



## Books and Development in Africa — Access and Role\*

KEITH SMITH

THE NATURE OF PUBLISHING and the constraints imposed upon it are important factors in determining the impact of books within a society. Key differences within societies as well as internationally account for important variables in the publishing process. The situation for children's books may be different from that for academic books or popular fiction. The close examination that has been given to other media industries, such as films and broadcasting, must be brought to bear on book publishing if a fuller understanding of the publishing process is to be gained.

The book should not naïvely be ennobled as the vehicle of culture and knowledge, but examination must be made of the structure and forces that determine what books are published, who reads them and with what effect. Earlier articles have discussed the forces that determine which books are published.<sup>1</sup> This article will consider the structures and forces that determine who reads the various categories of books and what function the books play within the society — access and role.

The geographical focus of this article is anglophone middle Africa or what is often called English-speaking black Africa, an area which stretches from Sierra Leone in the west to Kenya in the east, and from Sudan in the north to Lesotho in the south. The major focus will be on Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia. In this area, six or seven British-based multinational companies dominate book publishing activity. Other articles have described the control they retain and its impact. However, influences other than simply multinational dominance of pub-

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Keith Smith is Publisher and Consultant, Inter-Action Trust, London, and Director, Third World Publications, Birmingham and Campaign Books, London, England.

\* This article was researched at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex.

lishing determine the pattern of access to books and the role books play. The picture is complex and varied. The particular role of the book medium in development will first be examined and compared to the role of other media.

#### A ROLE FOR BOOKS IN DEVELOPMENT

Much eloquent prose has attempted to place books in the center of development strategies, but planners and politicians have remained only partially convinced. Such arguments see books and literacy as two "agents" furthering development. The ability to read and the availability of books are also aspects of development. They are skills and tools that extend the individual's freedoms of choice and action and freedom to learn. They are "enabling tools" that can produce a climate for development, or more usually, lead people on from such attitudes to the adoption of innovations which are in themselves development. They can, for example, allow the farmer to achieve higher productivity, or the family to remain in better health, or the curious to extend their knowledge. Books and reading can also retard development. They spread the techniques of exploitation and enable the advocates of conspicuous consumerism to reach their markets. These dangers should not eclipse the powerful potential of books for spreading knowledge internationally and within a country. The most obvious example of this is the schoolbook, which still provides the main source around which school learning revolves.

The cultural enrichment that can follow the capturing of traditional culture in print is increasingly important in a rapidly changing society — but print can be overemphasized as the essential media for this task. Some librarians have pointed out that the transfer of the concept of the print-based library from the literate metropolitan countries to the oral-based cultures of Africa might be inappropriate.<sup>2</sup> They favor an audiovisual and interpersonal basis for libraries through which users will be led to the more rapid and extensive communication of print.

Ever since the development of battery-operated transistor radios in the 1950s, radio ownership has been increasing in Africa. Because it is more accessible than television, radio provides the more satisfactory comparison to books. Recent figures show that the incidence of radio ownership reflects a continent's relative poverty or wealth in much the same way that book production does; of the four accredited "mass media" (cinema, newspapers, radio and television), radio is the only medium that approaches the Unesco "minimum adequate communications" yardstick of 5 sets per 100 inhabitants. Unesco figures show that those countries with

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the lowest density of radios are increasing their rate of ownership fastest.<sup>3</sup> This rapid increase in ownership is reflected in the data available for anglophone middle Africa. Of the 14 relevant African countries, 8 show continually increasing radio density of 1-4 more radios a year per 1000 inhabitants. In Swaziland the rate of increase is much more rapid.

The comparative figures for cultural paper consumption suggest a falling rate of local literary production per inhabitant within the region, except in the stronger centers such as Kenya and Zambia. (These figures include much nonbook production, although they cover only paper destined for print or writing of some type.) Other figures show the huge leaps in book imports in recent years; in Kenya the increase was from \$1.5 million in 1970 to \$3.6 million in 1971, and in Nigeria from \$7.6 million in 1970 to \$13.2 million in 1971.<sup>4</sup> The introduction of universal primary education in Nigeria has since created a huge rise in imports of books to Nigeria.

Despite the fact that books form an aspect of development, there seems to be a *prima facie* case for concentrating on use of broadcasting as a tool to engender development in Africa. It is a faster spreading medium, and since it does not require literacy, it is more accessible. There are, however, reasons why concentrating resources on broadcasting would be a mistake. Socially and economically it would be divisive and would induce frustration. It would also tend to exacerbate dependency on Western cultures. Such a policy would prove divisive because it would tend to lead to continuing illiteracy. Because illiterates do not have direct access to information held in print, they become distanced from those who can read and who therefore have better chances of upward socioeconomic mobility. When some social classes have far greater access to print than others do, then printed material functions as a tool to promote long-term concentrations of power and wealth. Concentration on broadcasting would likewise lead to frustration, because in Africa, listening to broadcasting tends to increase the desire for upward mobility into the modern sector.<sup>5</sup> Illiterates have this desire, yet communication in the modern sector is based on writing and reading, and thus excludes the illiterate from easy participation.

The international cultural dependence currently resulting from the flow of software into developing countries is most evident among the urban elites who have access to television and films. Several commentators have pointed to the powerful one-way flow of programs from Western manufacturers to developing countries. In particular, the software of U.S.-based multinational conglomerates tends to dominate the screens of most

developing countries. Although Western publishing multinationals dominate much of the book trade of developing countries, their dominance is less culturally deleterious. The flow of writing is not so markedly one-way, for the cultural ideology and economic shape of publishing allow multinationals to publish the works of some authors from developing countries. These books then reach an international readership, which includes part of the Western book-reading public.

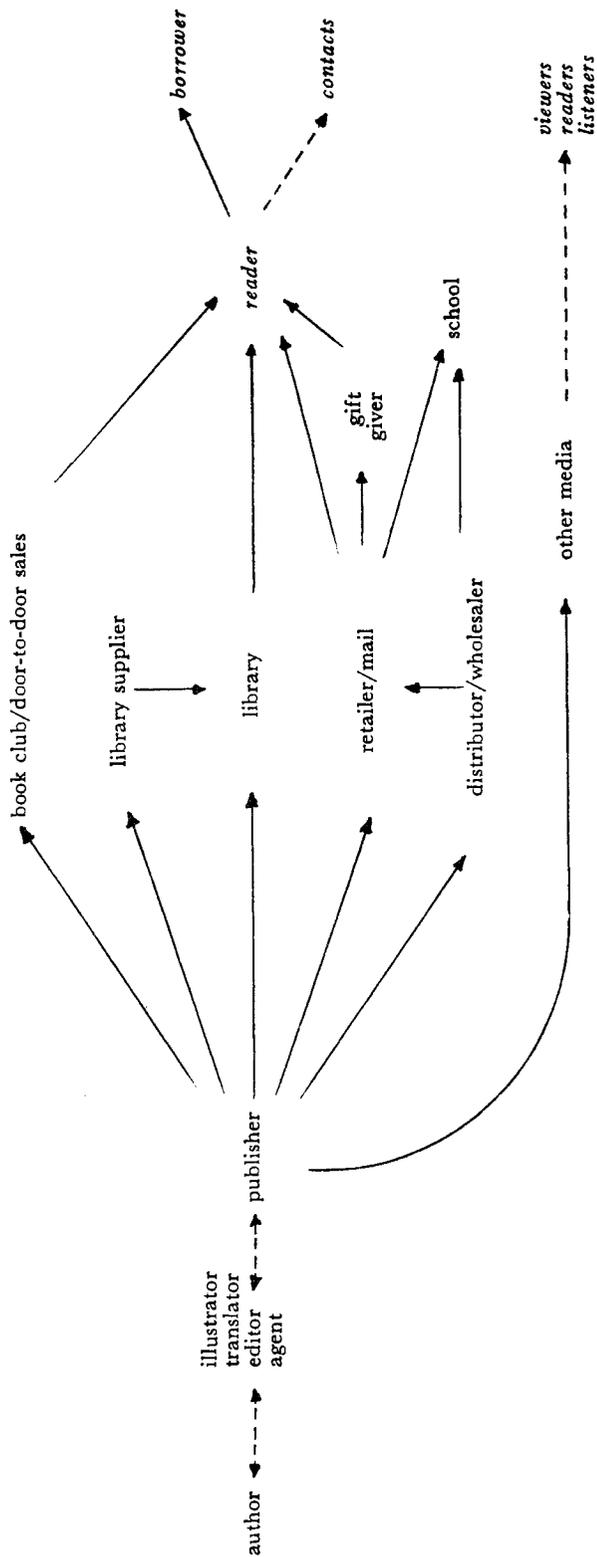
Interestingly, some recent mixed-media informal continuing education projects, which have been built up around radio programs, have proved to be effective mechanisms of development. Exceptional results have been achieved in the Tanzanian "Man is Health" campaign, which reached large numbers of the rural population through its radio programs, study groups and printed materials, thereby effecting extensive changes in health practices. Such media forums which combine radio, print and interpersonal channels hold some of the best opportunities for widespread development, provided they disseminate a relevant and credible message.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, both as part of mixed-media forums and in their own right, books are not only useful tools in development, but necessary if development is to be socially equitable. Furthermore, the book publishing trade helps to temper the more ferocious vehicles of cultural domination — although it is itself by no means a neutral agent.

#### ACCESS TO BOOKS

An earlier article on African publishing has sketched the picture of who publishes various categories of books and who determines which books are published.<sup>7</sup> There now arises the question of who in these African societies has access to books (and thus the information and entertainment they contain), and what features of society determine the pattern of access. At one level the question can be answered very simply — students. With around 80 percent of the book trade being educational books, students are clearly the major users of books. (The question of who attends school, with all its interesting components of the criteria governing the distribution of educational facilities, family wealth and cultural attitudes toward formal learning, is beyond the scope of this article.) Determining who outside the formal educational system gains access to books is a more central issue to publishing and the book world. There are many constraints on access which should be identified.

The right-hand section of Figure 1 shows that the message of a book passes to more people than its readers. Through speech and action it can reach contacts of the reader, whether it be as a retold joke or as a funda-



Key: ———→ message passes in book form  
 - - - - -→ message passes in nonbook form  
 italics indicate absorber of message

Figure 1. Channels of Access to an Author's Work

mental change in lifestyle. The extent of this network depends on the degree of social stratification present in a society and the nature of communication within and between social groups. A dominant group within a society tends to introduce relations of communication which prescribe asymmetrical communication. For instance, within the hierarchy of a church, social structure or business, ritual or sociojuridical rights to determine the content of an exchange or to begin or end it may be held by upper echelons only, i.e., "Speak only when spoken to." In this way the flow of information between dominated and dominating is controlled by the dominators.<sup>8</sup>

The flow of book messages through other media is increasing in the West through greater intermedia contact and penetration. Publicity departments of publishing houses are actively courting other media to feature their authors or serialize their authors' works. However, this is not a prominent feature of African communications. The messages of books are therefore not often passed on through the other media.

The most basic factor in determining direct access to books is literacy. With adult (15 years old and older) illiteracy standing at about 74 percent in non-Arab Africa in 1970, three-fourths of the population is excluded from reading. This figure is higher in some countries, such as Sierra Leone, where literacy has not yet reached 10 percent, and lower in others, such as Lesotho, where it is around 40 percent. Throughout the continent illiteracy is more prevalent among women (83 percent) than men (65 percent) and more extensive among the poor and rural dwellers than in towns.<sup>9</sup> Africa has not seen the massive literacy campaigns of countries such as Cuba and the USSR, and this has led to suggestions that some African governments have found it more convenient to allow the mass of their populations to remain illiterate. The relationship between literacy and reading is two-way in that various proportions of the illiterate populations were literates who have relapsed because they were unable to obtain appealing reading material. In some cases such material has not been published, and in others the neoliterate has no access to it.

One barrier that haunts African book production is the vast array of languages of the continent, many of which are used by comparatively few people. Even when larger numbers speak a language, they are occasionally peoples divided by the national borders artificially formed by the European scramble for Africa. They therefore form fragmented markets, too small to appeal to commercial publishers and with low priority for national noncommercial publishers. In the West, greater affluence among specialist readers allows publishers to produce titles for minority interests. In Africa,

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a person literate in only a minority language is unlikely to find many books or other publications available in that language.

There are three basic ways to obtain a book: buying, borrowing or receiving it as a gift (see Figure 1). Western publishing has always focused its attention on individuals buying either for themselves or as a gift for others; this has fostered bookshops. The focus of attention for the multinational publishers in Africa has been the educational system, whether it be approached through ministries of education, bookshops, teachers or parents. The multinationals do not invest in the book distribution system directly except by occasionally granting new outlets extended credit. They do very little to foster bookshops. It is still far easier to find a range of books on sale in the cities. Rural populations have been variously approached in different parts of Africa by peddlers, literature bureau vans, and the religious bookstalls which are offshoots of churches. Larger market towns usually have a shop or market stall that sells a few titles. The East African Literature Bureau has run promotions and is planning new ones to encourage small shopkeepers to take books — their present revenue from rural communities is 10 percent of their total. Other than through the small literature bureaus and mission work, there has been very little official encouragement of book distribution in these African countries.

Giving books as presents is not an established feature of African social life even among the urban intelligentsia. There is no equivalent to the Christmas book-giving bonanzas of Western countries.<sup>10</sup>

The major constraint on book-buying by literates in Africa is poverty. Libraries have always been seen as one way around this constraint. Table 1 shows the distribution of public and school libraries in African countries and compares their achievements with Cuba and Jamaica, two countries whose library development programs have been particularly extensive. Ghana, parts of Nigeria, and Tanzania have the most extensive library systems in anglophone middle Africa, but even these do not compare with the Cuban service, built out of a political ideology which gave priority to the extension of literacy and access to knowledge, or with the Jamaican system, built up with the assistance of British cash and know-how. The spasmodic nature of literacy campaigns, the absence of strong political lobbies for books and the underdevelopment of infrastructure remain the major restraints on African library services.

It is rare for the facilities provided by school libraries to be extended by using them as area libraries. In many cases this would be difficult, since the school library may still be a cupboard which contains only a few inap-

Country	Year	Estimated Population (millions)	Service Points	Public Libraries		
				Registered Borrowers	Loans to Users	School Libraries
Botswana	1968	.56	6	200	...	10
Ethiopia	1968	23.44	25	50,000	...	43
Gambia	1971	.37	5	1,018	17,257	3
Ghana	1971	8.86	50	26,000	830,000	...
Kenya	1968	10.48	5	9,959	...	206*
Liberia	1968	1.13	6	18,100	...	53
Nigeria	1971	56.51	74	150,979	...	...
Sierra Leone	1968	2.48	11	27,938	...	...
Uganda	1971	10.13	19	47,995	...	...
Cuba	1971	8.60	253	2.2 million	1.6 million	...
Jamaica	1968	1.80 (est.)	260	286,538	...	791

\* Secondary school libraries only

N.B.: Unesco cautions against close comparisons among countries because of the poor statistical returns.

Table 1. Public and School Libraries

Source: Unesco. *Statistical Yearbook, 1973*. Paris, Unesco Press, 1974; and Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Statistical Office. *Demographic Yearbook, 1973*. New York, United Nations, 1974.

propriate books. Thus, despite the attempts that have been made through some literacy campaigns and by the literature bureaus and sometimes by the library services, access to books remains severely limited in most parts of these countries. As a result, literates relapse; there is less incentive to achieve literacy, and some literates become nonreaders of books.

There are also social and physical elements of many African societies that determine access to books and reading. President Nyerere pointed to some of these:

Too often in our own society a person who sits down to read is accused of being lazy or of being unsociable. This attitude we must change. When we get to the position where a man and wife can sit together in the evening each reading or reading to each other, and when their children are encouraged to learn out of school by reading books which are easily available, then we shall have made a big breakthrough in our development.<sup>11</sup>

In all social groups in any culture, attitudes toward books affect book-buying and reading habits. Attitudes range from considering reading to be a pastime solely for women that is slighting to male virility, to buying certain books for display as part of a social message. In some groups within

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African societies, books (like spectacles and pens) are status symbols, but even this does not ensure that they are read. Many groups, particularly women, have little leisure time, and for others, patterns of leisure are firmly established as conversation, music or social activity that is far removed from the apparently solitary activity of reading.

Those who do want to read find problems. In her study of reading among groups of people with primary schooling in Uganda, Phipps found that the major complaint was noise (29 percent of the sample). A few readers found insufficient light a problem; just over 50 percent read by hurricane lamp.<sup>12</sup>

There are ways in which access to books and the ideas and entertainment they contain can be deliberately restricted to a privileged group. Where library systems are inadequate, a polarized society ensures that the poor do not have access to the knowledge in books. The same is true when literacy is limited or when publishing is confined to the language of an elite. Even when the dominated classes achieve access to books, a subversive literary culture can be harassed through censorship (e.g., South Africa), or through pressures resulting in self-censorship (e.g., Ethiopia during the reign of Haile Sellassie), taxes (e.g., Stamp Tax in nineteenth-century Britain) or control over the channels of distribution (e.g., the USSR).<sup>13</sup> Preempting a subversive literary culture by publishing material for the newly literate social groups with the intention of social control may be just as effective as repression. But none of these political mechanisms is required for restricting the impact of books when the social, cultural and literacy infrastructure, combined with market forces, ensures differentiated access to books.

Extensive illiteracy, a poor library service and disadvantaged indigenous publishing are fundamental shortcomings in the social and educational development of most anglophone middle African countries. Actions taken in other developing countries suggest that these are elements of the infrastructure of development that can be upgraded if the government and national political philosophy accords them sufficient priority and if, above all, the ruling interests want to effect change.

#### THE CURRENT ROLE OF BOOKS AND THE RESULTS OF LIMITED ACCESS

The role books play in the societies of anglophone middle Africa and in their development varies with the type of book and with the readership. The major types of books and their readers should therefore be considered.

When a group of people do not have access to books because of illiteracy, limited library service, absence of readable books, lack of interest in reading, or because of poverty, then books may not appear to have a role in their lives directly. Yet, if within the wider society books are read by some groups whose access is not inhibited, an imbalance in access to information will be created. Therefore, if books are present at all in a society, their function impinges on all groups and classes within that society.

#### SCHOOLBOOKS

Schoolbooks function as tools of education. They can contribute to the development of human resources necessary for national development. They are broadly controlled by the curricula, the exams, and in varying degrees by the ministries of education. Finer control is exercised by authors, editors and the buyers through the market.<sup>14</sup>

Schoolbooks influence the attitudes and ideas of pupils, and in doing so, reflect the ideas of the controls. Whether their influence is a force for development will vary; certainly books "dumped" by some foreign publishers are not. Some attitudes which promote development may be reflected by the controls but they are often limited. Curricula and exams are the products of metropolitan middle-class thinking, and in those areas with a less pervasive national philosophy, the main concerns are the strictly pedagogical aspects of education coupled with mild reinforcement of the existing social order. Countries such as Tanzania, with its more than usually egalitarian and development-oriented national philosophy, have found the schoolbooks of other African countries unsuitable.

In most countries of the region, schooling is seen to be a series of tests which determine life chances and, in particular, access to the urban areas and the modern sector of the economy.<sup>15</sup> Schoolbooks become tools in this hunt. This is particularly evident in the extensive buying of self-study and cram books by pupils and their families. Cram books like *The C.P.E. Pupil's Companion to All Subjects*, published each year for the Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education, sell over 70,000 copies a year. Their spread does seem to correspond roughly with success in CPE.<sup>16</sup>

Textbooks serve as a guide to and are a powerful influence on teachers in less-developed countries, who have often only undergone a comparatively short education and training. This produces a conservatism among teachers which counteracts the modernizing forces (sometimes developmental, sometimes not) found in newer books, which the conservative teacher will resist adopting. Other conservative forces are the result of a carryover of the colonial pattern, where official educators and minis-

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try staff wrote books or curricula which were then retained throughout that official's administration. At other times, a poor curriculum can be preserved if a good course of books is published for it.<sup>17</sup> Inappropriate modernization can be introduced through the practice of adapting foreign material for the black African market.<sup>18</sup> Many African governments have recognized both the need to provide free schoolbooks and the political popularity of this measure. If families have to purchase schoolbooks, the pupils from the already disadvantaged backgrounds suffer, and the purchase of schoolbooks becomes a mechanism for reinforcing inequalities.

Very little research has yet been carried out on bias, prejudice and stereotyping in African textbooks. Elsewhere, the German Internationales Schulbuchinstitut has pioneered work in this field and has been followed by the Society for Education Information in Japan.<sup>19</sup> Anglo-American studies of the 1960s concentrated on the selective vocabulary used in the portrayal of historical events (*we* "withdraw" but *they* are "defeated"). More recently, attention has passed to racial and sexual stereotyping in various types of books, particularly in reading schemes for children in their most formative years. This attention has not yet been applied to African schoolbooks in a systematic manner.<sup>20</sup>

In colonial times, history schoolbooks for Africa were grossly unbalanced. Extensive coverage was given to events in Europe and minimal attention was given to the history of African society. Africans tended to be cast in a passive role and political pressure for independence played down. This was a result of the controls on the educational system and the attitudes and unbalanced knowledge of the authors and editors of the era. Whether this imbalance has been corrected is doubtful. Much of the recent historiography has certainly sought to redress the balance by showing that Africa did have a past which could be accredited as a worthy history by European standards. There were kings, cities, empires, art and learning comparable to European history. But all these arguments accept bourgeois European standards and try to establish an African history to match them. Meanwhile, the social history of the common person, the dominated classes, the stateless societies, and the extension of underdevelopment through unequal trade tend to be ignored, which is a distortion of history.<sup>21</sup>

#### SCHOLARLY BOOKS

Turning to academic and tertiary books, it almost goes without saying that their main use is to extend, increase and spread knowledge. What

sort of knowledge and communication forms the core of this category and who benefits from it?

This African market is still largely dominated by metropolitan tastes acting through international market forces. These forces determine what is available for readers and which manuscripts are published. Since it is those books published by the multinationals that most easily reach the developed world, an African academic or tertiary teacher whose work is published by a multinational is much more likely to break into the international circuit, with all its prestige and benefits.<sup>22</sup> Once this has happened, the exposure the author receives will tend to make his next work more publishable and thus to fuel the cycles of academic stardom.

The degree to which these books of higher education benefit more people than merely their readers is almost entirely determined by the sociopolitical structure of a society. In a society such as China, the selection mechanisms of the village or factory ensure that those people who receive higher education return to benefit the community. This contrasts sharply with the professionals of many other poor countries, who frequently use their local training as a stepping-stone to the greater affluence of employment in the West, thereby leaving continuing shortages of trained personnel in their own country. Access to higher education, even when the beneficiary remains within his African country, is a means of passing into the very high income sector, which contrasts strikingly with the general level of poverty. Tertiary and scholarly books in these African market economies are functional and therefore reflect and reinforce these patterns.

While there remains a system of higher education that contains the two links of international professional migration and an internationally oriented salariat, there will be a tendency for higher education books to move only very slowly away from Western styles and influences, toward material of importance for widespread local development.

#### CULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARD BOOKS

Another aspect to be considered is the reading of noninstitutional books, that is, those books not written primarily for formal educational instruction. Among these are books for neoliterates, general work in African languages other than English and French, and literary and popular books. Reading of such books reflects certain attitudes found in anglophone middle Africa.

First, most reading is utilitarian or achievement-reading, aimed at personal advance toward or within the modern sector of the economy.

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This may be sought through qualification or through improved skills (particularly language skills), or through extended knowledge. Phipps, for example, found that not only did 69 percent of her sample of readers give learning as their main reason for reading nonfiction, but 63 percent stated that they read fiction because it was instructive (47 percent) or useful (16 percent), compared to 36 percent who read fiction because it was enjoyable (28 percent) or interesting (8 percent).<sup>23</sup>

Some commentators have lamented what they see as an unhealthy imbalance between achievement reading and leisure reading. More pertinent are the underlying reasons for the preponderance of achievement reading. African societies generally show strong desires to attain, as do other developing communities, and it would be strange if this were not reflected in their reading. (Tropical Africa does not have the leisured female middle class of South Africa that provides such a lucrative market for British and South African leisure book publishing.) The role of books in school and the frequent use of rote learning which accompanies them reinforces the attitude that books are instruments of learning.<sup>24</sup>

Why, it might be asked, should peoples with a strong oral culture embrace reading for pleasure? Nonfiction books are an invaluable means of spreading knowledge and speeding communications in the development process, but plastic art and oral communication can surely provide the cultural and leisure basis of a developing community just as well as literary art. There is nothing ignoble about reading fiction with the primary intention of learning rather than diversion. Art in many African societies performed a functional role as much as an aesthetic one; often it has been a medium of instruction. This attitude has spilled over into the work of many African literary novelists and is one reason why much African popular writing moralizes. It may even partially explain the now-infamous popularity of the British "Victorian" writers Bertha Clay and Marie Corelli in West Africa in the 1960s.

The second attitude revealed in general reading is that the contents of books are often considered indisputable and treated with unusual reverence. This is true of institutional reading too. Merely quoting a book can be regarded as substantiating a point, and teachers who wish to dispute a statement in a textbook will often find their efforts rejected by their students. This attitude toward books has a flimsy rationale, for there is no reason why writing in itself should be truer than speech. In fact, the impossibility of immediate refutation may encourage writers to put forward tendentious points. Publishers, while often concerned about the

overall accuracy of their authors' works, are more concerned about consistency than with checking the accuracy of the parts.

This reverential attitude toward books is found elsewhere among followers of movements with comprehensive philosophies which feature guru figures, such as Christianity and Maoism. In Africa this attitude is a derivative of the Islamic and Christian religions. Most societies in middle Africa appear to have had an almost totally nonliterate culture until the Almoravid movement into the west Sudan region of West Africa in the second half of the eleventh century. The Almoravids brought some Islamic texts,<sup>25</sup> but reading and writing remained confined to the small religious group and did not spread until the more populist Christian missions started literacy work in the second half of the nineteenth century. Much of Africa's early experience of the book was therefore of the Koran and the Bible, and the reverence and indisputability accorded to these titles has become associated with books in general. Many other cultures have come to the book through religious works and, in time, this spillover of reverential attitudes fades. In middle Africa the arrival of the book is more recent and so the reverential attitudes are still strong.

#### LITERACY

One of the most important roles that noninstitutional books take is in the fields of literacy learning, adult education and the reading of neoliterates. These forms of reading can be instruments of development — literacy is an incentive to innovate and a tool for acquiring knowledge. A further clue to the book's role can be gained from people's reasons for wanting to learn to read and write. Surveys show that it is more often for general social reasons, for its own value, or for prestige than for specific economic reasons. This appears to remain true even where the program goal is functional literacy, an approach which results in fewer dropouts than the more traditional methods. With the desire to break out of the seclusion of illiteracy, it is not surprising that neoliterates concentrate on reading newspapers and magazines rather than books. Newspapers and magazines are usually more easily obtained, more easily read and more vital than much of the book material published for neoliterates.

Book publishers tend to accept this situation and presume that neoliterates will read either topical mass-circulation material or will be provided for by government-sponsored organizations such as the literature bureaus. The religious publishing houses are exceptions. They have continued their concern to reach the neoliterate with basic informal education and religious propaganda. In anglophone middle Africa the neo-

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literate' limited access to appealing books and the consequential relapse into illiteracy (sometimes at rates of around 60 percent) combine to limit access to the modern sector and maintain the silence of ignorance. These phenomena in turn allow polarization within societies to continue unabated.

#### BOOKS IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Books in African vernacular languages play various roles depending on the type of book — schoolbook, literacy reader or literary work. The language of a book has an influence on its role, also. Cultural works in vernaculars have a particular function of capturing and developing traditional culture. This genre is not vigorous at present. Most categories of vernacular books, including these, widen access to information by making it available to people literate in their vernacular language only. Books could also play an important part in legitimizing vernacular languages. At present it is unlikely that they do, since more highly educated bilingual readers prefer to read English. This preference reinforces the attitude that characterizes English as a language of modernization and progress, and the vernaculars as the traditional regional languages of the countryside with its poverty, primitivism and isolation from the outside world. At present, there is little evidence that the limited publishing of vernacular books and booklets is closing the widening gap between these two cultures.

#### LITERARY BOOKS

The function of literary works and literary publishing differs from popular and mass market fiction in various ways. Compared with other categories, there is a fairly large number of literary titles published in English by African publishers. Poetry is, for instance, widely regarded as one of the most marginal types of publishing in rich Western countries, yet there is a small flow of published poetry coming from African countries where publishing is weak and books and book-readers scarce. This is partly an outcome of the popularity of poetry in oral cultures and partly the result of literature teachers wanting to include some poetry in their courses in order to provide a variety of literary forms.

African literature in English is published very largely for use in formal or semiformal learning in secondary schools and universities. This is in contrast to Europe, where the main market for literary work is sections of the general public and public libraries. As has already been noted, however, there is a variety of educational, social, economic and political reasons why this pattern does not occur in Africa. This situation is appreci-

ated by those African novelists who see themselves partly as teachers, those who write specifically for the demands of the higher education market, and those, such as Cyprian Ekwensi and Kole Omotoso, who have also written for the popular market.

An analysis of past traditional cultures, of colonial damage, and of aspects of Africa today is evident in much African writing, yet most of it is the product of privileged education and will be read by those working to break into the affluent sector of the economy. To say this is not to question the integrity of African literary authors; it is only to place literary writing and reading in its present elitist perspective — a perspective which is inevitable, given the nature of current stratified social structures.

Fiction publishing could present unusual opportunities in giving rural dwellers and those from outside the modern sector of the economy access to a media as contributors. Other media tend to preclude this: commercially supported media tend to concentrate their thrust on the richer consumers who are the targets of the supporting advertisers; government media tend to be dominated by messages flowing from the urban center to the rural areas, with very little in reverse. Creators or performers in other media, such as pop music, automatically enter the rich sector of the economy and are therefore no longer rural poor, although they may (but seldom do) continue speaking for them. The arts that currently flow from rural and suburban to urban dwellers and international circuits, such as carving, dance and music, do not carry rational messages as effectively as books. Books could theoretically present opportunities for the rural poor to speak to urban dwellers.

Despite its comparatively small sales outside Africa, African literature has succeeded in presenting a variety of views on Africans and African life to the non-African world. Some critics consider that this is a neo-colonial preoccupation of some African writers. Nevertheless, their work may have changed some attitudes and led some non-African readers to see a picture of a corner of African life, presented by an African writer. The availability of the story-from-inside as well as the story-looking-in is enriching for the outside world. It is now the fare of readers in far-flung places, including British, American and Australian schools.

While African writers present aspects of Africa to a foreign readership, this readership is very small. Far more non-Africans experience Africa through pop music, its sports players, its animals or through the activities of some political leaders. Like other literature from lesser developed countries, African literature is not as widely translated as the literature of the more developed countries. No African author appears in

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the Unesco listing of authors whose works were translated at least twenty times in 1971. Of these 131 names, the only authors from outside the rich countries of the world were Mao Tse-tung and the Guatemalan M.A. Asturias. (The writers of sections of the Bible are not included, since this title and the *Arabian Nights* are excluded from this listing.) The spread of African writing is therefore not as extensive as the works of writers from the USSR, United Kingdom, France and Germany.

#### LIGHT FICTION AND POPULAR NONFICTION

African popular literature does not command an international readership. There has been a rigid division between literary writing and popular writing which is only now showing signs of breaking down. Popular African literature has been dismissed by the African intelligentsia, and has only evoked curiosity from academics. The following short list is typical of the genre:

Rachel Ririani	<i>One Woman Too Late</i>	(Njogu Gitene, Nairobi)
Daniel S. N'gangá	<i>Gamblers Often Lose</i>	(Njogu Gitene, Nairobi)
Damaris Sousi	<i>Hesitant Love</i> and <i>Love Music</i>	(Transafrica, Nairobi, 1974)
Ogali A. Ogali	<i>Veronica My Daughter</i>	(Appolos Brothers, Onitsha, 1957)
Wilfred Onwuku	<i>The Way to Write Love Letters and Make Good Friendship with Girls</i>	(Gebo & Bros., Onitsha, 1963)
Sunday Okenwa Olisah	<i>Money Hard to Get but Easy to Spend</i>	(J. C. Brothers, Onitsha)
Naiwo Osahon	<i>Sex is a Nigger</i>	(Di Nigro Press, Apapa)

These titles themselves indicate the function of this genre. Much is entertainment, sometimes distractive, often read by people more familiar with local dialects of English than with national or international English. Much of the work has a strong informative content, covering subjects such as letter writing, courting, manners and money management. These subjects are of particular concern to younger readers in the informal sector. Much appears to have a strongly moralizing tone, for reasons discussed earlier and perhaps also because this justifies covering more risqué topics. This tone also reflects that of the religious writing, with which some of the readers are familiar.

Books are not mere noble vehicles of knowledge and culture. Their

function depends primarily on which groups have access to what kinds of books. This is determined by a variety of historical, political and economic forces. Whether books are a force for widespread development depends on the existence of a purposeful national program for development, backed by resources and national mobilization, and unimpeded by local reactionary elements or entrenched foreign interests.

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