of African publishing produced inequality by suppressing indigenous languages and consigning African scholarship to second grade status: “University and commercial presses were not even represented in middle Africa until the mid 1950's, and the only field available to African writers and scholars was to write in their own languages because so few expatriates were fluent in African languages - yet, at this stage, few Africans wrote in anything but English, because of the wider international market and also the stigma attached to the vernacular.” [Woode 1991: 6]

### **2.1.1 A chronology of publishing in South Africa**

Following the Magna Carta in 1829, and the emergence of missionary publishing enterprises, a local publishing industry gradually became established in South Africa. In 1854, Juta and Company was established; in 1887, a missionary press was established at Marionhill in Natal in the aftermath of the Anglo-Zulu war; in 1893, Maskew Miller was established, and began publishing in Afrikaans in 1910. Longman and Oxford University Press also established a presence in South Africa as importers of books from their British parent companies. Following the Anglo-Boer war and the establishment of the Union of South Africa, Afrikaner nationalism became a driving force in the incipient South African publishing industry; Nasionale Pers was established in 1914 and gradually became a centre for mainstream (Cape-based) Afrikaner nationalist publishing activities. During the 1920s, several Afrikaans publishing houses were established [Kantey 1990: vii-viii; Machet 1993: 168; Randall 1993: 105]. The rise of these Afrikaans publishers - particularly the Nasionale Pers stable of companies (Nasou, Academia, Van Schaiks, Via Africa) but also groups such as Perskor, Tafelberg and Human & Rousseau [Kantey 1990: viii-ix] - were given further impetus after 1948, which saw Afrikaans publishers begin to dominate the state book procurement system (which had previously been dominated by British multinationals Oxford University Press and Longmans), making

these publishers the largest and most active publishers of school textbooks in indigenous languages as well as Afrikaans. As British publishers which had established themselves in South Africa (initially as book importers and distributors) were forced out of the institutional textbook market, they turned to general and academic publishing. Publishing houses such as Longman, Oxford University Press, Butterworths, Collins, Heinemann, Macmillan, and McGraw-Hill became suppliers of books to the tertiary education market, in addition to publishing for the general market. Peter Randall observes that during “the years of the dominance of the apartheid state, Oxford University Press Southern Africa could no longer be regarded as oppositional publishers; they followed Longmans into the African school market, and concentrated more on being distributors of imported books. Other overseas publishers like Heinemann and Penguin, who might have been expected to be oppositional publishers, did not have a publishing presence in South Africa until very recently, when OUP Southern Africa once again began to publish some oppositional books.” [Phillip 1991: 106] Longman later amalgamated with Macmillan [16].

Heinemann, however, published ‘oppositional’ material (including the writings of Nelson Mandela, Ruth First, Oliver Tambo, Alex la Guma and Steve Biko) [Machet 1993: 167]. During the increasingly turbulent 1960s, heavy censorship and the banning or banishment of most of South Africa’s black writers led Nadine Gordimer (who published her work abroad during this time) to describe the decade as one of “paralytic silence”. In the early 1970s, however, a “burst of creative writing, primarily by black poets” [Randall 1983: 106] was accompanied by the rise of the first of several small, struggling but ultimately highly influential ‘oppositional’ publishers. In 1971, David Phillip started his tiny publishing house [Machet 1993: 167; Phillip 1991: 13]. Ravan Press was founded in 1972 by Peter Randall, and “barely survived its first five years” [Randall 1983: 106]. These independent publishers, and others which arose after it - notably Ad Donker, Afrikaans alternative publisher Taurus (both established in 1973) and Bateleur Press (1974) - faced continual harassment, censorship, bannings and court action, but provide the first authentic outlets for critical and ultimately influential local writing. Other publishers in the academic book sector, specifically, who published locally-relevant ‘oppositional’ material as well as scholarly works, include the university presses of Wits University and of Natal, the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University, the Centre for African Studies and the Centre for Intergroup Studies at UCT, the African Studies Institute at Wits, the National English Literature Museum at Rhodes, the Centre for Social and Development Studies at the University of Natal, Durban, and the University of the Western Cape [Phillip 1991:18].

In 1982 Mothobi Mutloatse (previously of Ravan Press) founded Skotaville, the first black publishing house in South Africa [Mutloatse 1992: 211]. It was established as “an indigenous, collective, and independent Black publishing house” specifically to publish African writers and intellectuals [212-3]. In 1988, Seritsi sa Sechaba, a black feminist press, was established [Phillip 1991: 16]. In 1989, the Independent Publishers Association of South Africa (IPASA) was founded to provide an alternative home for

independent publishers who felt that their interests were not adequately protected by existing publishers bodies (the South African Publishers Association and the the Book Trade Association) [Phillip 1991: 18]. IPASA has been heavily involved in training programmes for local publishing needs since its inception. Thus a pattern of gradual indigenisation and growing independence and autonomy has emerged in the publishing industry since the 1970s.

## 2.2 Multinational Publishers and Africa's Booktrade

Machet describes South African publishing in terms of "literary colonialism and hegemony" - related features of South Africa's history which "have together resulted in a South African publishing industry which is effectively controlled by white capital and expertise and which predominantly publishes books that reflect Eurocentric values and culture". Randall [1983] points out that

even in the first decades of this century, as South Africa's colonial period was drawing to a close, most of the country's reading material was imported from Europe, mainly from Britain, Holland and Germany. This was the case even with educational texts designed for use in local schools. Natal schoolchildren in the 1920s and 1930s still made use of *Our Country: an elementary history of Natal*, by Hugh Bryan. It was originally published by Thos. Nelson in London in about 1909 and made it "quite clear that the Zulus could not rule themselves or keep order in their country, so the white men were forced to do it for them", and in the process "thousands of foolish natives were killed or put in prison". In this way colonial children were taught how to shoulder the white man's burden! [105]

Early publishers in South Africa, such as Longmans and Oxford University Press, served the colonial market in South Africa as branches of British publishers by importing books to sell to the small English-language market [Machet: 167; Kante 1990: viii]. The educational system instituted in British colonies made use of books published in Britain; after independence, the resource-starved educational system in most African countries continued to depend on these publishers. In consequence, both the scholarly and textbook markets in anglophone Africa are still dominated to a large extent (or even completely) by British multinationals [Altbach 1983: 316; Altbach and Gopinathan 1985: 13].

British publishers still dominate the South African market which is a major export market .... In 1988 South Africa was the eighth most active importer of British books after the United States, Australia, West Germany, France, Canada, Japan and the Netherlands. The imports from Britain in 1988 accounted for £22 500 000...South African bookshops or distributors could not buy a book from the SA unless there was no British edition, nor would an American publisher sell the rights of a book to a South African publisher unless it had already been turned down by British publishers (Machet, 1988a:93). British publishers still dominate the South African market which is a major export market (Machet, 1988b:105). In 1988 South Africa was the eighth most active importer of British books after the United States, Australia, West Germany, France, Canada, Japan and the Netherlands. The imports from Britain in 1988 accounted for £22 500 000... [Machet 1993: 166].

According to the *Monthly Abstract of Trade Statistics* issued by the Central Statistical Services [1993], South Africa imported books and printed material to the value of R414,8 million in 1992 (and exported R31,2 million in the same year). In 1993, imports amounted to R553,6 million and exports to R51,1 million. These statistics testify to the extent of South Africa's dependency on imported books; the academic book sector is most dependent on imports in South Africa, as in most African countries. Woode [1991] notes that educational publishing in Africa

remained the domain of the British publishing houses and reflected the curricular orientation of the colonizer, but still based on the mother country model... thus key decisions were made by others, who had priorities far from the difficult process of nation-building and economic development... With the movement towards independence in the mid twentieth century 'Education' became a clarion call for the new nationalist leaders and independent states, thus increasing the demand for new and more textbooks.... British schoolbooks were imported and used in most parts of anglophone Africa. Frequently the emphasis on colonial traditions, curricula and practices and the use of the metropolitan language meant that the already limited market was even more severely curtailed as this led to the growth of a small urban elite and, little or no distribution to a largely illiterate rural population which had limited access to material, both because of a lack of understanding of the language and the vast distances between cities [4-5].

The early dominance of British publishers in the South African book market derived from their colonial advantage, though this advantage has been protected by international arrangements, such as the British Market Agreement - according to which British and American publishers divided the English-language market between them, with British companies operating without American competition in the book markets of their ex-colonies from approximately 1930 to 1970 - and by the Net Book Agreement - which regulated the retail prices at which listed books could be sold. Richard Nile [1990] argues from an Australian perspective that the effect of the Net Book Agreement on book supply and pricing in the Australian book market is to ensure that it remains subordinate to the 'metropolitan' market; he describes a scenario in which policy arrangements inherited from Australia's colonial past mesh with the economic power of large British (multinational) publishing companies to perpetuate the dependency of the Australian booktrade on a profit-oriented 'price cartel' [Nile 1990: 71-91].

\* Multinational publishers are able to produce books cost efficiently because they have access to bulk-buying advantages in paper and raw materials that come with (privileged) access to the international market, and they have large infrastructures to support not only mass production and distribution operations, but also product-support training, promotion and advertising activities. Woode observes that British publishers in anglophone African countries were able to publish the same books regularly "with different language translations, sometimes with modifications, for varying countries and languages. This led to great profit margins for many of these firms, but also, often, to inadequate, irrelevant textbooks for the African child or new literate... As a result of this situation many governments of the newly independent countries attempted to promote indigenous writing and publishing in order to establish a more relevant syllabus for their

education systems.” During the period following independence from colonial rule, “an education explosion... resulted in an enormous scramble for a share of the educational publishing market by state departments, African and foreign firms. In West and East Africa the use of British published school books was recommended, and this led to formidable profits for the British firms serving the areas.... During this period, multinational publishers gained an unenviable reputation, when firms like the British publisher, Macmillan, established a foothold in this lucrative market by a controversial 'joint' venture with State publishing houses in several newly independent countries. The intention was to supply the expertise and training and after a period to withdraw.... These 'partnerships' were lopsided as Macmillan had everything to gain and nothing to lose.” [Woode 1991: 5 ; Zell 1984: 177]

However, it is possible to argue that multinational British publishers no longer dominate African book markets in the same way; that books produced by multinationals are in many cases the work of genuine joint ventures with local publishers, authors and materials developers, and that such books can no longer be said to lack relevant local content which addresses the needs and interests of an African readership [Zell 1991: 66-7].

Initially, these foreign firms fostered the colonial educational systems and the language of the metropolitan country. Frequent accusations have been made against them for neglecting the vernacular and literary fields and only concentrating on the lucrative text book market to produce books which have little or no relevance to the African child, African culture or even the neo-literate.... However, despite these allegations, well known writers such as the Nigerian, Chinua Achebe have lauded the efforts of the multinational firms and, since the 1960's, increasing efforts have been made by the multinational publishers to promote, select and publish African orientated literature, written by Africans instead of by expatriate colonials. Many countries have decreed that a majority shareholding must be held by Africans which has resulted in control being retained by local Africans [Woode 1991: 5].

Machet argues that British publishers gradually developed local subsidiaries and evolved a style of publishing based on local needs, and so "substantially aided the emergence of a national literature." Heinemann has had a close relationship with South African oppositional movements (including the African National Congress), for instance; they published Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Oliver Tambo, Alex la Guma and Ruth First. Macmillan Boleswa, who hold publishing monopolies in Swaziland, Botswana and Zambia, recently formed a joint venture with ANC-aligned Thebe Investments. In the past, censorship and the increasing domination of the educational book market by (mainly Afrikaans) publishers who supported the apartheid government, limited the role of British publishers, such as Oxford University Press Southern Africa, from publishing for the local educational market. British companies gradually lost their dominance of the educational textbook market in South Africa after the second World War, and tended to publish "oppositional" material during the apartheid years [Machet 1993: 167].

Laura Czerniewicz [1993] points out that



South Africa is unique on the continent in that the majority of books published for the school market are produced by large indigenous companies. Three local monopolies, De Jager-Haum, Naspers and Perskor dominate the textbook market. All are locally owned by Afrikaans capital which gives a different meaning to 'indigenous' in the South African scenario. Although the role of these indigenous publishers is discussed at length in other articles in this collection, it is important to consider their relationships with the state. This situation is not far different from that in countries in which the state monopolises publishing or where certain publishers have special relationships with the ministries of education. One might even call the South African case 'publishing-of-a-special-type'! By contrast, in South Africa most of the multinationals fall in the middle range of publishers. It could also be argued that some multinationals have been traditionally liberal and have produced relevant books in a difficult climate. A new government must be asked questions regarding a changed and improved system of textbook provision. The state may well be tempted to take over textbook provision, but this temptation must not be succumbed to! This method has not worked elsewhere in Africa, and is so fraught with the problems mentioned that it should be avoided, however well-intentioned [90-1].

The domination of the textbook market by state-aligned 'indigenous' publishers, which sets the South African publishing industry apart from those in other African countries where foreign publishers have entered into agreement with state structures, suggests that state control over institutional book markets is likely to result in corruption and ideological manipulation, whether 'foreign' multinationals or favoured 'indigenous' publishers are involved in such special relationships. In another contribution to the Conference on Democratic Education, Oliphant [1993] says that "the term indigenous is misleading in certain contexts" since "it invokes the internal and external dichotomy which national chauvinism enlists for their programme of mobilisation." He argues that easy claims about the domination of South African publishing by foreign interests is "erroneous" [99]. At this conference, a shift away from the dependency paradigm led participants to focus in more detail on local and regional formations and contexts which have fostered 'book hunger', and largely abandoned attempts to find an generalised explanation for 'book hunger'. South Africa institutionalised 'book hunger' through systematic and political measures in the past, and the reasons for its lack of relevant and diverse reading material to serve the mass of its population can only be located here, in the economies and institutionalised practices of the local booktrade.

### **2.3 Educational Publishing and the Booktrade**

A well-balanced publishing industry includes a number of elements that function in a symbiotic relationship. Typically, in the industrialized nations, the book industry is a mix of the production and sale of school textbooks, general books, scholarly books, encyclopedias, mass-market fiction, and the like. These elements coexist in a delicate balance, with the profits from texts often subsidizing the production of uneconomic scholarly books or with mass-market fiction permitting the publication of poetry. In contrast, in the Third World these elements are seldom in balance. Further, peripheral support systems that are crucial to the publishing industries functioning well are often lacking or underdeveloped in Third World countries. Among these are a well-developed library system, which is a major purchaser of books and an economic pillar of the book industry, and a distribution network system that includes book stores as a major component. Despite the fact that Third World publishing is often overly dependent on the school



textbook market, there is little understanding that profits made on textbooks can subsidize the publication of less profitable but, nevertheless, badly needed materials; in many countries the textbook market is in the hands of government textbook boards. Third World nations must also face stiff competition from imported books, which are sometimes "dumped" at concessional prices in Third World markets. In short, dire lack of all the usual markets for books and the often unnatural development of the publishing industry means that the economics of the industry are skewed and the publishers do not serve the entire potential market for books [Altbach, Arboleda and Gopinathan 1985: 7].

English publishers that entered the South African booktrade on the heels of colonial administrators originally profited by serving as distribution arms for their parent companies. Oxford University Press, Heinemann, Macmillan, McGraw-Hill (later Lexican), Butterworths and Collins took advantage of the increasingly large and diverse educational publishing market, in addition to importing books from their parent companies. Maskew Miller published prescribed works in African languages, as well as local editions of English classics. Much of this educational publishing "was of poor quality, but some distinguished academic and general publishing also took place" [Machet 1993: 168; Kantey 1990: viii]. Book publishers rely on the institutional market, made up of library, university and Education Department book purchases. This market accounts for the bulk of book sales, since the general book-buying public is estimated at only 5% of the population [Kantey 1991: 103]. Machet estimates that 75% to 80% of the local book retail market is made up of educational books. Profits made in the educational textbook market serve to guarantee uncertain profit margins, and could subsidise titles that undersell, and thus make valuable contributions to the state of knowledge in South Africa.

However, Afrikaans publishers, who had close links with the Nationalist regime, increasingly dominated this lucrative market after the Nationalist election victory in 1948; independent or 'oppositional' publishers were denied access to it, even when their books were not banned in terms of the censorship laws [David Philip 1991: 17]. Domination of the institutional book market by conservative publishers therefore had a destructive effect on local publishing, since indigenous publishers had to survive on their marketing efforts in the retail and non-formal markets - in addition to facing censorship pressures which meant additional (sometimes considerable) financial risk. Afrikaans publishers were often founded with explicitly political aims - first to secure the language position of Afrikaners, later to secure Afrikaner political hegemony. **Nasionale Pers** (Naspers) arose out of **Die Burger**, a newspaper founded by Afrikaner nationalist interests in the Western Cape in 1914 as an attempt to counter English political and cultural dominance [Woode 1991: 60]. It has been pointed out that educational publishing, unlike general and trade publishing, is unique in being directed mainly to the 'black market' [Joubert 1990: 9]:

Educational publishing, largely controlled by the giant Afrikaans publishing houses, unlike general or trade publishing, which is aimed in the main at the small white middle-class minority, is aimed at the largely black market, as they comprise an estimated 76.8% of all pupils. The black school going population, at present, has an annual growth rate of 4.6% compared with negative growth rates in the white, and just over 1% in the Asian and

Coloured populations... Of a retail budget of approximately R400 million in 1989, an estimated 75 was spent on educational books, thus as elsewhere in Africa, this lucrative market, is sought after by all publishers .... [Woode 1991: 60]

The massive hidden subsidy available to conservative mainstream publishers through the school textbook market attracted strong criticism at the recent Conference on Publishing for a Democratic South Africa:

Most delegates recognized the urgent necessity of putting in place mechanisms to ensure openness and fairness in the future allocation of textbook contracts... This urgency was emphasised on the first day of the conference when delegates' attention was drawn to a newspaper report that the ANC's business arm, Thebe Investment Corporation, was in the process of initiating a secret deal with multinational publisher, Macmillan... The history of textbook publishing in South Africa has been characterised by close links between education departments and monopolistic publishers who squeezed out the often high-quality work of small, indigenous publishers. Departments favoured publishers whose position on apartheid was less than critical, and frequently deals were clinched on the basis of shady relationships between selection committee members and publishers... Glen Moss, of Ravan Press and the Independent Publishers Association of South Africa, stressed that mechanisms for strict regulation, rather than statements of grand policy, were necessary to prevent nepotism and corruption in the textbook industry. For example, some of the Department of Education and Training's selection rules are impeccable - it has been in the realm of implementation that things have gone awry.... many of the currently prescribed textbooks are out of date, inappropriate to students' experience, and poorly designed and written. Since ANC-aligned Thebe Investment Corporation announced the formation of Nolwazi Educational Publishers in conjunction with UK-based Macmillan Publishers and local black-owned company Skotaville, the spectre of bias in government procurement practices is yet again raised [Garson 1993: 1].

Maskew Miller, founded in 1893, was the first English-language publisher in South Africa. Maskew Miller produced Afrikaans readers (from 1919) and published in African languages as well as English [Machet 1993: 168]. They merged with Longman to form Maskew Miller-Longman when Longman, an established publishing group, bought a 50% stake in Maskew Miller in 1983 [Woode 1991: 53]. This publisher was one of the few publishers of British origin that gained access to the institutional textbook market, and has grown considerably since 1976, when English became the medium of instruction in black schools (both DET and "homeland" schools). According to the Department of Education and Training's (DET) list of publishers whose textbooks had been selected for prescription, Maskew Miller had sixty-eight titles selected in 1990, as compared to Educum's 236, De Jager-Haum's 197, Via Africa's 169, Juta's 124, and Shuter & Shooter's 107. The stranglehold well-connected Afrikaans publishers, such as Nasionale's Nasou and Perskor, held over this market had already diminished somewhat by 1990, though conservative publishing houses completely dominate the list. It was estimated that Maskew Miller was among the largest publishers catering for both the institutional educational and academic book markets; reports placed Maskew Miller, along with Nasou, Via Afrika, Juta, Perskor/Educum, De Jager Haum and Shuter & Shooter, in a group of dominant textbook publishers who shared this market more or less equally among them. In the market for prescribed literary books in African languages,

Heinemann, Maskew Miller and De Jager Haum were said to be the largest producers, while Tafelberg and Human & Rousseau (which are both part of Nasionale Boekhandel) and Perskor dominate the Afrikaans market [De Villiers 1993: 22 - 23].<sup>2</sup>

Macmillan Boleswa is the educational publishing arm of Macmillan Publishers. This company has been publishing English Language Teaching (ELT) materials since 1978. In 1988, it established the Macmillan English Language Teaching Services (MELTS), using teachers and specialists in English as a Second Language (ESL) and literature (including African literature), teacher trainers, writers and editors to provide consultative and planning expertise in areas such as research, curriculum development, language issues and examination. MELTS also undertook advisory services, materials development specialist editing, and teacher training and support ["A publishing team with a difference", **Sunday Nation**, 10 December 1993: 16]. Macmillan Boleswa's commissioning editor for English language teaching, Yvonne Kgame, works with organisations involved in language policy initiatives such as the English Language Teaching Information Centre, Language in Education Forum, and the Council for Black Education and Research (responsible for research based on rights to language). It also works with the Independent Examinations Board (previously the Joint Matriculation Board). Language policy study and research is linked into the process of commissioning and developing textbooks in order to make this process more conscious of the contexts in which these books will be used and read.

In October 1993, Macmillan Publishers (the parent company of Macmillan Boleswa) entered into an agreement with Thebe Investments and Skotaville Publishers. In terms of their agreement, a new company called Nolwazi Educational Publishers was established; Thebe would hold 42,5% of Nolwazi's shares, Skotaville 10% (thus giving the new players a controlling stake in the venture) with Macmillan holding the balance. According to Macmillan Boleswa's managing director, Christopher Patterson, this venture would "set high standards of quality and responsibility in endeavouring to fulfil the educational needs of all the people of South Africa." Skotaville's managing director, Mothobi Mutloatse, said that the venture "aimed at black economic empowerment in the publishing industry"; the new company would be staffed (like Macmillan Boleswa in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) by black people: "Nolwazi reflects the mission and business goals of Thebe, especially as it will give black people access to the means to shape their own educational future.... Nolwazi will actively promote black South African authorship and it is expected that its staff profile will reflect the new South African democracy." [New company tipped to be a boost to publishing", **Sunday Nation**, 31 October 1993: 17].

Concern was expressed at the recent Conference on Educational Publishing for a Democratic South Africa about school textbook selection procedures; the corrupt and secretive practices of Education Departments in commissioning books, which

disadvantaged independent publishers in the past, could not risk being carried on in a new guise under the new dispensation:

Publishers are worried, however, about Nolwazi's entry on two counts: on the one hand, Thebe, owned by BathuBathu trust which counts Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu as trustees, is too closely linked to the ANC for comfort; on the other, its UK partner Macmillan is known for its adeptness at dealing with African officials to its advantage. Macmillan is said to have the contract of sole supplier of school books in Swaziland for a period of 10 years. The company is also favourably ensconced in Botswana and Lesotho [De Villiers 1993: 22].

However, it was pointed out that "(i)n a number of instances where Thebe has been involved in areas where the ANC has been called on to proclaim policy, the Organisation has shown a singular lack of enthusiasm to promote Thebe's cause."

One such instance was cellular telephony, where the ANC remains steadfast that only one licence should have been awarded to Telkom. As part of the African Telecommunications Forum, Thebe called long and loudly for greater concessions to black business concerns, to no avail so far. ANC education desk spokesman John Samuel is adamant that more checks are necessary to ensure transparency and efficiency in procurement: "Part of the problem that even a new government will have is that good policy is not enough. Two elements are essential: a transparent process and the establishment of an effective monitoring system." Samuels reckons any affirmative action in authorship, which may benefit Nolwazi, would be wrong: "SA is a diverse society. We have to avoid showing a bias towards one culture at the expense of another."... As things stand, education authorities maintain they do not select publishers, companies and/or authors for school books. Says a DET spokesperson: "Publishers are provided with condensed curricula three years before they are to be implemented. They are asked to submit manuscripts within 18 months for selection - these manuscripts may contain no indication of publisher or author.... "The anonymous documents are evaluated by three selectors, who are not aware of the identity of their counterparts. Selection reports are then evaluated by subject committees and the department's book committees and placed in order of acceptability. The six manuscripts judged to be the best are normally placed on the department's book catalogue."... For Samuels, though, the biggest problems in school books centre around 'vast inefficiencies' in the distribution system. But the process of how books are prescribed also worries him. "That's where corruption can start," he says.... Although Nolwazi may be too close for comfort to the ANC, it would be grossly unfair to assume unreservedly that Nolwazi would seek to use its political correctness to promote its interests in an undue manner. Says Skotaville MD Mthobi Mutloatse: "Nolwazi will be more than just a publishing house. We plan to act as a catalyst for authors, teachers and the community to help develop the educational curricula of tomorrow." [De Villiers 1993: 23]

It is difficult not to see the rise of a new set of 'special relationships' between favoured publishers and state structures in the emergence of Nolwazi, despite claims to the contrary. Only coordinated efforts on the part of IPASA and independent publishing houses to ensure fair access to institutional markets can prevent the perpetuation of the separation of textbook publishers from more broadly educational, and specifically scholarly publishers.

Glen Moss [1994] describes developments in the educational publishing industries in strong terms, pointing out the extent to which the strategies of many publishers in

securing access to South Africa's only mass market in books continue to be influenced by the malpractices common under the apartheid system:

One may well ask why educational publishing is such an issue in South Africa today. Over the past year or so we have witnessed the development of what is one of South Africa's few growth industries - the commissioning of reports and research on the relationship between publishing and education. Certain publishers have worn down carpets in their attempts to reach the doors of the African National Congress (ANC) in particular, which they perceive as the most influential stakeholder in future policy and practice in educational publishing.... It is common knowledge that publishers have poured many millions of rands into their attempts to position their houses to take advantage of whatever new educational dispensation emerges in South Africa - after apartheid, after Bantu Education, after National Party rule. Historically discredited players, who only a few short years ago could talk the language of fundamental pedagogics and Christian National Education with the best of the Broeders, suddenly present themselves as torch-bearers of liberation, democracy and progressive education.... And the capital which they accumulated on the back of Bantu Education and privileged relationships with the education departments is now being poured into advertising campaigns proclaiming their commitment to a new social order, attempts to publish their way into credibility through shameless policies of bandwagoning and currying favour with authors or organisations they perceive as potentially influential [Moss 1993: 21].

Moss points out that the "estimated total retail value of books in South Africa during 1991 was R431 million, of which up to 80 per cent - or R345 million - was generated by the sale of textbooks. By far the largest percentage of this figure came from the DET's approved list... Over the last three years, approximately 80 per cent of the textbook market - again, by 1991 figures, worth R276 million was accounted for by three publishing groups: De Jager-Haum, Perskor, and Naspers... these three groups account for upwards of 60 per cent of textbooks which appear on the approved lists. In an industry where the sale of 3 000 copies of a quality work of non-fiction aimed at the general public, sold over eighteen months, is often seen as a best-seller, the financial importance of textbook publishing - especially getting books onto the DET's approved list - is obvious." [Moss 1993: 21]

Moss divides South African publishers into three broad categories: firstly, those "owned and controlled by indigenous capital, which have been able to dominate the market through either a set of privileged relationships to the state and its organs, or an ability to manipulate that relationship." Secondly, transnational or multinational publishing companies

...have become an increasingly important factor in educational publishing, especially since 1990, when they perceived new opportunities to break the stranglehold of those who had traditionally dominated the market. Believing that the *ancien regime* of textbook publishers was bound to be compromised in the eyes of those likely to succeed apartheid's last government, multinationals already having a South African presence began expanding this presence rapidly, while others began planning their entry or re-entry. Substantial capital has been injected into these operations, to buy skills, to develop materials, and often to attempt to buy themselves credibility through sponsorships, publishing authors on subjects they would not previously have considered, and general promotional campaigns and image-building. This group has been prepared to publish more widely in the field of

education than its South African competitors. However, this may be just an interim measure pending full access to the textbook market. In a number of other African countries, multinationals ignored more general publishing once they had cornered the education market. This category of publishers is involved in both the importation of books and local generation and testing of materials (Moss 1993: 22)

While it is easy to see cynical profit motives in the re-entry of multinational publishers into the South African book market in the wake of political changes which could open up the textbook commissioning system to publishers who have much experience in exploiting this market in other African countries, it could be argued that a greater diversity of books may result from the activities of a larger number of publishers. Multinational companies which are prepared to test their books in the local market, and to adapt materials in conjunction with local knowledge practitioners to the needs of local communities of readers, may provide a refreshing break with the hermetic enclosure and ideological narrowness of institutional publishing in the past. In addition, multinationals who can publish in the academic and scholarly markets as well as the educational textbook market would be a departure from the rigid separation between these sectors, which has largely precluded cross-subsidisation. Opportunities to export local books and materials (particularly into the African markets) may also be boosted by the presence of large marketing and distribution capabilities available to multinational publishers who sometimes know the markets north of the South African border better than South African publishers.

Small independent 'oppositional' publishers who "have historically been largely excluded from textbook provision" but have nonetheless contributed "to the broader area of education through their general publishing and their exploration and publication of non-formal and supplementary educational materials" will be able to play a significant role in educational publishing in the future. "Usually strongly anti-apartheid, and hence opposed to existing educational structures and procedures, the track record and credibility of such publishing houses, as well as the expertise gained in educational, rather than textbook, publishing while in opposition to apartheid, should enable these players to make a major contribution to educational and textbook publishing in a future dispensation." He then argues that a new dispensation in publishing requires the establishment of new institutional relationships with state bureaucracies involved in book commissioning and selection:

Simply put, all publishers must support the creation and development of a totally new set of relationships between themselves and the state in the pursuit of educational publishing. One sometimes fears that opposition to what currently appears in this arena is based more on the fact of exclusion from the system, than rejection of that system. It is a major challenge - as much for any future government as for educational publishers - to introduce a system which allows fair and equitable participation in the provision of educational materials. Merely replacing one set of players and benefactors with another favoured group will serve only to replicate the problems of the past. Both a future state and educational publishers need to formulate a credible set of relationships which function in the broader interests of education, rather than narrow or sectional interests - be they of a business or political nature.... Textbook publishers in South Africa over the past few decades have little

to be proud of. However, one should avoid locating their failures totally within the realm of publishing itself. The problems associated with book origination, development and provision for schools has existed predominantly within the nature of the relationship between the state and textbook publishers. One of the urgent tasks of the present is to explore and examine both sides of that relationship, and the way it was put together and operated, with the aim of transforming both it and its elements (Moss 1993: 21).

A reconstructed market for educational textbooks, in which independent publishers could participate, would have enormous implications for the production of scholarly books. However, the process of negotiating changes to institutional markets may well fail as the Government of National Unity finds itself swamped by pressures to provide mass education to deprived sectors of society, and as resources which were previously allocated mainly to serving a small sector of the population are stretched to accommodate much larger numbers of students. Likewise, there is the possibility that a thorough process of negotiated policy reform in the area of educational publishing - which pays attention as much to the needs of higher education, research and development requirements, and aspects of the knowledge system which fall outside of the orthodoxy of the narrow educational ethic of the past - may fall victim to bureaucracy, sectional infighting, and special interests. Building new relationships in the broadly educational publishing industry will also require organize grass roots pressure, which may not be forthcoming as vested interests with large resources and special contacts shoulder their way to the fore. Moss suggests that a whole range of changes will first need to be accomplished in order to arrive at a new set of institutional arrangements in the educational book market:

1. The textbook committees need to include a balance of people expert in assessing subject content, methodology, appropriate concepts, language, assessment techniques and so on, as well a people representing various stakeholders such as teacher organisations, relevant secondary or tertiary institutions and government.
2. The names of all syllabus or approval committee members as well as any central purchasing and distribution authority, should these exist, must be made public together with the reasons for their selection.
3. No-one who stands to gain materially from any decision of public policy should be party to the making of it. No member of any committee, nor any member of their families, should be allowed to gain materially, in any way, from the sale of textbooks.
4. This has to be explicitly stated in a code of conduct to which all authors, officials and publishers are expected to subscribe and which is enforceable by law and under the control of an ombudsperson.
5. The deliberations of these committees should be open and public at all times so that there is never any possibility of any party gaining privileged information about syllabi.
6. Criteria for approval of books should be public and in accordance with the aims of the syllabus.
7. Full reasons for the approval or rejection of manuscripts must be made public.
8. A system of review and appeal must be possible where an interested party can demonstrate reasonable grounds for believing that a committee is acting in contravention of declared principles.
9. There should be no limited lists.
10. Authors and publishers should be guaranteed a reasonable period of time in which to prepare quality texts before a syllabus is introduced, so as not to feel pressured to compromise quality in order to be the first on the market.



## **2.4 The Economics of Book Publishing: The Book Tariff Debate**

Aside from the dominant role played by the institutional book market, which is particularly subject to manipulation by state and political interests, the South African booktrade is subject to economic constraints that derive from a complex web of arrangements which include the levying of trade tariffs, the cost of paper and raw material, bulk discounting practices, cost of printing technologies, currency devaluations and marketing problems. South African publishers have on several occasions opposed protectionist trade policy proposals, such as the proposed tariff on imported books. They have used free-market arguments to oppose protection for the local printing industry by pointing out that protection for this favoured sector would occur at the expense of other sectors - and so would be in direct opposition to 'free market principles'. Protectionist tariffs would result in decreased competitiveness, reduced bookstocks and higher prices for the South African booktrade; higher costs, reduced margins and fewer published titles for local publishers; knowledge deprivation and long-term cultural impoverishment for society; and further diminished resources and capabilities for educational institutions and literacy programmes.<sup>3</sup>

The proposal by the Printing Industries Federation (Pifsa) that a 20 percent tariff be charged on imported publications - including foreign newspapers, calendars, exercise books and packaging in addition to educational and recreational books - provoked a high-profile campaign of opposition which had the effect of making the high cost of books - and the complex arrangements in the booktrade that resulted in such prices - a matter of public debate. In making their proposal to the Board on Tariffs and Trade, the Printing Industries Federation (which represents more than 80% of commercial companies involved in printing, newsprint and packaging) argued that a duty of 20% on imported books would provide "moderate protection" for the industry. Pifsa chairman Chris Sykes argued that duty was imposed on paper and raw materials, and that "if a duty is imposed on raw goods, then finished products should also be charged.... Publishers prefer to print off-shore and the books and packaging material they import are without tariffs - their markups are still extensive." [Chetty 1993: 11] Publishers have increasingly taken advantage of cheaper paper and advanced colour reproduction techniques offered in Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore and other Southeastern Asian countries, and then re-imported books for distribution..

Director of commercial and technical services of Pifsa, Eric Kuhl, argued that the printing industry was already subject to a 10 percent duty on imported paper (to protect local paper manufacturers). Paper costs comprise 45 to 50 percent of a printer's cost price [Kuhl 1993: 8]. Some paper manufacturers practice import parity pricing which inflates local paper prices to just below import price. Protectionist measures taken to protect paper local manufacturers Sappi and Mondi, in other words, were prejudicing printers; publishers



who opted for offshore printing further undermined a viable local printing industry. His remarks - "(w)e have jobs to protect and a balance of payments account to think about" [Kuhl 1993: 8] - reflect a continued preoccupation with policies aimed at securing local industrial, employment and monetary objectives through protectionist measures; since paper manufacturers enjoyed policy protection, the printing industry should likewise be protected. Mr. Kuhl laid the blame for the high cost of books on South African publishers, pointing out that the prices of books rose by an average of between 400 and 600 percent after they were delivered to publishers by the printers. He said that some large news agencies sell books at a discount of 50 percent, which still yields a hundred percent profit for the retailer, and reduces the publisher's profit by some 200 to 300 percent. Printers usually added a 10 to 20 percent handling fee to the price of the paper, and marked other costs up by an average rate of 25 percent of gross profit. An attempt by Pifsa to reduce the cost of educational textbooks by rationalising book sizes was rejected by publishers, who need to produce books of high quality in order to be competitive in foreign markets, in which they must be able to market their books if they wish to make profits of any substance [Chetty 1993: 11].

Penguin's managing director and executive member of the Publishers Association, John Allen, argued on the other hand that "publishers find that the prices of paper and printing are very high while sales are low - this makes the cost per book enormous.... Because of this high manufacturing cost, we find it viable to import books from Singapore and Hong Kong where they are printed at a better rate.... The costs and complications of licensing rights coupled with high prices, will make locally printed books prohibitively expensive." South Africa's tiny book market, which could usually not absorb a print run of more than a few hundred copies, was burdened by the highest import charge on publications in the world; with 40% of all books sold in South Africa coming in from abroad - particularly specialist academic books - university libraries' budgets would be further strained, and some publishers could close down because of the ripple effects of an increase in book prices. Sales of imported books often cross-subsidise those printed and bound locally [waka Makhanya 1993: 3]. Cynthia Hugo of READ Educational Trust pointed out that protection for the local printing industry would make the work of literacy programmes more difficult (more than 60 percent of black South Africans are still illiterate). READ spent "over R5 million on educational books each year. This will mean considerably fewer books." [Mitchell 1993: 1] State Library director Dr. Peter Lor stressed the additional budgetary pressures such a proposal would place on libraries, research bodies and universities; such institutions had a particular need for imported books, considering the "almost insurmountable" educational backlogs they had to face ["State Library hits book surcharge plan", *The Citizen*, 15 December 1993: 16]. The Cape Provincial Administration stated that the implementation of such a tariff would raise the tax on imported books to 36,8 percent, and result in 65 000 fewer books being acquired by their library service in 1994 than in 1993 ["CPA joins critics of proposed book tax hike", *The Cape Times*, 23 December 1993: 3]. Managing Director of Maskew Miller Longman

took the view that the booktrade should be exempt from taxes on knowledge: "Books are not a commodity. They are products with a unique quality." [waka Makhanya 1993: 3] This view - which stressed the knowledge context of which the booktrade was a part, and argued for a special value to be attached to books in the light of social, cultural and educational needs - was also articulated by others: Albie Sachs of the ANC likened the book tariff to "a new cultural boycott - by price. We need more books from abroad, not less." [Mitchell 1993: 23]

The Printing Industries Federation proposal came before the Board of Tariffs and Trade just as the Department of Trade and Industry was finalising its offer on trade policy to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The South African government's submissions to the final meeting of the 'Uruguay Round' of GATT talks - which aimed to break down global trade barriers and abolish protectionist trade policies - included an offer to bind the tariff on imported books at zero percent. This offer brought South Africa in line with GATT proposals directed at securing a global free market for books and published information. Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry, David Graaff, announced in December, 1993, that he had asked the Board of Tariffs And Trade to study the feasibility of the GATT proposal to 'zero-rate' tariffs on imported books in tandem with the PIF request for a 20 percent tariff on imported books [Wentzel 1993: 6]. Stephen Johnson, managing director of Random House and an executive member of the Publishers' Association, urged South Africa's adherence to Unesco's Florence Convention. This Convention prevents signatories from imposing customs duties or any taxes on "the movement of the printed word across national boundaries.... This is a far bigger issue in terms of books than Gatt, which though important, is an economic agreement. It is vital for the country's intellectual, spiritual, social and economic well-being" [Gowens 1993: 11].

The eventual sidelining of the book tariff proposal was due, not to the sustained protests of library and university staff, publishers, and booksellers, but to the pressures exerted during the The GATT negotiations - known as the Uruguay Round - which set new standards in the assertion and enforcement of intellectual property rights and copyright agreements, and made wide-ranging changes in a number of areas affecting book and paper tariff policies. South Africa's trade submission to the final meeting of the Uruguay Round included a proposal to zero-rate tariffs on imported books, paper and raw materials [waka Makhanya and de Waal 1993: 1-2]. The debate pointed out several reasons for the high price of books in South Africa - most especially the high cost of both tariff-protected paper supplied by Sappi and Mondi, and imported 'cultural paper' (high quality paper used to produce books). Another reason for high retail prices and the high markup on the retail price may well be due to the monopolistic and inefficient distribution system in South Africa, which reaches no more than 5% of the total population. Mchet typifies local publishing as 'hegemonic' in its exclusive focus on the elite (white) market [1993: 166]. While market viability - rather than ideology - determines what will be

published [Joubert 1991: 9], few attempts have been made to provide book delivery mechanisms for the 95% of South Africa's population which is not served by existing formal distribution channels. If a mass market served by an extensive and efficient distribution system is crucial to publishing industries, then the book tariff debate served to point out the difficulties facing the local booktrade in reconciling its cultural need for books, particularly educational and academic material, with the harsh economic realities of the marketplace. It is clear that the term 'free market' is inadequate to describe the system within which book production and distribution procedures are embedded; the market is structured by a whole range of policies and rule structures, by a plethora of economic and political interests and pressure groups, and by a system of policy arrangements which can sometimes become the focus of public debate and exchange, and which can be altered through public pressure and publicity as well as through the work of educationalists, developmentalists, researchers and academics. Such a system could become the focus of negotiations between groupings who may well exist in competitive relationships with each other, but nevertheless have a common interest in securing a balanced and culturally enriching book production and dissemination system.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, the comments made by Dr. John Samuels, head of the ANC Education Department and advisor to the Minister of National Education. John Samuels (1993) "Developing Educational Publishing for a Democratic South Africa", Keynote Address to the Conference on "Publishing for Democratic Education", 27 - 28 May, 1993, convened by SACHED Books and the NECC. Reproduced in *Books Bulletin* (Johannesburg, SACHED Books), p. 2 - 3.
- <sup>2</sup> De Villiers, L.(1993) "Textbook Tremor: harsher realities face SA 's pampered school book publishers", *Finance Week*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (14 October), pp. 22 - 23. This article discusses the implications of the formation of Nolwazi Educational Publishers in conjunction with UK-based Macmillan Publishers and local black-owned company Skotaville and looks at figures relating to the market in school books. It discusses contracts awarded by the Department of Education and Training and considers problems of selection and distribution.
- <sup>3</sup> See comments by Philip van Zijl (Library and Information Workers Association), B. E. J. Garmeson (English Academy of South Africa), and Lesley Thomas in letters ("Tariff: need for protest evident, urgent") to *The Star*, 14 December 1993, p. 20.

## Chapter Three

### Distribution, Knowledge Infrastructures and Book Development

At the Conference on Publishing for Democratic Education, hosted by SACHED Books and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) in May 1993, John Samuels of the ANC Education Department invoked the “widespread development of a reading culture” as part of a “holistic strategy” directed at rectifying book hunger in South Africa. In the short term, this would require “policy which fosters book development and the equitable distribution of educational resources. The possibility of establishing a national book development council could provide one mechanism which could in itself also serve to make policy proposals to the government.” [Samuels 1993a: 2-3] The conference also heard that in other African countries, “centralised state publishing has failed to stimulate the indigenous publishing industry”. Delegates were assured that the ANC supported an independent publishing industry for South Africa, though publishers would have to “promote indigenous thought, democracy and educational development, and to help eradicate the inequities of the past”, if they wished to retain such independence. Strong statements in favour of an equitable allocation of institutional book buying resources were heard; the ANC assured the conference of its support for an open book selection and textbook evaluation procedure, and declared its commitment to “fostering a learning and reading culture through the allocation of funds for the provision of much-needed services like community-based libraries and resource centres.” [Garson 1993: 1] A major proposal of the conference - the establishment of a National Book Development Council which would play a non-partisan and “facilitative” role - was identified “as a means of addressing South Africa's specific developmental needs and as being particularly significant in the forthcoming period of national reconstruction.” Problems in the local booktrade which were identified as the most important to be addressed by a NBDC included:

- low literacy levels;
- the lack of a 'reading culture', even among the literate;
- taxes on book imports and on the importation of materials for the manufacture of books;
- rising production costs;
- the escalating cost of books, whether locally produced or imported;
- the white and metropolitan location of most book stores;

- the predominance of white males in publishing companies, especially in senior positions, and the paucity of appropriately trained personnel (especially mother-tongue speakers of African languages);
- inappropriate educational textbooks which embody outdated and largely discredited curricula; corruption in the process of educational prescription, and the highly centralised nature of the prescription process;
- inappropriate purchasing in libraries and the inaccessibility of state libraries to marginalised communities;
- inadequate distribution mechanisms through which to reach marginalised communities;
- inadequate promotion of local writers and literature;
- lack of incentives for publishers to produce books which are socially important but unprofitable;
- lack of support for the development of indigenous publishing initiatives which, despite the existence of many publishing multinationals in Africa, are viewed as a crucial component of both book and societal development.<sup>1</sup>

The Bellagio Conference on Publishing in the Third World (in 1992) faced a similar list of problems, as heterogeneous and mutually-sustaining as the range of problems faced by South Africa's booktrade. And it responded with a similar strategy to the one articulated at the Conference on Publishing for Democratic Education. For instance, its crisis recommendations at the microlevel included support for translations of English books into "minority languages" and the dissemination of the "minority literatures" [Altbach 1992: 414], which seemed to diverge from South Africa's urgent need to translate, publish and disseminate books in the neglected indigenous languages spoken by the *majority* of South Africa's diverse cultural groupings. The divergence is only apparent, however; both the Bellagio Conference's call for more publishing resources to be spent on the world's peripheral languages and literatures, and the call issued to the book industry during the local Conference on Publishing for Democratic Education (in 1993) to "promote the development, production and distribution of reading materials in all languages in the country" [Kromberg 1993: 167], derive from a similar preoccupation with building a viable market among peripheral or marginalised groups. The promotion of literacy and 'the reading habit' is crucial to the emergence of a sufficiently large community of general readers to support a viable, diversified and appropriately cross-subsidised booktrade. Yet literacy campaigns require readily available reading materials; they require new kinds of books, written in vernacular languages, which are capable of appealing to those previously left outside formal systems of knowledge and book distribution. Evidence of an approach to 'book hunger' which is both more integrated - stressing the interdependence of competitive interests and sectors in the booktrade and the necessity of balancing different elements in publishing and distribution - and more localised - developing books in ways which are more responsive to the requirements and the interests of specific cultural formations - is revealed in the deliberations of these conferences. The Bellagio Conference called for the wider implementation of the Book Collective idea developed by the African Book Collective, which involves agreements between African publisher to market **their** books to the West, and thus ensure a degree of financial return and a wider readership for peripheral book industries [Altbach 1992: 414]. The Conference on Publishing for Democratic Education made a similar point in

calling for a National Book Development Council to serve as a “co-ordinating mechanism for communication and co-operation between different groups and individuals involved and interested in book development” [Kromberg 1993: 167]. In seeking networking arrangements both within the booktrade, and between publishers, distributors, researchers, educationalists, community activists and government officials involved with knowledge infrastructures, these proposals on book development strategies are seeking ways of securing an economic basis for peripheral book- and culture-producing industries. Permeating much recent literature on book development is the realisation that dependence on largesse is almost as damaging to the booktrade as lack of resources:

Given the 'book hunger' that exists throughout the continent and, indeed, in large areas of South Africa itself, an obvious response is to seek aid in the form of books. Book donations do occur regularly. One example is a Canadian organisation which used to send second-hand North American textbooks to Africa. Such schemes might well be described as book dumping rather than book donating. After all, if the books were no longer useful to North American school children, why should they necessarily be any good to African children? A better scheme is that of the British Council, whereby the recipient institution is given catalogues to choose the appropriate books for its own needs. The next step would be an undertaking that if book boxes packages of selected titles - are made up, an agreed proportion of the books, for example, 30 per cent, should be published in South African and/or Africa.... It is easy to be cynical about donors' reasons for sending books to developing countries, especially when their donation earns them a tax rebate. But encouraging signs have emerged from recent conferences, where funders agreed that the key ingredient to successful and appropriate book donation schemes is consultation with recipients, and that they should be recipient-led, not donor-led.... Overall, book donation schemes should be seen as a short-term solution. The long-term answer lies in a strong publishing industry in Africa that is able to publish and supply relevant books suitable to its own readership [Laura Czerniewicz 1993: 94].

Acknowledgement of the counter-productive effects of book aid policies in the past has prompted the realisation that books, however crucial they may be to a society's cultural development, cannot be successfully produced and disseminated in the absence of an economic infrastructure or without a self-sustaining system of productive arrangements which can consistently deliver good quality, innovative reading material to a range of different markets. Coordinated efforts to develop such a system would need to focus on distribution and marketing mechanisms in an effort to expand the market sufficiently to allow for diversification. In the case of universities, which have no coordinated strategy for selecting prescribed books, for marketing the work they produce, or for acquiring bulk discounts, for instance, continued dependence on imported books is inevitable:

Problems facing the tertiary market are mostly related to the idiosyncrasies of various courses, the high prices of imported books, the proliferation of photocopying and 'selected readings', and a general failure on the part of universities and publishers as a body to come to any democratic and transparent terms [Kantey 1993: 143]

Efforts to find an economical basis for local publishing initiatives, on the other hand, can only be successful if sufficient resources become available. In the case of many African countries, it was precisely the lack of independent economic resources and the scarcity of

capital which brought about the pervasive and counter-productive involvement of government in publishing. In this respect, the Conference on Publishing for Democratic Education was ambiguous. On the one hand, it asserted that “educational publishers, the education ministry of the present and the future and all stakeholders must develop and support appropriate policies and structures which will foster... diversity” and that “structures decided upon should provide a context in which all, including smaller and non-profit publishers, can survive and flourish”. On the other, it asked that “the future democratic state should consider and put in place financial incentives for publishing initiatives which fit in with national education and development objectives, but which in the short term may not be profitable” [Sached/NECC 1993: 179]. The Bellagio conference was as equivocal, asserting that “government must invest in books” and “facilitate the emergence of an indigenous and independent publishing industry”, but “should not publish books” or impose “misguided government policies, such as the domination of textbook production, tariffs and high taxes on books and paper, censorship, and other restrictions” [Altbach 1992: 416-7]. If the state is expected to provide compensatory resources for publishing activities which are culturally beneficial but economically unviable, and if book development strategies cannot succeed without the provision of such state resources, the question arises as to whether a viable and autonomous publishing industry is achievable.

### **3.1 Literacy and the Booktrade**

The legacy of apartheid reveals itself in a 0,72% illiteracy level for whites, 15,51% for Coloureds, 7,59% for Asians and 33,05% for Blacks, according to the University of Cape Town. Edward French of the Zenex Adult literacy unit at the University of the Witwatersrand estimates that illiteracy is much higher, and that at least 75% of the Black population is barely able to read anything but the most rudimentary of texts [Woode 1991: 52; Joubert 1990: 22]. Less than 1% of the educational budget is spent on Black adult literacy, and it is left to many community and non governmental organisations (NGO's) such as the READ organisation, Operation Upgrade, USWE, SACHED, ILRIG (International Labour Research and Information Group, Cape Town), CACE (Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of the Western Cape), Department of Adult Education and the Cape Town Centre for Community Education Resources, the University of Cape Town, the Zenex Resource Centre, and the University of the Witwatersrand's ERA (Easy Reading for Adults) initiative to attempt to redress this imbalance. Human Science Research Council (HSRC) figures for literacy are different: 0% illiteracy among whites, 25,6% coloured, 11,3% asian and 47,8% among blacks population groups. Literacy campaigns are essential, not only for the general book trade, but for the educational institutions and publishers who depend on readers to buy their books. No amount of 'local content' or indigenous publishing ventures can succeed unless literacy efforts succeed. In making the eradication of illiteracy one of the chief aims of a National Book Development Council, the Conference on Publishing for Democratic



Education acknowledged that the viability of knowledge infrastructures in South Africa will continue to be threatened unless broader access to books for the non-reading public can be achieved.

### **3.2 Libraries and the Booktrade**

Libraries play a crucial role in the knowledge dissemination system, particularly in poor countries where lack of disposable income makes book-buying a luxury. In South Africa, well-stocked libraries were largely available only to whites; the development of libraries for South Africa's townships and rural districts remains a most significant area of need. Machet argues that a lack of libraries within the black areas and schools and restrictions on use of libraries within white areas have inhibited a 'reading culture' from developing. 'Public and school libraries would also have provided a market for books aimed at the black reader, and thus encouraged publishers to develop and publish authors who wrote for this sector of the market.' Library budgets are shrinking to the point where even large public library services are closing their service points and depots. The glaring disparity between library facilities in previously racially exclusive white areas and black areas is the most significant feature of this very important element in the delivery of reading to a wider public - a public for whom purchasing books is not an option:

For example, Mamelodi has an estimated population of 300 000, covers an area of 2 100 hectares and has two public libraries (Nassimbeni, 1991:46). Khayelitsha has a population of 300 000, covering an area of 3 372 hectare has one library which opened in 1991 (Nassimbeni, 1991:46). In contrast, Pretoria has a population of 554 760, covers an area of 62 981 hectares and has 19 libraries (excluding the travelling services, 49 depots and a branch for the so-called coloured population and one for the Indian population) (Nassimbeni, 1991:46). Cape Town has a population estimated at 1 161 000, covers 30 330 hectares and has a total of 32 service points, excluding depots, hospital services and bookmobiles (Nassimbeni, 1991:46)... A very low percentage of township residents are members of a library. The reasons for this are that the stock is generally unsuitable (Zaaiman, Roux & Rijkheer, 1988) and the library may be a long distance away (taking into account the sparseness of service points in black areas). There is also a general failure to publicize the existence of the service (Nassimbeni, 1991:47)... The Transvaal Provincial Library Service has a service point for every 6 512 whites. Based on this... a total of 1 553 service points will be needed to reach parity in the black areas (Hansen, 1992:7)... The rural areas are the worst affected. Only 5,4% of the existing resource centres established by nongovernmental organizations as part of the democratic movement are serving the 16,5 million South Africans in rural areas .... However, in evaluating these figures it must be kept in mind that one of the major reasons for the lack of parity in provision of libraries between black and white communities is the fact that blacks are generally not readers. The culture is traditionally an oral culture, not a literate culture [Machet 1993: 174].

Many of the selectors in educational and library institutions are conservative and practice voluntary censorship. "In the libraries, books of a liberal or radical nature had been carefully not bought lest they should influence or even corrupt their (white) readers." David Phillips reported that public libraries deliberately did not buy books of a liberal nature, thus limiting the market for these books [Phillips 1991: 17].

It can be concluded that the majority of books made available in South Africa for all cultural groups, both in the bookshops and in their schools and libraries, are selected and published by whites. Many of the books which are selected for libraries and schools are totally unsuitable because the values and attitudes reflected in them are those of the white selectors rather than those of the children for whom the books are intended ....

Publishers of books in South Africa “are unable to ignore the views of those who carry out selection for libraries and the education system, because if the books are not bought for schools and libraries the market is often not big enough to make it viable to publish a book, especially one aimed at the black purchaser.” [Phillips 1991: 17]

Research by Dr. Mary Nassimbeni (1991) indicates that libraries are becoming aware of the need for appropriate study materials, community information and basic skills, vernacular materials and books which relate to or reflect “black experience” in this period of national reconstruction; they are aware that they need to accommodate “new members” previously excluded from access to libraries, and that library stocks will need to be supplemented, in the case of some libraries, to accommodate the significantly altered user profile; but “selection and acquisition in these instances appear to be time-consuming and haphazard”. Some libraries have reported continuing pressure from (white) local authorities not to buy materials from ‘oppositional’ publishers, community-based or alternative organisations, though the library service has approached 125 of such organisations who do not use formal channels of distribution to investigate acquisitions. Township libraries, on the other hand, already depend heavily on materials from literacy and community-based organisations [Nassimbeni 1991: 43-4].

### **3.3 Distribution and Book Development**

South Africa has only one bookshop for every 100 000 people as compared with New Zealand which has one shop for every 7 500 people [Machet 1993: 171; Kantey 1990: xv]. Small publishing initiatives are inhibited by the increasingly common practice - followed by most publishers in dealing with large institutional buyers such as libraries and Departments of Education - of selling directly to book buyers and increasingly bypassing booksellers, so further undermining their economic viability. [Kantey 1990: xv] Another opportunity for coordination between institutional buyers, publishers and retailers is presented by this scenario; the power of the institutional market, if channeled through book distributors and local booksellers, could be harnessed to assist in spreading retail book access points.

Most bookshops in South Africa are controlled by a single media conglomerate, Omni Media, which is linked through cross-holdings and interlocking directorships to the JCI-Anglo American complex (which in turn controls quality paper manufacturers, Mondi). In addition to newspapers, magazines, printing and distribution facilities, pay-television, news agencies and electronic information services, Argus controls or has substantial

interests in the CNA (Central New Agency) chain; Exclusive Books; Campus Books; Logans Books; Westedene Books; Bookworm and Pilgrim Bookshops; Centaur Publishers; and United Book Distributors [Louw 1993: 166- 167]. Large book stores, such as CNA branches, concentrate on selling imported books, or books in the official languages [Machet 1993]. The CNA-Gallo Group handles the majority of general sales other than in educational books; in 1991, CNA had 325 retail outlets nationwide and in many areas the CNA is the only access to books for sale that people have [Joubert 1991: 11]. David Phillip observes that “(l)arge bookselling operations such as the CNA and the Literacy Group often demand larger-than-normal discounts on the grounds that they offer larger guaranteed purchases. They and other bookshops in turn are rendered apoplectic when the smallest of discounts are offered on direct orders to individuals or institutions.” [Kantey 1991: 105] During an interview with Peter Adams of Adams & Company, an independent bookseller in Natal, he confirmed that CNA did enjoy advantages over smaller booksellers, including the ability to obtain larger discounts on general books - though not on most educational books - but did not regard the narrowness of South Africa’s book distribution system, or the size CNA-Gallo, as anything other than an expression of economic conditions in the booktrade:

I don’t think that it’s really fair to lay it at the feet of the CNA-Gallo Group. I think that copyright has a strong element of monopoly in it, which in fact has probably got as much to do with it as anything else. Because... with those other commodities, you can play suppliers off against each other and get extra discounts; in the book industry, once a publisher has published a book, he is the only source of it, so he can set a price. And with the book market situation - one has to look at each one of them individually - but if you look at the educational book market, the publisher sets a retail price, he sets a standard discount, and everybody buys at the same price. I think that even the CNA buys many educational books at exactly the same price as we do, which is ... the exact opposite of what they would plan if they were buying too cheaply, or if they were holding everyone else out... This is the nature of the game. I don’t know if you really want to have more profitable bookshops; the industry runs at low profits, and is providing a fair service, and I think that the book industry.. gives a good service, and more service than any other form of retailing. I can’t think of many industries where you could go to say ... “I want a particular item”, and the retailer will order that item from America, from England, and mark up 50% on cost... The markups are very, very low, by comparison with other forms of retailing, so the customer is probably getting a very good deal, in terms of cost of distribution... That CNA monopoly thing comes up, it comes up a lot. Yes, the CNA does buy more cheaply than other bookshops on general books. They have access to purchasers more easily than we have, cheaper rent, presumably capital is more easily available to them, so they are at an advantage... one can cry over the difficulties, but I’m not sure that there’s anything unfair in that... [Interview with Peter Adams, 9th November 1994]

The CNA was reluctant to stock locally published books from ‘oppositional’ publishers during the 1970s and 1980s (for fear of provoking angry responses from white customers, though it left decisions concerning the stocking of such books to individual managers at branch level) and still caters almost exclusively to the leisure-reading market. Although CNA did begin selling books from ‘alternative’ or ‘oppositional’ South African publishers in 1990, “these books did not sell well enough to warrant CNA continuing selling them. The buyers at CNA were forced to conclude that there was as yet no market

for these books.... However, publishers say that the reason for this is that the CNA does not buy sufficient quantities or give it the required shelf space.” Adams agreed that much of the material published by ‘oppositional’ publishers did not attract many readers; although David Phillips in particular had achieved a “semi-commercial” success with some of his published titles, most oppositional publishers have failed to attract a large numbers of readers [Interview with Peter Adams 1994]. Unpublished research conducted by Kitty Harmon for Phambili Books [1993] confirmed that “the perceived political slant of a publication influenced its success... when Jay Naidoo appeared on the cover of *Learn and Teach*, shopkeepers wouldn’t take it” [Harmon 1993: 9] Less than twenty independent booksellers are operating in South Africa, and most are concentrated in the wealthy suburbs of Johannesburg [Machet 1993: 171; Joubert 1991: 11; Adams, Interview 1994].

In attempting to gain access to the non-formal book market, indigenous publishers in Africa have experimented with innovative distribution strategies:

Innovative methods of distribution have been practised with varying success by those publishers who aim at the black market. Ravan's *Staffrider* series and *Learn and Teach* magazines have been successfully sold in the townships by runners. Unfortunately, such an unregulated system poses a financial risk to the publisher concerned (Joubert, 1991:12).... ILRIG distributes through the trade unions. They have a list of trade unions, to whom they send copies. In addition to the unions, ELRIG makes use of rural and urban Advice offices. In this way ILRIG managed to distribute 18,739 booklets in 1989. They, together with other progressive organizations, began the Joint Distribution Group (JDG). The JDG comprises among others SACHED, Ravan, David Philip and Buchu. They aim to promote their books in the following ways: set up bookstalls at conferences and rallies, offer other books as 'incentives' for responses to and orders for publications; expand ILRIG's policy of getting packages of books to workers at lunchtime; operate through the Unemployed Worker's Union to get informal, part-time sellers (Joubert, 1991:13).... The problem with alternative methods of distribution is that they do not offer effective sales techniques for high-volume items, sold over a vast area of land. The system is too diffuse and the return on sales is too low (Joubert, 1991:12).... If a viable black market is to be developed, it is essential that an effective means of distribution be established to enable publishers to reach this market [Machet 1993: 172].

In an attempt to develop a non-formal book circulation system, The Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) launched a “library suitcase” system in 1990 in their campaign to encourage black writers; they also opened the Can Themba library in Johannesburg [Nassimbeni 1991: 45]. The aim of widening distribution to broaden the market, and so to reap some of the benefits of economy of scale, is difficult to achieve in Africa, given the “vast distances and inadequate road systems, poor transportation systems, incorrect estimation of print runs, ineffectual government action, or excessive interference” which “have meant that distribution, in most parts of Africa, is in dire straits”. Endemic violence in South Africa’s towns, rural areas and informal settlements, which persisted throughout the transition, has further exacerbated the difficulties involved in using non-formal distribution channels. *Staffrider*, for instance, which took its name from the popular township term for pickpockets and gangsters who travelled on trains, and which was

originally distributed through informal channels, eventually had to be marketed through more conventional channels due to collection problems; however, this magazine was undeniably successful, as Peter Randall has pointed out: “ten years ago one would have scoffed at the suggestion that a literary magazine like *Staffrider*, catering primarily for black readers, would regularly sell 10,000 copies.” [Randall 1983: 107] In addition, lack of facilities, such as libraries, storage depots and transportation systems in many townships and most urban and peri-urban settlements, as well as in rural areas, makes it extremely difficult to provide large numbers of people there with access to books and reading material. In this respect, South Africa shares Africa’s “woefully inadequate storage facilities” that “expose book stocks to physical damage and pilferage”; its “inadequate transportation systems” that “cause loss, damage and delay” and its “inadequate trade outlets” [Arboleda 1985: 50].

The distribution report prepared for Phambili Books, entitled “Building an Alternative Marketplace for South African Books”, explores non-formal distribution procedures in an effort to gain access to a wider market and reach the non-reading public:

The assumed goals of developing an alternative distribution venture are:

- to support broad-based efforts to promote a ‘reading culture’, enabling individuals to gain access to information they need to generate informed opinions and take part in social debate; and
- to help develop a viable marketplace for books that will support publishers’ efforts to produce high-quality, affordable, market-responsive publications for an audience of South African readers who have remained outside the traditional market [Harmon 1993: 4]

Harmon’s profile of an “alternative market” stresses that “market research” needed to be done by publishers to assist in “estimating return on investment in developing alternative distribution channels” [4]. Alternative retail outlets needed to be developed: spazas, supermarket chains, independent traders [8] stokvels [13] and newspaper distributors [9] could be used to market selected books and reading matter in informal settlements and townships where no formal distribution facilities exist. Mobile libraries offer unprecedented access to books for rural people, as well as for those who live in townships situated far from municipal library facilities and bookshops [10-11], while retail outlets in municipal libraries might offer an opportunity to reduce book prices, as libraries could offer books for sale as a service and limit their markup to the minimum amount necessary to cover operating costs [11]. “Information depots” which offer one-stop book loan services and information packages could be provided under the control of local resource centres [12] Other suggestions include multi-level marketing, which involves face-to-face book sales and the payment of workers on a commission basis, or direct mail sales and book clubs. Harmon’s proposals include guidelines for developing distribution channels, sales forces, and venture capital [18-9] for a “distribution company” which would be committed full-time to developing new markets by means of research, training, networking and testing new products on new audiences while

simultaneously expanding public awareness of books. In exploring the dynamics of alternative book markets, Harmon's report indicates that low-cost marketing solutions are possible, though they require precise research and information-gathering abilities; many low-cost schemes suggested in the report involve complicated collaborations between diverse groups of people, who are able to pool their skills as a partial substitute for scarce capital.

Deficiencies in book production and delivery mechanisms cannot be seen as simply derived from the difficult socio-economic conditions prevailing in South Africa. Kantey points out a long list of deficiencies in the local booktrade, which are not beyond the control of local publishers, and which can be remedied. He argues that in the past

most South African publishing houses have relied extensively on their own innate and collective wisdom of what constitutes the right product. My biggest problem with this approach - whether in a big corporation such as Maskew Miller Longman or a small non-government service organisation such as Using Spoken and Written English (USWE) is that the executive is seldom in touch with what people really want. Attempts to undertake comprehensive market research or a needs analysis have often been met with resistance. 'It is too expensive,' they say, 'or not really scientific', when results differ from expectations.

Kantey points out that secrecy by the Publishers' Association makes it difficult to draw a map of what conditions are like in the publishing environment; that excessive commercialism pervades editorial decision-making ("in most established houses today, publishing decisions are taken by accountants"); that publishers need to distinguish between "an instrumentalist view of publishing (where books = knowledge = enlightenment = power) and a more holistic view which suggests that books have a far more modest role in social transformation. It is people who change society not books. It follows, therefore, that a new approach to marketing requires a new approach to publishing. Who is the audience we are publishing for? How many of them are there? What price are they prepared to pay? And - most importantly - what do they really want?" [Kantey 1991: 100-1] Furthermore, there is a need for more effective marketing, especially in developing new (or non-traditional) markets:

A new approach to marketing, therefore, will require a thorough and scientific commitment to discovering what of design, illustration, page format, extent, and binding helps newly literate readers to purchase and make full use of a text, and I do not see such research as hoping for one simple answer. As the various alternative and conventional printed media have shown, a diversity of species is the surest sign of a healthy reading environment. I am thinking of the difference, say, between the work of Tim James for the International Labour Research and Information Group and that of the Learn and Teach collective [Kantey 1991: 100-1].

Kantey argues that "one of the most vexed questions in South Africa is that of the right price. In the commercial world, prices are most often calculated with little reflection on what the market is prepared to pay. Conversely, the service organisations often calculate their prices with little reflection on what a just price for a printed product might be."

The most obvious method used by publishers is to inflate print runs in order to take advantage of economics of scale. This is usually because prices are determined by multiplying the unit cost of production (origination, reproduction and printing divided by the print run) by an arbitrary factor, say 5. Different publishers, however, have different ideas of what to charge to origination. Some charge artwork, for example, to origination; others charge it to overheads. Having worked for many different publishing houses, it is clear to me at least, that such costing procedures are themselves arbitrary. It logically follows, therefore, that prices are arbitrarily determined. Marginal costing, where the price is determined with reference to a fixed gross profit margin of usually 45%, also tends to become arbitrary. Once a title is in print, and the cost of production has been written down, gross margins become irrelevant. Gross turnover becomes the new arbiter of performance and every rand delivered by the customer is carefully monitored. More importantly, in a small publishing house where cash flow is a perennial problem, a feverish attempt is made to gain as many sales in the first few months of publication in order to meet the printer's bills. Discounts on the retail selling price is another well-chewed bone of contention. Large bookselling operations such as the CNA and the Literacy Group often demand larger-than-normal discounts on the grounds that they offer larger guaranteed purchases. They and other bookshops in turn are rendered apoplectic when the smallest of discounts are offered on direct orders to individuals or institutions [Kantey.1991: 106]

More careful pricing, calculated on the basis of extensive research, is a necessity; fitting the size of the print run to the potential market requires more than hit-and-miss calculation. A more sophisticated and differentiated approach to the market can be adopted which could correct imbalances in price and availability currently experienced in the South African booktrade. According to Peter Adam, however, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to pre-determine a price which achieves this careful balance between what a mass market is prepared to pay, and what constitutes a reasonable price for the publishers. Booksellers cannot determine ahead of time the degree of demand for a particular book, and since they operate on modest margins, with most prices and discounts pre-set by publishers, they cannot easily compete with other book suppliers on the basis of price [Peter Adam, Interview 1994].

## **Conclusion**

In seeking to develop an economically viable publishing and knowledge distribution system to overcome the legacy of 'book hunger' in South Africa, proponents of book development need to find ways of nurturing new markets and new readers. In order to do this, they will need to develop a book industry which is responsive to the distinctive interests and needs which prevail in specific communities of readers - whether these communities are found in adult education classes in townships, or in universities and research institutions. An acknowledgement of the interdependency of the different kinds of publishing required for these distinctive communities needs to be informed by an awareness of the very different requirements - including pricing, availability and distribution mechanisms - of these different book markets. An approach to books and book development which adopts a 'cultural negotiations' orientation, which recognises the interdependency of book publishing and distribution industries with cultural and

economic systems, and which seeks ways of meeting the cultural, educational and informational requirements of sub-classes, alliances and groupings in society on the basis of economical sustainability - but without surrendering the goal of cultural autonomy - may well succeed in redressing some of the effects of book hunger in South Africa.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "A National Book Development Council: discussion and background document presented to a meeting of publishers and the Education Department of the African National Congress", held at the Eskom Centre, Midrand, on 5 November 1993 (unpublished). This document calls for the establishment of a South African National Book Development Council - a step called for in 1982 at the UNESCO World Congress on Books - and offers a strong rationale for far-reaching changes in government policies toward books.

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