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Narratives of Transformation in South African Publishing in the 1990s

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Abstract

Publishing is a particularly important sector to examine when considering issues of cultural change and reconstruction, because it speaks to and seeks to represent the varied identities of the society in which it operates. This paper examines the state of the South African publishing industry in the 1990s, a time of transition and change, as well as crisis due to declines in textbook and library budgets. At a time when prevalent discourses included terms like transition, transparency, inclusivity, diversity, nation building, redemption and reconciliation, framed as a collective vision for the country, the paper considers the discourse of transformation as it relates to publishing and reading. Using articles in newspapers and journals, government and trade reports, as well as internal planning and mission documents from the publishers themselves, in this paper I assess various kinds of transformation, including the aims of both redressing the inequalities of the past, and developing a shared and more inclusive culture.

KEYWORDS
Publishing; transformation; South Africa; book trade; discourse

Introduction

After 1994, the era of state censorship ended, and freedom of expression was enshrined in the South African Constitution. Sanctions and the cultural boycott came to an end, and South African businesses – including publishers – started to be welcomed back into the international community. In the midst of an "atmosphere of renewal", there was a great deal of anticipation and optimism, but also apprehension (Driver 1993, 138). Publishers anticipated a boom, recruited new staff, turned their attention to new possibilities for government or educational tenders, and began to consider new languages and markets. However, the 1990s turned out to be a far more difficult decade for South African publishing than expected. A general economic downturn and recession was accompanied by the drying up of foreign funding after 1990. As the anti-apartheid struggle came to an end, so too interest in South African politics declined, and donor funding was redirected elsewhere, such as the newly liberated countries of Eastern

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Europe. The opening up of South Africa led to the re-entry of international publishers and an increase in competition. Publishers also faced uniquely local constraints and challenges, in particular relating to cultural and political imperatives, the consolidation of education systems and textbook ordering, and transformation to meet the needs of what was being called the "new South Africa" and the "rainbow nation".

A Publishers' Association of South Africa advertisement from 1998 captures both the spirit of transformation and its limits at the time. PASA, it stated, "celebrates World Day of the Book by sharing President Mandela's hope that every child can start the next school year with books on their desks" (PASA 1998). It went on to emphasise the importance of various tropes of transformation: access to quality education, a reading culture and nation, and cultural renewal. However, this optimism and renewal was tempered by the ongoing legacy of apartheid-era policies and practices, declines in library budgets, and later the effects of the textbook crisis. It appears that the government was slow to recognise that its aims of empowerment and cultural renewal were incongruent with some of its education policies and funding priorities. Thus, while many publishers displayed a progressive attitude and a willingness to make meaningful changes, they were often limited in the scope of transformation that fell within their control. This situation was not unique to South Africa, even though the transitional period had its particular characteristics: "Many countries in Africa made the mistake of implementing national book policies that destabilised their publishing industries. When they realised that they needed the services of a thriving publishing industry, it was too late" (Wafawarowa 1998, 1).

The aim of this paper is to examine the state of the South African publishing industry in the 1990s, and specifically to trace the narratives of transformation used to describe the book trade. At a time when prevalent discourses included terms like transition, transparency, inclusivity, diversity, nation building, redemption and reconciliation, framed as a collective vision for the country, what was the discourse around books, publishing and reading? In the media and the public sphere, there was a distinct "discursive shift from the 'old' to the 'new'", sometimes criticised for "a too easy forgetfulness, dismissal and even repression of the South African past" (Driver 1993, 131). Publishing is a particularly important sector to examine when considering issues of cultural change and reconstruction, because it speaks to and seeks to represent the varied identities of the society in which it operates. Eve Gray described the state of publishing at the time as being "similar to the state of the nation", noting that, "There is panic and compliance; euphoria and despair; experimentation and stagnation; innovation and conservatism. The only certainty is transition. We can also report that transition is not a very comfortable state" (Gray 1996: 262).

Brian Wafawarowa summarised the key aims of transformation in publishing in the following terms:

> … an ideal publishing sector is one in which people of all races and cultural persuasion have the space to participate in the various aspects of the book sector, a sector where the knowledge pool is enriched by the diversity of the literature that is available and where the population indulges in reading beyond reading-for-instruction purposes in institutions of learning. In a nutshell it should be a sector where all these elements of the book sector reflect the demographics of the people living in the land. It should be an environment where the book is a readily available commodity on the market and in homes across the whole

> society. It should be an environment where different authors from different racial and cultural backgrounds can write with the certainty that if their work is good in a language of their choice, it will be published. (Wafawarowa 2005)

This extract highlights some of the main themes which will be expanded upon in this paper, including equal access and accessibility; diversity; cultural or symbolic framing; and demographics. Using articles in newspapers and journals, government and trade reports, and internal planning and mission documents from the publishers themselves, in this paper I assess various kinds of transformation, including the aims of both redressing the inequalities of the past, and developing a shared and more inclusive culture.[1] A preliminary search on the SA media database produced 93 results for the search phrase "publishing industry" between 1990 and 2000, indicating the extent to which this topic was part of the cultural discourse of the time. PASA itself represents a shift in how the local publishing industry saw itself, created as an umbrella industry association in 1992, with the mandate to "promote the publishing industry to encourage it to produce publications which reflect and support the complexity and diversity of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural South African community" (APBR 1995, 3). The merger with the independent publishers' association was overtly linked to the aims of transformation, as it "underlines, in its echo of other national events in 1994, the value of persistent talking and reaching for compromise in a positive spirit of reconciliation" (PEG 1995, 3).

Publishing in the 1990s

The 1990s "can be viewed as a Rubicon era for the South African book-publishing industry" because the industry "had to make the transition from functioning in a colonial and apartheid context to operating in the arena of the fledging post-apartheid democracy" (Galloway 2002, 204). Publishing had been relatively protected during the apartheid years, due to political and economic isolation, which "allowed local media companies to entrench themselves in the historically white and affluent domestic market" (CIGS 1998, 11). The main local publishers mostly fell under the umbrellas of two large Afrikaner media companies, Perskor and Nasionale Pers, as well as significant independent publishers such as Juta, Van Schaik and Shuter and Shooter. As sanctions came to an end with the advent of democracy, the landscape changed to include competition from multinational corporations such as Macmillan, Heinemann, Hodder and Stoughton, and the local branches of Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press.

This established industry was faced with new challenges as part of what is now called the creative or cultural industries. According to the Cultural Industries Growth Strategy, "Historical attempts at developing the publishing industry have typically been characterised by controversy and conflict between different ideological and political groupings" (CIGS 1998, 71). This conflict can certainly be seen in the 1990s, as the African National Congress and other groups were jostling to promote their view of culture and the arts and to formulate a new cultural policy, of which publishing was only a very small and often undervalued part. On the one hand, writers such as Njabulo Ndebele and the National Art Initiative led by Mike van Graan argued for the value of seeing culture as a good in its own right, a channel for freedom of expression, and a means to promote

[1]The internal publisher documents have been anonymised due to requests for confidentiality.

indigenous culture and heritage. They promoted "the development of a vibrant, non-racial, non-sexist discourse and literature which expresses the aspirations and hopes ordinary South Africans" (CIGS 1998, 75). In contrast, the newly formed Department of Arts and Culture took a more instrumentalist view, of culture as a tool to develop skills, create productive citizens, and promote the image of the government and the country (Sirayi and Anyumba 2007; *Weekly Mail*, 7–13 May 1993). Cultural policy, as encapsulated in for instance the Draft White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (1996), was given the difficult task of maintaining a balance between "the traditional promotion of arts and culture and their contribution to economic and social development" (DACST 1995; Hansen 2005). In this context, publishing could be seen as an expression of both culture ("a vehicle for political, social and cultural expression") and trade (promoting economic growth and employment, and serving as "a strategic resource-provider to other information-based activities") (CIGS 1998, 2). The imperatives of transformation thus included concepts as diverse as democratising accessibility, developing books for all, and liberating publishing from the concepts and demands of the apartheid period, but also becoming more self-sustaining and viable.

The difficulty of implementing such opposing views of cultural policy can be seen in the decline of the small independent publishers in the 1990s. The radical activist publishers that had opposed apartheid for several decades harboured hopes for a changed industry and improved relationships with a new democratic government. Faced with increased competition, reduced donor funding and a lack of interest from the government, however, these small publishers faced closure. Glenn Moss of Ravan Press, for instance, noted that, "The 1990s demanded critical engagement rather than simple opposition to the mainstream of society. Caught up in the general malaise of economic decline and the impasse in political negotiations, Ravan have had difficulty in addressing themselves to the consideration of publishing for reconstruction and transformation" (1993, 144). David Philip Publishers, who had celebrated their 21st anniversary in 1992 "having survived all those years of increasing government opposition, managed to put out only one novel that year" (Driver 1993, 129). Such mission-driven publishers, not focused on profit, were soon left behind in what became an increasingly consumerist book trade.

A contemporary review of the transitional period identified key elements in publishing transformation as being "economic, political and technological" (CIGS 1998, 22). If we analyse this discourse more deeply, we see that these points largely relate to measures of demography and revenue, rather than culture or access. The CIGS report (1998, 8) focuses on the following measurable components of transformation or "growth":

- Consumers, or the number of people buying and reading texts;
- Revenue for publishers, printers, booksellers, etc;
- The number of publishers in the sector and efficiency of the value chain;
- Productivity, in terms of the number and variety of texts written and published;
- Employment, or the number of people employed by the industry.

While these issues could be related to calls for diversity and accessibility, in fact they frame publishing as a commodified, instrumentalist industry. Numbers are certainly important in terms of assessing shifts, especially demographic shifts, and in publishing

these relate to both consumers and producers, as well as employment and ownership. While publishers had a keen awareness of these forces, they seem to have had some trouble in relating their changing business objectives to either culture or commerce, to optimism or cynicism. For instance, Kerneels Breytenbach of Human & Rousseau stated at the 1990 symposium *Book Publishing in South Africa for the 1990s* that he hoped "the new South Africa would be acknowledged as a multicultural country, that all cultural groups would be equal, and that publishers would be able to publish for any of them, in whatever language was most suitable" (South African Library 1991: 25). For many observers, such statements were merely empty rhetoric. Andries Oliphant, in contrast, described publishing as having "regressed, in terms of diversity in ownership, as well as in the variety of its output" in the 1990s (Oliphant 2000, 121). On the one hand, then, South Africa's publishing sector in the 1990s was often referred to in terms such as vibrant, dynamic, independent, "gutsy and enterprising", and focused on change and innovation (Garson 1997, 7; Koenderman 1991, 75; Lazar 1994, 3). In the publishing industry overall, there was a general "increase in the number of titles produced up to 1995, which can be attributed to optimism about the "new South Africa" (Galloway and Venter 2006, 56). A number of small independent publishers were established, including Queillerie, Hond, Viva Books, focusing on books for adults with "limited language proficiency", which was interpreted as "an obvious sign of [the industry's] increasing vibrancy" (Weekly Mail, July-Aug 1993).

On the other hand, the author Christopher Hope described the transformation process in terms of the past having "its padlocks removed" (*Weekly Mail*, April 1993; quoted in Driver 1993, 131). These "padlocks" were (and are) related to the perception of publishers as "cultural gatekeepers", a perception that continued into the 1990s and depicted them as preventing transformation, and as being greedy, conservative, and complacent (Finlay 2009, 80). As a result, it was strongly felt that "the publishing industry, like all other sectors of our society, must be transformed because it is still characterised by the legacies of apartheid" (Monyokolo 1997, 16). Indeed, many authors and readers felt marginalised or alienated from the existing publishing industry, often with good reason. The Cultural Industries Growth Strategy report reflected that "publishers are biased against previously disenfranchised people on the grounds that they do not have an appropriate style of writing, or because there is no market for general books which are on the fringes of mainstream publishing" (CIGS 1998, 42–43). A call was thus made for the transformation of the book sector.

Representing authors and reaching readers

In 1995, the CNA Literary Award was awarded to Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* rather than *The Master of Petersburg* by renowned author, J.M. Coetzee – a political decision, many argued. This minor controversy in the book trade revealed the publishing industry's attempts to attract a broader range of authors and reach out beyond the traditional book-buying market (or perhaps, as some argued, as a transparent attempt to curry favour with the new political elite). As issues of representation and accessibility became increasingly important – to produce "books for all" – the imperative was to "grow the print pie", both for political and financial reasons, to meet the needs of the "rainbow nation" (Wafawarowa 47; Lazar 1994). Publishers thus found themselves

needing to respond quickly and decisively to the "demographically asymmetrical demand" for books in different languages and aimed at broader audiences (CIGS 1998, 43). While ownership of publishing companies was gradually changing, the reading public was still predominantly white and middle class, a very small proportion of the population as a whole. This affected what kinds of books and authors would be published: "The 10% or so that are dominantly white part of the population that reads is so powerful that it begins to dictate what publishers should publish" (Wafawarowa 2005, 49; Gray, 1996: 262). This reading public was not considered particularly open to change, a position attributed to a fear of losing status and power: "the white reading public has maintained its habits of bland consumerism, pretending to make a turn from the 'old' to the 'new', but not ready to support a vigorous, questioning, experimental cultural life, and apparently fearful of interrogating the sources, manifestations and implications of its economically and culturally privileged position" (Driver 1994, 157).

Nonetheless, publishers adopted a number of strategies to improve representation and signal their openness to transformation. Language was one of the strategies. Publishers focused on publishing in more African languages, beyond the traditional markets in English and Afrikaans. Nasionale Pers, for instance set up imprints such as Kwela Books aimed specifically at publishing primarily black authors. Macmillan grew by acquiring educational imprints such as Clever Books and Hodder and Stoughton Educational (Van Rooyen 2005, 289–90). At the same time, they sought to expand their author base, through attempts to include South African writers through prizes in a variety of African languages (Driver 1993, 128). Similarly, Van Schaik set up a literary award for African language short stories, Kagiso established the Kagiso-FNB Literary Awards for books in all eleven official languages, and MML started its African Heritage Literary Awards in 1993. While South African writer and critic Zoe Wicomb criticised the mechanism of literary awards as "an inappropriate or inadequate … means of encouraging writing" and as actively perpetuating inequality "by rewarding those who have been privileged", the creation of prizes did have a small effect on diversity of authors (in Driver 1994, 159). Publishing in African languages or "multicultural" books became a kind of shorthand for including more black authors and reaching more black readers, without overtly stating that as the mission – a balancing act between retaining the existing author and reader base, while also reaching out to previously marginalised groups (Driver 1993, 138). Reading between the lines of a contemporary publisher report, it becomes clear that there was intense competition for black authors, and that established publishers cynically felt that some may have been rushed into print (Publisher D; Mpe and Seeber 2000, 32).

Another strategy was to develop new book series on "inclusive" or "multicultural" topics. Heinemann introduced the Mamela Afrika Series for African-language titles aimed at adults, rather than schoolbooks. One of South Africa's longest established publishers, Juta commissioned new series on democracy, identity, and access to education. Like other publishers, they were criticised for the extent of these changes, especially for including very few authors of colour. A competitor noted that this created a business opportunity: "[Juta's series] is small and relatively cheap by a wide variety of white writers. I am sure there are still subjects that we could target at the black universities, written by black authors for predominantly black students" (Publisher A 1998; own translation from Afrikaans). In practice, as this extract states, white authors often continued to write in African languages as well, and certainly not just at Juta. Books authored by white

(often female) authors were often translated into a variety of African languages, which diversified the linguistic base but not the author profile. One publisher remembers that it was "common practice" in educational publishing for white writers to use a variety of black-sounding pen names and "churn out" books, a stark indicator of ongoing resistance to transformation at the more conservative publishing houses and an attempt to appear progressive without actually transforming (Publisher C).

In spite of these challenges, the numbers of black authors did begin to grow, and some significant and now well-recognised authors were given a chance where they previously may not have been considered. Dorothy Driver, who compiled annual summaries of the literary publishing scene in the early 1990s, was optimistic that "black South Africans are making themselves heard not only as writers but also as readers" (Driver 1993, 140). At the same time, she was cautious about the extent of transformation possible in a brief period of time, arguing that,

> Quite apart from the synthetic optimism being created in South Africa through continual media references to the "Rainbow Nation", the Reconstruction and Development Programme and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is too soon to expect the kinds of shifts in the demography of authorship and readership appropriate to radical political change. (Driver 1994, 152)

The rate of change would also be affected by the knock-on effects of the textbook crisis of the late 1990s. Some commentators went so far as to suggest that, "Writers in African languages were in a better position before 1994 than they are today", due to a lack of demand from the market, insufficient entries for prizes, and a preference among authors for writing in English (Van der Merwe 2000).

The limits of transformation were often framed in terms of literacy and reading culture, or the dire effects of the lack of such (e.g. *New Nation* 1995, 12). It was reported that "a greater range of voices [was] entering the debate, although a large number of people in this country remain non-literate or cannot afford to buy reading material" (Driver 1997, 99). Some publishers defended their decisions to retain a conservative and slow approach to transforming their editorial policies, arguing that "black people do not have a culture of reading", especially in African languages. The CIGS report referred to an "undeveloped reading culture", arguing that "book reading and book buying remains a luxury for most South Africans" (CIGS 1998, 34). The concept of a lack of a reading culture has become pervasive in any reporting on the book trade in South Africa, although it also deserves further scrutiny.

Ownership and rebranding

"As the transition to democracy gathers momentum," the CIGS report noted in 1998, "there have been shifts in ownership and control of several publishing houses, which reflect new priorities such as black economic empowerment, the need to respond to technological advances and changes in media and entertainment industries around the globe" (CIGS 1998, 34). These shifts were a response to the demographic make-up of the industry at the time, especially in terms of ownership, management and staffing. "Racial participation in the publishing industry is still almost exclusively white," argued Brian Wafawarowa, "black people are not involved in any meaningful

way in deciding what is published in the industry" (2005, 48). One of the key targets of transformation was thus the ownership and staffing of publishing companies.

The more established (often indigenous) publishers focused on rebranding and black empowerment deals, to retain their market share while appearing to be progressive. In an attempt to change public perceptions of their image and to shift away from rumours of apartheid-era corruption, especially schoolbook publishers sought to "shake off the bad name they acquired in the old South Africa" (Garson 1995, 7). As Czerniewicz (1994) noted, "the well-established old educational publishers who profited enormously from the previous system are not planning to lie down and die in the face of a new political order. Like everyone else, they are busy learning the new rules and changing their teams to maintain competitive advantage in a changing market". While the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) introduced a new code of conduct, the relationship between publishers and the government was adversarial, with publishers being "seen to be interested in nothing but the accumulation of profit". However, even given the general distrust of the established industry and the new government's desire "not to be seen conniving with certain publishers or making any purchasing commitments to them" (Vermeulen 1995, 1), the new government went on to forge new relationships with the same publishers and multinationals, in effect awarding textbook contracts as a political favour.

In particular, black empowerment deals were negotiated at the time of the political transition to access new investment revenue and to diversify the profile of the companies – but perhaps most importantly, to ensure continued access to the lucrative school textbook market. Such empowerment deals were seen as controversial from the start, a new form of patronage. The mergers and acquisitions were clearly not only politically motivated, but also financial; they also reflected a broader global trend towards consolidation in publishing. For example, in 1993, Thebe Investment Corporation, the independent trading arm of the ANC, entered into a textbook supply arrangement with the British multinational company Macmillan, with some involvement from the oppositional publisher Skotaville. This deal saw the establishment of Nolwazi Educational Publishers. Darkie Molontoa, the marketing manager, described Nolwazi (inaccurately) as the "only independent black-owned publishing company in South Africa", arguing that its formation "marked the end of decades of unchallenged Afrikaner monopoly in the publishing industry" (*New Nation* 1995, 12). Thebe described its objectives in terms of development: giving black South Africans access to "the means to shape their own education", but also using the language of accessibility, diversity, creativity and innovation in broad strokes. Moloantoa directly referenced the language of transformation in stating Nolwazi's "commitment to the transformation of the local publishing industry to a structure which truly represents and reflects the society within which the company exists." While Thebe and Nolwazi emphasised their independence from the ANC, inevitably, local schoolbook competitors and the media expressed their scepticism.

Similarly, the Afrikaner publisher HAUM, which celebrated its centenary in 1994, was bought by a black empowerment group, Kagiso, in that year. Eric Molobi, the executive director of Kagiso Trust, framed the deal in terms of expanding access, an aspiration echoed by the managing director of Kagiso Publishers, Lindiwe Mabandla: "The number one challenge facing the new South Africa is that education should be available to all the people of our country" (Smith 1994, 10). Following a further merger with

Educum from the struggling Perskor group, the company enjoyed an estimated 30% share of the educational market and lucrative tenders with parastatal companies, such as printing contracts for telephone directories (Betty 1995, 2). The new publisher was depicted in commercial terms in many newspaper articles, but also repositioned as local, transparent and inclusive, "an indigenous publishing company that offers transparency to previously disadvantaged people in the publishing industry" (Steve du Toit, chief executive, quoted in Magida 1997, 5).

The Kagiso merger also reflects an ongoing power struggle between two apartheid-era giants – Perskor and Nasionale Pers (Naspers) – both tussling for market share and a fresh public image. Perksor was unable to negotiate the changing economic (and perhaps political) terrain, and its failing business fortunes forced it to merge with Kagiso Publishers in 1997. Shortly afterwards, the Caxton newspaper and media group, which owned the local educational publisher Maskew Miller Longman, bought out the merged group. MML then also acquired the literacy NGO SACHED Books, in a move that "injected social responsibility, desirable in the new order, into the mainstream MML" (Mpe and Seeber 2000, 31). In contrast, Naspers focused on expanding its holdings in trade publishing, for the general market. To this end, it steadily acquired many of the most significant Afrikaans trade publishers, including Tafelberg, Human & Rousseau and Van Schaik, and diversified into television and internet service provision, becoming one of the largest media companies in the country (Klingenberg 2024; Galloway 2002). The company also made a series of very deliberate changes to its mission and entered into a black empowerment deal with Thebe Investments, to portray itself as inclusive and apolitical (Klingenberg 2024). Significantly, Nasionale Pers appears to have been successful in downplaying its former close connections with Afrikaner nationalism and the National Party. While some argue that this relationship "disappeared" after 1992 (Venter 2008), there were in practice ongoing links but now behind the scenes (Mosime 2014).

A number of black-owned publishers were also established at this time. They are often described in the media as "emerging" and "nurturing", and linked to the cultural aspects of transformation, i.e. a reading culture, a culture of learning and cultural heritage (e.g. *New Nation* 1995, 12). For instance, Naledi Publishers was founded in 1996 by Nick Boikanyo, who emphasised that he saw the company's role in terms of heritage and inclusivity: "The prevalence of black publishers is the key to the survival of local historical heritage" (Mashalaba 1999, 23). At the same time, he had a keen entrepreneurial eye for the possibility of lucrative schoolbook tenders, saying that, "The advantage with Government tenders is that they buy in bulk. The revenue keeps my business going."

Publishers thus made a deliberate attempt to reposition themselves to take advantage of the new dispensation. For example, Macmillan's new mission statement was reformulated as "Publishing to serve" and the local office of Cambridge University Press started referring to itself as an "African" publisher. An established commercial publisher, previously associated with apartheid values, revised its mission statement to include a focus on being "an active participant in the restructuring and development of education" while admitting that its focus would remain on "mainline educational publishing" and existing textbooks (Publisher F annual report, 1996/97). Some of these changes were genuine, but others could certainly be seen as purely commercial and perhaps cynical. Glenn Moss of Ravan Press complained:

> Historically discredited players who only a few short years ago talked the language of Christian National Education suddenly present themselves as torch-bearers of liberation, democracy and progressive education. The capital which they accumulated on the back of Bantu Education and privileged relationships with educational departments is now being poured into advertising campaigns proclaiming their commitment to a new social order. (Moss 1993)

Similarly, Oliphant (2000:, 121) refers to the "strategy practised by local and multinational publishers of acquiring or founding imprints with anti-apartheid pedigrees" as a means of repositioning themselves in a changed political context. Wafawarowa (2005) criticises the situation of publishers branding themselves as culturally sensitive, and showing an awareness of the importance of the accumulation of cultural capital – while at the same time actually focusing their efforts on the financial aspects of their business. "One did not feel," Wafawarowa argues, "that the publishers' practice was informed by a genuine conviction that participation in the transformation of the country, upholding the principles of democracy, reaching out to the broader population and tapping into the broader knowledge base of the population would create good business" (2005, 46). Analysis of the discourse used in internal publisher documents reveals that some used the language of equality to maintain their existing status and market share. Reports suggest that "natural" demand and the free-market system would over time lead to a broader range and more diversity (Publisher A internal report; Publisher B; Publisher F).

However, while there are certainly grounds for scepticism regarding the genuine intentions behind rebranding, the industry did begin to make changes in the make-up of its staff. Fairly quickly, "the marketing forces in education publishing became entirely black. The major companies appointed senior black men to strategic positions" – although "no one really bothered about staff composition as long as respectable black people were sent to talk to their brothers for business and black marketers were sent to sell the books" (Wafawarowa 2005, 46–47). While many felt that it was a unique opportunity for black people to contribute meaningfully to the book trade, change remained somewhat restricted. For example, publishing management largely remained white: "at the senior executive level, a significant number of black people remain at the top but are not at all involved with the operations and decision-making in the companies" (Ibid: 47). There was also cynicism among established publishers about "affirmative" positions (Publisher A, 1998, 1), reflecting entrenched racism in the industry. Moreover, editorial policies did not really change, even as staffing became more diverse. Some publishers' approach has been criticised as window dressing, for instance with "books which are cosmetically updated rehashes of old textbooks" (Reynolds 1997: 2). Gray agreed, saying that "the textbooks themselves have not changed substantially and, until very recently, have shown little sign of changing" (1996: 263). In trade publishing, which did not have to adhere to government regulations regarding the involvement of people from historically disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e. affirmative action), the staff make-up changed even more slowly.

Thus, ten years after the first democratic elections, it could be argued that, "ownership and economic participation by black people in the industry is dismal and continues to dwindle, even ten years after freedom. … Black people remain confined to selling and publishing African languages." (Wafawarowa 2005, 46–47). Similarly, Annari van der Merwe of Kwela Books reflected on the slow pace of change as a result of economic pressures as well as political ones:

> It is a sad fact that most big trade publishing houses in South Africa are still white-owned and run, and unless there is more money to be made from book publishing than is presently the case, this will remain so. Black entrepreneurs will simply not be motivated to invest in these ventures, and only when the ownership and management of publishing houses becomes as representative of the total population as the writing is becoming, will one be able to talk of a true democratisation of publishing and literature in South Africa. (2000, 135)

As a result, she bemoaned the fact that, "Even today, at a time when most businesses in South Africa feel obliged to employ African and Indian and coloured people, the three biggest Afrikaans publishing houses are still almost exclusively run by Whites." This had a knock-on effect on what was being published, by whom, and for whom. Unfortunately, just as the industry started to make changes to its ownership and staffing, the schoolbook market collapsed, leading to widespread retrenchments and a discourse of crisis.

Crisis

The limits of transformation can be clearly seen in what became known as the textbook crisis. Like many developing nations, South Africa's publishing industry is dominated by educational publishing and thus depends on the government as the primary book-buyer, which is a significant risk factor for its growth and sustainability. Government policies in the education sector changed radically in the 1990s, in an attempt to overhaul the racially segregated structures and curricula and introduce a revised outcomes-based curriculum. The aim was to "cleanse" the curriculum of its racist and sexist elements, to improve the performance of learners, and to promote more diverse and progressive values within a "dominant discourse … of rights, development, social justice and nation-building" (Chisholm 2005, 84). Ironically, though, the implementation of the new education policies as they related to publishing constrained the possibilities for transformation.

A revised curriculum usually requires new and revised textbooks as well. When applied to textbooks (or "learning support materials"), the main discourse was watered down to a focus on efficiency: textbooks were seen as "essential to the effective running of an education system and … that these materials are an integral part of curriculum development and a means of promoting both good teaching and learning", its implementation of the revised curriculum did not support this goal (Department of Education, quoted in Johannesson 2002, 86). The educational researcher Linda Chisholm argues that South Africa's ongoing textbook supply crises could have been avoided if, in the 1990s, a progressive textbook policy had been developed as part of the changing direction for education, with a strong partnership between the Education Department and a more diverse pool of publishers (2013, 13). However, textbook provision policies were not developed as a partnership between government and publishers. Rather, the Education Department relegated publishing to a service role or at best as "stakeholders", and tended to dismiss both the expertise and concerns of an experienced industry.

Textbook publishing was not a central part of planning for the curriculum. This can be seen in the fact that, in 1997 and 1998, the Department of Education introduced a moratorium of textbook purchases as it planned the new Curriculum 2005 roll-out. Schools had to make do with their existing stock of textbooks in the meantime, which would not be replenished until the new curriculum was introduced. As a result, publishers

were left with unsold inventory and no new revenue streams. This decision had an immediate and devastating effect on local publishing: estimates suggest that government expenditure on textbooks dropped in the range of 50% to 80% between 1995 and 1997, and a survey of publishing companies found they had lost between 35% and 80% of their revenue (CIGS 1998, 38; O'Grady 1997, 4). At the same time, there was disruption in the bookselling sector, as the CNA chain stopped book purchases for part of 1998, and libraries' budgets were also cut (Von Klemperer 1998, 9). As a result, many publishing companies were forced to downsize almost as soon as they had begun to diversify their staff.

Commercial reports emphasised that the local publishing industry would become less viable and thus less able to withstand international competition (Koenderman 1991, 96). "The devastating implications of this crisis for book publishers is that it could threaten the long-term survival and profitability of the book publishing sector as a whole" (CIGS, 35). A newspaper article similarly spoke of "education's financial crisis" as having "a devastating impact on South Africa's publishers of textbooks" (Prabhakaran 1998, 1). Brian Wafawarowa (1998:, 1) went further to argue that, "The current crisis in education poses one of the greatest threats ever to long-term development, peace and reconciliation in South Africa". The most extreme metaphor was one of death: it was feared that, by 1999, "the relatively healthy existing book industry of South Africa might have died" (Lazar 1994, 3). Of course, for individual publishers, going out of business as a result of the textbook crisis did lead to a form of death: "Financial exhaustion from investing over several years without returns, which characterises the education publishing industry, accounted for the demise of many" (Wafawarowa 2005, 47). Crisis thus seems an adequate term for describing the experience and effects of the suspension of textbook orders and the erratic and rushed tenders for new textbooks.

While the odd belief can be found that transformation itself would enable a publishing company to survive the crisis, even those under new management and attempting to transform suffered real losses. As noted earlier, the established publishers survived the best because they could continue to supply existing textbooks and produce new ones quickly. Eric Molobi, chairman of Kagiso, which had been praised for its black empowerment and equity strategies, attempted to reassure investors that, "the values of empowerment and equity will allow us to weather this crisis and grow in the educational publishing industry when the situation returns to normal" (Leshilo 1998). In reality, Kagiso also experienced the "painful and traumatic process" of retrenching around 25% of its staff (Leshilo 1998, 11). MD Mabandla estimated that retrenchment rates could reach as much as 40% within educational publishing: "Of course it varies from company to company, but it could affect everyone, from specialised staff like marketing to editorial and illustrators" (Prabhakaran 1998, 1). Its competitor Maskew Miller Longman retrenched 25 out of a staff complement of 320, and their chief executive Fathima Dada cautioned that, "If more money isn't spent on textbooks soon, we might have to retrench more people in future" (Prabhakaran 1998, 1). Another commercial publisher reported internally of staff turnover of around 30% a year from 1994 until 1997 (Publisher F, 1997–97). It was suggested that " … the delay in implementing Curriculum 2005 … forced the educational publishing industry to lay off 20%–30% of its work force over the past year" (Bisseker 1998, 35). Diversity hires may have been worst affected: "In most cases the last in, first out principle applied and many of the young black publishers

were dropped by the industry … The established companies gobbled those that survived" (Wafawarowa 2005, 47).

Almost every media report or interview from the time uses the phrase "textbook crisis" to describe the consequences of the decline in state funding as well as rumours of state publishing. The framing of the "textbook crisis" relies on a discourse of threat, fear and instability – which is not an exaggeration of the situation. Richard Cooke of Juta mentioned fear as a factor, being quoted as saying, "We're at that scary point on the roller coaster ride where you have just crested the top and are on the way downhill. You know everything is changing fast and you just hope you won't have a hard landing" (in Taylor 1997). Publishers were in a state of "uneasy suspension", in limbo (Gray 1996: 263), and even in chaos (MacGregor 1997, 5; O'Grady 1997, 4). Metaphors of combat and casualties were also used to describe "embattled" publishers (Reeves 1998, 2), and to refer to the struggle over too few resources as funding was "slashed" (Baleta 1998, 3; Driver 1993). The situation was regularly described as a "disaster" (e.g. *The Star* 1998, 10).

In an interesting use of the discourse of transformation, inclusion and transparency, publishers accused the government of standing in the way of transforming the industry, through its implementation of the new curriculum and its allocation of textbook funding. The Publishers' Association of South Africa, for instance, argued that "the lack of an inclusive, consultative process threatened government commitments to transparency, and could seriously undermine the Education Department's promise to provide quality education to all South Africans" (Vermeulen 1995, 1). The lack of consultation was seen as "opening the door to abuse", a reminder that collusion between publishers and government officials remained a concern. The issue of quality also became a contentious point, as can be seen in ongoing problems with the process of selecting textbooks and their distribution. A review of Curriculum 2005 found that "There is widespread evidence that the approval process is inconsistent", that cases of corruption had been identified on the part of both government and publishers, and that there were problems with low quality books or existing materials being hastily and superficially modified (Curriculum 2005 Review Report, 2000). A study of History textbooks points out that the "rainbow nation" discourse was used to excuse poor quality: "Some of the very worst books, books with no content at all, and with very suspect ideology couched in one-dimensional 'we are all rainbow warriors' jargon, are being approved by provincial education departments, and are popular among teachers" (Johannesson 2002, 92). The reduced funding, publishers argued, had affected the training and development of new authors, and the ability to produce high quality textbooks. The contrasting view is that "Plans for developing new skills and talent that were proposed in the early 1990s were never seriously implemented by textbook publishers" and the pool of writers was not transformed (Johannesson 2002, 92).

As a result of the textbook crisis, the publishing landscape changed. Transformation, in terms of employment, was set back after the necessary cut-backs and high staff turnover occasioned by the lack of revenue. Several experienced publishers opted for early retirement, leading to a skills gap. Publishers learned to use a leaner full-time core staff, and rely more extensively on more precarious part-time workers. Van Rooyen claims " … we have witnessed a permanent structural change in the industry, and that outsourcing and freelancing will remain the pattern of the future" (2005, 289). Moreover, diversity of titles, which is linked to transformation of both writers and readers, was affected by the lack

of resources: "The textbook crisis of the 1990s spilled over beyond the educational arena, and the effects were felt in a reduction of certain small-market titles, including less viable projects such as literary genres and special-interest non-fiction, which many publishers customarily subsidise from their textbook profits" (Galloway 2002, 211). Government officials appear to have recognised this possible domino effect on the local industry, but also felt that the crisis was exaggerated. Carol Steinberg of the Department of Education acknowledged that textbook publishing enabled many publishers to publish less profitable books by more diverse authors and covering more "multicultural" topics: "The department is concerned," she noted, "about any measures that might hamper the development of a thriving independent publishing sector as this would result in the loss of valuable opportunities to stimulate job-creating growth" (O'Grady 1997, 4). Policies, however, had the opposite effect. Indeed, even as orders slowly began to provide a measure of stability, the largest and most established publishers were the main beneficiaries.

The textbook crisis was "resolved" through increased spending on learning support materials, especially after 2000. Curriculum 2005 was withdrawn, as a 2000 review found many flaws in its conceptualisation and implementation, and replaced with a revised national curriculum with ring-fenced budgeting for textbooks (Chisholm 2005). However, lasting damage was done to the relationship between the Education Department and publishers, with the former being seen as inconsistent and opaque in its decision-making, with a focus on costs rather than quality, and the latter as greedy and entrenched in apartheid-era values, and potentially even superfluous. Ongoing curriculum changes continue to have a direct impact on publishers (Maphangwa 2016). Chisholm points out that, when there was another crisis around textbook distribution in 2012, a similar discourse prevailed: "The dominant discourse, shaped by journalists as much as by prominent spokespeople within the national elite, represented the textbook saga as one of chaos, corruption, incompetence and indifference in which dark forces of evil were at work" (2013, 8). She notes wryly that, "A high premium was not placed on accuracy in this discourse."

Conclusion

In 2000, *The Politics of Publishing in South Africa* was published, a book which became very influential in the local publishing industry. Coming at the end of the 1990s, it both looked back upon a decade of transition and turmoil, and forward to an evolving but more diverse future. Andries Oliphant noted in this volume that, by the end of decade, "The extent of the empowerment that has taken place in the industry falls far short of what is required" (2000, 123). At the same time, he acknowledged that transformation could not be "a solitary affair involving publishers only" (2000, 126).

This paper reveals the challenges of effecting change within an established but evolving industry. Entrenched interests and attitudes can be identified in the language used to describe business strategies, which has led to ongoing scepticism as to whether the publishing industry has "really" transformed, even today. While there were certainly many well-meaning and energetic attempts to diversify and open up the publishing industry, there were also more cynical attempts to profit off the new dispensation. Contemporary views suggested that (at least some) publishers were using the "images and

ideas of reconciliation", such as a "rainbow nation" "alive with possibility" in the "New South Africa" to rebrand without undergoing real transformation internally (Finlay 2009, 127). Over time, more abstract, idealistic and cultural framings of transformation came to be dominated by the language of demographics and commodification.

The government, authors and other commentators continue to criticise publishing for its seeming lack of transformation. Has the South African publishing industry transformed since the 1990s? This question is difficult to answer, as the qualitative indicators of transformation are more difficult to discern as the focus continues to fall on numbers. The proportions of staff of different races, for instance, have slowly improved, and there are more black CEOs than before. Authorship has not changed as quickly or as much as could be hoped. However, the period of the 2000s saw an increased pace of change and an upswing in book sales and revenues – perhaps a sign that the local industry was becoming more comfortable with its new roles, identity, and readers.

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