

Power to the People: Black Publishing for Social Change in South Africa

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Résumé de l'article

Le salut du « Black Power » est un puissant appel aux armes pour la résistance et le changement social. En Afrique du Sud, le « Black Power » est lié au « Black Consciousness Movement » des années 1970, qui visait à revendiquer l'identité noire. L'utilisation de moyens culturels et intellectuels faisait partie intégrante de cette tentative et, sous son égide, des groupes d'écrivains ont commencé à se former à la place des groupes politiques (qui avaient été supprimés), pour servir de base à la mobilisation et à l'action collective. Mais ces écrivains ne pouvaient pas provoquer un changement social par eux-mêmes : ils avaient besoin d'une plate-forme, d'un éditeur. Siphos Sepamla, soulignait dans le *New Classic* en 1976 que l'absence d'éditeurs était un obstacle pour les écrivains noirs : « Le manque d'éditeurs et de débouchés est un problème qui nous tire vers le bas. À ma connaissance, il n'y a pas un seul éditeur noir dans ce pays ». Dans le contexte des forces concurrentes de la répression et du « Black Consciousness », quelques éditeurs noirs ont vu le jour. Skotaville Press, par exemple, avait pour objectif de « produire de la littérature noire pertinente et contemporaine — et de le faire sous le contrôle des Noirs du début à la fin ». Toutefois, elle a agi dans des circonstances quelque peu ambiguës, en s'appuyant sur des fonds étrangers et sur des mécènes blancs. À l'aide de documents d'archives et d'entretiens, cet article examine les activités et la production de ces éditeurs, en étudiant la manière dont la race et le contexte affectent et influencent l'édition. En outre, l'article se demande pourquoi, contrairement à l'héritage créé par les éditeurs du « Black Power » aux États-Unis, une tradition de maisons d'édition viables appartenant à des Noirs ne s'est pas maintenue dans la période post-apartheid.



POWER TO THE PEOPLE: Black Publishing for Social Change in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The black power salute is a powerful call to arms for resistance and social change. In South Africa, black power is tied up with the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s, aiming to reclaim black identity. Integral to this attempt was the use of cultural and intellectual means, and under its aegis writers' groups started forming in place of political groups (which were suppressed), as a base for mobilisation and collective action. But these writers could not effect social change on their own: they needed a platform – a publisher. Siphso Sepamla, writing in the *New Classic* in 1976, pointed to the absence of publishers as a hurdle for black writers: 'A problem that wears us down is lack of publishers and outlets. There is not a single black publisher I know of in this country.' In the context of the competing forces of repression and Black Consciousness, a few black publishers did emerge. Skotaville Press, for instance, aimed 'to produce black literature that is relevant and contemporary – and to do it under black control from start to finish.' However, it did this in somewhat ambiguous circumstances, relying on foreign funds and white patrons. Using archival records and interviews, this paper will assess the operations and output of these publishers, considering how race and context affects and inflects publishing. Moreover, it will ask why, in contrast to the legacy created by black power publishers in the US, a tradition of viable black-owned publishing has not continued into the post-apartheid period.

RÉSUMÉ

Le salut du « Black Power » est un puissant appel aux armes pour la résistance et le changement social. En Afrique du Sud, le « Black Power » est lié au « Black Consciousness Movement » des années 1970, qui visait à revendiquer l'identité noire. L'utilisation de moyens culturels et intellectuels faisait partie intégrante de cette tentative et, sous son égide, des groupes d'écrivains ont commencé à se former à la place des groupes politiques (qui avaient été supprimés), pour servir de base à la

mobilisation et à l'action collective. Mais ces écrivains ne pouvaient pas provoquer un changement social par eux-mêmes : ils avaient besoin d'une plate-forme, d'un éditeur. Siphon Sepamla, soulignait dans le *New Classic* en 1976 que l'absence d'éditeurs était un obstacle pour les écrivains noirs : « Le manque d'éditeurs et de débouchés est un problème qui nous tire vers le bas. À ma connaissance, il n'y a pas un seul éditeur noir dans ce pays ». Dans le contexte des forces concurrentes de la répression et du « Black Consciousness », quelques éditeurs noirs ont vu le jour. Skotaville Press, par exemple, avait pour objectif de « produire de la littérature noire pertinente et contemporaine – et de le faire sous le contrôle des Noirs du début à la fin ». Toutefois, elle a agi dans des circonstances quelque peu ambiguës, en s'appuyant sur des fonds étrangers et sur des mécènes blancs. À l'aide de documents d'archives et d'entretiens, cet article examine les activités et la production de ces éditeurs, en étudiant la manière dont la race et le contexte affectent et influencent l'édition. En outre, l'article se demande pourquoi, contrairement à l'héritage créé par les éditeurs du « Black Power » aux États-Unis, une tradition de maisons d'édition viables appartenant à des Noirs ne s'est pas maintenue dans la période post-apartheid.

Keywords

black publishing; political publishing; Skotaville; South Africa

Mots-clés

Édition noire; Édition politique; Skotaville; Afrique du Sud

Introduction

A raised, clenched fist, a strand of barbed wire, a stark red and black colour scheme—the cover of Miriam Tlali's novel *Amandla* is emblematic of Black Power. The Black Power salute is a powerful symbol, a call to arms for resistance and social change, which was adopted by the South African liberation movement. In particular, the clenched fist was used at gatherings alongside the rallying call *Amandla!* (“Power!”), followed by the response *Awethu!* (“It is ours!”). Published by the anti-apartheid Ravan Press in 1980, Tlali's work was one of four “Soweto novels” written in response to the Soweto uprising in South Africa in June 1976. In part due to the aesthetics of resistance embodied in its uncompromising cover and its title—an “aesthetic of fists and flags”—*Amandla* was inevitably banned for its criticism of the apartheid state.¹

In South Africa, Black Power is tied up with the Black Consciousness movement of the 1970s, which aimed to reclaim black identity. Cultural and

intellectual means were integral to this attempt, and written work was used for political aims, to conscientize people, but also to celebrate black literary and cultural heritage and expression.² However, in contrast to the “black revolution in books” associated with the civil rights movement in the United States, few black authors were being published in South Africa in this period—to the extent that the 1960s are sometimes referred to as a “decade of black silence.”³ The lack of publishers for protest literature, and specifically for work by black authors, was regularly identified as a problem throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Thus Sipho Sepamla, writing in the *New Classic* in 1976, pointed to the absence of publishers as a particular discouragement for black writers: “A problem that wears us down is lack of publishers and outlets. There is not a single black publisher I know of in this country.”⁴ Writing in 1977, Mbulelo Mzamane bemoaned the difficulty that “you simply cannot publish an original, authentic novel. There are no black publishing houses, which would be banned, at any rate, like James Matthews’ Blac Publishing House in Athlone.”⁵ It was a small group of oppositional publishers that produced books like Tlali’s which directly challenged the state and its policies of separate development and violent repression. Little attention has been given to the important relationship here between Black Consciousness and print culture, however, and in particular to the “brave small presses” that were activists and protestors in their own right.⁶

This paper analyzes black print activism in apartheid South Africa through a study of the origins and development of the black publisher Skotaville. Skotaville offers a rich and specific case study for posing the question “What did it mean to be a black publisher in apartheid South Africa?” Their publishing lists deliberately ran counter to those of the mainstream publishers, and their strategies are similar to those of minority and black publishers in other settings; in the British context, for instance, Jeremy Poynting describes black, radical publishers as championing “the important books that mainstream publishing was quite happy to see disappear from view,” while Julien Hage refers to “protagonist” or “activist” publishers in Western Europe.⁷ The history of activist publishers reveals how publishing can contribute to politics and culture, whether in the form of political resistance or nation-building. In the case of Skotaville, the political aims of raising consciousness and awareness and providing a base for mobilisation and collective action went hand in hand with cultural and social aims, creating a

print counter-culture with the overarching goal “to radically transform society through books.”⁸ While we would expect activist publishers to employ print culture as an expression of political resistance, the Skotaville publishers also saw their politics as cultural, promoting the voices of black writers in a way that went beyond political emancipation to support the free expression of marginalized voices.

Given that the concept of voice was integral to the Skotaville publishing project, this paper foregrounds the voices of the publishers themselves, using contemporary accounts and reviews, archives, and interviews both old and new. In particular, attention is given to the directors of Skotaville, Mthobisi Mutloatse and Jaki Seroke. Mutloatse was a writer and journalist, had been Chairman of PEN Johannesburg, and was one of the co-founders of *Staffrider* magazine at Ravan Press. Most academic sources analyze Mutloatse’s role only as a struggle author, but in this paper I seek to reposition him as a publisher as well. Seroke, a very young man at the time, was also a writer, involved in writers’ collectives and working at Ravan. He is known for his work on *Staffrider* and as a political activist, but his work as a publisher also deserves more prominence.

Black Consciousness and Print Culture

The apartheid government had an impact on all spheres of life in South Africa, and brutally sought to minimize dissent. After the Sharpeville massacres of 1960, a host of political organizations were banned. With cultural production embedded in and inextricably linked with politics, cultural and literary organizations were driven underground, many authors proscribed or jailed, and journals closed down. The government’s attitude to dissenting views led them to develop a raft of legislation, restrictions, and inhibiting factors to control publication and distribution. The resulting framework was a system of post-publication censorship regulated by the Publications and Entertainments Act (1963, amended in 1974), which forced publishers to screen manuscripts and authors prior to publication.

But resistance was also on the rise. In the 1970s, the government faced a renewed wave of resistance, with labour unrest, economic boycotts, and both violent and non-violent protests that culminated in the Soweto uprising of

1976. There was also an increase in philosophical and cultural resistance, exemplified in the rise of the Black Consciousness (BC) movement. BC actively attempted to foreground black identity and reclaim the term “black” in place of the apartheid designation “non-white,” including through cultural and intellectual means. The most influential BC work is probably the collection of Steve Biko’s writings, *I Write What I Like*, first published by Ravan Press in 1978, shortly after Biko’s death in police detention. Biko argued that “culture was the means through which the psychological battle would be fought.”⁹ Cultural activism and writing were particularly important strategies for creating awareness and a sense of community; Leslie Ann Hadfield notes in this regard that “through writing, reading, and publishing print media, black authors fashioned and reconstructed identities, created forums for debate, and gave voice to the marginalized.”¹⁰ The role of books, newsletters, and magazines—including the London-based *Solidarity* and the local *Frank Talk* and *Black Review*—was to create awareness, to mobilize, and to resist.¹¹ In addition, cultural groups such as reading clubs were set up to deflect the attention of authorities from the actual (political) activities and ideologies of the groups. Jaki Seroke, later one of the first black publishers, set up Babupi Reading Club in 1978 and 1979: “We were using it as a front to mobilize, because we felt that we needed to mobilize people and conscientise them. We would give them books.”¹² This was a risky move, even with the focus on reading rather than directly on politics: Seroke would face surveillance and harassment from the security police, and later detention, and the Medupe Writers’ Association, to which he belonged, was banned in 1977.

In this context, the aim of writers and publishers was not intellectual or cultural work for its own sake, but conscious of building a framework of ideas to support a political movement. Artists and writers were “cultural workers” using their texts to disseminate political ideas, and writing was a “cultural weapon,” as Mafika Gwala put it.¹³ Ravan’s journal, *Staffrider*, captured the agency involved in “art [that] seeks *intentionally* to engage itself in a challenging and critical way with the social and political realities of its time and place. It does more than simply *reflect* the society which gives rise to it; it expresses a social or political message.”¹⁴ While Black Consciousness has been criticized for foregrounding race rather than class or gender, black identity was the most significant signifier in the racially stratified apartheid South Africa. As Gaylard explains: “In apparently ‘privileging’ the category of ‘race,’ one is recognising

the extent to which identity in apartheid South Africa was defined in racial terms: a person's racial classification determined almost everything about his or her circumstances and life opportunities. One was, almost necessarily, a racialized subject."¹⁵ Mbulelo Mzamane agreed: "Art and politics in South Africa, as in many parts of Africa, have become inseparable for the simple reason that politics pervades all aspects of a Blackman's existence."¹⁶ The political imperative was thus clear.

Moreover, with the influence of Black Consciousness came an emphasis on black people producing art or literature specifically for a black audience, focusing on their own lives. This emphasis was shared by both the Black Power movement in the US and Black Art in the UK, where publishers foreground "that which is produced by black people, largely and specifically for a black audience, and which in terms of content addresses the black experience."¹⁷ Seroke noted the importance of content as well as origin, commenting that "it must not only be black literature because it is written by blacks; it must be a literature of liberation."¹⁸ Publications within this movement were very deliberately targeted at a black audience, aiming to build a connection between writers and their readers. At the same time as black writers were forming collectives and writing about their own lives, black readers were also seeking more relevant, and more authentic, books. Mthobeni Mutloatse observed that "the black community is hungry, and hungrier since 16 June 1976: ever-ready-and-willing to lay its hands on 'relevant' writing, writing by blacks about blacks."¹⁹ Siphiso Sepamla's article in *New Classic* magazine also pointed to authors' changing awareness of their audience, commenting that while "in the past we might have taken the Black audience for granted, I think today we tend to believe that our duty is to reach that audience as much as possible."²⁰ Although it should not be assumed that "black writers in all circumstances write with immediate insight into the lives of other black people", on the whole such authors and books were considered more culturally authentic.²¹ Even as Black Consciousness declined in the 1980s in favour of a narrative of class consciousness, non-racialism, and nation-building, the emphasis on black authors writing for black readers remained significant.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, however, any author with these convictions had very limited access to mainstream publishing channels. To some extent

this was a commercial decision about mitigating risk on the part of publishers, since a book ban severely limited potential sales, but it was also a cultural-political decision about which voices to prioritize and which audiences to cater for. Publishers that did provide a platform for black writers were mostly small, independent organizations such as Ravan; given that South African publishing was almost entirely white-owned and -managed, any publisher that brought out books by black authors was acting in opposition to the government's apartheid policies of racial separation. As John K. Young has noted in the United States, black authors have of necessity had to negotiate white power structures to reach their audiences through a complex act of confrontation, collaboration, and compromise.²² The Johannesburg branch of the writers' group PEN was established in 1978 in an attempt to overcome the rigid racial divides, bringing together white writers' guilds and black township writing collectives.²³ The broader political climate and the influence of the Black Consciousness movement, however, made inter-racial cooperation difficult. For example, at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1981 protestors slammed the lack of black publishing houses from South Africa, and BC activists demanded that black writers justify their links with white liberal publishers.

One white publisher, Mike Kirkwood of Ravan Press, made a concerted effort to collectivize the organization and to set up a separate imprint, Staffrider Press, which would represent only black writing and be black-run.²⁴ It was hoped this would address the conflicts of running what Peter McDonald describes as a "white quasicommercial publisher committed to publishing black writing," but the inequalities remained.²⁵ Mothobi Mutloatse was a director at Ravan in name only, as Mbulelo Mzamane complained to Kirkwood: "Ravan is in your hands and not in mine or Mothobi's."²⁶ By 1984, Mutloatse was reflecting that "I don't regret having been involved with Ravan but there comes a time when you want to do your own thing, be the captain of the ship."²⁷ Around the same time, Jaki Seroke described feeling alienated from the decision-making at Ravan:

The real situation was that the establishment was white owned and decision-making at Ravan had been made into such an amorphous exercise that ordinary workers within Ravan, even us, who were supposedly in charge of *Staffrider* magazine and a series of books, did not know how it came about that these books were published.²⁸

He went on to state that “it is becoming increasingly difficult for white publishers to handle this kind of writing, because they are not part of the cultural revolution that blacks are involved in, and are only interested in making money.”²⁹

Black publishing emerged amidst this growing impatience with the control of white publishers, editors, and owners, with the deliberate aim of rejecting the “white exploitative editor” and “the white gurus who control publication out there.”³⁰ One of the first such attempts was BLAC (Black Literature, Arts and Culture), a small publishing initiative started by the poet James Matthews in 1974. BLAC relied for its distribution on his close relationship with Ravan, who had earlier published his poems, including the banned *Cry Rage!* In the face of police harassment, BLAC brought out works such as the anthology *Black People Shout!* and Matthews’ own *Pass Me A Meatball, Jones* before it shut down.

With such initiatives and a growing desire for self-reliance on the part of black writers and publishers, it now seems inevitable that the PEN Johannesburg group disbanded early in 1981, concluding that “there would be time later for black and white writers to converse; at the present historical moment there are more important needs.”³¹ The morning after the vote to disband, the newspapers announced the formation of the African Writers Association, a new collective body for black writers. At the urging of Es’kia Mphahlele, one of South Africa’s best-known black authors, the members of AWA soon advocated the establishment of their own publishing house as well:

For some considerable time there has been an increasing movement among Black writers and other members of the Black community to have the works of Black authors published by a set-up run and controlled by Blacks instead of commercial organisations. It is generally considered desirable for Black writers to be seen to be published by a Black publishing house... Black writers have so established themselves both as to number and quality of writing that justification now exists for their works to be handled by a Black publisher.³²

The Black Consciousness principles on which the AWA was based are clearly framed in this statement:

It is felt that a Black publishing house will be more understanding of the needs, aspirations and objectives of

Black writers and will not be subject to the criteria, constraints and restrictions experienced by the commercial publishing houses. An independent publishing house would play an important role in producing educational books of an alternative kind to those provided by publishers of educational books which are the framework of Bantu Education. The independent publishing house could play a significant role in offering a different perspective on Black South African history, which has hitherto been studied only from a white viewpoint.³³

In a brochure for Skotaville in 1986, its origins are described in terms of the split from white ownership. While allowing that “black writing has been published, even emphasized, by some of South Africa’s established white-run publishing houses . . . the AWA decided it was time we ‘do our own thing.’”³⁴ Seroke expanded on their motivation:

There was a great feeling among black writers that since they had established themselves in numbers, it would be necessary to establish a publishing house to look after their interests . . . an independent publishing house should serve the cultural struggle, in the broader national liberation struggle in our country.³⁵

Because of his experience, as Seroke recalls, “in the room, I was the only one who understood the inner workings of a publishing house, and then they said, ‘When you have the time, just start that publishing house.’”³⁶ And so he did, and Skotaville was established.

Black Control from Start to Finish: Idealism and Activism

Skotaville was set up “to produce black literature that is relevant and contemporary – and to do it under black control from start to finish . . . all our books reflect black people doing something for themselves.”³⁷ The publisher was run, at least initially, as a non-profit collective, with a steering committee made up mostly of members of the African Writers Association (AWA). These included established writers such as Sipho Sepamla, Es’kia Mphahlele, Matsemela Manaka, Miriam Tlali, Nape Motana, and Don Mattera.³⁸ In practice, however, Seroke and Mutloatse managed and ran the press.

Describing themselves as “the first indigenous publishing house in South Africa,” Skotaville adopted a pen nib as their logo, which resembles a spear when laid on its side.³⁹ Mutloatse chose the name to honour T.D. Mweliso Skota, an editor and publisher from the 1930s and former General Secretary of the African National Congress (ANC), who produced an African “Who’s Who,” the *African Yearly Register* (1930).⁴⁰ Brochures foregrounded Skota’s role as a publishing pioneer, “a printer, a designer, researcher and writer.”⁴¹ The rest of the name came from the black townships, as Skota was from Pimville, and the painful memory of Sharpeville remained fresh. Mutloatse and Seroke shared Skota’s pan-African views, seeing themselves as “part of a continent that’s trying to assert itself and rewrite part of its own history.”⁴² The historical connection was clear, as pan-African views of the early twentieth century mapped closely onto the Black Consciousness ideals of the 1980s. These common values were reflected in Skotaville’s mission, with its clear focus on black writing and audiences, as well as black ownership: phrases such as “black publishing,” “nation-building,” “indigenous publishing,” and “relevant books” recur, as well as “liberation” and “ideas to liberate our minds”; “writing that has a purpose”; “writing that promotes the liberation struggle in all aspects of life in Africa today.”⁴³ Mutloatse emphasized that “all our books reflect black people doing something for themselves,” while Seroke noted that “our difference will be that we are not saying, ‘This is how blacks live,’ but ‘This is how *we* live.’ The publishing house will be part of the people and it is established by them.”⁴⁴ In their own history, they phrased their mission in terms of social and political change:

Skotaville, as indigenous publishers, aim at pioneering contemporary books on theological themes confronting racist/capitalist South Africa, as part of its human rights objective and one of the national aspirations of the dispossessed majority, who are now not only demanding to be treated decently as human beings, but are also unhesitatingly insisting on determining the destiny of this great/tragic country like never before.⁴⁵

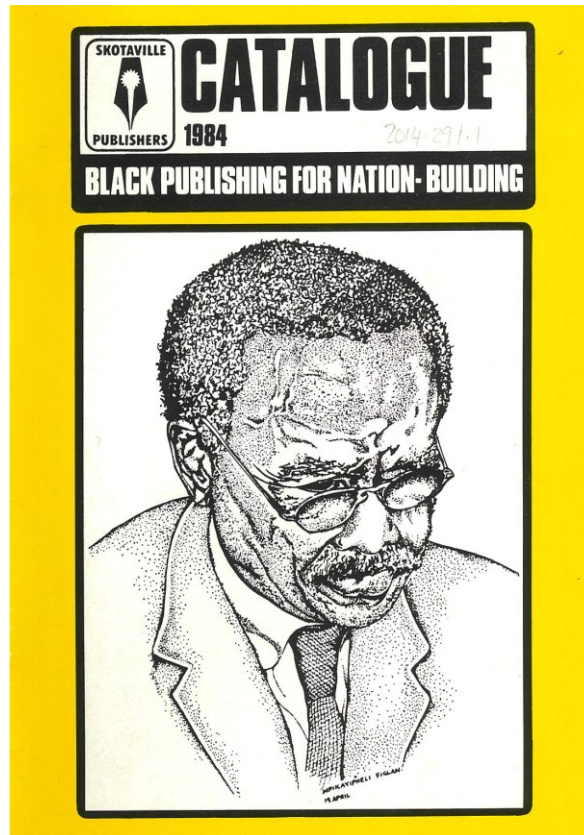


Figure 1. The cover of Skotaville’s 1984 catalogue, showing the branding and an image of Mweliso Skota (Amazwi Archive)

The origins and mission of Skotaville are thus “deeply rooted in the black national struggle.”⁴⁶ Mutloatse explicitly saw his role as print activism: “Publishing for me,” he noted in an interview, “was a calling, as a black man. I found it a historical mission.”⁴⁷ Another profile highlighted this mission in his writing: “Ideological convictions have played an important role in guiding Mutloatse’s literary activities. His projects are undertaken with a clearly-defined purpose.”⁴⁸ In spite of their work at Ravan, the Skotaville publishers felt that “when we started publishing we were ignorant. We had no publishing experience.”⁴⁹ Expertise was not the point, though—“the idea was to do it, not to ask how we were going to do it. So we went ahead and registered without a cent in our pockets.”⁵⁰ Clearly, this was not so much a business enterprise as an activist project.

Indeed, as a business Skotaville got off to a shaky start. It was registered in late 1982 but only started operating around May 1983 in a borrowed office in Johannesburg, with a small amount of seed funding to cover the first six

months. The printers did the first printing on credit.⁵¹ (Seroke recalled that “we had – truly – not half a cent!”⁵²) Working as a collective, the press also depended on “donor-authors, donor-readers, and donor-contributors,” as well as a small staff complement: Mpikayipheli Figlan (a book designer and typesetter, who had worked on *Staffrider* and with the Medu arts collective), Joe Masinga (distribution and book dispatcher), and Margaret Hlatshwayo (switchboard and reception).⁵³ According to Seroke, the aim of the cooperative structure was to “accommodate on a personal level, non-patronisingly, the works of black writers.”⁵⁴ Even with such a clear black focus, the racially stratified society found it difficult to take the directors seriously: “People still don’t believe we are on our own. They still look for the white person in control.”⁵⁵

Skotaville started strongly with a relaunch of the literary magazine *The Classic* and two very well-known authors, Bishop Desmond Tutu and the poet Don Mattera. These first two authors represent the two main strands of the early publishing: a Black Theology series, and the Skotaville literary series. Publishing Mattera emerged from a personal connection and his involvement in the AWA. The timing was fortunate because Mattera, an articulate supporter of Black Consciousness, could be published under his own name for the first time since 1973. “We were always publishing Don Mattera under a pseudonym,” Seroke recalled, “but now, we collected his poetry and we told him, when the banning order ends . . . that day we’ll send the manuscript to the printers.”⁵⁶ While the publishers were taking a risk as the ban could have been reinstated, Mattera’s collection, *Azanian Love Song*, sold out and needed to be reprinted within a year. Tutu was well-known as the secretary-general of the South African Council of Churches, and was one of the patrons of Skotaville. His support proved crucial in “breathing life into a publishing dream.”⁵⁷ Seroke described the impact of Tutu’s enthusiastic support, which included the contribution of his own work, the positive exposure gained from a globally recognized figure, and connection to networks that would bring in funding, readers, and additional authors:

So when Desmond heard we’re going to establish a book publishing house, he said, Okay, what can I do for you? Is the critical issue to raise funding? Then he said, I will point you to people who can help you. It also meant, with his support, most of the people who were supporting us with

his backing, wanted theology books. So when Skotaville started we published a lot of books on black theology.⁵⁸ Tutu's *Hope and Suffering*, a collection of sermons, sold out 5,000 paperback copies as well as a hardcover edition of 1,000, and quickly went into a second, and then a third printing. The title also garnered international interest, given Tutu's anti-apartheid credentials and especially after his Nobel Prize for Peace in 1984; subsidiary rights were sold in the United States and UK, and nine foreign language translations were produced. It became Skotaville's most successful title. "But the irony," Mutloatse pointed out, "is that we were actually taking a chance publishing that book because it was published even before Bishop Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize. The peace prize certainly helped the sale of the book and Bishop Tutu has even written to us to commend Skotaville for being willing to take the risk with the book."⁵⁹

Publishing Mattera and Tutu sent a strong message about Skotaville's political leanings, "an indication of the degree of resistance to attempts at cultural erosion of the blacks."⁶⁰ However, the focus of the press was not only "overtly political," as the third title was a collection of African folk tales translated into English. Mutloatse commented that this children's book, *Iso le Nkbono* by B.L. Leshoai, was "just as important to 'liberation' as the compilation of political speeches by Bishop Tutu."⁶¹

None of these titles was commissioned in the traditional sense of publishing. As one of the only black publishers, however, Skotaville was soon inundated by manuscripts. While there were many aspiring authors and many stories that writers burned to tell, Seroke recalls that the majority of the manuscripts submitted were not of a high standard.⁶² For him, political activism did not supersede literary standards:

We'll be publishing really topical books. Some will be political, and so on, but on the literary side, we don't want to be seen to be pushing writers who have not necessarily grasped the art of writing. The association [AWA] has consciously been trying to influence Skotaville to exercise literary merit on each case. We don't want to publish a play because it will have a sociological interest.⁶³

However, while Seroke emphasized literary merit, Mutloatse argued that "we must create our own standards."⁶⁴ He saw existing standards as defined by the white publishing context they had left, and asserted Skotaville's independence: "We take into account whether a thing is relevant to the

aspirations of the black community. We have our own concept of what is good for us. This time, we are the ones who decide and we don't ask for people to approve what we are doing."⁶⁵

The audience was primarily black, with no intention on the part of authors to cater to white readers. "Whatever different things we may be doing," Es'kia Mphahlele declared in an interview, "we black writers are no longer talking to the white man, pleading, trying to appeal to common decency. No. We are writing at one level to arouse and strengthen each other as an oppressed people, and at another to whoever may care to tune in."⁶⁶ Focusing on reaching—and in effect creating—a black grassroots readership, Skotaville used informal distribution channels and worked with reading clubs like the Soweto Reading Circle, run by Mphahlele. They aimed to encourage black people to read as widely as possible: "People must not think that reading ends in a classroom."⁶⁷ The publication of a book about soccer in 1983 gives a sense of the broad, mass market and their interests which Skotaville aimed to target. While the soccer book did not sell well—perhaps because the primary target market had little money to buy books, or little inclination to read books without photographs—the title was externally funded and thus contributed to the shaky bottom line. An interview with the Afrikaans *Rapport* newspaper highlights that the audience was both black and white, but that the publishers felt it necessary to do their own distribution because of a lack of willingness to stock their books in bookshops.⁶⁸

With the focus on "black publishing for nation-building," the publishing list soon expanded to reflect topical issues relating to both political and cultural activism in South Africa during the 1980s. Seroke and Mutloatse used their networks in newspapers, literary journals, and reading circles to attract authors and manuscripts. Given the close relationship between political activism and religious activism in South Africa, it was not surprising that the first significant publishing niche was "a theology that is grounded in our cultural as well as political experience of oppression."⁶⁹ More than twenty theology titles were produced from well-known activists and clerics such as Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane, James Cone (whose work was banned), and Gabriel Setiloane. The literary Skotaville Series, which was Seroke's main interest, matched this output with poem, plays, and novels from authors such as Siphos Sepamla, Es'kia Mphahlele and Essop Patel. Miriam Tlali, whose

Amandla is cited at the beginning of this paper, brought her next novel to Skotaville. The blurb written for Tlali's *Mibloti* (meaning "tears") emphasized the importance of publishing black women writers and their intersectionality: "In South Africa black means trouble, and black woman adds an extra dimension of subjugation and oppression." (However, the Skotaville publishing output shows a clear preference for male authors. The lack of focus on women contributed to Dinah Lefakane leaving Skotaville and setting up the womanist publisher Seriti sa Sechaba in 1988, the first publishing house to cater exclusively for black women.⁷⁰) The literary series was supported by the AWA, and seminars were offered for librarians, writers, and other "cultural workers." Seroke was particularly committed to such training, as he had been active in organizing writers' collectives and seminars since his days at Ravan, and he carried this commitment through to Skotaville.

As the political scene evolved in South Africa, so too did the focus of Skotaville's publishing list. In 1983, the United Democratic Front was formed as a broad umbrella for anti-apartheid civil society groups, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions was established. Acting as a front for the banned ANC and other political organizations, the trade union movement became increasingly important as a wing of the anti-apartheid struggle. Skotaville established a History Series with a variety of titles highlighting black resistance to apartheid, and a Workers' Series, *Izwe Labasebenzi*. The latter series published a number of scholarly titles on the trade union movement as well as workers' education books, including training manuals funded by the International Labor Office and World Health Organization. In addition to the trade sector, an attempt was made to access the educational publishing market through the Skotaville Educational Division—a rather ambitious name for a "division" that was actually just one of the areas covered by Seroke and Mutloatse, who continued to make the main editorial decisions.

The list is thus varied, and grew and developed over time. But does the publisher's output support the assertion, as claimed by a review of Skotaville in 1991, that the press "consciously support[ed] the development and nurturing of black authors, African languages and black ideological positions"?⁷¹ The Black Consciousness principles of creating awareness and expressing self-identity are clearly central to Skotaville's catalogue, and can also be seen in the design decisions. The covers are focused on black bodies,

sometimes traditional and colourful and sometimes portrayed in documentary-style black and white photographs, but all of which foreground and embody the black experience. Many black authors were supported through writers' seminars and published in both fiction and non-fiction. At the same time, white authors whose work was aligned with the ideals of resistance and social change were also published, such as Tom Lodge, Tim Couzens, and Charles Villa-Vicencio. The range of languages published was limited, with only a few children's titles in African languages and all the rest in English. The choice of publishing in English was made deliberately to increase the potential market, but in spite of a few very successful books, it is doubtful if the majority of books reached their intended black audience: "In retrospect," Seroke says, "I wonder if the books we sold were really read. Certainly, though . . . we were able to reach many people and mobilise them with struggle literature."⁷² Commentator Aggrey Klaaste paid the press a back-handed compliment in 1985 when he summed up their operations: "The best that can be said of Skotaville is that they seem to be one of the few black-manned outfits that is showing a reasonable amount of enterprise. They may not be the best publishers in the world, but by God they get some books onto the bookstalls."⁷³

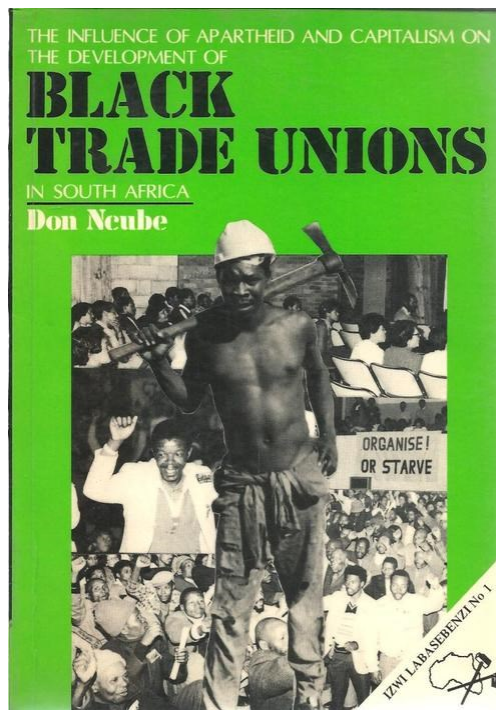


Figure 2. Cover image of *Black Trade Unions*

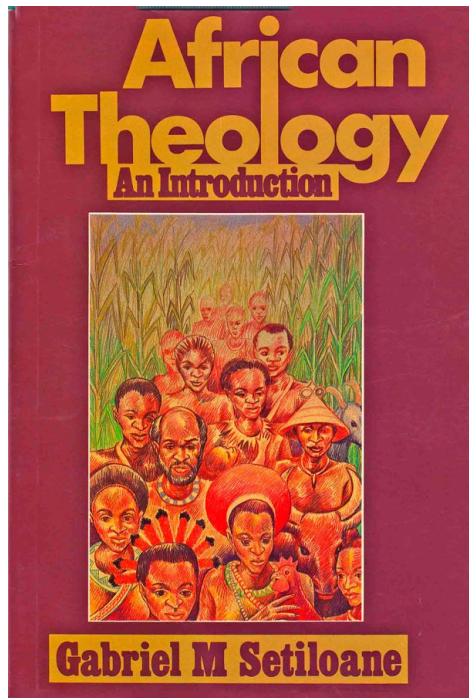


Figure 3. Cover image of *African Theology*

Harassment

Any consideration of activist publishing in South Africa would be incomplete without attending to the effects of government repression and harassment. Skotaville attracted the attention of the censors almost immediately. They revived an important literary magazine, *The Classic*, which “had the distinction” of being promptly banned, as Mutloatse ruefully observed.⁷⁴ The magazine was condemned as undesirable because it “aggrandised and idolised” the ANC, a banned organization at the time.⁷⁵ Seroke wrote to the Publications Appeal Board to emphasize the cultural and literary aims of the journal: “[W]e do not think that it is an undesirable publication, because— ever since it was established in 1963—it had served as a vehicle of South African black literature for generation after generation of creative writers.”⁷⁶ The appeal against the ban was successful, but only after legal costs were incurred and potential sales lost. “Being a banned writer or having one’s writings banned is a hazard of becoming a black writer in South Africa. In that first, temporarily banned issue of *Classic*, Mphahlele wrote: ‘Life for an oppressed person is one long, protracted, agonizing compromise.’”⁷⁷

Although the censorship legislation relaxed to some extent over the course of the 1980s, the States of Emergency of 1985 and 1987 imposed strict restrictions on the media. Skotaville deliberately billed themselves as the “voice of the voiceless” and declared that they would not take censorship into account when deciding on a new manuscript: “Publish and be damned.”⁷⁸ Seroke complained about the new “repressive tolerance” in censorship, and explicitly aligned “restrictions on the black imagination with paranoias about the anonymity of the ‘blue pencil.’”⁷⁹ The more politically risky books in Skotaville’s catalogue tended to be non-fiction focusing on political history or social justice; for instance, doubts were raised about the viability of Mokgethi Motlhabi’s *Black Resistance to Apartheid*, as well as Fatima Meer’s books on Robert McBride, Andrew Zondo, and especially her 1988 biography of Nelson Mandela, *Higher than Hope*. (At the time, Mandela was still in prison, and could not be quoted in print.) In contrast to the expected ban, however, the Meer biography of Mandela was a bestseller, going into a third printing within its first year. With good sales and a donor subvention, it became one of Skotaville’s most successful titles.⁸⁰

The perception is that the crackdown on the media and anti-apartheid voices had a devastating impact on publishers like Skotaville, with one commentator later summing up the period:

Skotaville has never had a smooth sailing in its commitment to publish books that projected an alternative and independent black perspective... Skotaville never enjoyed the cooperation of the apartheid government. Most of the books it published were banned. White-controlled distribution networks wavered in dealing with Skotaville because of stringent censorship laws.⁸¹

In fact, Skotaville was only minimally affected by direct censorship, as just a few titles such as *The Classic*, James Cone’s *Black Theology and the Black Church*, and Mokgethi Motlhabi’s *Black Resistance to Apartheid* were banned. The main impact was indirect “subtle censorship,” which resulted in reduced sales and distribution. For instance, there were problems with the mainstream bookselling chain CNA refusing to stock so-called “sensitive books,” including those that had been unbanned.⁸² The publishers also had to sign a general indemnity with their printers, to guard against possible losses for goods being seized by the security police.

It was the political activities of individual staff members which brought them into direct conflict with the authorities. Seroke is a particular example. As early as 1979, he was being harassed and interrogated for his political involvement, specifically with the Pan Africanist Congress.⁸³ His determination is clear from comments made at the time: “We are not doing it because we have eyes on the money. It’s bigger than that and we know we are going to suffer.”⁸⁴ He remained an active member of the PAC throughout the 1980s. Even though he used his publishing activities and opportunities to travel to Europe as a cover for his PAC work, he felt that “my PAC work helped, rather than hindered, the spread of ideas as a challenge to the apartheid authorities.”⁸⁵ On 8 September 1987, Seroke was detained under the Internal Security Act as he was leaving the Skotaville offices.⁸⁶ He remained in detention for several years. In his absence, Mutloatse assumed control over the press.

Changes and Compromise

Independent and activist publishers walk a tightrope balancing commercial viability and radical publishing. Kelwyn Sole describes this problem in the local context:

the interests of local and multinational publishing houses are by no means necessarily the same as the interests of political writers. Attempts to set up black-controlled publishing houses (such as BLAC Publishing House and, more recently, Skotaville Publishers) will only partly alleviate this problem, as black commercial concerns are subject to the same constraints and demands as white ones, even if their books are subsidised. Concern with commercial interests and individual success will seriously undermine claims of being the “people’s artists.”⁸⁷

Skotaville was vocal about the mission taking precedence over profit, and maintaining independence even if this negatively impacted the press’s sustainability. The same pattern is observable in the history of activist and black-owned publishers in other parts of the world. For instance, at Bogle L’Overture in the UK, Eric Huntley emphasized being “self-independent not relying on white people to fund the company,” and Andrew Fearnley describes similar pressures on the Black Panther Party’s print programme.⁸⁸ The reality of funding a business, however, led to some—perhaps inevitable—compromises. For example, Mutloatse sought out

commercially-funded titles, such as a celebration of the Kaizer Chiefs soccer team. He was gratified that black celebrities were choosing to be published by Skotaville, such as the “vote of confidence in Skotaville when [the singer] Miriam Makeba asked that her recent book – *Makeba, My Story* – be published by us at home.”⁸⁹ Another income stream came with the launch of an award in 1987, the Skotaville Indigenous Languages Prize. Funded by corporate liquor manufacturers, the prize called on “unsung heroes and sheroes” to submit their unpublished work for consideration.⁹⁰ The prize was intended to bring in funding for work in other African languages, but had very limited success.

Another source of funds was international sales. Understanding the limited size of the home market, Seroke and Mutloatse attended the Frankfurt Book Fair, the International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books in the UK, and the Zimbabwe International Book Fair whenever funding allowed. For a non-profit organization involved in the anti-apartheid movement, it was important to build networks, to reach a wider audience, and to harness the support of the global black activist movement. A significant example of Skotaville’s role in international Africanist networks is its participation in the establishment of the African Books Collective, which was formed to market and distribute African published books to northern markets.

Even with such initiatives, external donor funding became essential.⁹¹ External donors supported oppositional publishers as a contribution to the liberation effort, and Skotaville received support from the Rockefeller Foundation (e.g. to engage a full-time book designer in 1983), the Ford Foundation, and the Equal Opportunity Foundation.⁹² Seroke recalls that many of these grants were supported by the black staff in these organizations: “They understood what we were saying, when we said we need a black publishing house, or a black-run publishing house. And they came and helped us with that. With seed capital, with funding.”⁹³ African Bank was the first black South African body to offer funding, followed by church groups. Marie Philip (wife of the oppositional publisher David Philip) noted that Skotaville were “a non-profit publishing house, and they’ve always been subsidized and sponsored—and rightly so—as the first black publishing house that really attempted to give prominence to as many black writers as

they could.”⁹⁴ It was difficult to rely on donors, however; Mutloatse complained that “financially we depend on handouts.”⁹⁵ “There were times,” he said later, “when the jungle seemed impassable, when we felt the problems—especially those of a financial nature—were not worth the trouble.”⁹⁶ Seroke was also uncomfortable with the press’s reliance on external funding, as were many authors. “As Skotaville approached its tenth birthday,” he recalls, “we needed a commercial success to boost its financial state and free the publishing house from relying on donations.”⁹⁷

The 1990s were watershed years for South Africa in general, and for all anti-apartheid organizations. All expectations were that the oppositional publishers would have a head start in publishing under the new dispensation, due to their reputation, their backlist, and their connections. There was great optimism for their role in the new South Africa: “By the year 2000, Skotaville will have grown into a young giant, self-sufficient . . . not only in South Africa, but also throughout Southern Africa.”⁹⁸ As the political situation in South Africa changed, however, foreign donors redirected their funds away from civil society and towards the ANC. The effects were catastrophic for the non-profit sector, including small presses, at the same time as the broader publishing industry was transforming to meet new demands. Alternative publishers raised the alarm that “the futures of most oppositional publishers are at risk unless they can find funding from inside South Africa or become self-supporting,” recognizing that “it is virtually impossible for indigenous, socially committed general publishers to operate viably on commercial principles.”⁹⁹ With increased competition from mainstream publishers eager to show their changing credentials by publishing black authors, Skotaville’s distinctive role was in danger. They thus made a concerted effort to reorient themselves.

In archival documents, there is evidence of a rethinking of mission and finances in the early 1990s, to become a “commercial operation with a social conscience.”¹⁰⁰ We see this wrestling with the past and the future, an attempt to balance mission and commercial sustainability, in a 1991 statement from Mutloatse:

The establishment of an African publishing house such as Skotaville is an inevitable step in the process of African emancipation, a fulfilment of a cultural dream which has

to be translated into an economic reality—the ultimate objective of our independence.¹⁰¹

With the aim of moving towards self-sufficiency, Mutloatse approached donors to assess the publisher's operations.¹⁰² Consultants appointed by USAID in 1990 conducted an external evaluation of the publisher, finding that, “the business problem facing the company is the classic one of static sales being made at too low a margin over a period when overhead costs have grown considerably.”¹⁰³ At the time, decisions to publish were made by Mutloatse, sometimes using outside readers, with little to no formal commissioning or costing. The consultants noted that Skotaville showed “entrepreneurial flair” but poor marketing.¹⁰⁴ Suggestions were made to improve marketing, refine list-building by relying on standard procedures rather than instincts, and to do proper budgeting.

Perhaps more importantly, this assessment—focused as it was on the language of “the business problem”—also suggested that Skotaville's activist ideology was hampering its development as a sustainable publisher, and that values of engagement and resistance were too static to adapt progressively to changing circumstances. With a significant lack of sensitivity to the principles on which the publisher was founded, the consultants argued that

all the authors, customers and friends of Skotaville seemed to agree on one thing: that Skotaville needed to move away from its image as a “Black” publishing house. While the substance and content of their publishing might reflect African experience and African languages, it was expressed that South Africa was searching for a unified national culture and that the old Black-White perceptions were no longer appropriate.¹⁰⁵

The argument was that the “new South Africa” required a shift from the black-white polarisation that had led to the disbanding of PEN to a discourse emphasising nation-building and a non-racial culture, a “rainbow nation.”¹⁰⁶

The de-emphasis on activism led to a split in the press. Following a four-year prison sentence, Jaki Seroke returned to Skotaville in 1991, only to leave a year later. One reason is that the consultants recommended eliminating the writers' development workshops that Seroke had devoted so much time and energy to, and he was increasingly sidelined.¹⁰⁷ He was suspended in a letter from Mutloatse in 1992, ostensibly for belonging to a political organization and taking too active a role as a member of the PAC.¹⁰⁸ This can only have

been a pretext, as Seroke argues: “My political involvement had become a matter of contention, and it was said that I would make political decisions favourable to the PAC in my editorial work.”¹⁰⁹ The publisher David Philip commented in an interview, “I think if you were to ask Mothobi Mutloatse, he would say that Skotaville is not as PAC-leaning as it used to be. He is trying to change that image.”¹¹⁰ While archival sources and the interviewees are silent on the underlying reasons, there was clearly a personal falling out exacerbated by the failure to agree on the best way forward in the new circumstances, in particular regarding the move towards commercialism and what Seroke must have seen as compromise to the mission.

Thus, the focus shifted, replacing political and cultural activism with revenue streams and profitability. The most opportunities lay in the lucrative educational publishing market, but the sector was dominated by entrenched Afrikaner-supported publishers and multinationals. Glenn Moss of Ravan observed in the early 1990s that “the enemy is no longer apartheid, but the power of those transnational and other interests which tend to dominate educational publishing.”¹¹¹ Framing an essentially commercial decision as an ideological one—to produce “viable, critical, credible, and sound educationally relevant materials”¹¹²—a funding proposal to distribute backlist titles to schools and libraries was developed with David Philip and Ravan called “Promoting a Reading Culture for Democracy.”¹¹³ This project was partly funded in 1992 by Evangelisches Missionswerk, but it came to an end when funding stopped. Skotaville continued to submit titles for consideration in the educational sector, and their fortunes were greatly affected by the occasional titles approved for schools (e.g. a title selling more than 12,000 copies in 1990), but these remained the exception.

To improve market share, Mutloatse brokered an investment deal with Thebe Investment Corporation, the ANC’s trading arm, and the British multinational Macmillan, to establish Nolwazi Educational Publishers in 1993. The venture was launched with much fanfare as a black empowerment deal; the marketing manager, Darkie Molontoa, boasted that “apart from Skotaville publishers, NEP is the only independent black-owned publishing company in South Africa” (though at the same time he opined that “black publishing in South Africa has never been a viable enterprise”).¹¹⁴ Optimistically, Mutloatse predicted that “Nolwazi will be more than just a

publishing house. We plan to act as a catalyst for authors, teachers, and the community to help develop the educational curricula for tomorrow.”¹¹⁵ The deal was met with much scepticism, with accusations of nepotism and window-dressing, as well as a perception that the merger would mean the end of Skotaville’s independence: “Skotaville, once an independent black publishing house, has been taken over by Macmillan.”¹¹⁶ While the deal did not immediately lead to Skotaville’s demise, it was not successful.

What this deal did reveal, however, was the increasing interest from mainstream publishers and multinationals in the opportunities offered by the changing government and new education systems in South Africa. Authors who had previously only published with avowedly oppositional publishers now turned to the larger commercial publishers. The space occupied by the activist publishers was narrowing. In 1996 the publisher was transformed into the Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, “broadening the scope of the publishing house to make it a vehicle through which Mr Mutloatse continues his publishing activities as well as several other interests in the development and growth of the arts.”¹¹⁷ With this departure Skotaville, as defined by its original mission and character, came to an end. The Trust continues to work in the area of arts and culture, but is not a politically motivated publishing house.

Conclusion

Skotaville is a unique case in the history of South African publishing, both for its role in publishing black authors and its black ownership. Within the broader history of Black Consciousness and political resistance, the publishing house was an experiment in “black control, from start to finish” that emerged as a deliberate response to white ownership and control, especially after the attempts at building a non-racial PEN failed. The books published by Skotaville—more than 150 titles from over 100 authors—can be read as simultaneous political interventions and cultural affirmations of black identity. Books and writing were used for political aims, to conscientize people, but also to celebrate black literary and cultural heritage and expression.

Skotaville’s history reveals that, in spite of the press being run as a collective, and in addition to the initial role of the African Writers Association, the

character and aims of the publishers themselves were important in determining its direction. Mthobi Mutloatse and Jaki Seroke had little initial experience, but archives and interviews demonstrate their ongoing attempts to overcome the obstacles of author development, funding, government repression, and small markets to publish some of the most significant black authors of the 1980s and 1990s. As an experiment in publishing, Skotaville can thus be seen as successful—but only to a limited extent, as its commercial viability was always uncertain.

As Black Consciousness declined in the 1980s, calls continued for black authors writing for black readers, but also shifted to a more inclusive language of the “rainbow nation.” The general political and cultural climate supported a shift from the black-white polarisation that had led to the disbanding of PEN to a discourse emphasising national identity, democratic nation-building, and a non-racial culture. Skotaville’s rise and fall reflects the intensity and then decline of the anti-apartheid movement. With the transition to a post-apartheid society through the 1990s, activist black publishers lost many of their funding channels. In a context where the new ANC-led government showed little inclination to support independent publishers, they were also unable to leverage their political connections to gain an advantage in the schools market. The need to adapt led to a growing schism between ideological and commercial interests. One cannot help but conclude that publishers whose mission is too closely aligned with developing a counter-culture of print will fail if they cannot find ways of sustaining themselves once the political situation changes.

Contrary to expectations, however, this dichotomy has only widened in the post-apartheid period, with criticism of appropriation and the co-opting of black authors and books as commodities by mainstream publishers. Unfortunately, unlike black power movements in other contexts, the Black Consciousness and anti-apartheid movements in South Africa did not create a sustainable legacy of independent, black-owned publishers. Each new black-owned publisher is still hailed for its novelty, instead of following in a tradition of black publishing. A black print culture is thus still under development and activists are still required.

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Notes

¹ Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009), Chapter 5. See also Elizabeth le Roux, *Publishing against Apartheid South Africa: A Case Study of Ravan Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

² For a more in-depth discussion of the cultural and literary aims of BC, see Leslie Anne Hadfield, *Liberation and Development: Black Consciousness Community Programs in South Africa* (Michigan State University Press, 2016).

³ Mel Watkins, "The Black Revolution in Books," *New York Times* 10 (1969); Mike Kantey, "Publishing in South Africa," Foreword to *Africa Bibliography 1989* (London: International African Institute, 1990), xii.

⁴ Sipho Sepamla, "The Black Writer in South Africa Today" *New Classic* 3, (1976), 121.

⁵ Mbulelo Mzamane, "The Short Story Tradition in Black South Africa," *Marang: Journal of Language and Literature* 1, no. 1 (1977).

⁶ John F. Povey, Review of "On the Eve" by Boyd Makhoba, *African Book Publishing Record*, 1986.

⁷ Jeremy Poynting, "Interventions in Caribbean Writing," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 10, no. 2 (2013): 13; Julien Hage, *Maspero, Feltrinelli, Wagenbach, une nouvelle génération d'éditeurs politiques d'extrême gauche en Europe occidentale*, Thèse, Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, 2010.

⁸ Mothobi Mutloatse, "Indigenous Publishing in South Africa: The Case of Skotaville Publishers," in *Publishing and Development in the Third World*, ed. Philip Altbach (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992), 216.

⁹ Tom Penfold, "Black Consciousness and the politics of writing the nation in South Africa" (PhD. diss., University of Birmingham, 2013), 57.

¹⁰ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 66.

¹¹ The role of these magazines in the broader liberation struggle has received only cursory scholarly attention to date.

¹² Jaki Seroke, interview by Tshepo Moloi, Johannesburg, South Africa, November 11, 2011. Quoted in “Development of Competing Political Ideologies: Post-1976,” *SAHA: Archive for Justice*, accessed March 30, 2023, http://www.saha.org.za/tembisa/competing_political_ideologies_post_1976.htm.

¹³ Mafika Gwala, “Writing as a Cultural Weapon” in *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*, ed. M. J. Daymond, J. U. Jacobs, & Margaret Lenta (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1984), 37–53; Mafika Gwala, “Towards a National Culture,” *Staffrider* 8, no. 1 (1989): 71.

¹⁴ Joyce Ozyński and Andy Mason, “Committed Art – Where Is It?” *Staffrider* 3, no. 4 (1980): 14, emphasis in original.

¹⁵ Rob Gaylard, “Writing Black: The South African Short Story by Black Writers” (PhD. diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2008), 15–16.

¹⁶ Mbulelo Mzamane, “Literature and Politics among Blacks in South Africa,” *New Classic* 5 (1978), 42.

¹⁷ Philippa Ireland, “Laying the Foundations: New Beacon Books, Bogle L’Ouverture Press and the Politics of Black British Publishing,” *E-rea: Revue électronique d’études sur le monde anglophone* 11, no. 1 (2013), 83.

¹⁸ Seroke, “The Voice of the Voiceless: An Interview with Jaki Seroke,” interview by Carol Bundy, *African Book Publishing Record* 10, no. 4 (1984): 201–206.

¹⁹ Mothobi Mutloatse, ed., *Forced Landing* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980), 1.

²⁰ Sepamla, *New Classic*, 21.

²¹ Kelwyn Sole, “Political Fiction, Representation and the Canon: The Case of Mtutuzeli Matshoba,” *English in Africa* 28, no. 2 (2001): 38.

²² John K. Young, *Black Writers, White Publishers: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth-Century African American Literature* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).

²³ According to the PEN South Africa website, “PEN” (an acronym for “Poets, Essayists, Novelists”) “was one of the world’s first non-governmental organisations and amongst the first international bodies advocating for human rights”; PEN South Africa was founded in 1927 (“History,” PEN South Africa, accessed March 31, 2023, <https://pensouthafrica.co.za/about-us/who-we-are/history/>).

²⁴ Mike Kirkwood to Mbulelo Mzamane, 24 May 1982, Pan Macmillan Archive, Mzamane file, Macmillan Publishers, London.

²⁵ Peter McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 143.

²⁶ Mzamane to Kirkwood, June 1980, Pan Macmillan Archive, Mzamane file, Macmillan Publishers, London.

²⁷ Mutloatse in Pat Schwartz, “Books Putting Black Views into Words,” *Rand Daily Mail*, March 10, 1984, 6; Mutloatse, interview by the author, September 16, 2019.

²⁸ Seroke, “Voice of the Voiceless,” 201.

²⁹ Seroke in “Classic Is Back as Writers Plan to Publish Their Work,” *Rand Daily Mail*, December 10, 1982.

³⁰ Mzamane to Kirkwood, 6 May 1980, Pan Macmillan Archive, Mzamane file, Macmillan Publishers, London.

³¹ Dorothy Driver, “South Africa,” *Journal of Commonwealth Publishing* 17, no. 2 (1982): 150-62; Mike Kirkwood, “Reflections on PEN,” *Sesame* 3 (Summer 1983): 22–26.

³² AWA statement, quoted in Nigel Williams, “Lack of a Platform,” *Index on Censorship* 13, no. 5 (1984): 34.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Barbara Ludman, “A Publishing House Fuelled on Goodwill,” *Weekly Mail*, March 27, 1987, 17.

³⁵ Seroke, “Voice of the Voiceless,” 201.

³⁶ Seroke, interview by the author, 2019.

³⁷ Paul van Slambrouck, “Black South African Writers ‘Break Free,’ Publish Own Books,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 16, 1984, 39–40.

³⁸ The make-up of the Board differs according to different sources, with the names mentioned being supplemented by Modise Khoza, Bernadette Mosala of the South African Council of Churches, George Negota, Father Buti Tlhagale, Nokuzala Mthembu, and Willie Mokoia.

³⁹ The spear recalls the ANC’s armed wing, whose name translates as “spear of the nation.” The term “indigenous” in South Africa refers to the black majority, but “indigenous publishing” is also used as a less politicized synonym for “local publishing” (Skotaville, “Brief History and Background of Skotaville Publishers,” brochure, c. 1980s, Amazwi Archive, Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, Makhanda, South Africa).

⁴⁰ Mutloatse describes Skota’s background in “Indigenous Publishing in South Africa,” 212. See also J.T. Campbell, “T.D. Mveli Skota and the Making and Unmaking of a Black Elite” (paper, University of the Witwatersand History Workshop, Johannesburg, South Africa, February 9–14, 1987), 6.

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- ⁴¹ Skotaville, “Brief History.”
- ⁴² Schwartz, “Books Putting Black Views into Words,” 6.
- ⁴³ Mutloatse, “Indigenous Publishing in South Africa,” 211.
- ⁴⁴ Seroke, “Voice of the Voiceless,” 202.
- ⁴⁵ Skotaville, “Brief History.”
- ⁴⁶ Maud Motanyane, “Skotaville ‘Rooted in Struggle,’” *The Star*, April 13, 1984, 6.
- ⁴⁷ Mojafela Moseki, “Men with a Mission,” *Sowetan*, December 8, 1988, 6.
- ⁴⁸ “Focus on Writers: Mothobi Mutloatse,” *New Nation*, April 19-25, 1991, 22. Notably, this profile examines Mutloatse’s role as a writer, not a publisher.
- ⁴⁹ Moseki, ‘Men with a Mission.’”
- ⁵⁰ Mutloatse in Schwartz, “Books Putting Black Views into Words,” 6.
- ⁵¹ Motanyane, “Skotaville ‘Rooted in Struggle.’”
- ⁵² Seroke, “Voice of the Voiceless,” 201.
- ⁵³ Moseki, “Men with a Mission.”
- ⁵⁴ Seroke, interview in Alex Tetteh-Lartey, *BBC Arts in Africa*, 1984, 565. Complete transcript in Amazwi, BBC African Service folder, file 2011. 107. 6.
- ⁵⁵ Motanyane, “Skotaville ‘Rooted in Struggle.’”
- ⁵⁶ Seroke, interview, 2019.
- ⁵⁷ Z.B. Molefe, “How Tutu Breathed Life into a Publishing Dream . . . and Kept the Spirit of Skota Mweli Alive,” *City Press*, December 19, 1989, 10.
- ⁵⁸ Seroke, interview, 2019.
- ⁵⁹ Approximately 60,000 copies had been sold by 1986: 10,000 in SA, 15,000 in the US, 12,000 in the UK, and nearly 23,000 in the rest of Europe (cited in the unbelievably titled “Ching Chong for Tutu,” *New Nation*, March 25, 1986, 6).
- ⁶⁰ Pitika Ntuli, “Somewhere in the Ghetto,” *Index on Censorship* 1 (1984): 84–85.
- ⁶¹ Mutloatse, “Indigenous Publishing in South Africa,” 211.
- ⁶² Seroke, interview, 2019.
- ⁶³ Seroke, interviewed by William Brummer, “Violence Processing: Fighting Words and South Africa,” *Processed World* 25 (Fall 1990), <http://www.processedworld.com/Issues/issue25/25violenceprocessing.html>.

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- ⁶⁴ Van Slambrouck, “Black South African Writers ‘Break Free,’” 39.
- ⁶⁵ Schwartz, “Books Putting Black Views into Words,” 39.
- ⁶⁶ Van Slambrouck, “Black South African Writers ‘Break Free,’” 39.
- ⁶⁷ Kaizer Ngwenya, “Legacy of Black Books,” *Sunday Mirror*, July 8, 1984, 10.
- ⁶⁸ William Pretorius, “Nuwe swart uitgewer wil ander perspektief gee,” *Rapport*, March 4, 1984, 29.
- ⁶⁹ Bonganjolo Goba, *An Agenda for Black Theology* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1988), 95.
- ⁷⁰ The gender divide is clear. Speaking of Ravan and Skotaville, Miriam Tlali noted in an interview with Cecily Lockett: “I remember very clearly, because most of the people that take part in our organisations – like the political organisations – are men. You’ll always find that I’m the only woman there” (C. Lockett, “Interview with Miriam Tlali,” in *Between the Lines: Interviews with Bessie Head, Sheila Roberts, Ellen Kuzwayo, Miriam Tlali*, edited by C. Mackenzie and C. Clayton (Grahamstown: NELM, 1989), 71.
- ⁷¹ A. Higham and M. Kantey, *Skotaville Publishers in 1991: An Assessment* (Johannesburg: ABEL & USAID, March 1991), 4.
- ⁷² Jaki Seroke, *Zwelethu* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021), 85.
- ⁷³ Aggrey Klaaste, “Of Riots and Writers!” *Sowetan*, May 8, 1985, 4.
- ⁷⁴ Van Slambrouck, “Black South African Writers ‘Break Free,’” 39.
- ⁷⁵ Mutloatse, “Indigenous publishing in South Africa,” 211.
- ⁷⁶ Jaki Seroke to The Directorate of Publications, 13 January 1983, File P82/11/130, Cape Town Archives Repository (KAB), Cape Town, South Africa.
- ⁷⁷ Van Slambrouck, “Black South African Writers ‘Break Free,’” 39.
- ⁷⁸ Seroke, “Voice of the Voiceless,” 201.
- ⁷⁹ McDonald, *The Literature Police*, 154.
- ⁸⁰ “Biography of Nelson Mandela Is a Bestseller,” *Natal Witness*, January 12, 1989, 7.
- ⁸¹ “Birth of a New SA in Pictures,” *New Nation*, May 11, 1995, 12.
- ⁸² Maano Tuwani quoted in Z.B. Molefe, “Black Group Keeps Writing Alive,” *City Press*, February 26, 1995, 8.
- ⁸³ The PAC is a black political organization with differing views from the ANC. Seroke describes his active role in the PAC, sometimes under cover of Skotaville work, in his memoir, *Zwelethu*.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Marian Shinn, “The Voices They Won’t Let You Hear,” *Sunday Express*, November 25, 1979, 29.

⁸⁵ Seroke, *Zwelethu*, 134.

⁸⁶ “South African Publisher Detained,” *Index on Censorship* 16, no. 10 (1987): 11.

⁸⁷ Kelwyn Sole, “Culture, politics and the black writer: a critical look at prevailing assumptions,” *English in Africa* 10, no. 1 (1983), 70.

⁸⁸ Ireland, “Laying the Foundations,” 130; Andrew M. Fearnley, “The Black Panther Party’s Publishing Strategies and the Financial Underpinnings of Activism, 1968–1975,” *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 1 (2019): 195–217.

⁸⁹ Moseki, “Men with a Mission,” 6.

⁹⁰ Press release, Skotaville Indigenous Publishers Prize, 1987. Amazwi Archive, Skotaville folder.

⁹¹ David Philip, “Book Publishing Under and After Apartheid,” in *Book Publishing in South Africa for the 1990s* (Cape Town: National Library of South Africa, 1991), 45.

⁹² The Ford Foundation noted in 1985: “Support also went to Skotaville Publishers, South Africa’s only black-owned publishing house . . . to subsidize new books and to help expand Skotaville’s market.” Ford Foundation, *1986 Annual Report*, 61, <https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/2456/1986-annual-report.pdf>. The Equal Opportunity Foundation also gave a grant: “Skotaville Publishers, Johannesburg, which aims to be the literary voice of black South Africa, was given a grant to promote the general educational and cultural aspirations of the black community and to publish a biography of Nelson Mandela” (Ann McKinstry Micou, *U.S.-Related Corporate Trusts in South Africa: An Introduction and a Guide* [New York: Institute of International Education, 1989], 5).

⁹³ Seroke, interview, 2019.

⁹⁴ Geoffrey Davis and Holger Ehling, “Levelling the Playing Fields: An Interview with David and Marie Philip,” *Matatu* 11, no. 1 (1994), 136.

⁹⁵ Van Slambrouck, “Black South African Writers ‘Break Free,’” 39.

⁹⁶ Mutloatse, “Indigenous Publishing in South Africa,” 215.

⁹⁷ Seroke, *Zwelethu*, 188.

⁹⁸ Mutloatse, “Indigenous Publishing in South Africa,” 216–17.

⁹⁹ A similar situation can be found globally, when donor funding is redirected from cultural programmes. Philip, “Book Publishing Under and After Apartheid,” 45; Glenn Moss, “The Life and Changing Times of an Independent Publisher in South Africa,” *Logos* 4, no. 3 (1993), 146.

¹⁰⁰ Higham & Kantey, *Skotaville Publishers in 1991*, 1.

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- ¹⁰¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 5.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ¹⁰⁶ These are terms commonly used in the 1990s to describe the changing dispensation.
- ¹⁰⁷ Higham & Kantey, *Skotaville Publishers in 1991*, 10.
- ¹⁰⁸ Mutloatse to Seroke, 18 June 1992, Amazwi Archives.
- ¹⁰⁹ Seroke, *Zwelethu*, 188.
- ¹¹⁰ Davis & Ehling, “Levelling the Playing Fields,” 136.
- ¹¹¹ Moss, “The Life and Changing Times,” 146.
- ¹¹² Higham & Kantey, *Skotaville Publishers in 1991*.
- ¹¹³ Documents available at Amazwi, David Philip collection, folder 2009.92.2.3.1.2.
- ¹¹⁴ “Birth of a New SA in Pictures,” 12.
- ¹¹⁵ Mutloatse quoted in “New Publisher Aims to Meet the Critical Needs of Education,” *New Nation*, September 15, 1994, 12.
- ¹¹⁶ Driver, “South Africa,” 152.
- ¹¹⁷ Rajendra Chetty, “President’s Annual Report,” *English Academy Review* 31, no. 1 (2014): 119–23.

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