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Contents

REGULARS
4  • SA Booksellers National Executive Committee
   • Bookmark
   • SA Booksellers Association
5  From the Editor
6  Books in Focus

GENERAL TRADE
7  From Journalist to Bookstore Owner
   Meet Griffin Shea
9  I Want to go Home Forever
   Stories of Becoming and Belonging in South Africa’s Great Metropolis

INDUSTRY AWARENESS
11  Careers in the Book Industry
   Being an Associate Editor

13  Here’s the story with Nal’ibali
   An NGO that makes reading fun
16  Van Schaik’s innovative
   SmartSWOT app
   Clever learning solutions
17  Getting to know the Industry
   What does LIASA do?
18  The Ecosystem of Book Publishing...
   and the value of Small and Micro Publishers

INTERNATIONAL
20  Ngugi’s Epic Masterpiece
   The imperfect girl behind the story of ‘Perfect Nine’
22  Dance of the Jakaranda
   A New York Times Notable Book of the Year

TRENDS
23  In the Spotlight
   • Confronting Inequality – The South African Crisis
   • The Future of Mining in South Africa: Sunset or Sunrise?
   • Blue Weaver Family Expands

EVENTS
25  Books Extravaganza for Kids
   The South African Children’s Book Fair
26  Reading Aloud
   Why it means the world to children

For publicity contact: Eileen Bezemer at eileen@panmacmillan.co.za or call 011 684 0400.
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SA Booksellers National Executive Committee

PRESIDENT AND CENTRAL REGION CHAIRPERSON
Guru Redhi
redhi@iafrica.com • 032 945 1240

VICE PRESIDENT AND NORTHERN REGION CHAIRPERSON
Riaz Hassim
hassim@bookexpress.co.za • 011 482 843

TREASURER
Jonathan Ferreira
jferreira@caxtons.co.za • 0861 229 229

HONORARY SECRETARY
Peter Adams
padams@adamsbooks.co.za • 086 134 1341

EASTERN REGION CHAIRPERSON
Sydwell Molosi
ssmolosi@email.com • 072 220 5311

EDUCATION AND SOUTHERN REGION CHAIRPERSON
Hentie Gericke
hentiegericke@hotmail.com • 021 981 1270

ACADEMIC CHAIRPERSON
Mohamed Kharwa
kharwa_m@provisions.co.za • 031 337 2112

DIGITAL SECTOR CHAIRPERSON
Melvin Kaabwe
melvin.kaabwe@vanschaik.com • 083 408 7414

GENERAL TRADE CHAIRPERSON
Olinka Nell
olinkanellcz@gmail.com • 082 873 4200

LIBRARY CHAIRPERSON
Vic Lopich
vlopick@caxtons.co.za • 0861 229 229

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SA Booksellers National Office
saba@sabooksellers.com
021 003 8098

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EDITOR Maiyo Febi

EDITORIAL AND ADVERTISING
+27 (0)84 824 7757 • bookmark@sabooksellers.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
SA Booksellers Office
+27 (0)21 003 8098 • saba@sabooksellers.com

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS
Chace Brand, Senovia Welman, Peter Kimani

PHOTOGRAPHS
Thanks to all for photographic contributions

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SA Booksellers, PO Box 870, Bellville, 7535
Tel: 021 003 8098
saba@sabooksellers.com
www.sabooksellers.com
Office Hours: Monday to Friday, 09h00 to 13h00

Website Design: Through the Looking Glass
Website Development: Country Digital
Website Hosting: Databias

ABOUT THE SA BOOKSELLERS’ ASSOCIATION
The SA Booksellers Association represents a united front for booksellers. Through strategic liaison with the different sectors of the industry and provinces, SA Booksellers strives to regulate the book-trade, reminding publishers to act as wholesalers and booksellers as retailers. The annual SA Booksellers AGM has historically been co-located with the Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) AGM. The AGM is open to all members of SA Booksellers and is a conference full of information, energetic discussions, pertinent topics and eloquent speakers. This is an opportunity for education for all, keeping members at the cutting edge of developments in our ever changing industry.

SA Booksellers works closely with government departments, educational authorities, and the state tender boards concerning matters that affect the trade.

More than 50% of SA Booksellers members are previously disadvantaged and SA Booksellers is well positioned to lobby government on all issues pertinent to the book trade. SA Booksellers provides access to information for all its members, through the commissioning of research papers and the gathering of news, to the effective dissemination of this information via the industry magazine Bookmark and through www.sabooksellers.com.

Bookmark, the official magazine of SA Booksellers, is distributed free of charge to all members as well as to all influential people in the book trade from publishers to government departments. The digital edition is sent to an ever increasing subscriber database. This magazine is a mouthpiece for SA Booksellers members as much as it is a source of information. Send a letter to the editor at bookmark@sabooksellers.com to get your views published.
Welcome to 2019!!

We are almost a quarter of the way through the year and its back to business as usual after all the festivities.

In an effort to diversify content and be responsive to our reader’s expressed preferences, we are introducing some new features.

The careers in the industry section will explore the various career paths that are available in the book industry and the relevant qualifications that will help students establish a strong foundation. Generally graduates tend to opt for more traditional careers in finance or medicine without much consideration or thought given for the possible professions available in the book industry. In our first feature, we get to know Sibongile Machika an associate editor at Pan Macmillan. Sbongile shares her journey on how she got into the book industry and highlights the need for a more representative demographic of publishing professionals. Read the interview on page 11.

We will also be introducing a section to welcome new SA Booksellers members to the association. We will get to know a bit about their store, their offering and any exciting activities/events/projects they would like to share. We will meet some of the new members in the next issue.

The brand new international section focuses on key industry stories across the African continent. Celebrated Kenyan journalist and author Peter Kimani pens a riveting tribute to Ngugi wa Thiong’o; Kenya and Africa’s esteemed author; new work of fiction—his first in over a decade. Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who recently turned 81, returns to the fiction field with a ground-breaking epic that subverts patriarchy and roots for social equity.

The Gikuyu epic, Kenda Muiyuru: Rugano Rwa Gikuyu na Mumbi, is published by East African Educational Publishers, and will soon be translated into English by the author as The Perfect Nine: The Story of Gikuyu and Mumbi. Read more on page 20.

In recent South African history, another topical issue was the so-called xenophobic or what some might call afrophobia attacks on other African foreign nationals living in South Africa. I want to go Home Forever: Stories of Becoming and Belonging in South Africa’s Great Metropolis edited by Loren B. Landau and Tanya Pampalon, is a collection of thirteen stories. One of the narratives is about an Ethiopian and his harrowing experience of xenophobic attacks. Taken together the narratives give voice to the emotions and relations emanating from a paradoxical place of outrage and hope, violence and solidarity. Read more on page 9.

“In celebration on international Women’s month, we feature, Rolene Miller, founder of Mosaic, a South African non-governmental organisation which provides free counselling and courtroom assistance to disadvantaged women who have been victims of gender-based violence.”

Bridge Books in downtown Johannesburg prides itself on being a book store with a rich collection of African literature and an experiential aspect that offers book tours in and around the underground book industry. We speak to founder and owner Griffin Shea about how the unique book store came about and his take on the South African industry in comparison to the US, his country of birth. Read more on page 7.

In celebration of international Women’s month, we feature, Rolene Miller, founder of Mosaic, a South African non-governmental organisation which provides free counselling and courtroom assistance to disadvantaged women who have been victims of gender-based violence. Womandla! Women Power! The “Herstory” is a reflective story of one Noelen’e’s resolve to contribute to the upliftment of women in dire circumstances. Far from being a dry recounting of names, dates and facts, this book takes the reader on a deeply personal and emotional journey. Read more on page 24.
There Goes English Teacher – a memoir
by Karin Cronje

A powerful memoir that is searingly honest, heart-achingly funny and deeply sad. There goes English Teacher spans three years of adventures and misadventures as an English teacher in a small Korean village and later at a university. This is an unusually honest memoir with strong reflective passages on, amongst other themes, the nature of identity and the loss of it; sexuality; belief; ageing; displacement; and nationhood.

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RRP: R280

“With nuanced grace and considerable humour, Cronje makes of this episode in her life an enjoyable and enlightening yarn.”

Mail & Guardian
Bridge Books is a quirky bookstore with a special love for African Authors. Based in downtown Johannesburg, the store is owned by United States national Griffin Shea. Getting African authored books into the hands of Africans is part of the ethos at Bridge Books and we chatted to Griffin to get a glimpse of how the journey begun.

Why did you decide to leave the USA and come to SA to open up a bookstore?
I actually came to South Africa as a journalist. Most of my career I spent with the AFP news agency, and they sent me here as a journalist. When my posting was over and it was time to move again, my family decided we wanted to stay. So I needed to think of something new to do.

Tell us about the inception of Bridge Books? How did you go about setting it up? What were some of the challenges you faced?
The main challenge was that I didn’t have a clue what I was doing. And maybe that’s for the best, because you can’t be intimidated by what you don’t know. If you just jump in, then you have to figure it out.

When I left AFP, I did the creative writing program at Wits, and that’s when I got interested in where South African books end up. A lot of the local books that I wanted to read had to be ordered from overseas, which seemed strange.
So I started thinking about places other than bookstores where people buy books. There used to be a guy selling books on the pavement by the Shell garage near my house. That made me wonder if people could also sell books informally in places with more foot traffic. I headed down to Park Station to have a look, and that’s when I started meeting all the booksellers in the CBD. Eventually I met more than 70 booksellers downtown, and I started sellingremaindered books to them as an experiment.

Did you have a bookstore in the USA?
No, I never even thought about it.

What are the some of the highlights of Bridge Books?
We still have our wholesale book programme aimed at small booksellers. We’re looking at ways to expand that, by creating a Literary District downtown, which would encompass the library, small booksellers, and bookstores like Bridge Books and James Findlay Collectibles at the Rand Club. We’re asking the Johannesburg Development Agency to help design trolleys that would double as storage and sales space, with some kind of power source to charge a phone and a card swipe machine.

We also have a non-profit arm called the African Book Trust that donates new books to schools and libraries. Through the Trust we’re trying to trace copyrights on South African classics that have gone long out of print and finance new editions.
What are the notable differences between the South African book industry and the USA industry?
I’m not sure that I’m well-placed to answer that. I only know about Joburg. But globally speaking, the last time Joburg was in the World Cities Culture Report in 2012, the city had as many bookstores as New York or London or Paris. The difference is that most of ours were second-hand shops, and most of theirs were new bookstores. The other big difference was that most of their books were from their own country, whereas most of ours were imported.

Now that you have a bookstore, what are some of the experiences you’ve had that you would have never foreseen?
Well, when we moved stores in the CBD, we actually rolled the bookshelves against traffic up Commissioner Street to our new location.

Mostly I’ve gotten to meet lots of interesting, smart, funny and kind people – customers, writers, publishers, and lots of cool kids who come to our story times.

Why does your bookstore focus on African authors?
Bridge Books focuses on African authors because sometimes they’re hard to find.

It’s pretty unthinkable to me that I would walk into a bookstore in the US and see a majority of the books were by overseas authors.

Is there an appreciation of African literature in the USA?
I think that’s growing all the time, judging from the book sections of the New York Times and the Washington Post.

How did the underground book tour come about? What value does it bring?
That also started by accident, during the Johannesburg Development Agency’s JoziWalks weekend last year, when they encourage people to do walking tours of their neighborhood. A friend encouraged me to do a tour about the small booksellers, and we ended up oversubscribed. I thought we’d do it once more to accommodate people on the waiting list, but there’s still people wanting to do it every month.

I think it’s a great way to talk about books in the city, and the kinds of books that people read that never get recorded. There’s a huge amount of informal publishing that’s totally undocumented. Some of the booksellers do actually have spaces underground, but mostly they’re part of the city’s underground economy, feeding into the huge regional trading network that’s anchored by Park Station. It’s a really lovely counterpoint to the stereotype that people don’t read. In Joburg’s case, it’s possible we just don’t know what they’re reading or where they’re buying their books.

What do you love the most about the book industry in SA?
The book industry is such a warm and welcoming space. I mean, people trust a middle-aged white American guy to talk to them about what’s happening in downtown Joburg. That shows a particular generosity of spirit.

What would you change about the book industry in SA?
There’s a real need for an alternate distribution system that would cater on a larger scale to small booksellers and new entrants in particular. I often hear this lament about “Why can we get a shebeen in every neighborhood but not a bookstore?” Well, the reason is that beverage distributors have different methods of risk assessment for clients, and a different delivery model. If we had a book distributor that operated like the Multiflora Flower Market, for example, South Africans would sell more books. (If you know a venture capitalist, let me know!)
Generations of people from across Africa, Europe and Asia have turned metal from the depths of the earth into Africa’s wealthiest, most dynamic and most diverse urban centre, a mega-city where post-apartheid South Africa is being made. Yet for newcomers as well as locals, the golden possibilities of Gauteng are tinged with dangers and difficulties.

Chichi is a hairdresser from Nigeria who left for South Africa after a love affair went bad. Azam arrived from Pakistan with a modest wad of cash and a dream. Estifanos trekked the continent escaping political persecution in Ethiopia, only to become the target of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks. Nombuyiselo is the mother of 14-year-old Simphiwe Mahori, shot dead in 2015 by a Somalian shopkeeper in Snake Park, sparking a further wave of anti-foreigner violence. After fighting white oppression for decades, Ntombi has turned her anger towards African foreigners, who, she says are taking jobs away from South Africans and fuelling crime. Papi, a freedom fighter and activist in Katlehong, now dedicates his life to teaching the youth in his community that tolerance is the only way forward.

These are some of the thirteen stories that make up *I want to go Home Forever: Stories of Becoming and Belonging in South Africa’s Great Metropolis* edited by Loren B. Landau and Tanya Pampalon, published by Wits University Press.

The narratives, collected by researchers, journalists and writers, reflect the many facets of South Africa’s post-apartheid decades. Taken together they give voice to the emotions and relations emanating from a paradoxical place of outrage and hope, violence and solidarity. They speak of intersections between people and their pasts, and of how, in the making of selves and the other they are also shaping South Africa. Underlying these accounts is a nostalgia for an imagined future that can never be realised. These are stories of forever seeking a place called ‘home’.

Excerpt from book:

Estifanos Worku Abeto, 72 when interviewed, grew up in the town of Hosaena, in the southern region of Ethiopia. The son of a farmer and his second wife, he got a job out of high school working for the local government in agricultural research. Later he studied botany at Haramaya University, and then returned to the civil service, where he would stay for the next 35 years. He escaped the country in 2007 because of political problems and opened a shop with other Ethiopians in Tsakane, 50km southeast of Johannesburg, in February 2008. Three months later, xenophobic attacks erupted across the nation.

The attacks happened on 19 May 2008. The night before, the community...
people were warning us. They came to the shop and were dancing and singing, saying, “You foreigners, you must go back to your country! What are you doing here? This is our money! This isn't your money!” They were terrifying us. “You kwerekwere! We’ll show you!”

We didn't sleep that night. But even though we were very scared, we couldn't leave. We were thinking these people would come and kill us. But a South African lady came to reassure us. She said, “Don't worry”.

The next day, very early in the morning, they came in groups, singing. They went to all of the foreigners in the area. The three of us were hiding inside the shop, and they came and broke down the door. The police were there, too, and they tried to protect us but there were too many people and they couldn't stop them. The community people were warning the police, saying: “Take care. This is South Africa. We are South Africans.”

The landlady was crying. “I'm South African. What are you doing?” They screamed, “Where are the foreigners?” They were grabbing us, beating us, kicking us. We acted like dead people. The lady screamed. “Are you killing me? Are you killing them?”

Then they left, taking the blankets, the comforters, the bed sheets, the carpets. They even took our cooking oil. Then they went to the money. We had R80 000 cash. They took everything we had. Then they broke the owner's house. After they left, the police took us to the police station in Tsakane and we opened a case, listing everything that was looted. They gave us a case number, registering us, taking minutes. But he didn't help. He said, “Don't worry, I'll help you”. But he didn't help. Only God helped me.

After the attacks, the authorities came, the camp was closed and the few of us who were left were taken to another camp. I remember very well one man, a Rwandan from the United Nations, who spoke French. He said he could help me because I was a gentleman. But he was only helping the Congolese. He was a corrupt person. He was taking money. But I had none. He said, “Don't worry, I'll help you”. But he didn't help. Only God helped me.

The enemy within
The police took us to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees camp, which was set up in Springs. There were more than 300 or 400 people there by then. We ended up staying there for five or six months, living in tents, and they gave us food, clothes and blankets. It was very comfortable. I thank South Africa for this.

In the camp, I helped to coordinate the people. The Ethiopians elected me and, with the guys from Malawi and the Zimbabweans, we were arranging the queues and the donations that were coming in.

Many different politicians came to the camp. They said, “Don't worry. Be patient.” The white politicians [from the opposition Democratic Alliance] said, “Maybe you will go to another country”. The ANC politicians were saying, “You must integrate”. They told us those people who attacked us were in prison. But those people were not in prison, it was not true. They were saying that just to comfort us. The people in the camps were refusing to integrate back into those communities. How could we integrate with the South Africans? We didn't have anything. Everything we had was stolen. We were afraid, we were saying, “How can we leave here? They are the enemy. If they see us, they will kill us.”

But after the politicians came, the camp was closed and the few of us who were left were taken to another camp. I remember very well one man, a Rwandan from the United Nations, who spoke French. He said he could help me because I was a gentleman. But he was only helping the Congolese. He was a corrupt person. He was taking money. But I had none. He said, “Don't worry, I'll help you”. But he didn't help. Only God helped me.

After the camps closed, Worku Abeto moved to Yeoville, where he still lives in a small room with three other men. Since the attacks, he has been actively involved with the diaspora community, including the African Diaspora Forum. He often represents Ethiopians living in Johannesburg in matters with the government.

They didn’t want any foreigners in Soweto
There were xenophobic attacks in Soweto again in January 2015, and foreign shops were looted for one month. The Soweto community said they didn’t want any foreigners in Soweto. There was one lady, Mama Rosa, who wrote a report for the minister of small business. I went to Pretoria to represent the Ethiopians, but there were also representatives from Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

We had a three-day meeting in the minister's office so we could hear the report and give our feedback. They had the report taped to the wall, and after two days, they asked us, “What do you think about this? What are your ideas? What are your objections?”

I raised my hand – there were representatives from many offices, from [the Department of] Home Affairs, from [the Department of] Social Development, more than 20 staff and one white lady taking minutes – and I said: “How can you take this rubbish? Let me tell you something. I'm older than all of you. Maybe you have more knowledge, but you do not have more experience than me. You South Africans were foreigners in many countries. Mandela was in Ethiopia. He was a foreigner. Mandela went to the Ethiopian government and they gave him military training.”

We were helping them. But South Africans don't know about this history. They didn't learn about African history in school, but they were listening eagerly to what I was saying. I told them, “Please, how can you say you don't need foreigners? Foreigners are everywhere. This is a shame to say that no one can enter Soweto.”

CAREERS IN THE BOOK INDUSTRY

Being an Associate Editor

The book industry forms an integral part of a country’s education system and is filled with a variety of professionals that play a specific role in the business of books. However, the average person on the street generally knows very little about what it means to be a publisher or an independent bookseller; highly popularized professions like doctor or accountant tend to be more sought after.

Careers in the book industry is a brand new feature that will give the professions in the industry a voice. We will showcase the breadth and depth of the available career options through talking to active professionals within the industry.

In this issue we chat to:
Sibongile Machika
Associate Editor – Pan Macmillan

Please share your background and what you currently do in the book industry.
I was born in Mamelodi, Pretoria and was raised by a single dad, my grandmother and Toti. Between these three I fell in love with stories and storytelling. I studied Publishing at the University of Pretoria and I am currently an Associate Editor.

How did you get into the book industry? Was it something you always wanted to be in?
I have always wanted to be a story teller but only fell in love with books in matric. I had a brilliant English teacher Mrs. L. Joubert at Cornerstone College. She made words matter to me. She built us and cut us down to size with the power of her words; it was her super power. She made Shakespeare’s mythical worlds come alive and completely understood why I was ready to love a vampire when Twilight came out.

I wanted to be a publisher because stories changed my family’s lives; from the Soul City pamphlets that taught about HIV/AIDS to the 14:00 stories on Ukhozi FM and even Generations. I saw how stories impacted my family then and continue to do so now. I wanted to part of that.

Sibongile arriving at work.

What are your formal qualifications and how did they prepare you for the work you are currently doing?
I have an undergraduate degree in Publishing and an Honours degree in Journalism.

When I went to university I didn’t know what publishing was. My undergrad taught me the practicalities of how to produce the finished product; how one brings the dream to life.

My time at journalism school taught me how to listen and what it takes to formulate and write the story. It also taught me how to work under pressure, meet deadlines and build networks.

Most professionals say that their fields are constantly evolving and it’s a must to stay abreast of the latest trends, updates and new ways of performing functions etc. Would you say this is true to your role as well?
Yes, but in context. Whether it is new stories told in new ways or technologies there is always something new happening. So, I think it is worth while learning about new systems and technologies that might make our jobs easier. Knowing doesn’t always mean we can put it to use here in an African context. Sure, we keep our ears on the ground and stay plugged in, but reading widely is still top of my list in terms of progressively performing my job.

In terms of evolving, for the first time ever the publishing industry is open to black authors, readers and whatever they chose to image themselves as. That is a scary thought for most people so when I say that the industry is open to it, I mean that the black market is one that can no longer be ignored. It is a profitable, creative market that is telling human stories in ways we haven’t seen before. What does history look like when we write it ourselves? Who become the heroes, the villains when the writers are black? How do we (black people) address difficult issues that are to do with us? This might be new in SA but there is nothing new under the sun.

Many nations found their voice before us, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Botswana and India just to name a few. How have these nations chosen to recreate themselves,

In terms of the breadth and depth of the available career options through talking to active professionals within the industry.

With the significant changes in the book industry, it is crucial for professionals to stay abreast of the latest trends. This is essential for those who perform critical roles in the business of books.

Most professionals agree that their fields are constantly evolving, and it’s crucial to stay informed about new technologies and systems. Knowing about these trends doesn’t always mean one can put it into practice immediately. However, keeping an ear to the ground and staying plugged in is still at the top of the list.

In the current context, the publishing industry is open to black authors, readers, and anyone who chooses to envision themselves in various roles. This is a scary thought for many people, but it means that the black market is one that cannot be ignored. It is a profitable and creative market that tells human stories in unique ways. What does history look like when we write it ourselves? How do we address difficult issues that are specific to us? This might be new in South Africa but there is nothing new under the sun.

Many nations have found their voice before us, such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and India, to name a few. How have these nations chosen to recreate themselves?
to recreate their history, to retell themselves? There is so much to gain and from them but there is also so much of us to share with them. Yet it seem there is very little effort or interest in figuring out the best way to have this exchange.

What are some of the misconceptions that you had about the book industry prior to working in it?
Black people don’t read.
That well-read people are progressive, open minded and creative. It is not true.
The devil wears Prada!

What is your advice to young people that are considering a career in the book industry? What education path would you encourage them to follow?
Read, read, read. Don’t come into the industry for the money.
I would encourage one to study a language, ideally a local language or any of the major languages on the continent. Then I would say anything that gives insight into the human condition: Sociology, Philosophy, Literature (lean towards African literature), and consider journalism.

What are entry level positions in the book industry?
Internships and book reviews or working in book stores.

Are the professionals in the book industry comprised of a certain demographic?
Yes the industry is mostly white middle aged women.

There is over representation of white people and over representation of English language practitioners. Both factors have a huge impact on what stories get published and who gets access to them.

With regards to the over representation of white people, it comes down to this: we engage that which is familiar to us. So white publishers publish what they know or are comfortable with; they market in ways that make sense to them to reach the target audience they imagine; and, they sell in ways and at avenues they know. Therefore, if most of the industry is made up of white people at every point of the value chain, well then, we as an industry will continue to publish (mostly) for white people, those who assimilate as such (white) and those who aspire to do so (be ideologically white).

Most of the nonwhite practitioners we have can’t write or read African languages on a professional level, never mind being able to keep up with how these languages evolve. So it means most publishing houses don’t publish African languages, which then means we are not catering for the majority or nurturing this market. By African languages I am also referring to languages from other African countries. Of course there are many reasons and excuses for this and that is a story for another day.

Such things as I have outlined, create and maintain vicious myths like ‘blacks don’t read’.

If you had a magic wand and could make the Book Industry perfect, what would you do?
The book industry doesn’t exist in isolation. Books reflect our time, our world. Thus the changes I would want to make speak to our world as it relates to readers and those that create the content.

My dreams needs more than just a room, they must be the land on which the house is built. So with this in mind, the changes are:

Make African languages compulsory from grade R to honours level (after undergrad). Create a market that only fellow Africans can service well. Most people read in English because that is the language they learned to read first and probably express themselves best in. So what happens when people are as comfortable with their mother tongues?

What that opens us to is the possibilities of transmitting culture more effectively. An opportunity to write about ourselves in ways our souls and ancestors will resonate and to capture (write) what our ancestors might have imagined.

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There is over representation of white people and over representation of English language practitioners. Both factors have a huge impact on what stories get published and who gets access to them.

With regards to the over representation of white people, it comes down to this: we engage that which is familiar to us. So white publishers publish what they know or are comfortable with; they market in ways that make sense to them to reach the target audience they imagine; and, they sell in ways and at avenues they know. Therefore, if most of the industry is made up of white people at every point of the value chain, well then, we as an industry will continue to publish (mostly) for white people, those who assimilate as such (white) and those who aspire to do so (be ideologically white).

Most of the nonwhite practitioners we have can’t write or read African languages on a professional level, never mind being able to keep up with how these languages evolve. So it means most publishing houses don’t publish African languages, which then means we are not catering for the majority or nurturing this market. By African languages I am also referring to languages from other African countries. Of course there are many reasons and excuses for this and that is a story for another day.

Such things as I have outlined, create and maintain vicious myths like ‘blacks don’t read’.

If you had a magic wand and could make the Book Industry perfect, what would you do?
The book industry doesn’t exist in isolation. Books reflect our time, our world. Thus the changes I would want to make speak to our world as it relates to readers and those that create the content.

My dreams needs more than just a room, they must be the land on which the house is built. So with this in mind, the changes are:

Make African languages compulsory from grade R to honours level (after undergrad). Create a market that only fellow Africans can service well. Most people read in English because that is the language they learned to read first and probably express themselves best in. So what happens when people are as comfortable with their mother tongues?

What that opens us to is the possibilities of transmitting culture more effectively. An opportunity to write about ourselves in ways our souls and ancestors will resonate and to capture (write) what our ancestors might have imagined.

What are some of the misconceptions that you had about the book industry prior to working in it?
Black people don’t read.
That well-read people are progressive, open minded and creative. It is not true.
The devil wears Prada!

What is your advice to young people that are considering a career in the book industry? What education path would you encourage them to follow?
Read, read, read. Don’t come into the industry for the money.
I would encourage one to study a language, ideally a local language or any of the major languages on the continent. Then I would say anything that gives insight into the human condition: Sociology, Philosophy, Literature (lean towards African literature), and consider journalism.

What are entry level positions in the book industry?
Internships and book reviews or working in book stores.

Are the professionals in the book industry comprised of a certain demographic?
Yes the industry is mostly white middle aged women.

There is over representation of white people and over representation of English language practitioners. Both factors have a huge impact on what stories get published and who gets access to them.

With regards to the over representation of white people, it comes down to this: we engage that which is familiar to us. So white publishers publish what they know or are comfortable with; they market in ways that make sense to them to reach the target audience they imagine; and, they sell in ways and at avenues they know. Therefore, if most of the industry is made up of white people at every point of the value chain, well then, we as an industry will continue to publish (mostly) for white people, those who assimilate as such (white) and those who aspire to do so (be ideologically white).

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Make it compulsory for publishers, book retailers and media houses to fund tertiary education in languages, publishing and other industry related fields directly proportional to their market share. Publishing and languages go hand in hand so approaching them collectively at a tertiary level would greatly assist the industry. Such an obligation could drastically change things and it can be made attractive for the media/publishing houses by offering a tax rebate.

All publishing related government and SOEs requirements should be serviced by local publishing houses.

Introduce an industry quota for the next 10 years; each imprint at a publishing house must publish 50% nonwhite authors. Half of which must also be available in an African language.

Before publishing a white author, make sure there is no non-white person who is writing on that topic.

What 3 books are most representative of who you are?
Can I answer this on my death bed? Or better yet, I will visit you in a dream six months after my death…. I’m still reading and Sula by Toni Morrison is on the list.
In South Africa, children are not reading well. The results of the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessment placed South Africa last out of 50 participating countries. The study also revealed that 78% of Grade 4 children in South Africa cannot read for meaning in any language.

There is a severe lack of reading material in South African schools and homes. Fifty-eight percent of households have no leisure books, and only 7% of homes have more than ten books. Just 17% of schools have a stocked library, and many contain unsuitable books, are locked most of the time, or do not allow children to take books home. Books in African languages are particularly scarce: while South Africa has eleven official languages, 41% of children's books published between 2000 and 2015 were in English, 24% were in Afrikaans, and only 35% were in the other nine African languages combined.

Reading culture is also limited. Only 35% of adults who live with children read aloud to them. Few children have the opportunity to choose what they want to read or take books home from a school or library. This ring-fences reading as a technical decoding task – not an exciting, joyful and personally relevant activity.

**Aims of Nal’ibali**

Nal’ibali (isiXhosa for “here’s the story”) is South Africa’s reading-for-enjoyment campaign. It makes use of reading and storytelling in home languages as well as English to support children’s literacy learning and school success. It is one of the biggest literacy-based nongovernmental organisations in South Africa. It was initiated in 2012 by the DG Murray Trust and the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA).

Nal’ibali is built on the simple logic that a well-established culture of reading can be a real game-changer for education in South Africa. Literacy skills are a strong predictor of future academic success in all subjects – and children who regularly read and hear engaging stories, in languages they understand, are well equipped and motivated to learn to read and write. A significant body of research reinforces the link between reading for pleasure and improved outcomes for children.

Nal’ibali seeks to create and nurture the conditions throughout society that support children’s development as readers. These are:

- **KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS:** Adults and children understand and value reading for enjoyment, and know how to nurture it.
- **OPPORTUNITIES TO READ:** Frequent opportunities to read, write and hear stories exist in a variety of accessible spaces.
- **READING ROLE MODELS:** Adults share books and stories with children, and encourage others to do the same.
- **ACCESS TO READING MATERIAL:** Adults and children have access to a wide variety of relevant engaging reading material, in all South African languages.
Nal’ibali was launched to the public in 2012. It emerged out of two decades of research on multilingual education conducted by PRAESA under Dr Neville Alexander and Dr Carole Bloch, their successful development of a model for community-based reading clubs, and the experience of the loveLife behavioural change campaign, which sought to reduce the incidence of HIV among young people.

Nal’ibali quickly achieved notable scale and momentum, and, PRAESA, which implemented the campaign from its inception to 2015, received the 2015 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA) – the most prestigious prize in its field – for its contribution to children’s multilingual literacy development.

In 2016, the Nal’ibali Trust was born and Nal’ibali became an independent entity, with PRAESA continuing as a research and content partner.

Projects and Activities
In its aim to grow a reading culture in South Africa, Nal’ibali recognises the power and potential of communities in literacy development, and the importance of reading and writing in home languages as a basis to improve economic and social equality in a country where indigenous languages have historically been marginalised.

At its core, Nal’ibali works with partners and individuals across the country to set up and run a growing network of more than 4,000 reading clubs for children. Reading clubs are relaxed, informal spaces where children can enjoy books, stories and other literacy-related activities such as songs and games in their home languages as well as English. Nal’ibali trains and equips individuals and organisations to run reading clubs. The sustainability of these clubs is supported through mentoring, resource provision and partnerships.

Nal’ibali also runs digital and mass media campaigns. More than 7.4 million people listened each week to its most recent radio story season on SABC stations, and it recently launched a national billboard campaign.

It also does significant work distributing reading materials. Most notably, it has distributed more than 33.8 million copies of its bilingual newspaper supplement since 2012. Each edition includes three stories (two can be cut and folded to make a book), activity suggestions for teachers and caregivers, motivational messaging and information about reading, news from the Nal’ibali network, and games and activities for children. Stories celebrate traditional storytelling and local authors, and reflect readers’ lived experiences. All content is bilingual (English and another language), and it is currently available in eight of the eleven official languages. Nal’ibali has also distributed nearly half a million books, and its website has 646 stories in all eleven languages.

Key partners include:
- **Government**: Nal’ibali has a Memorandum of Understanding with the national Department of Basic Education, and works with provincial and district education departments.
to implement reading clubs across the country. It also work with various municipal entities.

**Media partners:** Key partners include Tiso Blackstar, a media company that prints and distributes Nal’ibali’s bilingual newspaper supplement, and SABC Education, which has aired three seasons of radio stories in all eleven South African languages between 2013 and 2018.

**Distribution partners:** In addition to Tiso Blackstar, the Post Office distributes supplements to reading clubs and the general public.

**Non-profit organisations:** Nal’ibali works with a national network of partners, who receive training and reading materials from Nal’ibali and run reading clubs in schools, preschools, after-care programmes and other youth development initiatives.

**Research institutes:** Nal’ibali is working with NORC at the University of Chicago on a randomised controlled trial of its Story Powered Schools project, and recently worked with JET Education Services on an external evaluation of its bilingual reading materials. Nal’ibali continues to work with PRAESA, its founding partner, on reading-material development, and training curriculum and content.

**Funders:** Funding partners include the DG Murray Trust, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the First Rand Empowerment Foundation (FREF), Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA) and the HCI Foundation.

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**Key Outcomes of Projects and Activities**

Nal’ibali tracks its social outcomes through monitoring, evaluation and research. Key social outcomes achieved (as of mid-November 2018) include:

**Increased access to, and use of, reading material:**
- Nal’ibali has distributed 34.8 million bilingual newspaper supplements, 466 253 books, and 1.4 million story collections and magazines since 2012. Also, 646 free stories are available on its website.
- An external evaluation of the supplement showed that supplements are well used in a variety of ways, enabling the reading behaviours it seeks to support. 95% of organisations and 18% of newspaper buyers that receive the supplement use it. Of those who use the supplement, the most common reading behaviours include:
  - reading aloud to children (90% of organisations, 72% of newspaper buyers),
  - adults and children reading together (88% of organisations, 70% of newspaper buyers), and
  - children reading on their own (88% of organisations, 67% of newspaper buyers).
- Bilingual reading supplements are increasing availability of reading materials in homes: 85% of organisations that receive supplements let children take them home.

**A network of reading clubs:**
- 4 353 reading clubs reaching 126 829 children are active in all nine South African provinces and 84% of these clubs meet at least once a week. The reading clubs give children regular, enjoyable opportunities to learn.
- More than 17 000 people are part of Nal’ibali’s broader network of literacy activists (known as “FUNda Leaders”).

**Mass media and participation:**
- In 2018, Nal’ibali mobilised South Africans to read aloud to 1 295 449 children on World Read Aloud Day – an 80% increase on 2017.
- In 2018, 7.4 million people listened to Nal’ibali stories on SABC radio stations each week.
- Community activations and events have reached more than 200 000 people.

To create a culture of reading, it’s crucial to shift mindsets and, consequently, behaviour. Once people have taken ownership of an idea or a concept, once they see it is an integral part of their world view and identity, behaviour begins to change. Nal’ibali strives to acknowledge and promote reading and storytelling as a key part of South African identity.

Since launch in 2012, Nal’ibali has solidly entrenched its position as a thought and action leader for children’s literacy development and has spread the power of stories and reading nationwide – one story at a time.

**For more information** about the Nal’ibali campaign, how to sign up as a FUNda Leader and to access children’s stories in a range of South African languages, visit www.nalibali.org and www.nalibali.mobi or find us on Facebook and Twitter: nalibaliSA.
Businesses in the educational sector operate in an ever-changing, tech-savvy, digital-centric market. Leading academic bookseller Van Schaik Bookstore has embraced the challenge with their innovative offering, SmartSWOT—a digital learning solution, that links to a mobile app filled with curriculum-based resources, and brings textbook publishers, educators, and learners onto one interactive platform.

“SmartSWOT is a digital learning ecosystem that goes beyond the e-Textbook experience. In a nutshell, it is a digital learning solution based in an app, that enables blended learning—classroom teaching supported by digital technology and resources to be used at home,” says Stephan Erasmus, MD of Van Schaik Bookstore.

Students install the SmartSWOT Learning App on a device of their choice at home (mobile phone, tablet, or computer). The app comes with prepackaged learning resources as per the curriculum, in the form of digital books. The student’s school has the additional option to administer homework, tests, and publish further learning resources through the app.

“SmartSWOT offers an unparalleled learning experience—it enhances learning with rich resources, fun, creativity and innovation—it’s the future of integrated, interactive learning,” says Erasmus.

“This product is an inevitable evolution of our product offering—Van Schaik as a business took a strategic decision to evolve with the times and was the first bookstore to introduce an aggregated e-Textbook platform to South Africa, which has allowed us to gain a deeper understanding into how e-Textbooks are used by and affect students, academics, institutions, and publishers. SmartSWOT evolved out of these insights.”

Erasmus says that SmartSWOT is largely based on the e-textbook concept, but takes it much further: “The SmartSWOT app hosts content from top publishers, and in an e-textbook format offers learners an interactive learning experience that can be customized according to specific courses and institutions’ needs, and can be bundled with other institutional content.”

Project leader Melvin Kaabwe says that institutions have embraced SmartSWOT, because it supports student learning in such an accessible way:

“Students can easily buy their prescribed e-textbooks and recommended e-books on vanschaik.com or their nearest physical Van Schaik Bookstore on campus. Once they have downloaded the SmartSWOT app, they have access to their e-textbooks and more e-learning material upon login. After the initial login, all the contents are available for offline use.”

“Teachers and lecturers can use the app to monitor student progress as the app has the ability to track students through self-marking quizzes and assessments, as well as analytics on student progress.

“Facilitators can upload notes, examples and assessments. They can also enrich the content via media tools, including embedded videos, audio, animations and 3D graphs. It allows for one-to-one teaching, digital assessments, as well as the ability to track students’ progress. SmartSWOT will also allow students to contact facilitators and to hold group discussions with their peers.”

Kaabwe says that the app is designed to be user-friendly and encourages interaction: “Students will be able to access their textbooks on and offline, as they only need to connect to Wi-Fi to download new content. The new platform allows students to make handwritten notes, while also allowing them to highlight and save certain sections. Textbooks will come alive with animations, widgets and exercises allowing students to do virtual experiments and practical assignments or partake in workshops.”

Bianca Le Cornu, Programme Manager and Creative Arts Lecturer at the Pearson Institute of Higher Education says the app is a natural progression in a technology-based learning environment: “The app is a great alternative (or addition) to existing LMS systems; allowing learners to engage in blended learning activities is one space, in close proximity to their learning materials. Furthermore, the after-sales service is top-notch.”

Van Schaik offers additional support through their call center at sharecall 08600STUDY or internationally +27123665400, and offers on-site support including DTP services, content origination and customer services.

The app is available for download on: https://www.vanschaik.com/smartswot/
The book industry is made up of key players that represent, empower and promote the development and image of persons engaged in specific services in the industry. One of the key players is the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA).

LIASA aims to unite the library and information services in South Africa and is a South African Qualifications Authority recognised Professional Body for the Library and Information Services sector according to the NQF Act 67 of 2008. It is a voluntary association that connects the Library and information Service (LIS) sector and promotes the development of South Africa through access to information. More information can be found at http://www.liasa.org.za/.

What is the leadership structure?
The executive committee that comprises of the President, President-Elect, Secretary, Public Relations Officer, Treasurer, plus 4 additional members presides over LIASA.

There are 10 branches throughout South Africa:
- Gauteng North, Gauteng South, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Northern Cape, North-West, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State and Mpumalanga

Each branch has its own executive committee, consisting of a Chair, Chair-Elect, Secretary, PRO, Treasurer, and additional members, which may include convenors of the 10 Interest Groups:
1. Higher Education Libraries Interest Group (HELIG);
2. Information and Communication Technology in Libraries Interest Group (ICTLIG);
3. Interest Group for Bibliographic Standards (IGBIS);
4. Interlending Interest Group (ILLIG);
5. LIASA Special Libraries Interest Group (LiSLIG);
6. Marketing and Advocacy Interest Group (MAIG);
7. Public and Community Libraries Interest Group (PACLIG);
8. Research, Education and Training Interest Group (RETIG);
9. School Library and Youth Services Interest Group (SLYSIG);
10. Support Staff Interest Group (SSIG).

Can anyone join LIASA?
Yes, membership is open to all LIS professionals within South Africa.

Is there a membership fee?
Yes, there is. The membership fee increases every year and is announced at the AGM during the Annual Conference in October. In 2019, the membership fee is as follows:
- Individual membership: R620 and
- Institutional membership: R3 075.

What are key events on LIASA’s calendar?
- March: South African Library Week
- May: LIASA May Seminar
- July: LIASA Librarians’ Day: 10 July
- October: LIASA National Conference & Open Access Week

An upcoming event is the South African Library Week (SALW) which takes place in Botshabelo, in the Free State on Thursday 14 March 2019. Keynote Speaker will be the Minister of Arts and Culture, Mr E N Mthethwa. The 2019 SALW theme, ‘Collaborate @ your Library’ which speaks to LIS practitioners and encourages communities to leverage the opportunities of partnerships with libraries and other information providing entities.

What value does LIASA bring to the book industry?
LIASA ensures the promotion of available LIS services and other types of support to communities that would not ordinarily have access. LIASA is also an active partner at the Annual National Book Week driven by South African Book Development Council (SABDC) in September of every year to promote and engage South Africa in the joy of reading.

What is topical at LIASA?
The award in 2014 of professional body status to the Association was a significant game changer that enables the Association to confer professional designations to LIS practitioners (who meet the criteria) within South Africa. Consequently, LIASA is in the process of reviewing its structural and organisational setup to investigate alternatives for a 21st century Association. Furthermore, consultations will take place with all stakeholders through a series of roadshows with visits to every LIASA branch and other engagements such as the annual LIASA branch seminars also known as the ‘May Seminars’.
The Ecosystem of Book Publishing... and the value of Small and Micro Publishers

Small and micro publishers contribute to the world of books in important ways. They take risks and publish genres (poetry, short story collections and plays, for example) which bigger publishers are often wary of; they also publish mostly debut authors by offering them an entry point into the world of publishing. Successfully promoted authors often go on to be published by the bigger publishing houses.

One such small publisher is Modjaji Books which has been around for 12 years. The publisher has travailed some challenging times and now has a fairly big list of published authors. A recent debut novel was Yewande Omotoso’s *Bom Boy* which went on to win awards and was short-listed for the debut Etisalat Prize. Omotoso is now with international publishers and has an agent to promote her work globally.

Modjaji came into being because founder, Colleen Higgs decided to start publishing the work of women. As a passionate and opinionated reader, she wanted to promote the writing of women writers in southern Africa.

Colleen Higgs commented, “I’ve achieved my goal of publishing the work of other women; it has been exciting, exhilarating and frightening. Part of my motivation was because of what I experienced as a writer of poetry and short fiction, and as a woman writer. I knew what obstacles I was dealing with.”

A particular book that kick-started Modjaji as a company was Tracey Farren’s novel *Whiplash*, published in 2008. In 2017 it came out as a movie, which went on to win awards and praise. As luck would have it in 2016, there was an Oscar winning movie called *Whiplash*, so they had to change the title to Tess for the movie tie-in edition of the book.

“When I first read *Whiplash* I felt as though I had stuck my finger into an electric socket. Tracey’s voice was strong and powerful and like nothing I had ever read in South Africa before. She was writing from the point of view of a young woman down on her luck, working as a street prostitute in Muizenberg. Even though the book is gritty and in parts tough to read, it is a “feel better” read – it changes the reader and brings us to awareness of the lives of others that we may have ignored. It is also a riveting, page-turning novel, full of feeling and heart” said Higgs.

Higgs shared that it was not an easy sell into stores, as many bookshops felt their customers would not be comfortable reading books like this. In spite of this, *Whiplash* was shortlisted for the prestigious *Sunday Times Fiction Award* in 2009. A shift has since happened in booksellers’ and publishers’ views about what sells in the SA market.

Modjaji books had the opportunity to publish the book because it was turned down by all the other publishers. Tracey has now written her third book, which Kwela is publishing this year, 2019. The rights to *Snake*, Tracey’s second novel have been sold to Catalyst Press in the United States of America, for publication in 2020 and Modjaji is proud that it played a part in the career of a gifted South African writer.

“We take risks on manuscripts we believe in. Our books are set in or give a flavor of contemporary life in southern Africa. Our books contribute to a sense of place, of here, in southern Africa now, think *Love Interrupted* by Renelwe Malatji or *Do Not Go Gentle* by Futhi Ntshingila, and *To the Black Women We All Knew* by Kholofelo Maenetsha.

Our books offer characters, situations, contexts and place within which local readers can see themselves. Our books explore troubling issues, but also imagine new ways of being in the world, and tell us more about the world we live in, and open doors into the worlds of others with whom we live, here I’m thinking of *Whiplash*/Tess, *Bom Boy* by Yewande Omotoso and *Grace* by Barbara Boswell, also *A Person My Colour* – by Martina Dahlmanns,” concluded Higgs.

Modjaji titles increase awareness of women’s lives and experiences, question assigned roles, and examine issues such as women’s health, sexualities and psychologies: for example Karen Lazar’s *Hemispheres*, Beverly Rycroft’s *missing*, Michelle Hattingh’s *I’m the Girl Who Was Raped* and Trifonia Melibe *Obono’s La Bastarda*.

Modjaji Books is a tiny fish in a smallish pond, yet it has made an impact on the continent and internationally as a feminist publishing house. Modjaji has opened the door for writers and new publishing ventures. Many others players are publishing the kinds of books that at first were only published by Modjaji. A shining example is Blackbird Books, with a focus on black writers, many of them women, who ordinarily would probably not have been noticed 12 years ago.

Modjaji is a trailblazer in its own right and has paved the way for several new poetry presses – in particular, Uhlanga, Dryad and imphepo press thanks to the pioneering work that Modjaji Books did in publishing over 40 poetry titles since 2007. Publishing can be seen as an ecosystem, and the more diverse it is, the healthier it is.
AUTHORS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Reneilwe Malatji (Love Interrupted); Trifonia Melibea Obono (La Bastarda); and Futhi Ntshingila (Do Not Go Gentle).
Ngugi’s Epic Masterpiece
The imperfect girl behind the story of ‘Perfect Nine’

By DR. PETER KIMANI

The New Year heralds a remarkable gift for Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s legion fans. Kenya and Africa’s esteemed author has a new work of fiction—his first in over a decade. Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who recently turned 81, returns to fiction field with a ground-breaking epic that subverts patriarchy and roots for social equity.

The Gikuyu epic, Kenda Muiyuru: Rugano Rwa Gikuyu na Mumbi, is published by East African Educational Publishers, and will soon be translated into English by the author as The Perfect Nine: The Story of Gikuyu and Mumbi.

This comes 13 years since Ngugi released his international bestseller, Murogi wa Kagogo (Wizard of the Crow), which has since been translated into more than 30 languages.

In the intervening years, Ngugi produced works of non-fiction and essay collections, including, Re-membering Africa, Secure the Base, and Globalactics, which restate the author’s enduring vision of an African renaissance rooted in the reclamation of the continent’s cultural heritage.

He also produced a trilogy of memoirs: Dreams in a Time of War, which recalls his schooling in colonial Kenya, and a land roiled by the state of Emergency (and the inspiration for his seminal novel, Weep Not, Child); In the House of the Interpreter, which chronicles his life at Alliance High School, and Birth of a Dreamweaver: A Writer’s Awakening, which documents his student days at Makerere University, where he cut his teeth as a writer.

After a trailblazing career, Ngugi’s detention without trial in 1977 precipitated his exile in 1982. Four years later, he published Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature, which he declared his farewell to English language.

Farewell to English

“This book, Decolonising the Mind,” Ngugi wrote, “is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way.” He has since modified his position to exclude his academic work and non-fiction, so Kenda Muiyuru is an affirmation of his decades-long commitment of writing in an African language.

The new book is ground-breaking on several fronts. As an epic, Ngugi takes on a genre that he is least known for. “I’m not really a poetry guy,” he concedes, “But I didn’t struggle with it...” he told the Saturday Standard from California, adding that the book took him three years to write.

At 136 pages, Kenda Muiyuru is possibly Ngugi’s shortest novel; aesthetically, it is possibly his most sophisticated. Every line encapsulates sage philosophy, rendered with lyrical tenderness.

The old Gikuyu fable posits that a man named Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi had nine daughters. They lived on the slopes of Kirinyaga, the abode of their God. Through earnest prayer, nine young men miraculously appeared to take nine daughters for their wives and subsequently founded the community.

This was the epic that the playwright Oby Obyerodhiambo tapped to produce the musical, Drumbeats on Kirinyaga, in early 1990s, around the same time that Okoti Omtatah penned Lwanda Magere, an epic on the Luo warrior whose supernatural powers lay in his shadow, evocative of the Biblical Samson and his mystic powers that lay in the tangle of his hair.

Predictably, Ngugi’s re-enactment, however, goes beyond the divine realm: he excavates the past to provide a complex vision of a future unencumbered by divisions along the lines of gender, ethnicity, and physical handicap, among others, in narrating the Gikuyu nation.

The centrepiece of the story is neither Gikuyu nor Mumbi, but their last-born daughter, Warigia, who is fabled to have borne a child out of wedlock—an abomination in the traditional society—and so fated to live in her father’s house.

Things are further compounded by Warigia’s physical disability, an imperfection that sits at odds with the idea of her siblings’ perfect beauty. By picking an unwed mother with a physical handicap for a heroine, Ngugi is making a pushing for a more inclusive society.

As the story develops, Warigia gains more importance in the narrative as the young suitors who are besotted with her pretty sisters are assigned a task that’s intricately woven with her future.

Ngugi’s fable provides a multicultural, multi-ethnic, even pan-African outlook: the 99 young men (one drifter, who is soft on Warigia, is not counted), are drawn from different parts of Kenya and
the continent: Nyanza, Tana River, Niger, Senegal, Congo, all coursing down the major rivers towards their source in the highlands of Kirinyaga, and drawn to the fame of the nine beautiful sisters.

In this universe, the nine beauties reject objectification of their physical beauty, “the beautiful ones will always be born,” Ngugi writes, teasing out Ayi Kwei Armah’s dystopian novel, “The Beautiful ones Are Not Yet Born.”

Even as the young men embark on their perilous assignment, they are warned that none of the young women will settle outside their parents’ land—but for Warigia, who elopes with the lone drifter—a bold gesture that this could be Ngugi’s most “feminist” epic.

In this book, work is not divided along gender lines; one undertakes tasks that they can handle. “By necessity, they had to do everything,” he says of the nine daughters. “They did not have brothers, so they had to go hunting to find something to eat, building huts, among other chores.”

The epic is also interested in ecological justice, as nature is presented as an entity that deserves human care, which cues in the American author Henry David Thoreau teachings on environmentalism.

“I would like to encourage Kenyan writers to create epics based on the stories of their communal origins, like Homer did for the Greeks and Virgil for the Romans,” Ngugi said in a recent interview with The East African.

While in the arduous journey to the top of the mountain, where Gikuyu the patriarch has instructed that all potential suitors to venture and bring a secret cure to treat Warigia’s handicap, only the most perseverant will survive and return to claim the nine fair ladies.

Ngugi’s Kenda Muiyuru proudly joins the hallowed space of world epics, such as Sundiata, An Epic of Old Mali and epics of ancient India such as Ramayana and Mahabharata.

“I would like to encourage Kenyan writers to create epics based on the stories of their communal origins, like Homer did for the Greeks and Virgil for the Romans,” Ngugi said in a recent interview with The East African.

Yet again, this pioneering writer is paving the way, as he has since 1962, when he published his seminal novel, while still an undergraduate. He’s presently a distinguished professor of English and Comparative Literature at University of California, Irvine, in the United States.

This literary milestone coincides with the release of yet another major text, 
Ngugi: Reflections on His Life of Writing, edited by Kenyan academics Simon Gikandi and Ndirangu Wachanga. This is published by the British imprint, Boydell & Brewer, last month.

The article was first published in The Saturday Standard of Kenya (www.standardmedia.co.ke).
Peter Kimani brings to life a colourful cast of characters in this mesmerising novel set in the shadow of Kenya's independence from Britain. He successfully weaves together a multi-generational, multi-ethnic tale of the formation of modern Kenya, a riveting saga of railroads.

1963. Kenya is on the verge of independence from British colonial rule. In the Great Rift Valley, Kenyans of all backgrounds come together in the previously white-only establishment of the Jakaranda Hotel. The resident musician is Rajan Salim, who charms visitors with songs inspired by his grandfather's noble stories of the railway construction that spawned the Kenya they now know. One evening, Rajan is kissed by a mysterious woman in a shadowy corridor. Unable to forget the taste of her lavender-flavoured lips, Rajan sets out to find her. On his journey he stumbles upon the murky, shared history of three men – his grandfather, the owner of the Jakaranda and a British preacher – who were implicated in the controversial birth of a child. What Rajan uneartls will open his eyes about the birth not just of a child, but of an entire nation.

Here is an excerpt from the book:
In that year, the glowworms in the marshes were replaced by lightbulbs, villagers were roused out of their hamlets by a massive rumbling that many mistook for seismic shifts of the earth. These were not uncommon occurrences—locals experienced earthquakes across the Rift Valley so often they even had an explanation for it. They said it was God taking a walk in His universe. They believed this without needing to see it, but on that day the villagers saw the source of the noise as well. It was a monstrous, snake-like creature whose black head, erect like a cobra’s, pulled rusty brown boxes and slithered down the savanna, coughing spasmodically as it emitted blue-black smoke. The villagers clasped their hands and wailed: Yu kiini! Come and see the strips of iron that those strange men planted seasons earlier—which, left undisturbed, had grown into a monster gliding through the land.

The gigantic snake was a train and the year was 1901, an age when white men were still discovering the world for their kings and queens in faraway lands. So when the railway superintendent, or simply Master as he was known to many, peered out the window of his first-class cabin that misty morning, his mind did not register the dazzled villagers who dropped their hoes and took off, or led their herds away from the grazing fields in sheer terror of the strange creature cutting through their land. Neither did Master share in the tamasha booming from across the coaches where British, Indian, and African workers—all in their respective compartments—were celebrating the train’s maiden voyage. Instead, Master was absorbed by the landscape that looked remarkably different from how he remembered it from his previous trip.

The mass of water appeared to have grown from a pond into a large lake. Maybe his eyes were playing tricks on him; or maybe after crawling through that very same land on either donkey or zebra, his lofty perch on the train now afforded him a very different view. To the left, a spring spewed hot water, the vapor casting clouds of woolly nothingness above it. One of these should be named for Sally, Master thought—the idea eliciting a mélange of soreness and softness that always came with the memories of his English wife, now estranged for four years. She was the reason he was looking forward to returning to England. A ship was waiting at the port of Mombasa, some five hundred miles away, where the rail construction had begun. The railroad tracks ended at the head of what he had named Port Victoria, memorializing the lake there with the same name, in honor of the Queen of England. So the rail that started by the shores of the Indian Ocean now cut through the hinterland to the shores of Lake Victoria. This was the mission that had brought him to the British East Africa Protectorate, and it had now been accomplished. He had been discharged with full honor, the cable from London said, echoing the military jargon that had regulated his life for twenty-three years. The cable also said a letter with full details of his release had been dispatched on SS Britannia, the vessel that would then deliver him home to England. Master suppressed a smile at the thought, and further subverted the thought by pretending to scratch his pate, whose receding hairline merged with his forehead to form what looked like a small crater.

**About the author**
Peter Kimani is an award-winning Kenyan novelist. He was one of three international poets to compose and present a poem for National Public Radio to mark Barack Obama’s inauguration in 2009. A prominent journalist on Kenya’s national news circuit, Kimani’s work has appeared in *The Guardian, New African* and *Sky News*. He teaches journalism at the Aga Khan University’s Graduate School of Media and Communications in Nairobi, and is presently the Visiting Writer at Amherst College in the United States. Kimani was awarded the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for literature, Kenya’s highest literary honour, in 2011.
IN THE SPOTLIGHT »

**Confronting Inequality – The South African Crisis**
South Africa's distorted distribution of wealth is one of the biggest challenges facing the country's economy, with unemployment sitting at an unsustainable 27.7%. In terms of wealth, the top percentile households hold 70.9% while the bottom 60% holds a mere 7%. 76% of South Africans face an imminent threat of falling below the poverty line. With such statistics, the inequality crisis in this country is at a desperate level and strategies to remedy this challenge seem shallow and lack urgency.

In this context, the Institute for African Alternatives has brought together a series of papers written by eminent South African academics and policymakers to serve as a catalyst to finally confront and resolve inequality. With papers from former Public Prosecutor Thuli Madonsela, Ben Turok and former President Kgalema Motlanthe, this book provides a guide to how the nation can confront and resolve the inequality plaguing the country.

The nation is headed to the polls later this year and books such as this are vital for providing a strong guide on how those in power can address South Africa's biggest economic crisis. A great contribution to the current political discourse, the book both confronts the issue and provides strategies on how to remedy inequality.

"I am emboldened by the hope that the future that we imagined at the founding of democracy can be attained. This hope, however, is not one underscored by naiveté or attempts to disregard the material reality and political circumstances that contribute to its current state." – Former President Kgalema Motlanthe

"There is a growing body of data showing that extreme inequality and poverty is not only a threat to peace and stability but also impedes development. That makes sense to me. Structural inequality translates into structural inefficiency in the utilisation of human capital.” – Former Public Prosecutor Thuli Madonsela

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**About the author**
Michael Nassen Smith is currently the deputy director of the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA), having previously lectured at the University of Cape Town in the politics department. Michael is eager to connect intellectual work with pursuits for social and economic justice. He is also interested in promoting interdisciplinary work in the academy.

**The Future of Mining in South Africa: Sunset or Sunrise?**
A MISTRA PUBLICATION
The Future of Mining in South Africa: Sunset or Sunrise? Comes at a time of debate around the Mining Charter. The book encourages broader discussion on the role of mining in a South Africa that is striving to improve its growth and development and even serve as a catalyst for change.

The book covers issues like the potential of platinum to spur industrialization, land and dispossession on the platinum belt, the roles of the state and capital in mineral development, mining in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a historical survey of women and mining from the late 19th century to present and mine worker organizing: history and lessons and how post-mine rehabilitation can be tackled.

It was inspired not only by an appreciation of our country’s extensive mineral endowments; but also by a realisation that, while the South African mining industry performs relatively well on many technical indicators, its management of broader social issues leaves much to be desired. It needs to be deliberated whether the mining industry can play as critical a role going forward as it did in the evolution of our economy.

This book has an international appeal as it shows what the future of mining is for all mineral-rich countries given the current global moment of climate change, cumulative environmental damage caused by mining and an industry dominated by transnational corporations. The book offers key questions and a methodology to investigate them, which can be applied to/by any country.

**About MISTRA**
The Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) is an independent research institute that takes a longer term view on the strategic challenges facing South Africa.

MISTRA was founded by a group of South Africans with experience in research, academia, policy-making and governance who saw the need to create a platform of engagement around strategic issues facing South Africa. It is an institute that combines research and academic development, social reflection and intellectual discourse. It applies itself to issues such as economics, sociology, history, arts and culture and the logics of natural sciences.

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**Blue Weaver Family Expands**
Blue Weaver, a fully independent book marketing, sales and distribution company based in Cape Town is excited to announce they will be distributing titles from three new international publishers: Quiller Publishing, The Indigo Press, and Helion & Company.

Quiller Publishing is an independent publisher established in 2001 and is situated in the UK. Their Quiller imprint focuses on various genres within non-fiction such as sport, fishing, guns and gun-making, pets and pet training. The Kenilworth Press imprint focuses on a wide variety of equestrian titles.

The Indigo Press is an independent publisher situated in the UK who focuses on both fiction and non-fiction. While the publishing house is young, they place great emphasis on quality content and well-designed books.

Helion & Company is situated in the UK and was founded in 1996. Today it is one of the world's leading publishers and booksellers of military history in the English language.
International Women’s Day (March 8) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

Locally, Womandla! Women Power! The "Herstory" is a reflective story of one woman’s resolve to contribute to the up-liftment of women in dire circumstances.

Rolene Miller is the founder of Mosaic, a South African non-governmental organisation which provides free counselling and courtroom assistance to disadvantaged women who have been victims of gender-based violence. Miller’s book Womandla! Women Power! The “Herstory” of Mosaic was published in 2018 for Mosaic’s twenty-fifth anniversary and chronicles the founder’s life with the organisation from the time of its founding up until today.

Rolene Miller is the founder of Mosaic, a South African non-governmental organisation which provides free counselling and courtroom assistance to disadvantaged women who have been victims of gender-based violence. Miller’s book Womandla! Women Power! The “Herstory” of Mosaic was published in 2018 for Mosaic’s twenty-fifth anniversary and chronicles the founder’s life with the organisation from the time of its founding up until today. The formal establishment of Mosaic as an NGO in 1993 coincided with the end of Apartheid in South Africa, a timing Miller felt to be symbolically perfect. However, although Mosaic started off at a time of transformation, in an atmosphere of freedom and hope, getting an NGO up and running in the post-Apartheid climate would prove less straightforward than anticipated. Womandla! is the story of Mosaic’s bumpy ride.

Far from being a dry recounting of names, dates and facts, this book takes the reader on a deeply personal and emotional journey. The author makes the history – or herstory – of Mosaic come alive; to Miller, her time with Mosaic is part of her very being. We get a vivid sense of her motivations for founding the organisation, her strong inner drive to get her idea off the ground, the familial and professional hurdles she faced on the way, and her steep learning curve in the world of community work. A well-to-do white South African woman of the Jewish faith, Miller paints a detailed and insightful picture of the challenges of establishing bonds of trust with disadvantaged communities, of fostering sisterhood across the boundaries of racial classifications during the early years of South African democracy, and of bringing men and women together in discussions about abuse. She also writes openly about her personal relationship with God.

While Womandla! is Miller’s personal story, it is also – and equally importantly – the story of Mosaic’s community workers. These are women who came to Mosaic in search of empowerment for themselves and others; women who sometimes faced opposition from husbands and family members for choosing to work with Mosaic; women who voluntarily jumped straight into the deep end of the pool and, despite their lack of previous experience, learned to expertly navigate a completely new professional environment; women who had the courage and willpower to revisit their own traumatic experiences as part of their training as counsellors. Reading about these women, I find them to be truly inspirational role models.

In Womandla!, Miller shows herself to be an astute observer. Her text has the ethnographic detail of an anthropological monograph and is essentially an auto-ethnography, brimming with thick descriptions and excerpts from Miller’s personal journal through which Mosaic’s volunteers and participants are often referenced in their own words. Womandla! contains revealing behind-the-scenes accounts reminiscent of such ethnographic works as Geertz’s Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight and Rabinow’s Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco. Miller’s journal entries tend to reveal her judgements of specific individuals, which some may find off-putting, but which I choose to read as signs of honesty and transparency. By sharing even her most problematic thoughts and opinions, Miller adds important dimensions to the story and opens herself up for commentary and constructive criticism.

Although Womandla! is not explicitly branded as a scholarly work, it holds significant scholarly value, most obviously because it provides an exhaustive documentation of the herstory of Mosaic. Furthermore, seen in a larger context, the book is essential reading for anyone interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the situation of women in South Africa’s immediate post-Apartheid era. Womandla! provides an interesting take on interracial, intercultural and inter-class dynamics, and to a certain extent even issues of gender and sexuality. Mosaic’s early focus on intersectional identities strikes me as ahead of its time, and as a transgender woman, I am especially impressed by the fact that Miller was emphasizing the difference between sex and gender as early as the mid-1990s.

There is strong symbolism in the name Mosaic, which was chosen to illustrate how “Broken pieces of abused women’s lives will be put together to create a beautiful and whole life for themselves” (p. 9). Although Mosaic has done much good in its 25 years of existence, the fight against gender-based violence and abuse – as Miller rightly points out in the book – is still a work in progress. As broken shards are picked up and mended, new lives continue to be shattered. Reading Miller’s account of a silent demonstration against woman abuse held by Mosaic in 1995 reminded me of the much less silent Total Shutdown protests which took place across South Africa in 2018. This book, then, is not simply a work of historical documentation; it is a testament, indeed a salute, to the ongoing and ever-vibrant women’s rights struggle in which Mosaic and similar organisations continue to play a crucial part. Womandla awethu!
Books Extravaganza for Kids
The South African Children’s Book Fair

By MAIYO FEBI

The count-down is on to the 2019 South Africa Children’s Book Fair (SACBF) which will be held at the Blue Wing Conference and Events Venue, Ticketpro Dome in Northgate. Running from 30 May – 2 June, the mandate of SACBF is to encourage children to get into the healthy habit of reading thus entrenching a culture at an early age.

The goals of the Children’s Book Fair are to create a platform for children’s books writers to get exposure, provide a large scale opportunity for various stakeholders in the children’s books industry to interact and; encourage authors to continue telling stories that are easily readable and in the context of the African child.

This year’s event marks the 3rd edition and organisers are expecting growth in the number of feet that visit the fair. “My dream is to see the SACBF as a must-go-to event on every child’s calendar and around the Johannesburg area. I also believe that the fair should be listed as one of the events to look forward to in support of youth month on the government’s calendar; we are working towards that possibility” comments Vuyo Biyana founder and director of the SACBF.

The first two days of the fair are dedicated to school children with a jam-packed programme filled with exciting activities. The last two days are open to the general public.

Most of the learners are first-time visitors to a book fair and SACBF prides itself in giving learners an immersive experience. Children from all walks life have the opportunity to read books, listen to compelling stories, attend interactive workshops, witness book launches and so much more.

Schools are selected in collaboration with the Gauteng Department of Education and just under 400 learners attended last year.

The event attracts global publishers, corporates, self-publishers, small and medium exhibitors and young writers to showcase their work in a conducive environment geared towards fun and engagement.

Entry fee
Adults  R50
Pensioners  R30
Children:
– ages 13–17  R20
– 12 years and below  Free entry

Tickets can be purchased online at www.webtickets.co.za, in store at any Pick n Pay or on the day upon entry.

For exhibition space please contact Vuyo Biyana on +27 72 785 0512
For 10 years, World Read Aloud Day has drawn global attention to the importance of reading aloud and sharing stories. Celebrated on the 1st of February 2019, it is well worth taking time to consider the countless benefits of this activity, and mulling over some staggering statistics surrounding literacy.

Approximately 758 million people across the globe cannot read. According to South African government statistics, our youth literacy rate for those aged 15 to 34 sits at over 90%, whilst adult literacy (ages 35–64) sits at just under 80%.

Of tantamount importance is the enjoyment of reading; a responsibility that not only rests on the shoulders of educators, but also falls on parents.

For those of us blessed with a parent who read aloud to us, we viewed it as a treasured, time-honoured tradition; one which surely had a hand in helping us reach our full potential in later years.

Reading aloud is a great way of connecting with little ones. Along with the benefit of spending regular time with your children, this activity supports healthy brain development that forms a priceless foundation for success at school and on the journey of life. Which toddler doesn’t love sitting on their parent’s lap and hearing that beloved voice reading aloud to them?

Reading aloud is invaluable when it comes to language development and promoting early literacy skills such as book handling and naming, understanding how stories work, recognising sounds and letters, expanding vocabulary and honing listening skills.

Reading aloud also boosts confidence, helps children cope better with anxiety, develops memory and expands children’s worlds.

Sadly, surveys show that only half of parents read to their kids daily, and less than 10% of parents read to their children from infancy.

READ Educational Trust is all too aware of the power of literacy, and as a non-profit organisation, focuses on promoting literacy across South Africa. While 90% of children may be able to read, the most daunting statistic was revealed by the Progress In International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2016, where an alarming 78% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning in any language.

Among various tools promoted and disseminated by READ, the READ ALOUD MAGIC BOX SETS are vital in encouraging reading aloud, and all the benefits this activity holds.

Each of three box sets contains 12 beautifully designed books filled with enchanting, adventure-filled stories set in Africa. These stories are all set in Africa and revolve around children and animals discovering the world in which they live. These sets are a priceless investment, not only in terms of serving to build your child’s vocabulary, but as far as spending quality time with your little ones goes. Set A is aimed at children aged 4–7; Set B is suited to kids aged 5–8 and Set C is for children aged 6–9. All three sets are available online at http://www.thereadshop.co.za/. All profits are ploughed back into promoting literacy.
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CAPE TOWN: Debi Dagnin, Charles Dagnin, Mary Lochner  Tel: 021 386 0136  Fax: 021 386 0134
DURBAN: Iqbal Samad  Tel: 031 337 8567  Fax: 031 332 1588
JOHANNESBURG: Jan Ludolph, Nicolene Bezuidenhout  Tel: 011 396 1830  Fax: 011 396 1925