

Minding Their Own Business: Penguin in Southern Africa

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Abstract

The primary title of this essay is taken from that of the 1975 Penguin African Library revised edition of Antony Martin's exposé of (as its subtitle read) *Zambia's struggle against Western control*. The essay exploits original archival evidence to highlight Penguin's distinctive attitudes to and practices within the Southern African market, particularly, but not exclusively, the major market of South Africa. The Penguin African Library itself contained not only many volumes on South Africa and *The Struggle for a Birthright* (subtitle of a 1966 volume by Mary Benson), but also pioneering works on Portuguese decolonisation, on the Rhodesian question, and on South-West Africa (by Ruth First). The essay adopts the framework of a three-phase development in the motivation behind publishing for Africa: Tutelage, Radicalism, and Marketisation. The first of these phases is represented by the Penguin (Pelican) West African, later simply African, Series; while the later Penguin African Library illustrates the Radicalism of the then editorial standpoint.

These African Library mass-market paperbacks had a double intent: to inform Western readers about a region which from the early 1960s dominated international headlines; and to reflect back to increasing numbers of self-aware and educated Africans aspects of the region hidden from them or about which they wished to know more. The degree of opposition to and compromise with colonial and apartheid regimes forms the subject of discussion in the essay as do the reactions in the UK to continuing operations in the region, particularly after the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961, the adoption of UN Resolution

1761 in 1962, and the growth of the Anti-Apartheid Movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Penguin faced not just the commercial challenge of possibly losing an important export market but also the ethical dilemma posed by a belief in the transformational power of knowledge through the availability of good books at reasonable prices. The essay concludes with a discussion of the resolution of that challenge and dilemma subsequent to the takeover of Penguin by Longmans in 1970, and the onset of the final phase of Marketisation.

Introduction

In previous work on the operation of UK publishers in Africa, I placed greatest emphasis on the changing structures of such companies as they adapted to the changing political status of the countries within which they operated.¹ Initial representation of UK publishers by independent agencies based in overseas territories moved to the establishment of wholly owned overseas branches of UK publishers carrying out the agency functions of import and distribution and finally resulted in those overseas branches evolving beyond import to the autonomous publication of their own locally commissioned titles. This model can be mapped onto a movement from colonial to postcolonial to globalised with the qualification that a differential rate in the application of the model existed between settled (faster) and administered (slower) territories. There are also occasional anomalies, such as the local buy-out (until 2008) of Longmans Nigeria in 1978 as part of the latter country's policy from 1974 onwards of Africanisation of its economy, but the model seems generally applicable despite its origins in specific examination of Penguin Books.²

¹ A. McCleery, 'Penguin and post-colonial publishing 1948-1972', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 48, 1 (2013), pp. 131-144.

² J. Rea, *History of Longman Nigeria 1961-2011* (Published 2012 for Private Circulation). See also M. Kernan, 'Routledge as a Global Publisher', *Publishing Research Quarterly* 29, 1 (2013), pp. 52-72.

In the first of these three phases, the expectation of UK publishers was that a common legal and trading framework would operate across all their colonial markets. In the period before the Second World War, colonial jurisdictions had taken their lead from the English courts; in this way, a single market was created with harmonisation of statutory governance and recourse where necessary to English case law. Educational and other key governmental functions were modelled on their UK originals and administered by expatriates, themselves educated in the UK. This structure led to the almost exclusive dominance of colonial markets by UK publishers. However, in the period after the Second World War, the colonies and Dominions began to assert their legal and cultural independence.³ (The most extreme example of this was South Africa where, after the election of the Nationalist Party government in 1948, some 60 titles a month were banned, leading to a list of over 3,000 prohibited books by the mid-1950s.⁴) It was clear to UK publishers that the colonial regime, and the privileges this brought them, could not survive and a new form of protectionism was required.

In the postcolonial phase of operation, UK publishers exploited the Traditional Market Agreement (TMA) from 1947 to 1975 to consolidate commercial control over those territories that were seeking that greater cultural and political autonomy that would eventually lead to independence, beginning with India in 1947 itself.⁵ The TMA, a non-statutory concordat arrived at in 1947 between UK and US publishers, proved the protective barrier for continuing UK exclusive access to anglophone Africa as its countries transited from colonial to independent status. Until its termination in 1975, after an Anti-Trust suit brought in the USA

³ The single legal and trading regime is explored further in A. McCleery, "Sophisticated Smut": *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in New Zealand', *Script & Print: BANZBS*, (2006), pp. 192-204.

⁴ Half of this total was banned on the grounds of supposed sexual obscenity; a quarter was regarded as Communist literature; and the remainder dealt with racial matters. A summary by the New Zealand authorities can be found at Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, MS-Papers-1502/23. See also Peter D McDonald, *The Literature Police* (Oxford, OUP, 2010)

⁵ The collaboration between UK and US publishers forms a focus of A. McCleery, 'Legions, Laws and Languages: Book History and English Hegemony', in S. Frost and R.W. Rix (eds) *Angles on the English Speaking World* (Copenhagen, MT Press, 2010), pp. 39-54.

in 1974, the TMA divided the markets for English-language books into those that were exclusive to one or other of the UK or US editions and those that were 'open' where both editions competed against one another. UK publishers tended to exercise their monopoly in those territories, with the occasional exception of Canada, which had constituted part of former Empire, new Commonwealth. New Zealand, South Africa and, to a greater extent, Australia were key protected markets for the UK publishers. Other African territories included (before independence): Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Basutoland, British Somaliland, British South-West Africa, British Togoland, Gambia, Gold Coast (including Ashanti and Northern Territories), Kenya, Nigeria and the British Cameroons, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Sierra Leone, Southern Rhodesia, Swaziland, Tanganyika, Uganda, and Zanzibar and Pemba. No British publisher would buy or sell rights in a particular title unless a monopoly was ceded over sales in the Traditional Market.

From the 1970s onwards, independent UK publishers increasingly merged or were taken over to create, together with their overseas branches, global transnationals.⁶ The overall process bears some resemblance to Kenichi Ohmae's five-stage model of globalisation: the export-orientated company in stage one opens up overseas branches in stage two, before in stage three relocating production to key markets, where in stage four they create copies of the parent company to provide a full service to those markets, but these copies are then consolidated with the centre in stage five to create the globalised, transnational corporation.⁷ However, the three-phase movement, from agents to branches to transnational, models more effectively the development of the publishing industry (compared to pharmaceuticals or cars).

⁶ This is discussed in more detail in A. McCleery, 'The book in the long twentieth century', in L. Howsam (ed), *Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, (Cambridge, CUP, 2015), pp. 162-180.

⁷ K. Ohmae, *The next global stage: challenges and opportunities in our borderless world* (Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall, 2005).

However, it became clear, particularly in the focus of this earlier work upon Penguin Books, that another model might be just as appropriate: a model that was based upon the motivation for publishing rather than these operational structures and their morphology; and that would also reflect a three-phase movement from colonial through postcolonial to globalised. This alternative model is characterised by a transition from Tutelage, which took the form of the education of native cadres to take control under the guidance of books written by expatriate and UK-based authors, through Radicalism, when less obviously didactic books were produced, written increasingly by indigenous authors, for both newly independent states and for those in the West who wished to understand aspects of them, to Marketisation, where the commercial motive was the exclusive reason for operating in Africa. This model also derives more clearly from the educational and academic publishing that constituted by far the greatest proportion of the activity of UK publishers in Africa, as opposed to the trade publishing of fiction that has constituted by far the greatest proportion of scholarly criticism to date.⁸

Tutelage

This is the first of a series of Pelican Books especially designed for West Africa. They will cover a variety of topics, including politics, economics, science, social problems, literature and history. Some will be the result of original research into West African problems; others will present traditional subjects in the light of the African background, rather than from a European point of view.⁹

⁸ See for example C. Davis and D. Johnson (eds), *The Book in Africa: Critical Debates* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); or, typical of the wealth of scholarship on literary publishing, B. Clarke, 'The African Writers Series: Celebrating Forty Years of Publishing Distinction', *Research in African Literatures* 34, 2 (2003), pp. 163-174.

⁹ The Penguin Archive, University of Bristol (hereafter PA), File DM1107/31, Editorial Files West African Series, n.d. press release by A.S.B. Glover.

Penguin, of course, was not primarily an educational publisher as such, unlike others such as Longmans or Nelsons.¹⁰ The latter, for example, built on a strong UK market for its schoolbooks and Readers to sell these widely, not only in Australia, Canada and South Africa where it had branch offices, in Melbourne, Toronto and Cape Town, but also ‘in darkest Africa, eg Nigeria, The Gold Coast, Kenya etc.’¹¹ (Branch offices were eventually opened in Lagos in 1961 and Nairobi in 1963.) Nelsons had moved into the formal educational market at the close of the nineteenth century. The *Royal Readers* series, followed by the *Royal School* series, eventually extending to seventy titles, sold in vast quantities throughout the Empire. Among other educational works published by the firm, *Highroads of History* (1907), *Highroads of Literature* (1911) and *Highroads of Geography* (1911) were to remain on their backlist for more than forty years. After the First World War, John Buchan brought in Sir Henry Newbolt, with whom he had worked in the Ministry of Information during the war itself, to act as editorial advisor in the educational field. Various series along the lines of its reprints were produced, such as the Nelson School Classics. In part response to Newbolt’s own 1921 report on the teaching of English in schools in England and Wales, Nelsons produced in 1922 *The Teaching of English* series, eventually running to some 200 titles, under the editorship of Newbolt himself and Richard Wilson. The latter also introduced a new type of school Reader in *Reading for Action* and *Read and Remember*. A further series, *The Teaching of History*, also grew out of Buchan and Newbolt’s collaboration. By 1937 Nelsons had upped its game to the point where it had an extremely professional editorial department for educational publishing in its London offices at Paternoster Row, a pool of experienced teachers and academics writing for it, and a team of representatives, both home and abroad, who specialised in selling

¹⁰ Other UK publishers with predominantly educational interests included: Bell, Blackie, Collins, CUP, Dent, Ginn, Grant Educational Company, Harrap, Macmillan, Methuen, Oliver & Boyd, and OUP.

¹¹ Edinburgh University Library, Nelsons Papers, GEN1728/507, JC Hardy to GS Dickson, 21 July 1937.

to educational boards and schools, and in providing accurate feedback on the reception of its books and on gaps in the market.¹²

Penguin had nothing really of this when it started the Pelican series in 1937. Nor did it need it as this series had been established, with much prompting from W.E. (Bill) Williams and the key involvement of Krishna Menon, to provide subject-guides for the general reader without access to formal education or for readers within the context of Extension or Extra-Mural services or the Workers' Educational Association. In other words, Penguin's market was that of informal education, as opposed to the focus by others such as Nelsons or Longmans on the provision of school and academic textbooks for formal education. Penguin published explicitly didactic non-fiction, for readers outside the formal institutions of school or university. Those readers existed in the Colonies as much as they did in the UK. By 1938, Pelicans were outselling Penguins in India and Bill Williams was dispatched there to investigate why this should be so. He discovered a culture of self-improvement and a reverence for the left-wing authors found in Penguin and Pelican colours: Shaw, Wells, Cole, Haldane and Laski. In 1951, Williams made a similar tour to Nigeria and the Gold Coast (Ghana) where he found a situation that paralleled pre-war India. The sales of Penguins and Pelicans had increased in West Africa at a higher rate than in any other territory in the immediate post-war period.¹³

Penguin had already published two key books by W.M. Macmillan: *Warning From the West Indies: A tract for Africa and the Empire* in 1938; and *Africa Emergent* in 1949.¹⁴ Macmillan had also been responsible for establishing the British Council in West Africa and had been based in Accra from 1943 to 1946. The British Council itself focussed particularly, from 1949

¹² See A. McCleery, 'Introduction' in D. Finkelstein and H. Holmes (eds), *Thomas Nelson & Sons* (Edinburgh, Tuckwell Press, 2001), pp. xv-xxii.

¹³ Details of both tours are to be found in PA, DM1819/27/2/6.

¹⁴ I am grateful to Hugh Macmillan for pointing out to me his father's presence in Penguin livery. The Penguin editions were paperback reprints of originals published by Faber and Faber in 1936 and 1938 respectively.

onwards, on educating potential African high-flyers through places at UK universities, including St Andrews where Macmillan became Director of Colonial Studies until 1954. The emphasis of Macmillan, and others including the Fabian Colonial Bureau from 1940 onwards, throughout the period immediately before and after the Second World War, was on native administration and a form of self-rule rather than independence, on colonial reform and trusteeship rather than decolonisation.

This intellectual context, and the specific discovery by Williams of a local market for Penguins, provided the impetus to establish a series of West African Pelicans from 1953 under the general editorship of David Kimble and his wife Helen, a series that eventually contained 14 titles, latterly as the Penguin African Series until its cessation in favour of the Penguin African Library. David Kimble had arrived at the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948, at the age of 28, passionate about the role of universities in community outreach. He established the extra-mural department of the University College, the success of which could be measured through the composition of the elected membership of the first legislative assembly – 80 out of the 104 members sitting in Accra were or had been his students.¹⁵ His initial motivation for the series, at least as represented in the titles he chose, was to educate native cadres for self-rule by learning the British way of governance. Kimble was the leading figure of what Clapham and Hodder-Williams have termed ‘the Ghana school’, based in extra-mural studies at the Gold Coast, where ‘they saw the development of African political life not from the perspective of the colonial administration but from the “subaltern” level’.¹⁶

The first title in the West African series in 1953, Ronald E. Wraith’s *Local Government* [titles in the series designated by Penguin using the WA prefix, so WA1], provided a practical guide for

¹⁵ Obituary of David Kimble by Lalage Bown, the *Guardian* [UK], 19 June 2009.

¹⁶ Christopher Clapham with Richard Hodder-Williams, ‘Africa and the Study of Politics’ in Rimmer and Kirk-Greene (eds), *The British Intellectual Engagement With Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000) p.117.

countries moving towards district self-rule written by an eminent member of the London School of Economics. It was therefore quite clearly within a Pelican tradition; indeed, African booksellers were concerned that in terms of its cover design and its title it could be too easily confused with the pre-existing W.E. Jackson, *Local Government*, Pelican A162 (1945). However, Wraith's book set both the tone and the format for the rest of the series.

The West African books were to be 128 pages in extent with a retail price of one shilling and sixpence. Authors were to be paid an advance of £60 on a first print run of 20,000 copies and a 4% royalty on sales above that. The driving force behind it and the other titles, as well as the person who took on the burden of making sense of often disorganised and poorly written manuscripts, was, in fact, Helen Kimble as much as David. Although the marriage was later to end in divorce, at this stage both were fully involved in the tasks of creating a series of books that would make a contribution to the development of West Africa. The second title, Sanya Dojo Onabamiro, *Food and Health* (WA2, 1953), pursued that ambition but also used a local author – he was based at University College Ibadan in Nigeria – rather than one based in the UK. On the appearance of the third title, Phebean Itayemi and Percival Gurney, eds, *Folk Tales and Fables* (WA3, 1953), the blurb ceased reference to a 'series of Pelican books' and changed to a 'series of Penguin books'. Both editors were colleagues of David Kimble at the University College of the Gold Coast. He himself contributed WA4, *The Machinery of Self-Government*, also in 1953, although it is evident from correspondence that Helen did all the work in making the material fit for publication while David pursued his day job.¹⁷

This had been an ambitious initial programme of publishing in 1953 and it is not surprising to find a hiatus before the series resumed in 1955. There was more to that interval, on the other hand, than overload or fatigue: Penguin hesitated to undertake WA5, George Cansdale, *Reptiles of West Africa*, because of the high costs involved in the reproduction of its

¹⁷ PA, DM1107/31, Editorial Files, West African Series.

illustrations and A.S.B. Glover wrote to Helen Kimble in November 1953, urging her to reconsider its inclusion in the series.¹⁸ She persisted but Glover's judgement proved correct as the title took ten years to sell out its print run of 20,000, a much slower rate of sales than the other titles in the series and too slow to be reconsidered for a reprint when the author inquired in 1969. Indeed, the sales pattern of the first four titles had clearly indicated by mid-1954 that, in the words of Glover writing to David Kimble, 'the volumes dealing with current problems and social affairs are more satisfactory from the selling point of view than the more purely literary ones such as FABLES AND FOLK TALES [sic]'.¹⁹ In other words, a congruence existed between those titles dealing with aspects of preparation for self-government and its aftermath, on the one hand, and commercial success, on the other. However, Helen Kimble had also commissioned David Bannerman, at the same time as she had Cansdale, to write *Larger Birds of West Africa* that was not to appear, as WA10, until 1958. Its long gestation period was a mixture of authorial procrastination and publisher hesitation (as with WA5) over the exceptional length of 208 pages and the cost of the blocks for the illustrations. On its eventual publication, the retail price was three shillings and sixpence, almost double those of others in the series issued concurrently. WA6, on the other hand, represented in a sense a return to normal service: Walter Birmingham, *Introduction to Economics* (1955), was directed at the needs of West African students such as those the author taught at the University College of the Gold Coast alongside Kimble; and it found a steady market, going to a second edition in 1962.

The series began to push against its geographical constraints, partly in an effort to find new, publishable titles, and partly because the market was so much bigger than just Ghana and Nigeria. Although the titles of WA7 and WA8 indicated their commissioning provenance – Dennis Austin, *West Africa and the Commonwealth* (1957) and J.I. Roper, *Labour Problems in*

¹⁸ PA, DM1107/31, A.S.B. Glover to Helen Kimble, 18 November 1953.

¹⁹ PA, DM1107/31, A.S.B. Glover to David Kimble, 21 June 1954.

West Africa (1958) – the adjective ‘West’ was omitted from the blurb and they were badged as part of the Penguin African series. So John Taylor, *Christianity and Politics in Africa* (WA9, 1957) represents that wider ambition for the series and, despite a retail price increase to two shillings, it sold 5,700 copies in the first three months of publication.

Bill Williams joined David Kimble on a further tour of Ghana (independence had been achieved in 1957) in 1960 during which they visited all the teacher-training colleges and spoke to groups from the People’s Educational Association (modelled on the UK Workers’ Educational Association). The demand for Penguins and Pelicans from these constituencies was very high; possible competitors such as Longman and OUP were concentrating on the formal educational, schools market that provided them, and others, with a steady and predictable turnover. Williams and Kimble took with them on their tour 1,000 copies of titles from the West African series and had sold most of them after ten days.²⁰ However, the intervals between the appearance of titles was becoming marked again: E.H. Pyle and S.G. Williamson, *Introducing Christianity* (WA11) and Thomas Hodgkin, *African Political Parties: an introductory guide* (WA12) did not appear until 1961; while neither of the Kimbles was involved in the initial commissioning of L.H. Gann and P. Duignan, *White Settlers in Tropical Africa* (WA13, 1962). The series continued to sell well: a revised edition of the Hodgkin (WA12) was requested in 1965, after reprints in 1962 and 1964, and this eventually appeared in 1969, to be reprinted in 1970; while Gann and Duignan went into a second edition in 1973. However, the general lack of dynamism and ‘presence’ in the series was seen as unsatisfactory from the perspective of London, not least through the eyes of Penguin’s new editorial director, Tony Godwin, and coincided with a drive to increase Penguin’s sales in overseas territories.

²⁰ PA, DM1819/27/2/6.

Sales of all Penguin books to South Africa had grown from 20,743 in 1953, through 69,023 in 1954, to 98,430 in 1956.²¹ However, this was a relatively small share of an expanding market for UK publishers. 'The prime need is to attack the large non-European markets which other British publishers are handling more effectively than Penguins.'²² By 1958, the South African market was worth £1,985,000 to UK publishers, of which Penguin had a 0.77% share; the rest of Africa totalled £941,000, of which Penguin had a 1.91% share. The countries of Africa with the exception of South Africa (the latter including Northern and Southern Rhodesia [Zambia and Zimbabwe] as well as the Union of South Africa), were handled by the Export Department in the UK selling on to appointed agents. Penguin in South Africa was represented by a single agency (for 5% commission on all orders) that also looked after five other (non-competing) UK publishers. All the agents were essentially selling into trade retail outlets rather than seeking to enter the formal educational market and its institutions, so ably exploited, for example, by Nelsons. Penguin would conclude that this was an inhibition to growth: 'it must surely be that Penguins have a great many titles which could be used if they were offered to the right people, and it is quite clear that in the main the [current] set-up make [sic] no attempt to do this'.²³ Two solutions were equally clear: 'special series for this market abroad'; and a new arrangement for representation that embodied experience of the formal educational market.

The then Longmans Green had already approached Penguin as a possible representative in those territories where Penguin was weak. Mark Longman stressed his company's large and successful network for educational and academic publishing on a global scale: in Africa, India, the Far East, Australasia, the West Indies, and Canada.²⁴ Its success was evident from comparative figures collected by Penguin: in 1957, in the rest of Africa, Longmans had a

²¹ PA, DM1663, Memorandum of 7 Years of Trading Results to 7 June 1957.

²² PA, DM1663/12/1.

²³ PA, DM1663/12/3.

²⁴ PA, DM1663/2.

turnover of £400,000 compared to Penguin's £18,000; while in South Africa the figures were £195,000 to £15,300.²⁵ Penguin realised the advantages of this two-fold expansion of its markets – geographic and sectoral – and signed, rather tentatively perhaps, an agency agreement with Longmans Green. The latter would hold Penguin stock locally in its overseas offices and pass orders to Penguin in the UK. Such stock was held on the basis of a 7.5% commission for the first year and 10% for the further four years the contract was to run. From 1 April 1959 onwards, Longmans Green would represent Penguin in South Africa and in the rest of Africa. (The USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand were initially excluded from this agreement as Penguin felt relatively secure in those territories in terms of its own representation and market intelligence.) The initial results from this new arrangement were not encouraging: sales in South Africa from April to October 1959 fell by 5% on the same period in 1958; and by an average of over 4% in the rest of Africa.²⁶ Perhaps the other solution of 'special series' might fare better.

Certainly, the omens were propitious. Where Kimble and many others had left the UK in the immediate post-war period to serve in the new and expanded tertiary education institutions of East and West Africa, creating a more formalised African Studies curriculum, by the early 1960s many such ex-pats, though not David Kimble himself, had returned to the UK where African Studies, under one rubric or another, found a place in both the old and growing 'new' universities. 'The scramble for Africana', as it was termed by A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, began with the 1953 SOAS conference on Africa but picked up speed with the launch of the *Journal of African History* in 1960, the Hayter recommendations to the University Grants Committee in 1961, and the foundation of the African Studies Association UK in 1963.²⁷ John Lonsdale, in designating 1960 the 'Year of Africa', also concluded that 'the strength of university feeling

²⁵ PA, DM1663/22/1.

²⁶ PA, DM1663/26.

²⁷ A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, 'The Scramble for Africana' *African Affairs* 70 (1971) pp.77-83.

must have reflected a general sense of political obligation to Africa among Britain's middle classes'.²⁸ A more radical academic agenda, in other words, could find a wider readership.

Radicalism

The Penguin African Library is intended, not for academics nor indeed students, but for intelligent lay people... On the other hand, you don't have to feel that you are writing down to your readership, and so if you work on the principle that the reader has all of your intelligence but none of your knowledge I don't think you will go far wrong.²⁹

This drive to raise sales in Africa, coupled with the increasing appearance of Africa in UK headlines, from the Sharpeville Massacre to the Biafran War, prompted the development from 1961 of the Penguin African Library under the general editorship of Ronald Segal discussed in more detail below (titles in the series designated by Penguin using the AP prefix). The West African, latterly Penguin African, series was allowed to peter out. Ken Post's *The New States of West Africa* appeared in 1964 as AP14, not WA14. The latter designation was used in an ignominious manner for the publication in 1965 of KAB Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*. This rather fawning and certainly unchallenging biography of the first President of Nigeria would have sat uneasily in the Penguin African Library and so became the final title in a WA series that was to all intents and purposes already defunct. The baton had now been passed on, in the widest sense: from the tutelage of the postwar period to the radicalism of the 1960s.

The Penguin African Library specifically represented an attempt to inform UK readers about a continent, the constituent countries of which, from Nigeria to the Congo to South Africa, began

²⁸ John Lonsdale, 'How to study Africa: from victimhood to agency', available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa/democracy/agency/2796.jsp>, retrieved on 17 July 2017.

²⁹ PA, DM1952/554, Robert Hutchison to Odette Guitard, 23 January 1968.

to dominate international headlines; while reflecting back to Africans themselves, aspects of the continent hidden from them or about which they wished to know more. The West African series had given, as noted above, the company confidence that its social and political titles would find a ready market throughout Africa (though East Africa was always seen as having less potential than other areas because of relatively low rates of literacy).³⁰ The founding of the Penguin African Library not only provided the opportunity to extend the geographical scope of the titles but also to target them at UK as well as African readers. UK readers would, it was presumed, welcome the pronounced political note of the titles.

The radicalism now to be found in Penguin's mission was embodied by Tony Godwin, appointed in May 1960 as the editorial and managing director of Penguin. Godwin represented a fresh dynamism and a reinvigoration of the spirit and values of the company. He brought Penguin firmly into the 1960s.³¹ The re-launch of Penguin Specials as the Britain in the Sixties library or the transition from the West African series into the Penguin African Library, under the general editorship of his friend, Ronald Segal, embodied Godwin's revitalisation of the list. The balance-sheet of Godwin's seven years in control was impressive: a 300% increase in turnover; a 100% increase in the backlist; an 83% increase in the number of Penguin fiction titles; the launch of a new hardback imprint, Allen Lane The Penguin Press; and the establishment of Penguin Education, under Christopher Dolley and Charles Clarke, to further the company's interests in formal education – and, of course, the Penguin African Library: 'the fact of the matter is that the African continent exists, and the extent of ignorance on the subject is very considerable'.³²

³⁰ PA, DM1819/1/4, A.S.B. Glover to Allen Lane, 19 March 1953.

³¹ See Steve Hare, *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970*, (London, Penguin Books, 1995).

³² Tony Godwin, quoted in Jeremy Lewis, *Penguin Special: The Life and Times of Allen Lane*, (London, Penguin Viking, 2005), p. 348.

Ronald Segal, then based in London, was only 29 when appointed general editor of the Penguin African Library and its first title was his own *African Profiles* in 1962 (AP1). He received a 2% royalty as general editor or advisory editor for the series (the two titles are used interchangeably) as well as a standard advance of £350 against a 7.5% royalty in TMA territories and 6% in the USA for his individual contribution.³³ Although born into a wealthy Cape Town family (which continued to support him until the intervention of the South African authorities), Segal was a determined opponent of apartheid and a supporter but never a blind partisan of the African National Congress (ANC). In 1956 he began to publish the journal *Africa South* in Cape Town, financed through a family trust and offering its pages to other opponents of apartheid drawn from a wide spectrum of political and religious backgrounds. This, and other activities such as a speaking tour of US campuses and the management of a defence fund for Nelson Mandela, led eventually to the loss of his passport, the official label of 'communist' (ironic given his earlier public condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Hungary), and a ban on association with others. After the introduction of the state of emergency in 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre, and the subsequent banning of the ANC, Segal escaped internment by driving with Oliver Tambo, the ANC leader, over the border into Bechuanaland (Botswana), the first stage, for both of them, of a journey into exile in London. Segal re-established his journal *Africa South* in London as a platform for his committed anti-apartheid stance and for exploration of the challenges faced by the wider continent.³⁴ His very appointment as general editor of the Penguin African Library, and the contrast of his history with that of David Kimble, marked then an assertion of a more political intent, and less *de haut en bas* attitude, than had been evident in the West African series.

One of the consequences of the explicit political nature of the Penguin series was that a high proportion of the titles, including the first, had to be reviewed by libel lawyers. Another may

³³ PA, DM1952/546.

³⁴ See Ronald Segal, *Into Exile*, (London, Jonathan Cape, 1963).

have been the low take-up of the Library in the USA remarked already. More generally, however, the series was very successful: it sold very well in India; and translation rights in individual titles were sold to German, Swedish, Italian, Japanese, and Catalan (the first for Penguin) publishers. The single largest bestseller was Oliver and Fage's *A Short History of Africa* published in April 1962 (AP2). By August 1962, it had overall sales of 7,600, of which 3,600 were exported to Africa and a further 750 to South Africa, and by the following month that total had risen to 11,400. A reprint was needed.³⁵ *African Profiles* had been banned in South Africa because Ronald Segal was a 'Proscribed Author' and this provoked a concern that his name appearing as General Editor of the Penguin Africa Library on all its titles would result in a blanket ban, particularly damaging to the commercial prospects of the bestseller, *A Short History of Africa*. The proposal was made by Longman, Penguin's agent in South Africa, that Segal's name should be dropped from the reprint of *A Short History of Africa* and indeed from any other titles that might find a ready market in South Africa. However, the Penguin management decided to go ahead with the reprint of *A Short History of Africa* including Segal's 'Preface'.³⁶ This was not altogether an assertion of principle as Penguin was prepared to print an edition omitting Segal specifically for the South African market if the authorities there reacted adversely to the 'standard' edition. The South Africans ignored or were ignorant of Segal's connection to the title and no special edition was required.

However, other titles in the Penguin Africa Library could not be so readily the focus of a South African blind eye. Of the eventual 42 titles in the series, four were contributed by Ruth First, another Proscribed Author in exile, and a close friend of Segal's. Govan Mbeki's *South Africa: the peasants' revolt* (AP9, 1964) had been smuggled out in instalments from Robben Island, where the author was imprisoned with fellow ANC members. Penguin dispatched copies to the author's friends in South Africa under plain wrapper from a private residential address in

³⁵ PA, DM1107/AP1-AP24.

³⁶ *ibid.*

London. Royalties, from the print run of 25,000 priced at 3/6d, were transferred, without mention of author or book, to an equally anonymous account in a Cape Town bank.³⁷ Brian Bunting's *The Rise of the South African Reich* (AP12, 1964) also acted as a red rag to the Boer bull, provoking protests and requiring careful vetting for possible libels on first publication and again in an updated edition in 1969. In 1964, the South African government orchestrated a hostile campaign against the Penguin African Library; *Die Vaderland*, the ardent supporter of the Nationalist Party, condemned it in a vituperative editorial.³⁸ Some of the opposition proved counter-productive. Sales of Father Cosmas Desmond's *The Discarded People* (AP32, 1971) actually increased when the author was placed under house arrest by the South African police.³⁹ The final title in the series, *South Africa: an historical introduction* by Freda Troup (AP44, 1975) had already been banned in South Africa in its hardback edition (Eyre Methuen, 1972) so Penguin did not ask Longman to distribute the paperback there. 'We are pretty ill-viewed by the Portuguese and the such like, especially so in connexion [sic] with the Penguin African Library, of which many volumes have been banned in Southern Africa'.⁴⁰

It should not be concluded that the Penguin Africa Library covered only South Africa, however topical and passionate an issue. The breadth of the continent was covered in the series; and these other titles also sold well. *Portugal in Africa* by J.P. Duffy (AP3, 1962) was a fastseller, 11,200 copies by the end of July 1962, but not a bestseller, perhaps because the decolonisation movement in Portuguese Africa took a further decade to reach news headlines and television screens. *East Africa: the search for unity* by A.J. Hughes (AP11, 1963) was a steady-seller: from publication it sold 2,500 copies each year until a new edition in 1969 was produced in a print run of 15,000 with 500 going to Australia, 6,000 to the USA, and 8,500 for UK sales and export to other markets. Other titles in the series covered the Maghreb and

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ See Alex Hepple, *Press Under Apartheid* (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1974).

³⁹ PA, DM1852/AP10-AP46.

⁴⁰ PA, DM1952/546, Dieter Pevsner to Aaron Segal, 3 October 1966.

Egypt. Nor were all polemical. *Modern Poetry from Africa*, edited by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier (AP7, 1963), was sufficiently popular to be reprinted in 1968 (and 1984 and 1998). It was eventually followed by *Africa in Prose* edited by O.R. Dathorne and Willfried Feuser (AP24, 1969). Yet all were political in the sense that the very publication of the series was significant in its contemporary context. The titles were adopted in academic courses, particularly in anglophone Africa's burgeoning higher education systems, and extracts were licensed for use in course readers, especially in the USA. However, the US market was also used in what now seems like an attempt by the less radical members of staff within Penguin to moderate the intensely and overtly political nature of the series. Christopher Dolley, later Managing Director of Penguin, urged Segal from the USA in 1968 to commission titles on African art and African music for which he was confident there would be large sales. One of his colleagues followed this up later in the same year, with no hint of collusion, seeking greater representation of African literary criticism within the series.⁴¹ This prefigured later events from the death of Allen Lane onwards.

Sales were high despite the equally high threshold for success. Segal was to write to the author of a rather minority-interest title: 'The Penguin African Library has, commercially, to deal in such large sales figures – around a minimum of 20,000 copies per title – that the potential readership must be rather different from that reasonable for a hardback by Routledge or OUP'.⁴² The prices of the books were fixed in the UK and in South Africa but in the rest of Africa, the retail prices were usually set by the local booksellers' associations, as a means of containing competition, and the wholesale prices were determined by the amount of profit any importer wished to make on any particular consignment. By 1969 the Penguin African Library had sold three-quarters of a million copies of its various titles.

⁴¹ PA, DM1952/631, Dieter Pevsner to Robert Hutchison, from New York, 30 January 1968; 'Our list is now being criticized for being weak here [in the USA] because of the lack of literary criticism on Africa', Bill Weatherley to Robert Hutchison, 12 February 1968.

⁴² *ibid.* PAL Advisory File Ronald Segal, Ronald Segal to R.A. May, 27 January 1970.

The series came to a halt in 1975. Segal was maintained as a consultant after the demise of the Penguin African Library, drawing an annual fee for his services of £350 up to the mid-1980s. During this period, he acted as an advisor on a number of Africa-related titles such as Lanning and Mueller, *Africa Undermined: A history of the mining companies and the underdevelopment of Africa* (1979) and Denis Herbstein, *White Man, We Want to Talk To You* (1978) – titles that prior to its abandonment would have carried the AP designation. To understand the reasons for the ending by whimper of the series, it is not to Segal or any lack of continuing interest in Africa that one should look but to Penguin's move into formal educational publishing and its closer ties with Longman, culminating in the takeover by Pearson Longman in 1970.

Marketisation (and Conclusion)

As of a year or so ago the decision was taken, due to falling sales, not to commission new books for the series and to publish only those which had a definite delivery date. In six months or so we will be able to determine the progress of the series as a whole and whether it can continue.⁴³

Longmans Green had now represented Penguin in South Africa since 1959, an agency agreement that led to some of the tensions discussed above in the case of the Penguin African Library. Longmans Green was generally risk-adverse in the face of the South African regime and unwilling to put its market position there in jeopardy for the sake of any one title or even series. The merger with, or takeover by, the now Pearson Longman when it did take place, in a precipitate fashion after Allen Lane's death in 1970, was based to a great extent on chasing the formal educational market – prefigured over a decade earlier in this initial agency agreement. It was also a reaction to a threatened takeover by McGraw-Hill, the US educational and academic publisher that had bought up 17.3% of Penguin shares on the open market as a

⁴³ PA, DM1952/85, Michael Dover to David Seddon, 2 May 1975.

platform for a fuller bid.⁴⁴ Better a British corporate takeover than a North American one seemed to be the xenophobic rationale. Some of the rhetoric in support of the merger with Longman as part of the Pearson Group was hyperbolic: Christopher Dolley, by then Managing Director of Penguin, and formerly manager of Penguin Education, forecast a 50% increase in company profits due to the merger, based on increased sales generated through the entry through Longman into educational publishing – begging the question what Longman had been doing previously when the (agency) relationship with Penguin had been contractual.⁴⁵ However, it was the sort of rhetoric designed to appeal to the anonymous figures of the Stock Market. Lord Boyle, formerly plain Sir Edward, newly retired as a Conservative MP, educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, by then acting Chairman of Penguin, claimed in a letter to all shareholders that the Longman deal ‘was the best prospect for maintaining the company’s independence, integrity and tradition for offering good reading at acceptable prices’.⁴⁶ The new company was 60% Pearson, 40% Penguin.

The Pearson Longman Chairman, R.P.T. (Patrick) Gibson was a figure of the establishment: educated at Eton and Magdalen, Oxford, married into the Pearson family, Chairman of Pearson Longman from 1967 until 1979, ennobled in 1975, Chairman of the Arts Council from 1972 to 1977, and Chairman of the National Trust from 1977 to 1986. Lord Gibson (by 1975) in turn chaired a Board composed of other establishment figures, overly concerned in their judgements not to rock any political boats or threaten any of the Group’s commercial interests. Longman’s earlier hesitations over the Penguin African Library, and its putting at potential risk their interests in Southern Africa, can now be seen as running counter to Penguin’s willingness to challenge the establishment from its beginnings in 1935 through the Penguin Specials and the trial of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* to the Penguin African Library.

⁴⁴ PA, DM1819, Box 21.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ PA, DM1819/21/3.

The success, stressed above, of the Penguin African Library led to the development of an analogous Pelican Latin American Library (PLAL) for the 1970s. South America had taken over the news headlines to a large extent from Africa. The issues of decolonisation gave way to those of Marxist liberation from Havana to Rio de Janeiro and beyond. The first in the new series was to be Carlos Marighella [sic], *For the Liberation of Brazil* – translated by John Butt and Rosemary Sheed with an *Introduction* by Richard Gott of the *Guardian* who was also general editor of the series. Gott wrote in 1973: ‘It is the lack of balance in the origins of the authors in the PLAL that worries me, more than the accusations of Leftist bias... I am hard pressed to find many Englishmen [sic] who can put pen to paper and produce a readable, scholarly book on a topic of importance’.⁴⁷ Instead, the list of authors reflected Gott’s experience as a Latin American correspondent for the *Guardian* and his close association and identification with Marxist liberation movements there. Marighella, for example, was a Brazilian Marxist revolutionary and writer, an advocate of urban guerrilla warfare, who had been shot dead by the Brazilian police in 1969 after the kidnapping of the American ambassador. The four other titles in the first batch for publication were: Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, Thomas and Marjorie Melville, *Guatemala – Another Vietnam?*, and Marcel Niedergang, *The Twenty Latin Americas*, volumes 1 and 2. Pearson Longman’s reaction can be all too easily imagined and the effects of that reaction were immediately felt.

The publication date had been pre-announced to the trade as 26 August 1971, and a launch party for press and others had been fixed for 24 August. Pearson Longman learned of these plans in July, hard on the heels of *The Little Red Schoolbook* dispute, and immediately called a moratorium. A further statement was released to the trade: ‘Penguin Books announce that publication of the first group of titles in the Pelican Latin American Library has been delayed

⁴⁷ Richard Gott, quoted in C. Harding and C. Roper (eds), *Latin America Review of Books* (London & Leeds, Ramparts Press, 1974), p. 218.

from August publication to a date to be fixed subsequently'.⁴⁸ The launch party was cancelled and the printing of the Marighella was halted on the presses. However, the Pearson Longman Board gave way, and the books were published, for two reasons: the major one was that details of the interference by Pearson Longman in the editorial affairs of Penguin were constantly leaked from within Penguin's HQ at Harmondsworth to sympathetic newspapers and magazines (such as the *Guardian*) and created poor PR in terms of press freedom for the then owners of the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*; the minor explanation was that the process of publication was too far advanced, the investment too large, the potential profit too great, and the parent company's interests in South America too small for cancellation to be worthwhile.

However, this represented the commercial decision-making and editorial context in which the future of the Penguin African Library was considered and its demise decided upon.

Notification of its closure was given to Ronald Segal over lunch at Bertorelli's on 3 September 1975.⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, Africa was less of a hot topic than it had been in the 1960s but the Lonrho affair, continuing political turmoil in many states, and the persistence of and resistance to apartheid kept the continent before the public gaze throughout the 1970s and beyond. Segal had been finding it increasingly difficult to commission original titles from authoritative writers but there were still interesting and informative books on the topic being published by Penguin and other publishers. A more convincing explanation lies in Pearson Longman's perception of Penguin as an extension of its educational activities, a function welcomed by some within Penguin who had seemed to be building up to this relationship since 1964, and the annoyance that 'gadfly publishing' such as the Penguin African Library, or indeed the Pelican Latin American Library, caused in a distraction from or threat to that

⁴⁸ PA, DM2221/9.

⁴⁹ PA, DM1952/631, Michael Dover to Ronald Segal, 21 August 1975.

profitable function. In 1975, there was little enthusiasm within Pearson Longman, or indeed Penguin, to refresh and re-launch the Penguin African Library.

Coda

By 2000 the Pearson conglomerate possessed global interests in educational publishing. It exemplified the devolved and segmented model of a transnational conglomerate in which branch companies operate within global markets and each pursues a particular sector. In 2009, Penguin Books (South Africa) announced that it was to begin publication of a Penguin African Writers Series (concurrent with a Penguin Prize for African Writing that comprised both a cash award and guaranteed publication).⁵⁰ Behind this lay the purchase by Pearson of Harcourt Education in 2007 from Reed Elsevier who had, in turn, taken over Heinemann and absorbed it within Harcourt in 2001. This gave Pearson (and Penguin) access to the backlist of the Heinemann African Writers Series (HAWS). Harcourt Education had abandoned HAWS in 2002 as an ongoing series, keeping only the titles in print that found a schools and colleges market in Africa and elsewhere.

The original series, founded by Alan Hill in 1962, had self-consciously copied the Penguin model established by Allen Lane in 1935 in terms of good books at low prices in a clear branding, using colour-coding and a numbered series eventually reaching 270 titles.⁵¹ The original HAWS editor, the renowned novelist Chinua Achebe, was retained by Penguin as senior editorial advisor, lending an authority to what was essentially a repackaging of material Pearson now owned. The first title in the Penguin African Writers Series in 2009 was Achebe's own *Girls at War and Other Stories*, originally HAWS100 issued in 1972. The Penguin

⁵⁰ Tracey [sic], 'The Winners of the Penguin Prizes for African Writing', *Books Live* (6 September 2010), available at <http://penguin.bookslive.co.za/blog/2010/09/06/the-winners-of-the-penguin-prizes-for-african-writing>, retrieved on 4 February 2017.

⁵¹ See James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2008).

African Writers Series fell into abeyance in late 2011, seemingly as a result of internal politics in Johannesburg and London, but 72 of the original HAWS titles were retained by Pearson Education and are still sold as 'a celebrated selection of literature from Africa' to schools and FE Colleges throughout the continent.⁵² In its continuing pursuit of the formal educational market, rather than trade publishing, Pearson sold off Penguin in 2012 to Bertelsmann. The bottom line, rather than any sentiment or belief, now ruled.

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⁵² Secondary Resources, available at <http://www.pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk/Secondary/Literature/Internationalwriters/AfricanWritersSeries/AfricanWritersSeries.aspx>, retrieved on 4 February 2017.