

‘Unique perspectives on South Africa’: Imagining South Africa through the Homebru book marketing campaign, 2002–2012

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Introduction

Publishers’ and booksellers’ marketing campaigns are aimed at “target audiences” – groups of potential book buyers who can be demographically and geographically segmented. This segmentation is not always overt, but in the case of a “buy local” campaign, it becomes so. The aim of a ‘buy local’ campaign is “to encourage consumers to purchase locally made products in preference to imported goods” (Elliott and Cameron 1994: 50), or, put differently, for “local and regional cultures to assert themselves in the face of global homogenization” (Sutherland 2004: 59). These campaigns are thus an interesting site for an examination of the relationships between local and global cultures, and they provide insight into particular representations of ‘local’ identity or identities.

An example of such a marketing campaign is the ‘Homebru’ promotion run annually by South Africa’s biggest trade bookseller, Exclusive Books. In a way, a ‘buy local’ campaign in the publishing industry goes against world-wide trends, because of the diffusion of international bookselling chains and the increasing irrelevance of geographic borders due to the rise of e-commerce (Miller 2006: 114). Exclusive Books justifies its continued existence as a locally grounded, geographically distinct bookseller, noting that Homebru provides an opportunity to answer a commonly asked question: ‘Why are the South African books put on separate shelves from the rest?’ (Exclusives blog, 2012/2013). Their response reveals their inherent wish to assert a South African uniqueness, an identity:

Because South African books are unlike any the rest of the publishing world produces ... We don’t separate South African books because we feel sorry for them or because they need a little help. They simply deserve their own platform. Our HomeBru promotion is important in this respect: it’s our way of introducing South Africans to fresh reads, from voices new and well-established, engaging in the

conversations that South Africans love to have – and sometimes the ones we want to avoid. (Exclusives blog, 2012/2013)

Marketers for Exclusive Books go further in emphasising the importance of local identity in the conceptualisation of their ‘buy local’ campaign, arguing: “Homebru is unashamedly by South Africans, about South Africa and the South African experience. It is our annual platform to highlight, recognise and encourage the excellent work that our local publishers and writers are producing” (Green-Bricker, 2006). They also argue that “Homebru is about holding a mirror up to the South African publishing scene” (Exclusives blog, 2012). Marketing materials are often seen as a mirror of reality – indeed, a key advertising concept is that it ‘should accurately reflect or represent the world ... and that, indeed, it would fail if it did not accurately reflect prevailing cultural values and norms’ (Holbrook 1987: 95) – but this discourse of reflection and of uniqueness conceals the careful construction of a certain reality. Moreover, this reality is constructed for specific audiences. Woodward (in Naidoo 2008: 21) argues that

[m]arketing promotions can construct new identities at particular times which we can appropriate and reconstruct for ourselves. Advertisements only ‘work’ in selling us things if they appeal to consumers and provide images with which they can identify. Clearly then the production of meaning and the identities positioned within and by representational systems are closely interconnected. It is impossible to separate the two.

The 2012 and 2013 Homebru campaign, for instance, was titled ‘Unique perspectives on South Africa’ and had a deliberate emphasis on the environment and landscapes of the country. The marketing posters feature photographs of South African locales such as townships, but their apparent realism masks the fact that this is certainly not the milieu where one will find the average local book buyer. So who would identify with such images, and what does the campaign suggest about how we ‘imagine’ South Africa as a construct?

This article will examine the changing imagining of South African identity and space that has been constructed over the past ten years through the choice of specific images and messages in the Homebru campaign. The marketing materials and their messages – both textual and visual – will be analysed for insights into their discursive framing of South Africa and, indeed, South Africans. The article will examine how the consumption of post-

apartheid South African books has been mediated by the paratextual elements of marketing campaigns and blurbs. In similar marketing campaigns, “[t]he use of particular South African images and identities led to the creation of an image and an identity for the country, which resulted in South Africa being commoditised. The campaign thus tries to promote South Africa as if it were a product that could be advertised and sold to a public” (Naidoo, 2008: ii). To what extent, then, does Homebru position South Africa and its books as products for consumption?

From ‘Local is lekker’ to ‘Unique perspectives’: the evolution of marketing messages

The marketing materials and messages (both textual and visual) for the Homebru campaign have evolved since 2002, but there is still a sense of continuity. Homebru was started in 2002 as a month-long focus on 22 black South African writers working in English, including ‘heavy-weights’ such as Gcina Mhlope, Keorapetse Kgositsile and Zakes Mda. One of the authors selected, Sandile Dikeni, saw this as a significant new initiative, arguing that Exclusive Books had been seen as “Elusive Books” for black writers prior to the marketing campaign: “I see this as a beginning on how to begin to change that. People always say black people do not have a reading culture but what people don’t say is that we have a writing culture ... When I spoke to my publisher I said let’s hijack Exclusive Books via Homebru” (Dikeni, 2002). This comment reveals the continuing unequal access of both readers and writers to the publishing industry in South Africa.

The campaign was not widely marketed in 2002 and did not have a significant over-arching theme, as it would in later years, but the choice of the name ‘Homebru’ is a clear signifier of intention – a link to the wider “Local is Lekker” and “Proudly South African” marketing campaigns for local products. ‘Proudly South African’ was initiated in 1998, and has since become a popular designation of local origin, and, to some, a mark of authenticity. ‘Homebru’ is an amalgam of words – ‘homebrew’, indicating home-made beer (a well-known product in the South African context) and ‘home, bru’, echoing the South African English slang phrase ‘bru’, meaning brother.

This focus on ‘homegrown’ authors is reflected in the selection procedures, which emphasised that a writer should be born in South Africa (Green, in *Beeld*, 2002). In its first

year the selection criteria were more restrictive, emphasising not only nationality, but also ethnicity. Highlighting this factor, Dikeni (2002) gave his own thoughts on the motivations behind the campaign: 'There are a plethora of reasons why Exclusive Books decided to embark on this project, and then there is the main reason. Guilt. They have over the past few years neglected black writers.' Others have focused to a greater extent on nationality, arguing that the campaign was introduced in response to increasingly vocal criticism that local booksellers 'won't buy South African ... books' (Schimke 2004: 24). The stated aim was to promote local writers and publishers through a preferential promotional campaign, as experience had shown that local readers avoided local books: 'South Africans, as we know, have traditionally been very resistant to local cultural products' (Nell 2012). Booksellers, it was argued, still have 'to contend with the old, residual, cultural cringe. How many times have I heard people say they don't like reading South African books – too depressing, too dull, too badly written – too South African?' (Von Klemperer 2009). The aim was to change this perception by making local books more visible and attractive, through specialised marketing.

A shift in focus to South African or national identity – rather than black or ethnic identity – was reflected in the campaign in 2003, under the theme of "Stories of Us", which focused on "ordinary people with extraordinary stories". The marketing materials represent South Africa in terms of the tropes of inclusivity and unity, although the key term 'us' is left deliberately obscure. At the launch of the campaign, Dr Annari van der Merwe (in Nieuwoudt 2003), head of the local publishing imprint Kwela, said, "It is time that we all begin to listen to each other's stories. And if South African publishers really want to contribute to the reidentification process taking place in the country, we must focus on the life stories of ordinary people". While these words emphasise sameness (through the use of the first person plural), the accompanying emphasis on *ordinary* people belies the fact that only a small elite, perhaps 1% of the population of South Africa, buys books regularly (SADBC data). The Homebru list, which no longer included only black South African authors, acknowledged this core target market by including greater diversity in terms of authors (white as well as black), genre (with autobiographies and biographies included as well as fiction), along with language (with a few Afrikaans titles added to the English mix).

The Homebru marketing messages over the years have made recurring use of the notion of being proudly South African, and of the apparent uniqueness or exceptionalism of South African identity. The year 2004, with the slogan ‘Uniquely South African’, highlighted this theme. The selection of books “reflected ... the way in which writers have dealt with the young democracy in the past ten years” (Nieuwoudt, 2004). The press release from Exclusive Books argued that the aim of the campaign was to create interest in South African books and move away from the misconception that South African books were heavy, angsty reads (Green in Nieuwoudt, 2004). But did the marketing paratexts support this aim?

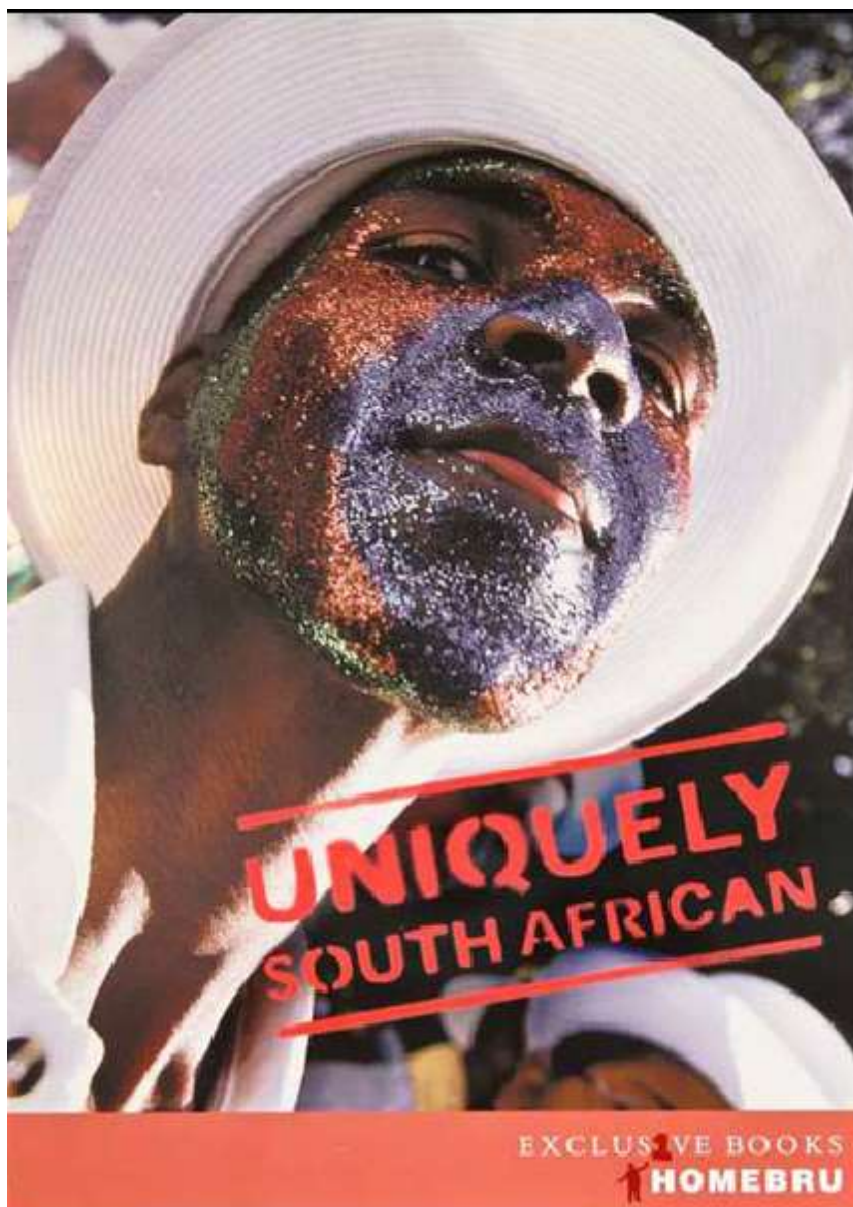


Figure 1: Shamil Jeppie (n.d.: 7)

The imagery used (see Figure 1) is certainly light-hearted, and intended to be associated with fun. The core image was that of a masked Cape Town minstrel, the dancers who perform at the Cape Carnival on 'Tweede Nuwe Jaar' (2 January). Shamil Jeppie describes the minstrel as the “pre-eminent expression of working class culture in Cape Town” (n.d: 7) – which is certainly not the culture we associate most closely with reading in South Africa, nor with any of the books selected for the Homebru list that year. Sutherland (2004: 57) notes that this use of “elements of culture from South Africa’s former marginalized cultures” is widely used in South African design, but warns: “Within this practice [lie] many dangers, not least of which [is] the issue of appropriation”.

The appropriation of previously marginalised identities in the Homebru campaign reveals that the marketing materials are playing on tropes of race and alterity. But the question should be asked: does the use of stereotypes or what Haupt (2012) calls “hegemonic media representations of blackness” undermine their intentions? In other words, how does the average predominantly metropolitan audience member relate to the use of ‘exotic’ imagery with which s/he clearly cannot identify (Huggan, 2001: viii)? For, while the imagery may all relate to South Africa, there is a sharp disjuncture between the groups embodied in the marketing campaign and those targeted by it; the ‘exotic’ is at once ‘local’ and ‘other’ for the latter. This brings us to a key question: who is Exclusive Books targeting with their campaigns? And who – given that the marketing does not highlight books as the product being sold – is the typical South African reader? The South African Book Development Council (2007) portrays the average book-buyer as predominantly white, female, urban and middle class, but this is not the South African image reflected in the Homebru campaign. In 2005, the slogan “Many stories, one people” – a theme of simultaneous diversity and unity, a familiar one in the ‘rainbow nation’ – deliberately attempted to interpellate a wider audience for the products being marketed, and thus for the seller. The images consisted of “mix and match” pictures of a variety of races and genders in an apparent attempt to enable consumers to identify with the images (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

This was supported by public relations copy that situated the campaign as moving away from “categories, separate realities and black and white boundaries”:

the boundaries have softened into shimmering shades of grey. The cross-fertilisation of many cultures blurs and continues to blur boundaries of race, gender, lifestyle and tradition. Exclusive Books celebrates the vibrancy of the emergent multicultural story-telling with its Homebru 2005 collection. (Exclusive Books Press release, 2005)

This theme of inclusivity amidst multiculturalism – often referred to using the nation-building advertising jingle, ‘*simunye*’ or ‘we are one’ – is widely used in the South African media, especially television, but it has been increasingly criticised for bearing little relation

to reality. At best, it is seen as being aspirational rather than reflective, but critical analysis tends to highlight 'the contradiction between fictions of consumption and the reality of exclusion' (Kruger 2010: 75).

The Homebru selection also saw a shift in subject matter, towards contemporary South African issues: "Politics is slowly becoming the backdrop, as opposed to its previous position as the central core of all South African stories" (Green-Bricker, 2005). Nonetheless, the make-up of books has remained fairly constant since then: some novels, plus non-fiction in the form of current affairs, cookery books and sports biographies – very much the stock in trade of the average trade publisher targeting a popular audience. The collection of 21 titles was 'shot through with a common thread which illustrates how we have more drawing us together than keeping us apart,' said Batya Green-Bricker, marketing manager of Exclusive Books (ibid.).

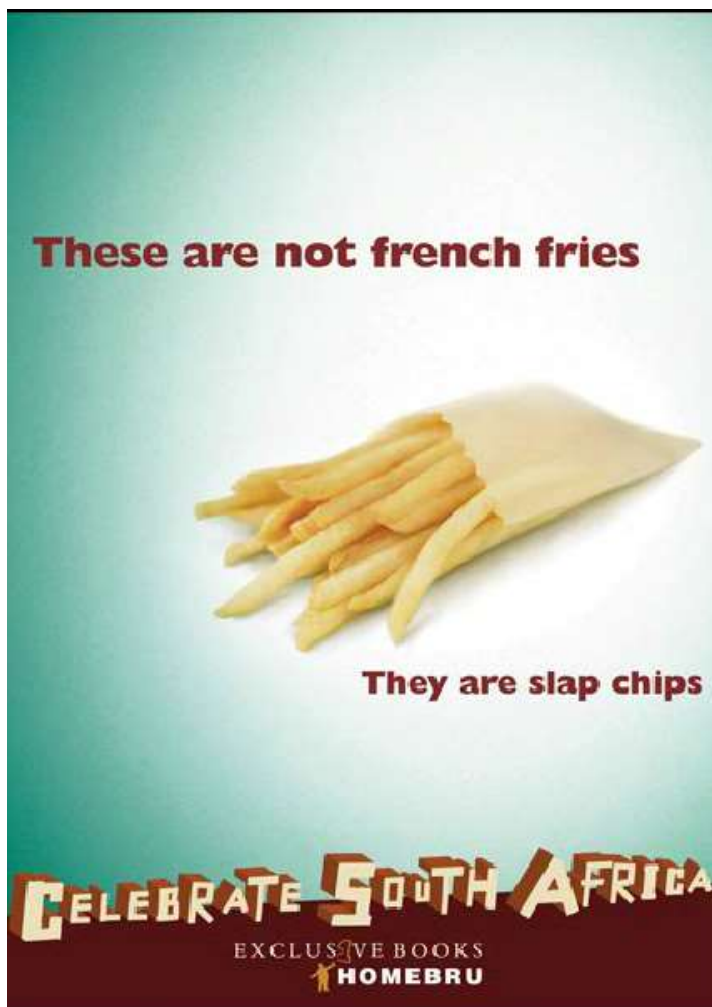


Figure 3

The 2006 campaign shifted slightly in perspective from celebrating South African *books* to the more overtly 'buy local' (and generic) message of 'Celebrate South Africa!' The materials again focused on uniqueness or exceptionalism, in the form of local expressions from South African English, such as "robot" (for a traffic light) and "slap chips" (for french fries) (see Figure 3). These are terms that "we" as local readers would expect to have in common with one another, whatever "our" differences. The lighthearted tone of the campaign was deliberate: "After five years of running Homebru, we are not taking ourselves quite as seriously. There is a certain lightness, a sense of humour and ease about the books we have featured" (Green-Bricker, 2006). But the dropping of any reference to the actual products being promoted – books – means that the campaign was becoming increasingly generic and even less focused on the core target audience of the bookseller. South Africa was being presented as the commodity for consumption, rather than books (or 'stories', as the campaign kept insisting), as in the earlier years.

The generic "buy local" emphasis and the increased commoditisation were taken further in 2007 with the use of iconic South African products, such as rooibos tea, on the marketing materials (in fact, Freshpak was a part-sponsor) (see Figure 4). It was argued that "Exclusive Books chose to ride the prevailing "local is lekker" sentiment by associating itself with South African household brands like Mrs Ball's, Freshpak, Inkomazi and Zambuk. This allowed the brand to piggyback on the goodwill created by these brands over the years" (Green-Bricker, 2008). These 'household brands' are products used by a broad cross-section of South Africans, including the working-class and poor, and their packaging is easily recognisable and familiar to the vast majority. Books might generically be as recognisable to most South Africans, but they are not household products. In fact, research has shown that less than half of all South African households have books in their homes (SABDC 2007). By associating books with such household brands, the marketers were attempting to suggest that these are essential items – but they also (perhaps inadvertently) were claiming that the marketing and consumption of books and food are equivalent. This argument is more or less acceptable depending on one's position in the debate on whether publishers and booksellers should promote 'culture' or 'commerce', and on the ongoing tension between the cultural and economic capital adhering to books (see Miller 2006).

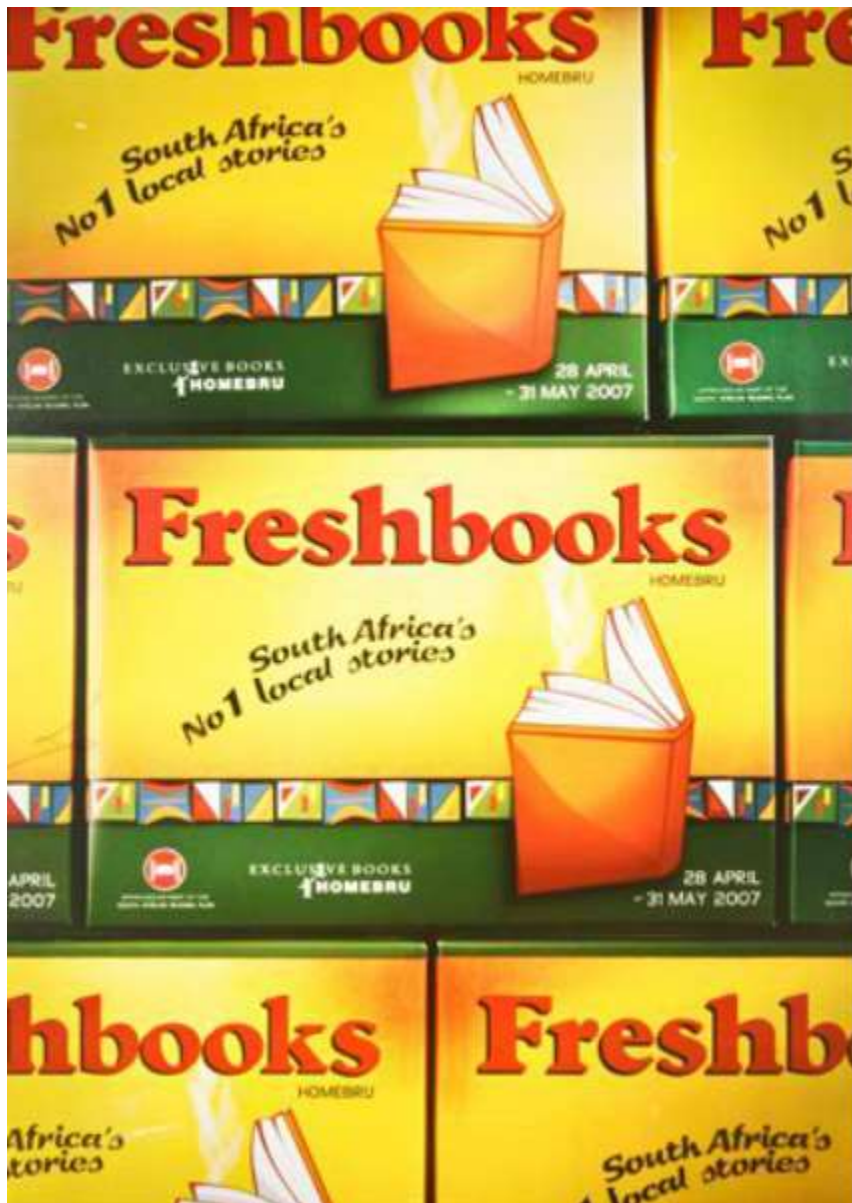


Figure 4

The main tagline for the 2007 campaign did mention books as the main product, in the form of “Stories from South Africans to South Africans”. But, once again, the use of the broad term “South African” served to mask differences. While the retailer’s press release called on the reading public “to experiment with both ways of writing and perspectives on the world that may fall outside their traditional framework” (Nel, 2007), the selection of books was very similar to previous years and not at all the “cross section of superb, locally-published books” intended (that is, they may indeed have been superb, but they were neither diverse nor widely representative as a crosssection should be). The year’s list did see the first-ever inclusion (and to date the only inclusion) of an African language title, *Usomachiza*, the Xhosa

translation of Paulo Coelho's iconic *The Alchemist*, but this nod to linguistic diversity was the only indicator of a wider potential audience. The focus on English and Afrikaans titles alone is perhaps one of the most exclusionary aspects of the Homebru campaign.

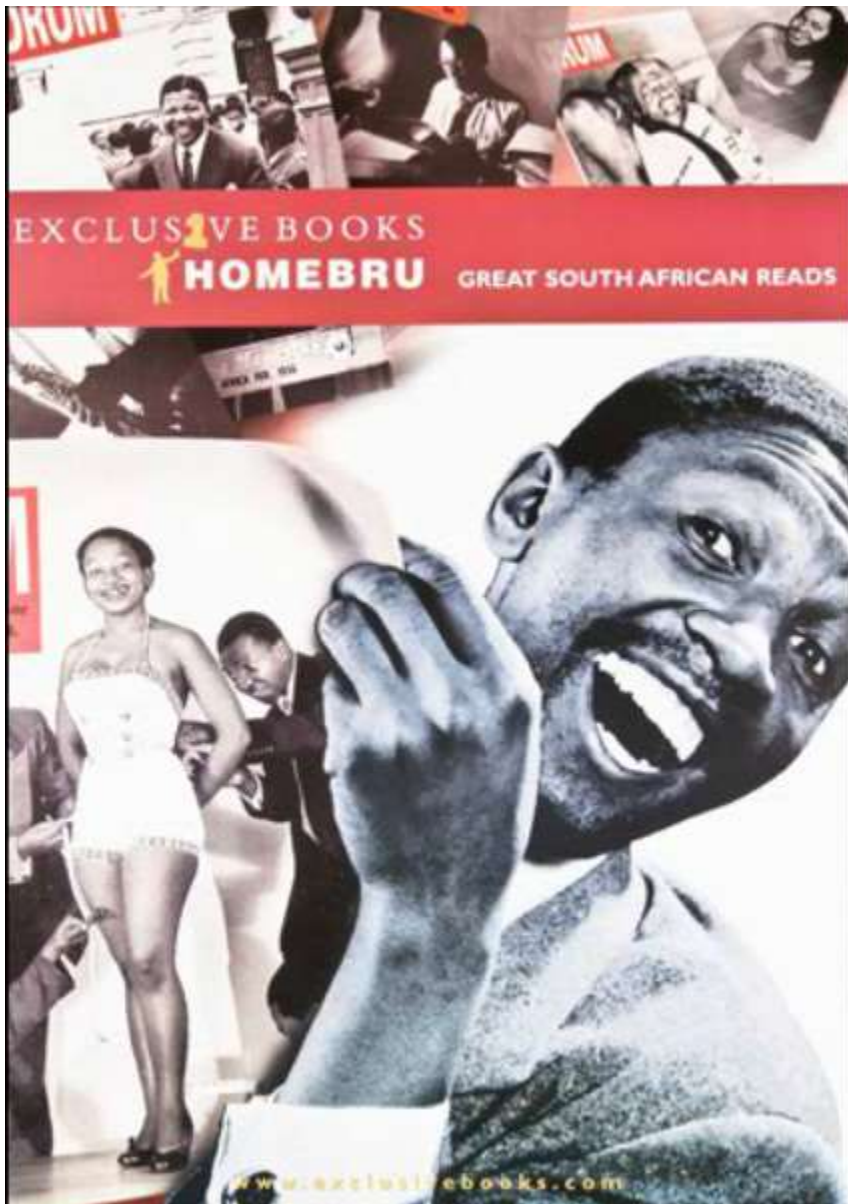


Figure 5

The effective development of a brand identity linking Exclusive Books to other “Proudly South African” products would be repeated later. In 2008’s campaign – “Great South African reads” – there was both a textual and a visual focus on the actual products that Exclusive Books sells, i.e. books (see Figure 5). The theme of the books selected for 2008 was “political influence and how it has shaped every aspect of our world”, a selection also described as “a *potjie* of hot topics and key issues, with a dash of humour” (Iafrica, 2008). While the aim in

previous years may have been to show that local books were not necessarily “angsty”, post-apartheid

[a]ll the books resonate in some way with what South Africans are feeling and doing right now, and politics is the backdrop to much of that. Homebru encourages South Africans to read real stories told by ordinary South Africans, exploring societal issues and our rich cultural heritage — much of which has been misrepresented in the past (Green-Bricker, 2008).

In 2008, the advertising was split between images that nod towards an iconic black magazine of the 1950s, *Drum* magazine, and pictures of South African wild animals reading books. While *Drum* magazine may, by some stretch of the imagination, be said to complement the themes of political impact and reading, the wild animal posters have no such congruence with the aims or target audience of the marketing campaign. The *Drum* images are reminiscent of the use of the Cape minstrel in earlier years – especially given the clown-like facial expression of the black ‘reader’. It is an uncomfortably dated image, evoking once again the notion of appropriating the ‘exotic’ and making it palatable for the middle-class target audience – what I referred to earlier as ‘local exoticism’. The wild animals, in turn, are less polished, and fit even less easily with a theme of South African reads – although there is a certain level of humour in associating the ‘Big Five’ with middle-class readers on leather couches, the use of safari imagery is over-used, even clichéd in the South African setting. So the question is: who would be expected to relate to these visual representations? Perhaps some might see this as the first indication of an attempt at differentiated marketing to different groups, but it is not particularly successful in this aim, even though the campaign won an award for “representing uniquely South African advertising”. This award arguably shows that despite efforts to the contrary, the political economy of advertising in South Africa remains as exclusionary as the publishing industry.

To some extent, 2009 – “Great South African reads from A to Z” – saw a replay of the 2006 campaign, but with a book-related ring to it, with the use of an alphabetic primer of local South African English terms, such as “S is for Smaak-it-Stukkend” and “V is for Voertsek” (see Figure 6). The terms may in fact be more Afrikaans than English on the whole, reflecting a recognition of the growing importance of the Afrikaans book-buying market – which is the most important segment of Exclusive Books’ core market. The 2009 press release specifically



Figure 6

calls the campaign “proudly South African” for the first time, and uses the rhetoric of unity and togetherness: “We hope that the Homebru list encourages South Africans to explore local literature and become the strongest supporters of the stories told by our fellow citizens” (Green-Bricker, 2009).

The following year replayed the use of iconic foods, such as milk tart and bunny chow, with taglines playing up the food imagery, such as “Sample all the best local reads” and “True SA flavours in 30 lekker reads” (see Figure 7). The styling of the food photography is deliberately retro, even nostalgic and the choice of particular foods is telling: it is at once a reference to diverse cultures and to the core buying market. The press release refers to “a fabulous celebration of South African writing talent”, “a cornucopia of lekker and local” and “a candid snapshot of South Africa” – the term ‘snapshot’ is significant in that it directly suggests the representation as a reflection of reality. Moreover, this is not only a reflection of the social context, but also of the zeitgeist and of emotion: “All the books resonate in some way with what South Africans are feeling and doing right now. Homebru encourages South Africans to read real stories told by ordinary South Africans, exploring societal issues and our rich cultural heritage” (Brophy, 2010). Once again, the notion of the “ordinary”

South African is presented, as though the average book-buyer can be conflated with the “typical” South African, and in a conflation of reading, conversation and shared identity.



TRUE SA FLAVOURS IN 30 LEKKER READS
EXCLUSIVE BOOKS

Figure 7

The visuals for 2011 – alongside the very ‘buy local’ theme of “Made in South Africa” – saw the use of beaded products, which are typically sold alongside the road in South Africa (see Figure 8). The suggestion is that local books are as indigenous as local artwork. Similar beadwork was widely used in advertising in the late 1990s and has come to be seen as somewhat clichéd. As Sutherland (2004: 58) argues:

commenting upon the popularity of the 'Ndebele style', Ivor Powell makes the point that 'one is far more likely to see Ndebele designs in the suburbs of traditionally white cities than in the traditionally black townships'. In this way, the 'ethnic' has become a commodity largely devoid of its original meaning that has been used by others for either political or commercial purposes.

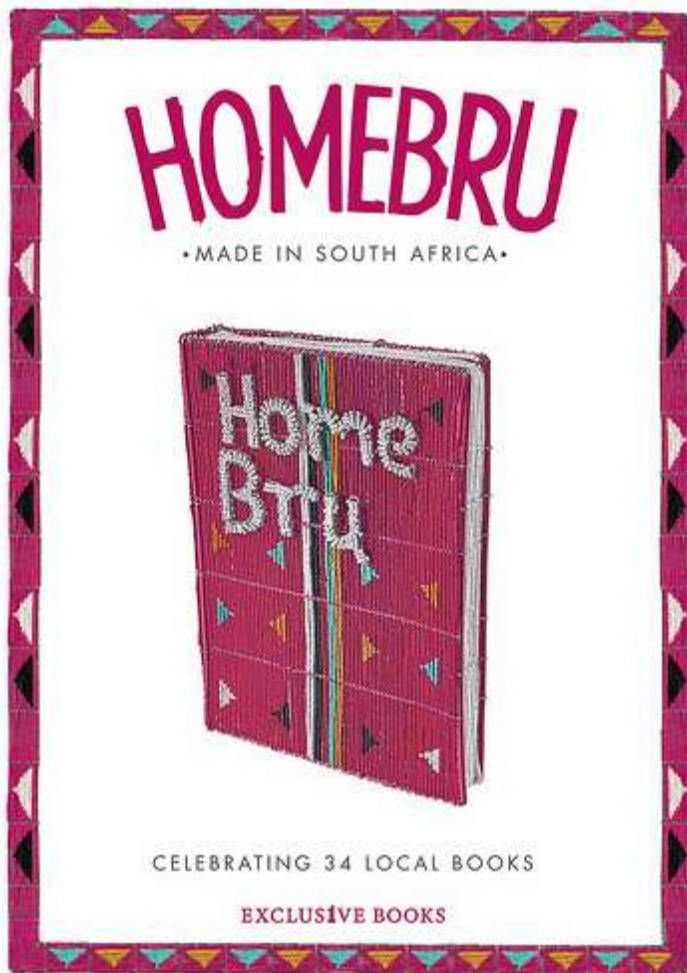


Figure 8

The commercial aim of the Homebru campaign certainly has little connection to any 'ethnic' meaning that could be associated with the beadwork. This is imagery that is familiar and acceptable to white South Africans, but is representative of little actual diversity.

The 2012 campaign – "Unique perspectives on South Africa" – was perhaps the most ambitious yet, and the best designed – and it was re-used in 2013, probably in an attempt to cut costs. The imagery makes use of 'coffee-table' style photographs or an "idealised representation" of various urban landscapes, with the yellow Homebru banner strung on a 'washing line' across the image (see Figure 9). The impression given is that the consumer is

looking through a telephoto lens at a 'slice of life': this is intended to offer "some insight into the complex history and landscape of South Africa" (Brophy, 2012a). While the images



Figure 9

are realistic, they are almost devoid of people and are generic to the point of being unidentifiable. Yet, they are recognisably 'South African', probably through the repetition of similar images which effectively mark the places depicted as South African. The distant humans in the stock photographs are not people we would expect to see walking into Exclusive Books and buying books. (The bookshops themselves are located almost entirely in suburban shopping malls, rather than the city centre or townships, in any case.) This was taken further in 2013, with a shift to the use of rural settings, and an absence of people. This representation is attractive, but it also 'flattens out' the landscape; this is 'the kind of flattening out of all of Africa and of all Africans so present in the many problematic tropes representing the continent; a flattening out that homogenizes and de-historizes African specificities and particularities' (Mathers 2013).

And perhaps the absence of people is somewhat deliberate. The campaign aims to provide "something for every type of reader" (Brophy, 2012b), yet the 2012 list consisted only of English and Afrikaans books, as before. A slightly higher percentage than usual was Afrikaans or bilingual, with Brophy (ibid.) commenting that "there is currently a strong almost cultish following of Afrikaans books within the SA publishing world, and Homebru seeks to reflect that." A review also noted this emphasis:

So, what is the 'zeitgeist' of South Africa's literary landscape this year? If Homebru is anything to go by, it is marked by an upsurge in Afrikaans books but a dearth of writing in any of the country's other indigenous languages. Surprisingly, about one quarter of the books are either solely published in Afrikaans, or have been translated into Afrikaans with English-language versions. (Ballim, 2012)

This suggests that Exclusive Books is strongly aware of its core market, and squarely targets that market with its promotional initiatives. The marketing messages tend to focus more on association than identification as a tactic. But their relentless optimism also serves to obscure both contradictions and difference within South African society, as well as the harsh economic realities of running a bookstore. In this regard, it is worth remembering that the media group that owns Exclusive Books has put the bookseller up for sale, and has struggled to find a buyer.

Reaching out to a wider readership

Exclusive Books argues that the annual Homebru campaign has had an impact on publishers, writers and readers: "Homebru is both a catalyst to change reading habits, and a response to readers and their preferences" (Green-Bricker, 2006). But has the campaign been a success, on any of these terms? According to Nel (2007), Homebru has become a powerful driver in the promotion of local publishing: "Publishers are timing their local releases to coincide with Homebru and we are also receiving many more titles for consideration. For example, [in 2007] 140 new titles were submitted compared to 110 titles for 2006" (Nel, 2007). But submissions have since remained fairly steady, at between 120 and 140 (Green-Bricker, 2009), possibly unintentionally capped by the limited number of local publishers participating. In spite of the centralised decision-making structure and the costs associated with submitting titles, publishers have responded positively, on the whole. But the total numbers of local authors being published have not grown.

The reading public also appears to have responded to local books being more readily and visibly available. Exclusive Books has repeatedly cited data showing an increase of 35% in overall sales over the promotion period (e.g. Nel, 2007). From 2004 to 2005, the sales of Homebru titles grew by around 120%, while the 2007 promotion was linked to increased sales of up to 979% for individual books:

... it sells books – local ones – in much larger quantities than they ordinarily would be sold. Many publishers and authors can confirm Homebru’s wild success in terms of sales and author profiles and their influence on South African reading habits. (Green, 2006)

The results of the campaign speak for themselves and not only has Homebru directly contributed to the year on year increase in the sale of South African books, but it has encouraged more South Africans to read local books and launched the careers of several South African authors” (Green-Bricker, 2008).

In addition, the campaign has been seen to have “a carry-on effect, beyond the initial promotion”, which may be seen in the increase in Fanatics Club membership for the duration of the promotion (Nel, quoted in Von Klemperer, 2009). It should be borne in mind that, while this may be an increase in the number of titles sold, it does not necessarily reflect a rise in the number of actual buyers.

Exclusive Books also argues that, apart from greater sales volumes, the audience appears to have become more diverse. Audience data show that the average age of book-buyers during the campaign is between 24 and 34, rather than the usual average of between 35 and 45 (Green-Bricker, 2008; *Cape Librarian*, 2005). While this is encouraging, it is not clear whether this represents a real diversification of the book-buying audience. It is also not an indication that the campaign has “influenced ... South African reading habits”, as claimed. It would, to be fair, be difficult to measure a change in reading habits. A related concern is based on the slight use of actual books or reading within the marketing campaign. A consumer not familiar with the Exclusive Books brand would have little insight into what was being promoted, and would be unlikely to be drawn into the target audience. So, while Homebru sought to cultivate and define a new public, the results have been disappointing.

There have been other criticisms, the first of which relates to the concept of a “buy local” campaign, which some say leads to the “ghettoisation” of local works: the campaign “reinforces the idea that SA literature is separate from ‘real’ literature. So instead of putting SA fiction in the African Literature ghetto, as others have coined the distant shelves to which ‘South African Writing’ is relegated, bookshops should promote our literature as the best on their shelves” (Van Eeden, 2011). Exclusive Books responded by considering the market dynamics:

Should South African books be grouped in one section or cross-merchandised? Is 'South African' a genre? Some think not. Well, nor is 'latest releases' strictly a genre, but that 'genre' sells a lot of books. A selection of British fiction on one table – packaged as a 'Brit lit fest' is certainly not as 'laughable' as one writer contends. In fact, the popularity of Stieg Larsson has spawned a themed Swedish crime writers table in many bookstores around the world. And the 'genre', falsely created or not, is proving popular with customers. The art of bookselling is in playing on book-buyers' triggers, focusing readers' attention so that they may try a new author, or in triggering cross-buying. It is not in our best interests to be snooty about how books are categorised, if that's how readers look for them. (Green, 2006)

However, the wider public debate around books that this quote suggests has not become more visible nor more diverse as a result of the campaign.

In other contexts, the form of nationalism embodied in a 'buy local' campaign has slowly dissipated over the years. For instance, in Canada, booksellers no longer reserve specific shelves for 'Canadian literature', as South African ones still do. This is in spite of – or perhaps a result of – ongoing government support in that country for the cultural industries (cf. Miller 2006: 113). The very existence of the Homebru campaign thus suggests a representation of South Africa as a young country, still unsure of its place in the world republic of letters.

Another criticism concerns the actual motivations of the retailers. The argument is that "Exclusive Books marketing campaigns, such as Homebru, are seen to pay 'lip service' to South African literature, rather than offering real support for local publishers" (Finlay, 2010): "To get into the Homebru brochure you have to pay for advertorial ... And all the books on the display stand are on sale or return. So they are saying: 'We will support local literature on condition it doesn't cost us anything'". Hichens (2012) echoes and elaborates on this critique:

Exclusive Books appears to be doing its bit for local authors and publishers with the Homebru promotion, which focuses on local work, but it's practically under duress. Publishers are held to ransom with stringent stipulations including a heavy fee to make the cut. Exclusives stipulate an amount of stock which needs to be available so there are no shortages if it sells out, but they reserve the right to return every single copy. And once the promotion is over there doesn't seem to be any logical management of stock. I know of titles that have done very well for the Homebru month, then been instantly relegated to the back shelves and stock returned. Then sales dry up. If the browser doesn't see a book on display, he or she simply won't

buy it. In-store presence, or shelf space, is the most important factor in boosting a book's sales. That's why good store managers are so vital. Many books succeed or fail based on what Exclusive Books decides. (Hichens, 2012)

The campaign has also been criticised for being too narrow in its selection of titles, and specifically for not including African-language writers. This criticism has been made since the first year of the campaign, in 2002, with local newspaper *Beeld* (Nieuwoudt, 2002) noting: "The campaign's aim is to market the work of black writers. But unfortunately the focus is only on writing in English. Where, we wonder, are the African-language books?" Exclusive Books responded that in the future they hoped to expand the "project" to include books in other languages, but in practice this has not happened. The rationale is that there are few books available in these languages for selection, but in fact the bookseller has not encouraged the submission of such titles, preferring to focus on proven bestsellers such as cookbooks and sports biographies. This limits the scope for new writers to participate in the campaign in a meaningful way.

In spite of such critiques, the campaign has become increasingly popular among consumers. Perhaps the greatest tribute to the marketing campaign is that has now been copied. Kalahari.net – the South African version of Amazon.com – has launched a promotion called "South African Books to Shout About" that "bears a more than passing similarity" to the Exclusive Books Homebru promotion, both in its number and range of featured titles (Bookslive blog, 2012). While the threat of digital retailers is growing, it is interesting to see a traditional and an online bookseller employing a very similar marketing technique to reach what is essentially exactly the same market.

Conclusion

The development of South Africa as a nation has meant that it does not have a large book-buying public. The local audience for books is typically marked by class, race and language; the dominant construction of the South African book-buying audience is comfortably middle-class, predominantly white, and English-speaking (albeit not first-language English-speaking). The political economy of publishing in South Africa means that this audience is repeatedly targeted by trade publishers when selecting, commissioning and publishing books. But this fairly homogeneous group has been targeted in this campaign through the

rhetoric of diversity, as these quotes show: “the Homebru promotion ... highlight[s] a country as broad and diverse as the books and writers it creates” (Jacana, 2011); “The Homebru titles capture the deep and wide range of topics which captures the diversity and polarity of South Africa beautifully ... The content is all about accessibility – this is not highbrow stuff of the past. We’re interested in life on the streets and in the hearts of the people” (Brophy, 2012a). But the campaign itself, as has been shown, is not ‘all about accessibility’.

Another key thread is the notion of promoting positive messages, or celebrating South Africa. Homebru has been described as creating “a powerful wedge for inserting celebratory messages about South African writing into the wider public conversation” (Cape Town Book Fair, 2007). This is part of a wider broader, mainstream instance of marketing and cultural identity in South Africa over the past twenty years as the “rainbow nation”, by highlighting the positive, local uniqueness, exceptionalism, and the multicultural aspects of local society. There is still little evidence that Exclusive Books is using the same imagery in an ironic or self-reflexive way. Rather, it appears to be using the same tropes as a plethora of other advertisers, presenting books as products for consumption like any other. With the associations with South African products and landscapes, the campaign interpellates a specifically geographically located reader, as well as geographically located writers. But its focus on South African exceptionalism serves to obscure the many real and continuing differences among South Africans – a diversity which is not yet reflected in the local book-buying audience. Thus, the disjuncture between the constructions of ‘South Africa’ and the South African reading public is perpetuated.

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