

DISSEMINATING AFRICA:
BURDENS OF REPRESENTATION AND THE *AFRICAN*
WRITERS SERIES

Clive Barnett

1. Laura Chrisman, *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural readings of race, imperialism, and transnationalism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p120.

2. In 2003, Harcourt, Heinemann's owners, announced that no further new titles would be published in the *AWS*, effectively confirming the transformation of the *AWS* series into a backlist series.

3. See A.R. Yesufu, 'Mbari publications: a pioneer Anglophone African publishing house', *African Publishing Record*, 8, 2 (1982): 53-57; J. Rea, 'Aspects of African publishing, 1945-74', *African Publishing Record*, 1, 2 (1975): 145-149; P. Ripken, 'African Literature in the Literary Market Place outside Africa', *African Publishing Record*, 17, 4 (1991): 289-291. Also W. Griswold, *Bearing Witness: Readers, writers, and the novel in Nigeria*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000; B. Lindfors, *Long drums and canons: Teaching and researching African literatures*, Trenton NJ, Africa World Press, 1995. For a re-consideration of African textualities during colonialism, see G. Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African self-fashioning and the colonial library*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2001.

Laura Chrisman has recently argued that existing analyses of the circulation of postcolonial culture tend to presume the existence of a singular 'West' or 'First World'.¹ She suggests that the category of the West needs to be broken down into its 'national constituents' in order to better understand the transnational reception histories of postcolonial culture. While sympathetic to this argument, I want to focus on a case study that does not fit easily into the national frame that Chrisman suggests differentiate between contexts. The example is the well-known *African Writers Series (AWS)*, launched by Heinemann Educational Books (HEB) in 1962 with publication of the paperback edition of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.²

The *AWS* is synonymous with the development of a canon of post-colonial African literary writing in English. It was not, as is sometimes supposed, the first such initiative. It had important precursors, in particular the example of Mbari publications in Nigeria. Furthermore, the *AWS* was only one of a number of metropolitan publishing initiatives that aimed to project a distinctively post-colonial African imagination into circuits of international public culture from the 1960s onwards. Longman emulated the *AWS* with its own highly successful *African Literature Series*. Penguin's *African Library* was a more explicitly political enterprise, publishing historical and contemporary analysis of African transformations. And in due course, the success of the *AWS* spurred the development of Heinemann's successful *Caribbean Writers Series*, as well as the less successful attempts at developing an *Arab Writers Series*. It is also important to underscore the existence of thriving popular literary publics in Africa, existing in tandem with local publishing sectors. The most famous of these is the so-called *Onitsha* market literature of Nigeria.³

The *AWS* was distinctive in mediating between the formation of the concept of African Literature and the growth of institutionalised literary pedagogy in post-colonial African states. As Kwame Anthony Appiah puts it, the *AWS* 'constitutes in the most concrete sense the pedagogical canon of Anglophone African writing'.⁴ According to Appiah, the *AWS* belonged to a moment that 'has a profound political significance' because it provided a space in which Africans could write for and about themselves.

When it was first established, the *AWS* had a dual commitment. First, the Series aimed to establish itself as the publisher of record for modern African writing by re-publishing and keeping in print previously published

African texts. This included editions of classics such as *Equano's Travels* (AWS No. 10, 1967), Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* (AWS No. 201, 1978), and Thomas Mofolo's *Shaka* (AWS No. 229, 1983), as well as collections of oral mythologies (for example, *The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths*, U. Beier (ed), AWS 23, 1966). It also involved publishing extensive book-length collections of short stories, plays, poems, and later, innovative anthologies of women's writing (such as *Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa*, C. Bruner (ed), AWS No. 256, 1983).

Second, the Series pioneered the publication of original works in English by African writers. This included original works by novelists, including Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, and Cyprian Ekwensi. In the 1970s, AWS was instrumental in publishing Bessie Head's work when no other British or US publisher would do so. The AWS also rapidly turned to translating works from other major languages into English, such as Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* from French (AWS No. 29, 1966), and later Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar* from Arabic (AWS No. 197, 1978). But publication of original work was not restricted to fiction. Right from the very start, the AWS also published writings by leading figures from the movements for African independence. No. 4 in the series, published in 1962, was Kenneth Kaunda's political biography, *Zambia Shall be Free*. Mandela's *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, first published by HEB in 1965, was reissued as No. 123 in the Series. Steve Biko's *I Write What I Like* (AWS No. 217, 1979), Ngugi's prison diary *Detained* (AWS No. 240, 1981), and Amilcar Cabral's collected writings on culture and politics (*Unity and Struggle*, AWS No. 198, 1980) all became staples of the AWS's list.

There are two things worth noting about this range of titles. Firstly, the AWS was instrumental in making available a durable canon of African writing, that is, with keeping titles in print after their initial publication. Secondly, even from the above selection of titles, one gets a clear impression of just how catholic was the definition of 'Africa' that the AWS worked with. The *African Writers Series* list was not racially exclusive - its earliest works included writings by leading 'Coloured' South Africans like Alex La Guma, Richard Rive, and later Bessie Head, as well as translations from Arabic traditions. Nor was the Africaness of the Series defined solely by language or region. As the inclusion of political writings indicates, the AWS was strongly identified with a broad politico-cultural movement that asserted African political independence and cultural autonomy.

I examine the active role of publishers in laying the basis for more formal canon-formation through criticism and pedagogy. As already noted, Heinemann's AWS was critical in this respect because it made texts available and kept them available over time at affordable prices. Previously, books by African writers not only struggled to find publishers in the West, but even those which did get published often fell out of print very quickly. The story of AWS's role in enabling subsequent processes of canon-formation is partly a story about commodification. But it is also a story about educational

4. K.A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p55.

5. See A. Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing*, London, John Murray in association with Heinemann Educational Books, 1988; C. Achebe, *Home and Exile*, Edinburgh, Canongate, pp49-54; H. Chakava, 'Publishing Ngugi: The challenge, the risk, the reward', in C. Cantalupo (ed), *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Texts and Contexts*, Trenton NJ., Africa World Press, 1995, pp13-28; H. Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One man's perspective*, Bellagio Studies in Publishing, 1996; J. Currey, 'Interview', *African Book Publishing Record*, 5, 4 (1979): 237-239; J. Currey, 'African Writers Series – 21 years on', *African Book Publishing Record*, 11, 1 (1985): 11; A. Maja-Pearce, 'In pursuit of excellence: Thirty years of the Heinemann African Writers' Series', *Research in African Literatures*, 23, 4 (1992): 125-132; V. Unwin, and J. Currey, 'The African Writers Series celebrates 30 years', *Southern African Review of Books*, (March/April 1993), pp3-6.

6. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre*, London, James Currey, 1993.

7. G. Griffiths, 'Documentation and Communication in Post-colonial Societies: the Politics of Control', in A. Gurr (ed), *Year's Work in English Studies*, (1996): 21-37; G. Griffiths, 'Writing,

institutions, state-formation, and dispersed practices of cultural evaluation. Drawing on empirical materials from the editorial archives of the *AWS*, held at the University of Reading, I argue that publishing is best understood as a set of distinctively geographical practices that involve the *dissemination* of ideas and materials, and the articulation of texts with multiple contexts. By looking in particular at the interactions between publishing, commodification, and educational networks, I argue that the public spaces that the *AWS* helped constitute were never straightforwardly contained at a national scale, either actually or imaginatively.

REINTERPRETING THE AFRICAN WRITERS SERIES

Existing accounts of the *AWS* depend on a fairly limited evidential basis, primarily the first-hand biographical reflections of key players in the rise and development of the series.⁵ Academic analysis of the Series is also characterised by a particular model of how cultural power is exercised and reproduced. It turns on a fairly simple understanding of the differential economic and ideological power between a 'core' region of Western Europe and North America and the 'periphery', the rest of the literary world. This dependency model is, of course, quite explicitly developed in the cultural theory of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, himself a key figure in the history of the *AWS*.⁶ It also underlies Griffiths' discussion of patronage in the history of the *AWS*.⁷ Griffiths interprets the role of publishers in shaping the styles of narrative that have come to represent Africa as a form of illegitimate control over what can be said. This implicit theory of cultural dependency also informs the self-consciously 'materialist' analysis of postcolonial publishing more broadly.⁸ The general critical claim of these sorts of accounts is that publishing does a certain type of *ideological* work, always only ever reproducing a pre-existing set of relations of appropriation, dependence, and extraversion whose history stretches back to colonialism. Behind these analyses there lies an unstated notion that the integrity of writing, literature, and thought is compromised by its dependence on various intermediaries - publishers, printers, educationalists, reviewers and so on - who are always presented as agents for enforcing a zero-sum exchange of literary value from the periphery to the centre. In these accounts, the transnational circulation of postcolonial culture only ever reproduces neo-colonial relations of dependence.

Griffiths' account of the *AWS* identifies a continuity between colonial and post-independence relationships of patronage precisely because his focus is primarily on the relationship between authors and publishers. He suggests that the operations of publishers like Heinemann were 'as directive and invasive as that of missionary presses and the colonial publishing institutions'.⁹ In contrast, I want to argue that the work of a series like the *AWS* is not primarily ideological at all, but rather more practical. It lies in the generation of new types of public space. Rather than thinking that

commercialised postcolonial publishing simply reproduced the earlier role of mission presses, Karen Barber suggests that the shift from mission-based publishing to commercially published writing in the post-independence period institutes a fundamental break in the dimensions of African public cultures, by laying the basis for the creation of new forms of spatially and temporally extended public communication. The commercialisation of African writing, whether under the auspices of African or international publishers, is pivotal to this innovation, in so far as commercialised and commodified publishing made texts available through the market to anyone and everyone irrespective of identity, qualifications, institutional affiliation or status: 'it is the anonymity, the extensivity and the presumed equivalence of persons that makes an audience a public'.¹⁰

I want to trace the outlines of the publics summoned into existence by publishing initiatives like the *AWS*. By emphasising the internal relationship between commodification, textuality, and publicness, I argue that the determinate contexts through which postcolonial African writing has circulated are certainly not singular and undifferentiated, but nor have they ever been straightforwardly national either. Rather than simply presuming a map of distinct national contexts, the history of the formation and transformation of the *AWS* over forty years is better understood by reference to Paul Gilroy's intuition of the 'rhizomatic, fractal structure of the transcultural'.¹¹ Publishing will emerge as having been crucial in defining the horizons of expectation and interpretation through which the significance of African textualities are inscribed in geographically dispersed and socially fractured contexts of reception.

There are two features of the institutional and discursive complex of post-colonial African print cultures that distinguish them from the standard narrative of secularisation, democratisation, and seamless nationalism derived from an inward-looking interpretation of European modernity. The first of these is the legacy of ethnocentric conceptions of writing in Western thought.¹² There is a long history of assuming that writing is merely a visual substitute for speech, and in turn assuming that speech is the medium for self-conscious expression. During the colonial encounter, this understanding was instrumental in the denigration of African cultures, which were understood as standing outside of history on account of the projected absence of the means of historical memorialisation itself.¹³ In fundamental respects, as Gates suggests, 'writing' is a racialised category in the self-understanding of the trajectory of the modern West. The deployment of the hierarchical opposition of oral and written culture in the denigration of African societies casts a long shadow over more contemporary practices of cultural expression. Not least, it has led to writing, and in particular literary writing, being identified as the privileged medium for the assertion of an African presence on the stage of international cultural exchange. It is this legacy that African writers consistently sought to overcome throughout the twentieth century. It is therefore no surprise that the most important and founding publishing

literacy and history in Africa', in M. H. Msiska and P. Hyland (eds), *Writing and Africa*, Harlow, London, 1997, pp139-158; G. Griffiths, *African Literatures in English: East and West*, Harlow, Longman, 2000.

8. G. Huggan, *The postcolonial exotic: marketing the margins*, London, Routledge, 2001.

9. G. Griffiths, 'Writing', op. cit., p153.

10. K. Barber, 'Audiences and the book in Africa', *Current Writing*, 13, 2 (2001): 16.

11. P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, London, Verso, 1993, p4.

12. See J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University, 1976; R. Harris, *The Origins of Writing*, London, Duckworth, 1986.

13. C. Barnett, 'Impure and worldly geography: The Africanist discourse of the Royal Geographical Society', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 23 (1998): 239-251; H.L. Gates Jr, 'Criticism in the jungle', in H.L. Gates Jr (ed), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, London, Methuen, 1984; H.L. Gates Jr, *Figures in Black: Words, signs, and the 'racial' self*, Oxford, Oxford University Press,

1987; C. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985; V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994.

14. V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-87*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

15. M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996.

16. C.R. Larson, *The Ordeal of the African Writer*, London, Zed Books, 2001.

venture in African writing in the early part of the twentieth century was called *Présence Africaine*.¹⁴

If one legacy of colonialism for postcolonial African print cultures is this ideological one, then the second is more straightforwardly material, and follows from the distinctive sociology of literacy in modern Africa. As an instrument of colonial governmentality, print culture was not deployed as a medium of mass literacy, nor for the integration of whole populations into shared national imaginaries. In the case of British colonial Africa, print culture was deployed as a medium of differential, exclusionary colonial subject-formation restricted to a small proportion of the total population, consistent with a broader rationale of governmentality that distinguished between citizen and subject, urbanity and rurality.¹⁵

These twin legacies - of ethnocentric understandings of writing and representation, and of highly uneven and socially differentiated access to literacy - help to account for the precarious position of the African writer, whose position is defined by a double marginalisation: marginalised with respect to Western canons and publics by virtue of the legacy of racialised and ethnocentric constructs of writing, literature, and narrative; and marginalised with respect to African publics by virtue of the socio-economic-cultural privilege ascribed to and made accessible by print literacy and Western ideals of high culture.¹⁶

This, then, is the broad geo-historical context in which the *AWS* was initially conceived. The history of the *AWS* indicates that the received understanding of print culture and modernised nation building might require revision. The Series was specifically launched to develop original writing *by* Africans, thereby redefining the role of Western-based publishers, who had previously concentrated on publishing Western sourced writing for restricted African audiences. The explicit objective behind the Series was to develop and take advantage of two potential but as yet unrealised markets for published materials: on the one hand, to make writing by Africans available to Western markets on a more sustained basis; on the other hand, and crucial to the whole concept of the Series, to steal a march on other publishers by anticipating the emergence of new markets for African writing which would follow in the wake of independence, with curriculum reform leading to an imperative to supplement, if not replace, a canon of European and North American literature with African writing. In this second respect, the *AWS* served an important role in facilitating the development of a pan-African discourse of postcolonial cultural nationalism. This discourse was, nonetheless, an elite-led cultural movement, one that was (initially at least) dependent on the continued dominance of international publishing capital. This is to underscore the specific position of the *AWS* within a highly selective, elite complex of education, examination, and public debate largely restricted to specific strata of African post-colonial societies and states. As part of the project of post-independence nation building, the circulation of the *AWS* was largely contained within a pattern of social relations and institutional

infrastructures in which literacy has continued to function as a key dimension of socio-economic differentiation.

The key point here is that, as an enterprise which explicitly aimed to project writing by Africans into the literary publics of the metropolitan Anglophone world as well as the educational publics of soon-to-be and newly independent African states, this effort at inscribing an African presence also necessarily involved a re-*inscription of difference*. This is not to do with the bad faith of publishers, or the lack of moral or political backbone of African writers. It is important to recognise this pattern of asserting presence and inscribing difference as a structural feature of the contexts in which the Series, as well as its imitators and competitors, have operated.

There are three axes around which this re-inscription of difference is hinged: the question of language; the question of genre; and the distinctive qualities of African reading publics. The first of these - the language question - is the dominant theme in African literary criticism. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's position is central to this debate. From the 1970s onwards, Ngugi chose to write his novels in his own language, Gikuyu, and then translate them into English, in line with his argument that African writers should use African languages to reach broader audiences and thereby ensure their wider relevance. Other writers and critics, including Achebe, Irele, and Soyinka, argue in favour of the Calibanistic strategy of appropriating the 'masters' tongue and 'writing-back'.

These debates often focus on the 'choice' of language by writers. Ngugi's position shifts attention to the broader structural determinants that often impose a choice upon writers, and this has the advantage of bringing into focus the important role of publishers in this set of debates. Nonetheless, it is in turn possible to overestimate this influence. As we have already seen, Griffiths interprets the relationships between writers and publishers in terms of patronage, arguing that the publishing imperative that lay behind the *AWS* was 'as strong in its controlling influence as any of the previous patronages of the colonial period'.¹⁷ This claim is based on the assumption that Heinemann were concerned solely with publishing books in English. Griffiths asserts that there was an 'almost exclusive concentration on writing in the ex-colonial languages and seeming lack of interest in commissioning translations of works originally written in the indigenous languages'.¹⁸

In fact, the HEB archives show that the *AWS*'s editors were very active in pioneering the translation of works from Gikuyu, Kiswahili, Ndebele, Shona, Yoruba, Amharic. And furthermore, in the mid-1970s, they made significant efforts to develop a Series of Swahili translations of *AWS* originals. This initiative proved difficult to sustain, however, for reasons that indicate the extent to which the influence of publishers was significantly constrained by the *AWS*'s commercial dependence on educational prescriptions. HEB in London felt that publishing in vernacular African languages did not sell unless books were prescribed.¹⁹ Thus, the proposed series in Swahili was 'a very risky market' because it was difficult to keep costs down in the absence

17. G. Griffiths, *African Literatures*, op. cit., p84.

18. G. Griffiths, 'Writing', op. cit., p153.

19. Letter: James Currey to Robert Markham, 9 March, 1972, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File NO. 6/8.

20. Letter, James Currey to D. Bolt, 14 August 1978, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 6/6.

21. See C.L. Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp120-121; A.O. Amoko, 'The problem of English literature: canonicity, citizenship, and the idea of Africa', *Research in African Literatures*, 32, 4 (2001): 19-43.

22. W. Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, op. cit., pp88-119.

of a realistic expectation that books would be adopted on examination curricula.²⁰ These initiatives ran afoul of the reluctance of African states to use books in vernacular languages in their education systems, preferring to construct a version of nationalist education in which English (or other colonial languages) was privileged as the medium of instruction.²¹

The second area in which difference is re-inscribed in and through the mediums for making African writing present in the world is around the question of genre. As we have already seen, the *AWS* was explicitly set up as a series of African *writing*, not just literature. Titles in the Series included separate designs for novels (orange, famously copying Penguin's distinctive branding); for non-fiction (blue); and for poetry and plays (green). Nonetheless, it is for canonising the Anglophone African novel for which the *AWS* is most well known, and upon which its financial viability has largely depended (and in particular, Achebe's novels, followed by those of Ngugi). Since the 1980s, as the *AWS* shifted steadily away from publishing original titles to becoming a backlist series, almost all the new titles and in-print backlist have consisted of novels. This is significant because the novel is a distinctively European cultural form, in its origins at least. As with the question of language, and more so perhaps than with other non-European literatures, the politics of genre has also attracted much critical soul searching. The key question is whether the narrative rhythms, forms, and textures of what has come to be called 'orature' can be adequately transcribed into the rhythms, forms, and textures of the novel. More specifically, the *AWS* in particular has often been associated with the predominance of a particular style of novelistic discourse, one that is overwhelmingly realist in its aesthetic dispositions. The dominant aesthetic of the Series eschewed the styles of high literary modernism which constituted the taken for granted canon of 'Literature' in the West. This contributed to the reception of this tradition of writing as bearing a distinctively mimetic burden of representation that supposedly characterised Africa writing.

Moving away from the formal features of texts as such, the third dimension along which difference has been re-inscribed through the circulation of African writing in English relates to the broader question of reading publics and reading cultures. A recurring theme in commentaries on the dilemmas faced by both local and international publishers looking to extend markets in African contexts is the idea that, while reading publics certainly exist and even thrive, there is a tradition of 'serious' literature being *read for achievement*, as distinct from being *read for pleasure*.²² There is, of course, an implicit evaluation contained in this analysis but it does nevertheless pinpoint one of the fundamental conditions for the establishment of reading publics for 'serious' English language writing in post-colonial African societies, namely the dependence on educational markets, directly connected to levels of state funding, curriculum design, and examination procedures. The *AWS* exemplifies this relationship, since it was launched and sustained for the first twenty years of its history as a

series providing affordable and accessible paperback books for adoption in the reformed secondary and tertiary institutions of newly independent states such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda.

Here, then, we see the theme of contradictory conditions of possibility and limitation. The projection of a new tradition of Anglophone African literature was enabled by an alliance of Western publishing capital and state-funded educational reform in Africa. The *AWS* was, after all, an initiative of Heinemann Educational Books, a subsidiary of William Heinemann, and it remains, after successive takeovers in the 1980s and 1990s, embedded within an educational publishing conglomerate. Most of HEB's business when the *AWS* was first initiated and growing remained in educational textbooks, not in mainstream trade publishing for a general readership. The commercial significance of the *AWS* lay less in its being a source of high revenue or profits itself, but rather as an important 'loss-leader' for this broader educational publishing programme. Over the years, the *AWS* has become an important source of credibility for Heinemann: 'The *AWS* is a backlist led list. Chinua Achebe is perceived as the most important author on our list by the outside world. As publishers of this list we have entry to African educational markets and a kudos that other multinationals do not have'.²³ This status of the *AWS* served as one argument for continuing to publish new titles in the series in the 1990s, even as the margins on the series were increasingly squeezed:

As the publisher of the African Writers Series we have entry into Ministries and a reputation and esteem in Africa which far exceeds our current market position. To stop publishing the series would have a huge negative effect and make entry into local publishing agreement much harder. We would be viewed as just another multinational but without the infrastructure and contacts that companies like Macmillan and Longman have.²⁴

One consequence of the most important publisher of African literary writing being an educational publisher has been that this writing is constrained both positively and negatively to circulate through particular distribution networks of educational rather than general trade publishing, and this too has helped to reinforce a set of sedimented associations of African writing with didactic forms of storytelling and witness.

GEOGRAPHIES OF TEXTUALITY

The making present of writing in the world depends on the work of various intermediary devices that help to shape the horizons of meaning through which texts are made meaningful. The conventional interpretative vocabulary of 'text and context', whether used in literary studies, historiography, or historical geography, is shaped by a highly normative system of spatialised

23. Internal Memorandum on *AWS*, 1994, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/6.

24. Memo, 'The African and Caribbean Writers Series Performance Analysis', 21 August 1996, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/6.

25. See M. Curry, *The Work in the World*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

26. C. Barnett, 'Deconstructing context: Exposing Derrida', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 24 (1999): 277-293.

27. I. Hofmeyr, and S. Nutall, with C.A. Michael, 'The book in Africa', *Current Writing*, 13, 2 (2001): 7.

28. M. Warner, *Publics and counterpublics*, New York, Zone Books, 2002.

29. G. Genette, *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

30. T. Bennett, 'Texts in history: the determinations of readings and their texts', in D. Attridge, G. Bennington, and R. Young (eds), *Poststructuralism and the Question of History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

distinctions between insides and outsides.²⁵ One of the more peculiar things about this vocabulary of contextualisation is that it leads to the elision of perhaps the defining feature of modern print cultures, exemplified above all by the book, namely the portability of meaning.²⁶ The most important feature about the modern book is that it is extremely mobile. This connection between the concept of textuality, which emphasises movement and iteration, and the materiality of the book suggests a simple methodological principle: 'It is by following things in motion, exploring the conditions in which they circulate in space and time and according to different regimes of value, that we understand them to have a particular type of social potential'.²⁷

It is by tracking the conditions of mobility of African writing that we can glean the ways in which the abstract potential of texts to convene publics is practically realised.²⁸ Publishing is a key mediating practice that links writers to markets and audiences, and helps to shape the formation of tastes and horizons of aesthetic expectation. In order to develop this argument, I want to focus on the role of a set of liminal devices (formal, material, and institutional) through which African writing was made available through the *AWS*. I develop this analysis of the dynamics of textual mobility by drawing on Gerard Genette's suggestive analysis of the 'conventions of the book', or what he calls *paratexts*.²⁹ By this, he means the whole set of devices through which 'texts', narrowly construed, are made available, or packaged. Genette's argument is that attention to these sorts of liminal devices - everything from titles to typeface and cover design, to reviews and criticism - thoroughly ruptures any lingering sense of there being a singular, idealised text that is differently packaged and differently interpreted according to different contexts. Rather, these devices and conventions are instrumental in making texts present in the world in the first place. Genette distinguishes between *peritexts* and *epitexts*. The former refers to those features that are proximate to the literary-textual object itself - illustrations, indexes, title pages, cover designs and so on. The latter refers to those more diffuse practices, such as reviewing, criticism, and pedagogy through which texts are inscribed into patterns of use. Genette's suggestion that these features help to cement a certain sort of contract between reader and text suggests that we should attend not so much to how texts are received in different contexts, but rather look at the *geographical constitution of reading-formations*. A reading-formation refers to:

a set of discursive and inter-textual determinations which organise and animate the practices of reading, connecting texts and readers in specific relations to one another in constituting readers as reading subjects of particular types and texts as objects-to-be-read in particular ways.³⁰

I want to focus on the 'paratextual' practices of publishers in making texts available to different audiences through the manipulation of various rhetorical and material devices that facilitate the mobility of texts through

multiple contexts. The 'peritextual' analysis that follows will show the importance of seemingly mundane devices such as cover design, glossaries, and illustrations in constituting and maintaining a particular type of publicness for the *AWS*. The 'epitextual' analysis looks not at the public world of reviews and criticism, but at the interactions between publishers and other organisational actors in negotiating the availability of African writing. In particular, it looks at the role that educational contexts have played in facilitating the growth of the *AWS*, both in Africa and in the West. The commercial viability of the *AWS* has depended on books being set, taught and examined in both secondary and tertiary institutions. We shall see that this relationship between commodification and education means that the institutions and conventions of legitimation that help shape the international publication of African writing are not, as might be supposed, solely located in the 'core' at all, but also include African elites, Ministries of Education, and publishers.

MAKING A DURABLE CANON

Genette's work on paratexts is just one example of a burgeoning field of book history that has focused attention on what D.F. McKenzie calls the 'expressive function of the material form of the book'.³¹ McKenzie's focus is on typographic conventions; closer to our topic here, Laura Chrisman reads the back cover blurbs of South African novels to track the ways in which these works were framed for different audiences. It is this kind of attention to what one might call the phenomenology of the book - how the conventions of the book makes certain types of objects capable of appearing as bearers of meaning - that I want to bring to bear on aspects of the *AWS*.

The first thing to underscore is that the *AWS* was a paperback series. It reprinted previously published works and new titles, in both cases with the intention of providing texts in accessible forms - accessible in the basic sense of being in print, but also in terms of price. Historically, the paperback - portable and affordable - convenes a new sort of reading public. And in this respect, *AWS* was quite explicitly designed to emulate the example of Penguin Books.³² The construction of the *AWS* as a *series* was crucial to establishing the long-term viability of the venture as a profitable publishing venture. This included colour-coding of the covers, and the numbering of each title in the series, as well as the inclusion of a full listing of all *AWS* titles on the inside covers of individual titles. From the outset, then, the Series was itself a hugely successful example of successful branding. The *AWS* became known simply as the 'Orange series', referring to the distinctive design of the fiction publications. In these ways, any given title was located within a broader frame, as part of a sequence of titles, and in the case of the *AWS*, as part of an explicitly programmatic publishing project - a project aimed at transforming the image of Africa held by Africans and non-Africans alike.

Another key feature of many *AWS* titles was the inclusion of illustrative

31. D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

32. On Penguin, see S. Hare, (ed), *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1995.

material in the text. Early titles had cover designs that were explicitly intended to illustrate the main topic or theme of the text. Many titles also included illustrations as front-pieces and between chapters. These illustrations tended to be distinctive line drawings or woodcut prints. Some books contained forewords and introductions; others contained glossaries explaining the meaning of phrases and words. *Things Fall Apart*, for example, contained a glossary when originally published. The latest *AWS* edition, published in 1996, also contains: an introductory essay on Igbo culture and history; an essay on Achebe's importance to African literature; maps; and suggested further reading. This clearly indicates the intended audience of schools and Universities. The presence of these sorts of supplementary devices in the *AWS* indicates the importance ascribed to making texts accessible to a wide readership. This is a constant concern of publishers and readers when assessing titles for the *AWS*. For example, commenting on a proposed collection of translated Swahili verse, one external reader recommended the inclusion of maps and tables in the book: 'Will readers in, say Lagos, Accra, Washington DC, be sufficiently familiar with location of Lamu, Mombasa, Tanga? Similarly, a table of the main historical events might also be useful as a point of reference for non-Swahili readers'.³³

33. Memo, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 15/3.

This sort of concern has two dimensions. On the one hand, it indicates the importance ascribed by publishers to ensuring that titles from one context would be readily accessible to audiences unfamiliar with those places. This was not simply a matter of making Western audiences familiar with African contexts. It was just as much about making texts from one part of Africa available to readers in other parts, a crucial concern given the overriding interest in having books set by Exam Boards. On the other hand, the use of this set of peritextual devices - illustrations, maps, glossaries, forewords and introductions - underscores the didactic intentionality inscribed into the very form of the *AWS* as a series of paperback books. This is not just a matter of providing context for the reader. It adds up to a set of conventions that helped to construct a horizon of expectations whereby one would read *AWS* books in order to *learn about other places*.

34. Letter, 10 March 1969, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 1/9.

This was an important dimension of the marketing of the Series from the outset. In this respect, HEB received regular commendations from a range of organisations on the value of this way of using the books. For example, the Canadian University Service Overseas, responsible for the training and orientation of professional volunteers prior to their overseas assignments, regularly made large orders of *AWS* titles: 'We are most interested in new editions forthcoming which could be added to our library and individual copies sent to each of our perspective [*sic*] recruits destined for an assignments overseas'.³⁴ An Assistant US Secretary of State commended the series in these same terms: 'I frequently tell my colleagues and prospective travellers to African that there is no better way to know Africa today than to see it through the eyes of its contemporary authors'.³⁵

35. Letter from R.M. Moore to James Currey, 31 January 1980, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 24/12.

The *AWS* was produced, designed, and marketed according to a

specifically didactic imperative, which meant that it was understood to bear a representative function in relation to African societies - speaking of them, certainly, but also claiming to speak *for* them too. This didactic/representative framing is sustained by a whole set of 'epitextual' and 'peritextual' practices that activated books as texts to be read in certain ways by readers with certain sorts of dispositions to learn about contemporary Africa. In this respect, the *AWS* also depended on the construction of a particular type of author-effect. In the original format of the series, each title contained on its back cover a picture of its author or editor, as well as a bibliographic portrait. The crucial signature is the country of origin of the author - a Nigerian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, and so on. These devices construct an author-effect that involves an ascription of the author as an authoritative witness to the traditions and transformations of the nation-states to which their works were attached. Importantly, this 'nationalising' effect is the condition of the construction of a pan-African canon of writing, in so far as the national form remained the dominant entry point into broader contemporary narratives of independence as the shared experience of postcolonial African societies. The importance of this feature - pinning authors down to particular places - has been reasserted more recently, as Heinemann refocused attention on the marketing value of the *AWS* as a *series* in the 1990s when redesigning the books:

The back cover blurbs must mention the location of the novel and the nationality of the author. We have some back cover blurbs that never mention the location of the story or nationality of the author and yet we are supposed to be selling the African Writers Series. This does not help build the Series identity.³⁶

The artifactual qualities of the *AWS* as a *series of books* both reflected and sustained the conditions through which this exercise in making Africa available was made possible - primarily in terms of a set of both formal and informal didactic or pedagogical objectives. They are examples of devices that open up texts to certain sorts of 'preferred readings' - as testimony, as representative, or as informative - inserting them into wider discourses in which the narrative forms of the novel in particular are attached to wider historical movements of anti-colonialism, national autonomy, and cultural self-consciousness.

The argument here is not that these devices - the peritexts that make 'texts' into 'books' - somehow determine the readings made of the text they surround. Rather, I would suggest that we can read them as *traces* of the institutional intentionalities that shape what is made publicly available, as well as of the practices of reading, judgement, and evaluation into which these objects were woven. So we need to consider the 'epitexts' of the *AWS* as well, the set of practices of interpretation that impinges upon 'the text' externally, at a distance, as it were. In this respect, there are two important

36. Memo on African and Caribbean Writers Series, 4 June 1992, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/2.

37. C. Barnett, 'Constructions of apartheid in the international reception of the novels of J. M. Coetzee', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25 (1999): 287-301.

38. J. Guillory, *Cultural Capital: the problem of literary canon formation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993.

39. A. Amoko, 'The problem of English literature', op. cit.

40. Letter from Keith Sambrook to Henry Chakava, 8 January 1981, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 54/13.

41. Circular Letter No INS/80-35, Inspectorate, Ministry of Higher Education, Nairobi, 26 November 1980, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 53/13.

dimensions to the shaping of the *AWS* as the medium for African writing in English. One might focus here on a metropolitan circuit of criticism and reviewing in literary reading publics located in Europe and North America.³⁷ But much more crucial to the history of the *AWS* is the role of educational public spheres, located in both Africa and in Europe and North America. As already noted, the original *raison d'être* for the Series was to provide affordable paperbacks for a predominantly educational market in Africa with which Heinemann was already deeply involved. One of the determinate dimensions of the editorial process in the 1960s and 1970s was a set of calculations concerning whether titles were likely to be adopted as set texts by Examination Boards in African states.

The process of canonisation, in which Heinemann played a critical role through the construction of the *AWS* list, is not best thought of as a process of inclusion and exclusion, but more in terms of a process of selection by reference to explicit and implicit criteria.³⁸ In the case of the *AWS*, this selection process involved the ongoing negotiation of different, sometimes competing criteria adopted by those directly involved in the series, by HEB more broadly, as well as by educational actors and academics. But a critical point about the *AWS* is that the institutions of legitimation through which this canon of postcolonial writing was made present in Africa and worldwide were not located only in Western markets or institutions. A critical role was played by the ideologies of post-independence educational institutions in Africa, shaped by a firm commitment to shaping English literature programmes that reflected African writers, African idioms, and African realities, rather than slavishly following an inherited Western canon.³⁹ It was therefore crucial for HEB to keep track of the changing curricula and educational ethos in its key African markets. The *AWS* was originally established to take advantage of the increased demand for educational books that would follow from the expansion of secondary and tertiary school systems and the development of universal primary school programmes after independence. By the 1980s, the success of the *AWS* is illustrated by the predominance of *AWS* and HEB books on the set book list for the Kenya Certificate of Examination. These included setting at O Level: Ngugi's *The River Between* (*AWS* No. 17, 1965); *Poems from East Africa* (*AWS* No. 96, 1971); Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (*AWS* No. 3, 1963); Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (*AWS* no. 191, 1976). While at A Level (alongside *Death of a Salesman* and *The Grapes of Wrath*) were set: Sembene Ousmane's *Gods Bits of Wood* (*AWS* No. 63, 1968); and Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (*AWS* NO. 35, 1968).⁴⁰

This type of curriculum is indicative of a widespread policy of setting literature syllabuses that laid greater emphasis on African and Oral literature: 'This reflects the fundamental educational principle that education being a means of knowledge about ourselves, we must examine ourselves first and then radiate outwards and discover peoples and world's around us'.⁴¹ The aim of syllabus design should, according to this approach, be to 'deepen

the students' understanding and appreciation of Literature of the people of East Africa, Africa, the third world and the rest of the world in that order'.⁴²

42. Ibid.

It was in this context that the *AWS* expanded in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. It is worth noting that this ideology of Africanising literature syllabuses still depended on teaching through the medium of English. At the same time, it is also notable that in principle, and in the range of *AWS* books set (which included the Nigerian Achebe, the translation from French of Ousmane from Senegal, and the South African La Guma), the range of reference was not narrowly nationalistic or even regional, but covered the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. In this respect, the 'Africa' in the *African Writers Series* was never exclusive. Contrary to Phasanwe Mpe's argument,⁴³ race never wholly defined the *AWS* as a series of *Black* African writing, and the commitment to translation of originals ensured a broad coverage of writings from Francophone, Lusophone, and North African contexts as well.

43. P. Mpe, 'The role of the Heinemann African Writers Series in the development and promotion of African literature', *African Studies* 58, 1 (1999): 105-122.

A central criterion of selection for the *AWS* from the outset was, then, that books should have some chance of being prescribed by exam boards. This issue recurs when *AWS* editors considered whether to publish manuscripts. So, for example, the decision to translate and publish the Cameroonian novelist Oyono's *Houseboy*, written in local vernacular French, had to consider whether the language of the novel was 'too rough' and 'outspoken' for an educational book,⁴⁴ as well as the explicit treatment of sexual issues. These sorts of concerns recur all the way through into the 1990s. The consideration of whether to support the translation and publishing of Marlene van Niekerk's award-winning Afrikaans novel, *Triomf*, ran up against the concern that the 'presence of explicit sexuality in the text' would 'complicate its possibilities for classroom adoption'.⁴⁵ But it is important to acknowledge that these sorts of concerns were not hard and fast rules. The *African Writers Series* did publish *Houseboy*, and this in part reflected the fact that African Examinations Boards often turned out to be more tolerant of content than those in the UK. The important point is that the negotiation of educational criteria was a critical determinant of the editorial process shaping the development of the *AWS*'s list.

44. Letter from HEB to John Reed, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 5/7.

45. Memo, HEB File No. 56/6.

Furthermore, HEB was not a passive actor in the process of the canonisation of its own headline series of African writing. From an early stage, HEB also developed a set of supporting publications designed to make the African writing knowable in specifically academic contexts. These included bibliographic guides, as well as a highly successful series of literary criticism. The aim was to help market the list. What developed as a result was a complimentary list of Heinemann critical editions, often written by African academics, about texts by African writers also often published by Heinemann. These supplementary publications contributed to making the *AWS* *teachable* in schools and Universities, providing a mechanism through which the presence of African texts in the marketplace could be translated, through the conventions of academic criticism and pedagogy, into an educational canon of African literature.

In short, it is impossible to underestimate the importance of educational reading-formations in the emergence of African writing as part of a canon of postcolonial literature. However, although the initial impetus behind the growth of the Series was African educational markets, from the late 1970s the focus of this educational context shifted fundamentally. An attempt to reframe the *AWS* as a general trade paperback list in the 1980s was not wholly successful, and in the 1990s the educational framing of the series was reasserted. Nonetheless, though African educational markets have continued to be important for the viability of the series, the last two decades have witnessed a discernible shift in the centre of gravity of the Series, both towards the United States and towards tertiary educational contexts. The next section explores the ways in which the publishers of the *AWS* negotiated this reorientation.

46. John Watson to Keith Sambrook, 26 March 1980, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 24/12.

47. This restructuring of markets and publishing sectors also helps account for the pattern found by Lindfors in his survey of literature syllabuses in African universities in the 1980s and 1990s. On the one hand, he found a predominance of *AWS* titles, but also found that this was a reflection of the dependence on old texts purchased a long time ago along with cheaper locally published books. Thus, the economics of publishing and book markets in Africa meant that an 'ideal syllabus' had given way to a 'practical syllabus' based on what books were available to be taught. The *AWS*, in this narrative at least, has become canonical by default. See B. Lindfors, 1995, pp45-60.

RELOCATING AFRICAN WRITING

For the first two decades of its existence, the *AWS*'s primary market was in Africa. HEB practiced a dual pricing policy, according to which *AWS* titles were sold at lower prices in price-sensitive African educational markets compared to the UK and elsewhere. This policy depended on the ongoing vitality of education budgets in post-colonial African states. The cost structure of the *AWS* depended on the large bulk orders for African educational markets - a book being set by examinations boards was estimated to double the likely annual sales. Importantly, as we have already seen, the *AWS* was only one, relatively small, aspect of HEB's broader involvement as an educational publisher in African markets. HEB was, therefore, an exporting publisher, practicing a differential pricing policy for the *AWS* to sustain a market for schools, Universities and students. African countries increased the number of imported books in the 1960s and 1970s, with economies buoyed by vibrant commodity markets often supporting the expansion of education systems. By the late 1970s, however, this 'golden age' of educational publishing was under strain, as foreign exchange became increasingly expensive.⁴⁶ In the early 1980s following the devaluation of the Nigerian currency, the previously reliable African market for the *AWS* collapsed. The lack of foreign exchange meant that *AWS* books were more and more expensive, and domestic economic crisis meant that educational spending stalled or declined in HEB's established markets.

One effect of this period of market restructuring was the partial indigenisation of African literary publishing, as *AWS* increasingly entered into licensing agreements with African publishers - with David Philip in South Africa, for example, the Zimbabwe Publishing House, and Henry Chakava's East African Publishing House. These publishers licensed the rights of *AWS* books and printed and published them locally.⁴⁷ This tightening of the key African markets for the *AWS* also coincided with a succession of corporate takeovers that saw the ownership of Heinemann

pass between four different companies in five years. During this period, James Currey, the main editorial force behind the growth of the series since the late 1960s, left Heinemann to establish his own eponymous imprint specialising in African history and social science. In the context of changing market conditions in Africa and a heightened imperative for the *AWS* to show its financial viability within an increasingly commercialised international publishing sector, the 1980s saw a shift in the geographical and institutional foci for the Series. With the relative decline of the African secondary and tertiary education market, Heinemann identified two new significant areas for potential growth: the general trade market in the UK, where it was felt that the *AWS* might be repositioned to take advantage of the growth of interest in ‘Third World writing’; and in University markets in the United States in particular, where the growth of African-American Studies and Women’s Studies programmes potentially provided an alternative public for the forms of African writing that the *AWS* had pioneered since the 1960s. The importance of the US market had been recognised from the 1970s onwards, where it was felt that the educational market provided an opportunity for HEB to market *AWS* titles for which it held the rights direct to this specialist market while avoiding competition with other editions of these titles held by US publishers. The diversification of the *AWS* list, to include new women writers like Bessie Head, for example, clearly supported this strategy.⁴⁸ From the 1980s onwards, this US College market became increasingly important in the positioning of the *AWS*.

A second issue that had been on the table since the 1970s, but which came to a head in the changed commercial situation of the 1980s, was the question of the design of *AWS* books. The African-based editors in Heinemann’s offices in Ibadan and Nairobi held fast to the importance of retaining ‘the Orange Series’ as a marker of quality and as an instantly recognisable brand in African markets. The London based publishers, however, expressed concern over ‘the message of the cover’, worrying about the impression that the distinctive style of *AWS* books, primarily targeted at schools and universities in Africa, gave in UK trade publishing markets.⁴⁹ Following the incorporation of Heinemann in the mid-1980s into larger publishing conglomerates, a clear decision was taken to reposition the *AWS* in line with broader trends in general paperback markets in the UK and USA. This involved a shift to publishing the *AWS* in the larger ‘B format’, rather than the smaller ‘A format’ of the original list. In publishing and marketing terms, ‘B-format’ books are associated with prestige literary publishing. The idea was to make the books look like mainstream trade paperbacks, in order to capitalise on the *AWS*’s brand strength while also taking advantage of the revitalisation of paperback publishing being pioneered in the UK by Virago, Bloomsbury, Picador and others at this time. This repackaging of the *AWS* list was a response to a steady decline in sales, and was a clear expression of the sense that the future of the series depended on exploiting UK and US rights. The aim of the redesign was to

48. Letter from James Currey to Anna Cooper, 14 February 1978, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 13/4.

49. Letter from James Currey, 8 October 1979, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 24/12.

50. Letter from V. Unwin to Awoonor, 13 February 1986, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 26/8.

51. Paper on the *AWS/CWS*, 21 November 1988, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/2.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Memo on The African Writers Series, 1992, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/6.

54. Memo on African and Caribbean Writers Series, 4 June 1992, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/2.

55. *Ibid.*

‘revamp and repackage the series in a larger trade format with attractive four-colour covers and really try to make an impact on the UK/US markets’.⁵⁰

The internal debate about the future of ‘the Orange Series’ was part of a reorientation towards new mainstream trade markets in the UK and US. This did not mean the abandonment of African markets, which have continued to be a central focus of *AWS* publishing. Indeed, in the new commercial circumstances of the 1980s, the *AWS* was recognised as an important asset that helped to maintain Heinemann’s credibility as an educational publisher in Africa. This was a key reason to continue to publish the series: ‘The *AWS* is the flagship of Heinemann International overseas. As major publishers of reading and literature the fame of the *AWS* is a great help in getting prescriptions [...] particularly in Africa’.⁵¹ However, African educational markets were now primarily backlist markets, whereas in terms of selecting new titles, ‘North America is the key influence in our choice of publishing’.⁵²

The 1980s was, then, a period of considerable upheaval and uncertainty around the *AWS*, related to broader corporate and market shifts. An attempt was made to reposition the series as a mainstream trade list, but this was only partially successful. By the early 1990s, Heinemann’s imperative was to refocus the *AWS* back on educational markets (along with the *Caribbean Writers Series (CWS)*, now treated as one for publishing, distribution, and marketing terms):

From 1986 we have been trying to establish a market presence that competes with Picador and Penguin B formats. The new covers and trade promotions have all supported this. This is good and we have definitively created a general trade presence but we need to compete on our terms, as specialists in our area, and not those set by the larger general paperback publishers. We now need to re-establish ourselves in the marketplace as specialists. We have the brand name and respect and we now need to concentrate on our core market.⁵³

This shift away from trade markets reflects a reassessment of *AWS*’s position as part of Heinemann’s educational publishing strategy:

As an African specialist publisher we have no competition, as mainstream international fiction publishers we fade into obscurity.⁵⁴

we are niche publishers with a specialist product. We have lost many of our links with our core academic market chasing pipe dreams that each and every book that we publish, often by an unknown author, should be treated by the international literary world as if it were a new Chinua Achebe’.⁵⁵

As this last statement suggests, one key aspect of the refocusing of the *AWS*

was the recognition of the importance of its identity as a *series* to the successful publishing of new titles:

We are not going to be successful publishing new unknown writers if they are introduced as individuals, they must carry the Series weight with them. The Series is a marketing tool and must always be seen as more important than its individual components.⁵⁶

56. *Ibid.*

The early 1990s therefore sees further redesign of the Series as well as changes to the marketing strategy to re-establish the list with its core academic market, but this market is now increasingly located in the UK and especially the US University sector. This included a clear decision to focus the series on 'classics', by selectively pruning the backlist. This was an important shift in the rationality of the *AWS*. One of the original aims of the series was to act as the publisher of record for African writing, and this implied a strong commitment to maintaining backlist books in print even if sales dropped off. As early as 1980, a decision to put some titles out of print was made.⁵⁷

57. *AWS* Policy, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 39/1.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a two-step redefinition of the *AWS*'s publishing strategy. On the one hand, the *AWS*'s backlist is acknowledged as an important asset, but on the other hand, the continuing possibility of publishing new titles depended on streamlining the number of books on the backlist. Combined, these two factors see the *AWS* reoriented away from publishing original works, and towards publishing the canon of African writing. In the early 1990s, publication of new titles was limited to between four and six a year, and these had to stand a good chance of course adoption.⁵⁸ These should preferably be by new writers with a growing *academic* reputation, and it was also recognised that Heinemann should provide academic backup to new titles in the form of selections of critical essays. This in turn reflected a clear editorial decision to cultivate more direct feedback from academic networks:

58. Memo, 27 February 1992, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/2.

This feedback comes from the same people who are writing reports on our new books, organizing conferences which may pay to bring over our authors. They are the same people who are influencing student reading lists and writing academic critiques and generally contributing to the current body of thought on African literature.⁵⁹

59. Memo on African and Caribbean Writers Series, 4 June 1992, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/2.

These successive repositionings of the *AWS*, while clearly determined in 'the last instance', as it were, by the commercial considerations of Heinemann, were also overdetermined by the structural features of the list as a brand and as a 'loss-leading' asset in educational markets in Africa, the UK and Europe, and North America. In short, the commercial viability of publishing new titles, and of maintaining a backlist of classic titles, was in large part shaped by non-commercial, non-economic factors to do with

curriculum design, canon-formation, and pedagogical trends.

This process of repositioning, redesigning, and repackaging the *AWS* involved different actors at Heinemann in the negotiation of different commercial and 'aesthetic' imperatives. And in turn, these different imperatives mapped onto the problem of reconciling the imperatives of geographically distinctive markets. So, for example, Heinemann's US operation, an increasingly powerful voice in shaping the *AWS* in the 1980s and 1990s, strongly favoured 'Americanising' the series, in terms of the selection of authors and advisors, sharing printing costs, and selecting titles that fit into a hybrid 'Trade + College' market. Heinemann UK favoured retaining the *AWS* as a UK-based list, on the grounds that the question of what would sell in African school markets remained a key to the success of the list, and it was the UK publisher that could take advantage of what was called its 'ex-colonial' profile and links with African and Caribbean markets.⁶⁰ Marketing of the fortieth anniversary of the series in 2002 reaffirmed the African market as core to the lists' future viability. There is, then, no once-and-for-all shift from an African-focused series to a UK and US based series, but rather a shift of emphasis in terms of editorial procedures. One key issue to underline is that the ongoing restructuring of the *AWS* list in the 1990s remains embedded in educational circuits of both economic and cultural capital. The refocusing on 'core' educational markets in the early 1990s after the experiment with trade publishing in the late 1980s clearly illustrates the key paradox of the success of the *AWS* in making African writing a 'presence in the world'. On the one hand, the success of this series over its first two decades depended on the combination of educational publishing expertise at Heinemann and educational expansion in African markets. This in turn established the brand value of the Series, and the asset value of the backlist rights, for Heinemann as it was restructured from the 1980s onwards. The flip-side of this success has been that the ongoing viability of the *AWS* has depended upon it being contained within institutionally specific circuits that constrict the circulation of titles to broader, non-specialist markets and publics (although, of course, *AWS* has also played an important part in establishing the possibility for non-*AWS* African authors and titles to enjoy success in these markets and publics).

If one of the costs of the success of the *AWS* has been this channelling within specialist educational publics, then a related aspect of this has been the reinforcement of the characteristic representative framing of the list. The refocusing on core educational markets has been associated with a clear definition of the strength of the list in this sector: 'Sell the pan-African appeal of the authors so that we can say we represent the continent'.⁶¹ Marketing books to new audiences in US colleges and universities has, therefore, reaffirmed the representative framing for *AWS* (and *CWS*) titles: 'The books must be clearly definable as African or Caribbean and fit in with the experiences of the country'.⁶² The criteria for publication in the *AWS* and *CWS* defined in the 1990s emphasised the idea that books should be representative of an area, and that while novels need not be set in Africa, nor necessarily authors be African, they

60. Agenda for the IAH Literature meeting, 7 September 1995, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/6.

61. Memo on The African Writers Series, 1992, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File NO. 56/6.

62. The African and Caribbean Writers Performance Analysis, 21 August 1996, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/6.

did need to convey a clear 'African perspective' and be based on a strong experience of African situations. Diasporic forms, in turn, were to be considered the exception.⁶³ Above all, this reflects not only the criterion that books should be suitable for secondary or tertiary education adoption, but the acknowledgement that the market value of *AWS* books continued to depend on them being constructed in strongly representative terms. The books

must be able to be marketed as college texts, e.g. for Women's Studies, Post colonial studies, Commonwealth Literature, Anthropology, History, Religion, Politics, Afro American studies. They must not be too long. They must not be too expensive.⁶⁴

What is most significant about such criteria is the clear recognition that the market for *AWS* and *CWS* lists extends well beyond Literature programmes, into both identity-based pedagogical programmes (Women's Studies, African-American Studies) and into History, Anthropology and other social sciences. And in the case of both of these markets, it is the framing of *AWS* books as *representative* - speaking of Africa, speaking for Africa, and speaking as African - that is the source of their entwined cultural and economic value.

BURDENS OF REPRESENTATION

The publishing history of the *AWS* can serve as a prism for exploring theoretical questions concerning relationships between markets, distribution, reading publics, state-formation, and cultural politics. Tracking the changing fortunes of the *AWS* scrambles any clear divide between the autonomy of aesthetic form and the instrumentality of the commodity form that defines 'the double discourse of value' of modern cultural criticism.⁶⁵ In this case, literature is clearly understood to have a set of instrumental uses that derive from a distinctively realist aesthetic, while the realisation of this value in commercial terms depends on a clear appreciation and manipulation of the aesthetic qualities of books as material artifacts.

One lesson of the *AWS* case study is that African writing is not naturally 'realistic' or 'representative' at all. Not only did the *AWS* bring to attention writing that is stylistically innovative - the work of Bessie Head, or of Dambudzo Marechera, for example - but more broadly, we have seen that the 'representative' qualities of this canon of writing are as much a construct of the 'paratexts' of the series - the design of books, and the imperatives of markets and institutions - as they are some integral quality of the texts themselves. The 'burden of representation' through which the *AWS* has been framed, marketed, read, adopted, taught and examined is the outcome of a deeper imperative that sees writing as a medium for asserting the presence of African culture in the West, as well as acting as a medium of self-representation for domestic educational and reading publics.

The representative qualities of the *AWS* have never been unproblematic,

63. Memo, 1996, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/2.

64. The African and Caribbean Writers Series Performance Analysis, 21 August 1996, University of Reading, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, HEB File No. 56/6.

65. B. Hernstein-Smith, *Contingencies of Value*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1991.

precisely because the territorialisation upon which representation classically depends is undone from the start by the distinctive geography of the *AWS*. Heinemann provided continent-wide distribution for writing in English, and helped construct a shared sense of African public culture which was geographically extensive, without perhaps ever being deeply embedded in African societies. In its early history, the *AWS* was instrumental in the institutionalisation of systems of national literary education which differentiated rather than integrated the subjects of newly independent national education systems in Africa; while subsequently, its continued survival has depended in no small part on being embedded in networks of multicultural post-nationalist secondary and tertiary education in the USA and Britain.

The *AWS* is, then, certainly a transnational cultural formation, but looking at the role of publishers brings to light the extent to which the conferral of cultural authority upon African writing in this case was never merely reserved for Western actors, but depended on the interactions of geographically dispersed institutional networks. Publishers, as embodiments of a rather peculiar form of multinational capital, were never all-powerful in shaping the forms of African representation circulating in the Continent or farther afield. The *AWS* is embedded in the wider history of nation-building projects that depended on extra-national institutional networks but also addressed only a limited section of national populations, yet stretched beyond national boundaries to constitute a de-territorialised discourse of African identity. The *AWS* was never a straightforwardly 'nationalised' project. Its predominant commitment was to pan-Africanism, and as time passed, many of the writers it helped support lived in exile. Its placement within education systems in African states meant that it was part of programmes whose effects are culturally differentiating rather than integrative. And its more recent dependence on UK and US Tertiary Education Markets is part of a broader movement of post-national multiculturalism.

The lack of congruence between language, identity, economy and territory is a dominant trope of postcolonial theories of culture and politics. From them, we have learnt that the assumption that culture and identity is or should be contained within the spatial boundaries of territorialised national cultures is a contingent product of the historical sedimentation of European traditions of reading, education, and publishing which underlies a whole critical apparatus of comparative analysis. The case of the *AWS* indicates not only that this model is not relevant to all contexts, but more than this, it sunders the assumed normativity of the national frame for analysing postcolonial cultural politics whether in the 'Western' core or the periphery of the 'Global South'.

This paper draws on research supported by a British Academy Research Grant, (Award No. 32829), entitled Recontextualising post-colonial African literature: reading formations, markets and the editorial process. I would like to acknowledge the help of James Currey, Becky Clarke, and Andrew Gurr in helping me understand the contexts of African literary publishing. Thanks also to the staff at the University of Reading Library for their assistance in negotiating the Heinemann archive.