



University of Dundee

The lure of postwar London

Low, Gail

Published in:
The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing

DOI:
[10.1017/9781108164146.019](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108164146.019)

Publication date:
2020

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Low, G. (2020). The lure of postwar London: networks of people, print and organisations. In S. Nasta, & M. U. Stein (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* (pp. 278-295). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108164146.019>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in Discovery Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from Discovery Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

University of Dundee

17. The lure of post-war Londons: networks of people, print and organisations

In pursuit of the English, Doris Lessing's memoir of her years as a penniless writer newly arrived in postwar London, she recounts an anecdote when a friend from Cape Town accosts her with, 'Hey, Doris, man... how are you doing and how are you getting on with England?' Lessing's riposte was, 'I don't think I've met any. London is full of foreigners'. In this account, London, after the Second World War, is a place of transnational, cosmopolitan population flows living cheek by jowl with working-class Londoners. The chapter moves across the three postwar decades presents a materialist history of London as it grappled with – however fitfully and unevenly – the legacy of empire. In addressing the diverse and discrepant material histories of broadcasting, cultural organisations, publishing, bookselling and bookshops this chapter describes the multivarious experiences connecting local spaces with global cultural production, all within commercial, social, educational and political imperatives. 'The lure of post-war Londons' cannot but give a selective portrait of London during these decades but such a narrative is vital for understanding the role that individuals and organisations have in creating a cosmopolitan city space.

Radio Days

Because of its ability to reach beyond its broadcast location, transforming print into the spoken word and hence widening its reach, radio is perhaps the most logical place to begin. At once real and virtual, the airwaves constitutes an imaginary space that makes material *and* substantive London's presence and its connection with other far-flung spaces. Debates over postwar

programming at the BBC were marked by contradictory pulls towards and away from the Commonwealth – a 'continuing adjustment to imperial decline'; 'public apathy' towards the Commonwealth in favour of Europe; anxieties regarding the rise of American cultural and political influence (Potter, 2012: 201-2) – the BBC *Caribbean Voices* was no different in embeddedness in a Reithian value system and a new more regional, decolonising transnationalism.

Many scholars have explored the impact on the literary landscape of the Caribbean on the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* (Nanton, 1998; Cobham, 1986; Low, 2010, Griffith, 2016). As we saw in Chapter 6 of this history, *Caribbean Voices* was a twenty, then thirty, minute programme launched by Una Marson in 1943 and later edited by Henry Swanzy. An influential radio series, it supported a developing literary ecology on the islands, mentoring writers and developing literary-institutional frameworks. As *Caribbean Voices* gathered creative work sent in from the BBC agent in Jamaica and also regional little magazines, it acted both as publisher and forged a pan-island Anglogone imaginary community over the airwaves when readership did not easily transcend locality or offer writers payment. The programme sought to professionalise debates on Caribbean writing modelled in part on the BBC's 'home' arts broadcasts on the *Third Programme*, growing thus a network of relationships between Caribbean writers and the London establishment that, unsurprisingly, challenged both stakeholders.

The programme's literary-critical developmental work which included the creation of 'The critics circle' was vital. Charges of neo-colonialism were inevitably levelled at the series. In reply to Trinidadian writer Rodwell Debysingh, who criticised the English poet and critic Roy Fuller's contributions to one such programme (Fuller presented regularly on the *Third Programme*), Swanzy wrote reminding him that literature was a republic of letters. The formation of literary traditions, heritages and public intellectual and literary-critical forums were necessary. Swanzy

provocatively contrasted local island 'schoolmasters' with 'literary men', arguing that literature needed the full weight of educational, critical and cultural apparatuses to support its development. Patronage may be neo-colonial, 'the imposition of alien standards on a regional culture which ought to develop of itself', but was necessary to 'help build up a better tradition' at a time when local literary-critical culture was only coming into its own with the creation of the University of the West Indies.¹

For some writers who gravitated towards London, *Caribbean Voices* provided employment as they became paid readers of broadcast material. As printed texts became the spoken word, the emphasis on sound and voice was pronounced. This led to complaints about regional accents but as Griffiths (2016: 41) and Laurence Breiner (2008: 55) both note, the differing patterns of speech and accents had the effect of sensitising writers and authorities to the spoken word. Broadcast voices therefore opened up debates about authenticity, form and voice, and encouraged writing poetry for performance poetry after independence.

Swanzy's role as mentor to this circle of Caribbean writers in London, who included figures such as VS Naipaul, Wilson Harris, George Lamming and Samuel Selvon, has been well documented elsewhere (Low, 2011; Griffiths, 2016). Swanzy's introduction to the London literary elite enabled a productive network of connections between these individuals and English writers, publishers, reviewers and editors in the London literary establishment. These informal networks were important to the metropolitan patronage of the Caribbean which helped facilitate publication. Arthur Calder-Marshall and Walter Allen encouraged and championed Lamming which led to the appearance of *In the Castle of My Skin* (Michael Joseph); Roy Fuller, William Plomer and Alan Ross's support of the young Derek Walcott (working then in Trinidad)

smoothed the path toward his poetry debut, *In a Green Night* (Jonathan Cape). Francis Wyndham and Diana Athill, both with Andre Deutsch, supported V S Naipaul's early work; Charles Montieth, advised by Andrew Salkey, published Wilson Harris's first novel, *Palace of the Peacock* (Faber). These friendships and the contradictory, complex networks of patronage enabled Caribbean writers to be 'celebrated literary figures in metropolitan highbrow circles throughout the decade.' (Kalliney, 2013: 117)

The importance of *Caribbean Voices* as a transnational metropolitan nexus of cultural activity is mirrored by that of the Transcription Centre (1962-1978) – albeit less influentially and more problematically – given the latter's reliance on external, private funding. The organisation was founded by Dennis Duerden whose interests and connections with West Africa were sparked by working as education officer in the Nigerian colonial administration, and as director of the Hausa BBC World Service. The Centre functioned primarily to create cultural radio recordings on African arts for distribution in Africa and beyond (including North America and the Caribbean), and as a result raised awareness about things African via London. It comprised a radio studio, a cultural centre containing a library, exhibition space and reading room in, initially, central London, and then West London.

Its flagship programme, *Africa Abroad*, spread news of African cultural activities in Europe, the United States, the West Indies, South America and beyond. Presented and edited from 1962 by Lewis Nkosi, South African novelist and then the Nigerian critic, Aminu Abdullahi, from 1964, the weekly magazine offered a mixture of reviews, theatre, music, literature and art and politics. Transcription Centre also made other notable series, including: 'African and Afro-American Literature', 'African music as an Art Form', 'African vernacular literature', poetry in different African languages as well as 'English-Speaking Caribbean Novelists'.² Duerden also recorded interviews for sale and radio broadcast in Africa and the US with emerging West African writers and also Anglophone Caribbean writers. As Pinto observes, *Africa Abroad's* 'eclectic mix' was a

way to 'self-consciously' situate culture at the 'centre of diaspora identity and politics' in London, as well as contribute to the positive representation of the continent abroad (Pinto 2012).

London cosmopolitan nexus

Duerden wanted to 'break down the barriers' between he considered the 'self-centred cultural worlds of Europe and Africa' and, much like Swanzy, offer assistance to newly arrived African writers.³ Duerden recognised that London's location at the centre of a nexus of relationships between diverse cultural bodies, and the constant and consequent traffic of visitors in the arts from abroad made the city if not unique then certainly crucial to a literary cosmopolitanism. Transcription Centre published a monthly informational newsletter, 'Cultural Events in Africa', with events listings, news items, reviews of new books, press releases and general reviews and short pieces, and extending to Black writers of African descent. As Gerald Moore noted the Centre 'became a first port-of-call for most African and West Indian writers, artists, or musicians' (2002: 170). These networking opportunities were significant and the Centre's archive contains many appreciative letters of thanks. Similar to *Caribbean Voices*, the Centre connected with local West African arts organisations like *Mbari* and pioneering West African little magazines such as *Black Orpheus* and *Transition*.

The Centre's drama workshop, Transcription Theatre Workshop filmed a production of Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers*, staged readings of other African plays and poetry at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) and at the Little Hampstead Theatre Club, where Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* were performed. And the workshop in turn led to the formation of Ijinle Theatre Company, hosted by the Centre and formed to produce Soyinka's plays with African actors.

Scholarship on the reach and influence of the Transcription Centre is in its infancy. Yet what is

clear is the troubled and difficult path it trod between pleasing its secret funders, firstly the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom and then later the Fairfield and Ford Foundations, and undertaking the genuine cultural work necessary to create awareness of Africa and African diasporic culture. While Congress funding was directed at resisting the spread of communism especially among intellectuals in a decolonising world, the Centre did give voice, as Jordanna Bailkin observes, 'to various registers of transnational black solidarity' (2014:234). Duerden believed that London distance from Africa, its cosmopolitan mix of visitors, organisations and research libraries, countered narrowly nationalistic concerns in a decolonising Africa. Yet if London was imbricated in the future of a decolonising Africa, the reverse was also true as a cosmopolitan post-imperial future was imagined on British soil by such organisations as *Caribbean Voices* and Transcription Centre. London location and connections were paramount as the Centre entered into a collaboration with the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) located on the same West London street. Members of the Centre were granted ICA membership and ICA galleries were sometimes available for the exhibitions and lectures the Centre organised. Some joint programming included, 'The European Image of Africa', 'African Literature' 'Africa and Jazz', a reading of Lewis Nkosi's play *Rhythm of Violence* as well as a screening and discussion of a Centre produced film, *African Writers of Today*.

A progressive postwar bastion of twentieth century art, the ICA was an ideal partner with overlapping interests. Part museum, art gallery, educational centre and part members club, the ICA's interest in African art (music and dance) came from its avowed Euro-modernist preoccupations with primitivism and with anthropology. It cultivated a deliberate eclectic openness to internationalist writers and artists with exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s including not only James Joyce and Picasso but also Roberto Matta and Wilfredo Lam, paintings from Haiti and India, film screenings of African plays, and readings by 'British Caribbean Writers' chaired by Stuart Hall. Lamming had already read his poetry at the ICA open series for emerging

poets, 'Platform for Poets'; while he was critical of the literary patronage evident at these meetings, he was also aware that different kinds of partnership could work for. (Laming, 1960:85)

In his welcome speech at the ICA launch in 1950, Herbert Read, a founder, emphasised the Institute's distinctive location at the heart of Britain and the Commonwealth. The ICA would be a meeting ground where 'foreign intellectual[s]' and 'visiting arts' might gather, where different cultures and artistic fields might 'mutually inspire each other'. As Massey and Muir write in their retrospective, the founders 'styled' the ICA as potent broker of 'challenging art, high culture and intellectual endeavour[s]' that sought to actively trouble the conventional and 'restrictive hegemony' of the postwar period (2014: 11).

The ICA was not, of course, the only metropolitan institute positioning itself as breaking with imperial cultural legacies. The Commonwealth Institute, newly opened in 1962 in Kensington High Street, made a gradual, if fitful, transition from imperialism to post-imperial, postcolonial and multi-cultural. Despite its past, the re-named Institute represented a 'co-operative effort' by Commonwealth nations all to 'create a physical expression in London' of a 'constructive' shared legacy, where culture and the educational activities was put above the narrow confines of politics or trade relations (Bradley, 1963: 404).

The building's modern design was significant. It contained a central space - raised marble platform under a distinctive tent-like canopied roofing - where visitors could glimpse three tiers of gallery displays devoted to diverse Commonwealth nations. Critics have argued that this positioning interpellates the everyday visitor as British, confirming Britain as the invisible centre, for the galleries contained no displays on Britain itself. Yet the Institute's archival papers attest to individual Commonwealth nations' resistance to centrist and neo-colonial paternalistic demands; many updated their displays and saw the networking opportunities as useful and considered the organisation as offering a productive space for exhibiting their 'visualising and materialising'

independent national identities in a changing global world. (Wintle, 2013: 193-4)

Sited not far from those very neighbourhoods which in the fifties and sixties were seen to be enclaves of postwar immigration, the Institute became a landmark with significant visitor numbers. Ruth Craggs cites visitor numbers upwards of 612, 000 a year after its opening. The educational opportunities and activities the Institute co-ordinated meant that several London schools visited the building regularly, allowing children from areas with significant 'new' Commonwealth populations – Notting Hill, Kensal Rise and Bayswater – to locate themselves as integral to the shared and larger narrative of imperialism, colonialism and decolonisation. The Institute thus enabled many local minority ethnic school children and visitors to affirm themselves as part of a larger Commonwealth history that provided a narrative and rationale for their continued presence in Britain (Craggs, 2011). This reimagining of a modern, cosmopolitan post-imperial Britain represented a coming to terms with the legacy of empire as a distinct problem of Britain's making and not one exclusively created by immigrant flows fetching up on its shores.

In the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, the Commonwealth Institute's sustained investment in multicultural arts and education meant a direct engagement with the changing face of London's diverse population, and with promoting literatures from other parts of the world. Not only did the Institute's resource centre and library offer important portals to the histories, geographies, arts and cultures of the nations it represented, but the Institute became a unique repository for many foundational reports: the *Handbook of Library Holdings of Commonwealth Literature: UK and Europe* (1977), *Critical Writings on Commonwealth Literatures: A Selective Bibliography to 1970*, pamphlets, bibliographies, booklists and resource booklets for the teaching of African, Caribbean, South Asian, Black and Minority Ethnic literatures in Britain produced by the Association of the Teaching of African, Caribbean, Asian and Associated Literatures (ATCALs). In 1986, the Institute staged a Caribbean Focus Year with special events, film screenings, music

and talks and educational programmes linking the Caribbean islands with the black British community in London, and with major cities such as Liverpool, Bristol and Leicester.

Caribbean transnational

London played a key role in the growth of Caribbean transnational movements. As was evident in Campbell's chapter earlier in this volume, The Caribbean Artist Movement (CAM) became an important forum on Caribbean arts and letters, and an enduring influence long after its organisational demise. The Bajan poet, Kamau Brathwaite, surprised at not finding local organisations with transnational links with Commonwealth nations or the wider non-Anglophone Caribbean when he was a student in London, initiated a critical forum at the West Indian Students Centre (WISC) to remedy this lack. Initially, CAM's focus on carving out a 'space' within 'the existing metropolitan system of artistic production, consumption and criticism' was key, or as Brathwaite observed, why Caribbean literature was being 'marginalised into West Indian or black literature [sic]' instead of being treated simply as literature (Brian Alleyne, 2002:34). CAM's early concerns were centred on mutual contributions, literary cross-fertilisations between the Caribbean and Europe but this changed as Black identity politics strengthened in Britain. An enthusiastically received public reading of Brathwaite's poem *Rights of Passage* in 1967, staged in a theatre in Holborn, was followed shortly by the first public CAM meeting at the WISC in Collingham Gardens.

The location was important. Established over a decade earlier, WISC was funded by West Indian governments to provide a hub of leisure, social and cultural activities for Caribbean students. WISC was the location of Wilson Harris's seminal talk, 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel', a lecture subsequently also published by the organisation; it was also where the Ugandan poet, Okot p'Bitek's, *Song of Lawino* was first performed. WISC was closely associated with CAM in the

early years, and some of CAM's office bearers were also appointed to the board of WISC. The benefits were felt by both organisations. CAM brought intellectual and cultural programming to WISC, and WISC provided CAM with a widening audience of students and activists drawn from local communities. Informal discussions became more structured with accompanying newsletters, bibliographies, cultural programming and the election of office bearers. The bi-monthly newsletter, much like Transcription Centre's 'Cultural Events in Africa' put local activities in London alongside those on the islands, including lecture transcriptions, notes and news of creative activities taking place on two sides of the Atlantic. While details of CAM, including its journal *Savacou* is addressed in detail elsewhere in this volume, it is important to remember that CAM's presence on the London scene helped grow and catalyse the formation of a number of important activist, creative and publishing enterprises which followed on. These included: Creation for Liberation, South East London Parents Organisation, the Nigerian Society of African Artists, and perhaps, most significantly New Beacon Books which survives to this day

Publishing and Bookselling in London

New Beacon, founded by CAM member John La Rose, had already brought out its first book by the time of the 1967 inaugural CAM meeting; the two organisations developed in tandem throughout the sixties. La Rose was scholar, teacher, writer and trade union activist and he believed that owning the means of literary production was vital Caribbean literary development. He saw publishing, as 'vehicle' for cultural validation and a means to overcome the discontinuities and the overt suppression of information that characterised the colonial period (First International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books programme brochure). In addition, publishing independently afforded small presses such as New Beacon flexibility and enabled them to eschew profitability as a main driving force for the press; as Brathwaite put it, this was 'a publishing adventure' not in hock to 'commercial jagguernauts [who] wd never touch

& therefore scissored, silenced out [sic]' what was real, diverse, experimental and committed writing (1992:21).

La Rose published three books in two years, *Foundations*, a book of poetry written by himself, *Marcus Garvey 1887-1940* and *Tradition, the Writer and Society: Critical Essays*, the latter a reprint of Wilson Harris's WISC pamphlet. In the decade that followed, Ivan Van Sertima's collection of essays, *Caribbean Writers* followed; this comprised recorded radio broadcasts (including some produced by the Transcription Centre). Reprinting out of print work by Caribbean authors were part of a programme to assert the continuity of Caribbean intellectual and literary life.

Brathwaite's doctoral work, *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica*, as well as Bernard Coard's pamphlet, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British School System* were also published, the latter in association with the Caribbean Education and Community Workers' Association. La Rose did not hive off the political from the aesthetic (or vice versa) and the wide range of New Beacon's titles - literature, criticism, education, politics, history - were characteristic of the press's broad mission even as his selling and networking trips to the Caribbean and to Africa testify to transnational commitments.

New Beacon's bookselling arm first based at the La Rose flat in Hornsey and later at Albert Road and Stroud Green in North London, was another factor in building an alternative publishing and bookselling dynamic focused on politically left and 'Third World', Black and Asian Minority Ethnic concerns. The New Beacon Book Service, as it was then called, started as a service provider for CAM (Walmsley, 1992: 90). Later, as a high street shop with a mail order service, it became a lively and welcoming community centre and meeting place for anti-colonial and anti-racist activities. Growing alongside the emergence of the black British community in London, the shop provided both important organisational focus, combining local engagement with transnational Caribbean awareness as visitors were both local and international, the latter drawn by the La Roses' activist and intellectual connections. Jeremy Poynting, who founded Peepal

Tree Press, a black British and Caribbean independent publishing house, in Leeds in 1985, was a frequent visitor from 1970s, commending its unique 'complex of commitments': bookselling, publishing and a 'grassroots political activism' and awareness that made simultaneous sense of what was happening in London, the Yorkshire coalfields, Port of Spain, Lagos, Soweto, New York.' (1991: 149)

Much like New Beacon, Bogle L'Overture also begun life in the living room of its founders, Eric and Jessica Huntley, later moving to rented premises in East London. Like New Beacon, the building in Chignell Road, West London, became both publishing house, specialist bookshop and grassroots cultural, political and intellectual activity hub. As a press, Bogle was formed in 1969 to publish the lectures of Walter Rodney, Guyanese historian and UWI lecturer. Rodney was a close friend and associate of the Huntleys through their joint political activities. When Rodney was prevented from re-entering Jamaica on account of his political activism, the Huntleys launched a London campaign to publicise Rodney's work. Rodney's lectures *The Groundings with My Brothers* and *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, addressed to ordinary black people, represented a Black Power-inflected indictment of poverty and underdevelopment as a consequence and legacy of imperialism on Africa, the Caribbean islands and North America.

Bogle continued to bring Black history, politics and literature to public attention, publishing work by what are now canonical black British writers such as Linton Kwesi Johnson, Valerie Bloom and Lemm Sissay. They also made available a range of political work, educational and children's writing. As with New Beacon, the bookshop became a community space where artists, writers, activities, students, teachers and parents met to promote, sustain and protect Black cultural interests in London and beyond. Both Bogle and New Beacon can be located as part of a vein of alternative radical (and feminist) bookshops with community interests, though many of these are no longer in operation. The list includes: the Black Panther Bookshop (Sabarr), Compendium, Collets, Silver Moon, Sisterwrite, Central Books and Gay's the Word in London,

Grassroots in Manchester, News from Nowhere in Liverpool, Frontline in Leicester, Greenleaf in Bristol, and Mushroom in Nottingham.

Given Bogle and New Beacon's grounding in the local communities and activist politics which included support for the Black Parents (BPM), the Black Youth movement (BYM) and Supplementary schools and police injustices campaigns, it was perhaps natural that they would work together to mount the influential International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books in London between 1982 and 1995. New Beacon, Race Today Publications and Bogle inaugurated the Book Fair committee in 1982 with Education for Liberation and Griot International Books joining them in 1987. These London-based, annual, self-financing book fairs affairs, were staged to grow 'radical ideas and concepts' given the 'the failure of the post war settlements' to address minority ethnic communities' needs and aspirations (inaugural flyer reproduced in White, Harris and Beezmohun, 2005: 74), though some satellite events spread to Manchester, Bradford, Leeds and also in Glasgow after 1985.

The International Book Fair and other small presses

The Book Fairs were not only bookselling and exhibition events but provided networking and consciousness-raising opportunities, platforms and debates on film, theatre, art, poetry, criticism and publishing. They included specific local political campaigns; they staged music and live poetry events. The initial roll call of publishers which attended the Book Fair may read like a who's who of presses with Black and Asian, feminist or political left interests, but by the nineties, while never losing its radical political impetus, the Book Fairs included exhibits from many more international and mainstream publishers. Stalls ranged from small and medium-sized London-based community publishers such as Black Ink, Karnak House, Shakti, Allison and Busby, Nubia, the Leeds-based Peepal Tree Press and *Wasafiri*; African presses such as Ikenga, Nok;

Caribbean presses such as Savacou, Susan Criag and Sangam Books; Indian presses such as Vikas, feminist presses such as the Women's Press, Virago and Kitchen Table; to larger commercial presses such as Andre Deutsch and educational presses such as Longman, Heinemann Educational Books/Heinemann International, Oxford University Press, Routledge and the University of the West Indies Presses.

The Book Fairs can be located within a growing movement of small publishing collectives in the late 70s and early 80s, many of which were run by self-help, democratising and consciousness-raising networks devoted to radical cultural, postcolonial and sexual-political struggles. Well-known feminist presses who also attended the fairs; Virago and The Women's Press were perhaps the biggest and best known of the women's presses that started life in the 1970s, but smaller collectives such as Onlywoman Press and Teeth Imprints also thrived and were important in encouraging and growing an audience for women's writing. The Black Ink Collective, founded in 1978 to give a platform to young Black British writers, also exhibited at the Book Fairs; with its Black Writers Workshop arm, the Collective provided a mentoring environment for a new generation of black British writers such as Benjamin Zephaniah, S I Martin, Desmond Johnson and Michael McMillan (Thomson-George, 2016).

Initially, feminist presses in the late seventies published mostly white women's writing but criticisms of the absence of women of colour in their publishing output led to the formation of other presses that served to remedy this lack. Smaller independent presses such as Sheba, established in 1980 as a not-for-profit workers' co-operative, sought to prioritize 'writing by women of colour, or lesbians, or working-class women'. Other notable smaller London houses include Karnak House, the publishing arm of the Intef Institute, an African-Caribbean arts and culture organization formed in 1975 which published Grace Nichol's award winning poetry collection, *i is a long memoried woman* (1983); Karia press who published Claudia Jones; Ogwugwu Afo started by Buchi Emecheta as a self-publishing venture for her own works - *Double Yoke*

(1982), *The Rape of Savi* (1983), and her autobiography, *Head Above Water* (1986); Tamarind, launched by Verna Wilkins in 1987 to address diversity in children's book publishing; the Asian Women's Writers Workshop (later Collective) inaugurated in 1984, which with the Women's Press and Virago, produced *Right of Way* (1989) and *Flaming Spirit* (1994); Mango Publishing, formed in 1995 by Joan Anim-Addo and Diana Birch to promote literature from British, Caribbean and Latin American traditions both in English and in translation. The international dimension of the women's movement meant that prominent Black American writers such the cultural theorist, bell hooks, or writers, Audre Lorde and Jewelle Gomez were published in Britain; such transnational dimensions were informed by continuities between Black Atlantic cultures and a preoccupation with identity politics within a growing local agenda of multiculturalism (Low, 2015: 89-90).

Not all London presses had political agendas writ large; Allison and Busby, founded in 1967 by Margaret Busby and Clive Allison, initially to produce affordable paperback poetry, published a diverse and eclectic list of international writers of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and children's books (including books by Jill Murphy). Allison and Busby also published many transatlantic writers of African descent including C.L.R. James, Nuruddin Farah, Buchi Emecheta, Ishmael Reed and Chester Himes before being acquired by WH Allen in 1987. After leaving the company, Busby, one of the first black women in publishing, went on to edit the influential *Daughters of Africa* (1992). This Jonathan Cape anthology offered a literary ancestry of Black women's writing across continents and historical periods and is now being updated and republished by Myriad, a small independent publishing house in Sussex.

Mainstream and Educational presses

Mainstream presses based in London in, particularly, the 1950s and 60s, published many writers

from Africa and the Caribbean. This substantial roll-call of writers – Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thionga, George Lamming, Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris, Edgar Mittelholzer, Samuel Selvon among others – are now established writers in their respective national and international world literature and postcolonial canons, and will be dealt with later in this volume by J Dillon Brown and Mpalive Msiska. The networks of friendships and patronage provided gateways into a metropolitan republic of letters, but many were also subsequently dropped by their publishers when publishing fashion moved on. Mittelholzer, for example, found it increasingly difficult to find a publisher for his work and some reviewers complained of 'a composite Caribbean author', a 'V Selvon Mittelholzer' writing 'sunnily of quaint brown lives'. (Brydon, 1963: 13). While these networks flourished, writers were sought after for overseas trips, and the extended cultural and educational networks already linking Britain, the Caribbean and West Africa assisted in the traffic of literary material. There were overlapping interests between writers of the nationalist period from abroad and London publishers and intellectuals. These synergies allowed the former to be incorporated into the latter in mutually beneficial ways.

Educational and textbook publishing contributed to the boom. Decolonisation had ironically paved the way for the flourishing of a metropolitan-produced textbook that catered for a changing curricular market abroad (Davies, 2013). The formation of the West African Examinations Council (1952) and the Caribbean Examinations Council (1973) led to a demand for textbooks with local interest and appeal, which in turn contributed to the flourishing fortunes of Heinemann Educational Books' pioneering African Writers Series (AWS) and Caribbean Writers Series, and a rash of similar work published by Longman, Nelsons, Collins and Macmillan.

Launched in 1962 with Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwesi and Kenneth Launda in a newly created cheap paperback format modelled on Penguins, AWS would over the course of the next twenty-two years publish a total of two hundred and seventy titles, including now well-known names such as Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah, the Botswanian writer

Bessie Head and the Nigerian born British writer Buchi Emecheta; the Series published Anglophone fiction predominantly but included but poetry, plays and nonfiction, and also some literature in translation. The success of the African Writers Series afforded HEB, a new and relatively small player in the postwar West African market, the opportunity to compete with the bigger and well-established educational publishing companies such as Oxford University Press and Nelsons, endowing Heinemann with brand recognition and enabling a generation of African writers to gain international recognition. (Currey, 2008; Ibrionke, 2009; Low, 2011).

Between 1966 and 1968, foundational anthologies by London-based publishers for an educational but also general readership appeared. Many educational firms had appointed specialist Caribbean editors to develop their lists. In the early 1970s, both Longman and Heinemann began reissuing Caribbean classics from the fifties. Longman republished George Lamming and Samuel Selvon's novels in paperback and Heinemann launching reprints of novels by Michael Anthony and Edgar Mittelholzer, VS Naipaul and Vic Reid. Later, Longman would commission original titles such as Lamming's *Water with Berries* (1973) *Natives of My Person* (1972), and Roy Heath's *A Man Come Home* (1974). The first title in the Longman's Drumbeat Series, a cross-market educational series of fiction, poetry and drama for Africa and the Caribbean appeared in 1979. The fortunes of educational and literary publishing linked up; publishers made general trade books widely available, applying the standards of mass production and suitability for school audiences to works of literary value, and in turn affecting adversely, or favourably, the economic, symbolic or cultural capital accruing to these texts.

Multicultural London:

Literary and educational publishing histories are therefore imbricated in the rise of postcolonial and black British writing for both the general and higher education markets. Decolonisation

turned into a commercial opportunity for mainstream metropolitan educational publishers both abroad and at home. A series that serviced parts of Africa, the Caribbean or Asia could also be commercially viable in Britain. Such crossovers were fortuitous, for example, with the African Writers Series, the Nigerian economic collapse in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the currency restrictions put in place to deal with the crisis, meant dwindling overseas orders resulted in the market focus change from Nigeria to the US and the UK as schools and higher educational curriculum were beginning feel the pressure towards cultural diversity.

Multiculturalism appeared to be gaining ground. Naseem Khan's groundbreaking study, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (1976), sponsored by the Commission for Racial Equality and the Arts Council of Great Britain, led to the formation of Minorities' Arts Advisory Service (MAAS) which in turn contributed to a flourishing of the black Arts movement, with magazines such as *Echo* and *Artrage* providing valuable fora for inter-cultural and inter-media activities. A new Ethnic Minority Arts Unit was created within the Arts Council of England, and in 1986, a two year Ethnic Minority Arts Action Plan was launched leading to a further report, *Towards Cultural Diversity*. A major British 'Conference on Ethnic Arts' was staged in 1982, sponsored by the Greater London Council (GLC). Following the findings, GLC funding was made available for small minority presses like Kala Press, Black Ink, *Wasafiri* and for workshops such as the Asian Women Writers' Collective.

The Association for the Teaching of Caribbean, African and Asian Literatures (ATCAL), formed in 1978 to 'advance the education of the British public in the works of authors of African, Caribbean and Asian origin'.⁴ ATCAL staged annual conferences, organized workshops, compiled booklists for schools (many lodged at the Commonwealth Institute), submitted recommendations to Examination Boards effecting change to GCSE and Advanced level syllabuses. A 1982 publicity pamphlet, draws attention to its intention to 'promote and encourage new writing by ... Black British artists.'⁵ ATCAL's 1985 conference theme was 'Black

British Experience in Literature'. Amongst other measures, ATCAL campaigned effectively in the 80s to include African, Caribbean, Asian and black British writers across the school and university curriculum (see Roger Bromley's chapter in volume). *Wasafiri*, a little magazine launched by Susheila Nasta at a 1984 ATCAL conference, offered serious critical and pedagogic space to promote these literatures that were not gaining adequate notice in the mainstream press. It outlived ATCAL and is now a National Portfolio organization founded by Arts Council England. It continues to sustain transnational cultural dialogue between an international community of diasporic writers and their audiences.

Conclusion

The spatial turn in cultural geography, following the work of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and Donna Massey, has taught us to see place not simply as physical terrain but as a web of social constructions and processes that constantly makes and remake the environment. In this sense, London is a constellation of competing forces – dynamic, contested and diverse territorialisations and de/re territorialisations – put into motion by different infrastructures, diverse social processes and everyday practices, drawing on varying histories and practices. Heterogeneous but also hierarchical postwar London(s) were formed from institutions, organisations, communities and diverse groups of individuals making material their entitlement to inhabit, to belong, to change or imagine a different future.

Once the heart of an Empire, the centre of a vast global traffic of capital, services, goods and people, postwar London was, and still is, a city of migration, diasporic settlements and cultural heterogeneity. In his 1986 assessment of the arts in Britain, Kwesi Owusu argues that 'Black arts' in London have benefited the flow and 'highest and most exciting concentrations of [resident and visiting] Third World artists' and that London's artistic efforts have in turn served

as a 'strategic resource' for Britain as a whole (78). In this chapter's exploration of postwar London staged by institutions, organisations and individuals all *performing* their contradictory and conflicting visions of a post-imperial city within global cultural trajectory, we have a dream of cosmopolitan post-imperial Britain imagined and then, fitfully, worked into being.

Notes

¹ Henry Swanzy to Mr Debysingh, 18 October 1948, Swanzy Box 1 (1945-52) Henry Swanzy Papers MS 42.

² Transcription Centre Programmes (Appendix G); 21.2 CCF Financial Correspondence 1961-1966, Transcription Centre Archives, Harry Ransom Centre.

³ Transcription Centre Programmes (Appendix N); 21.2 CCF Financial Correspondence 1961-1966, Transcription Centre Archives, Harry Ransom Centre.

⁴ ATCAL, undated 'draft proposal for possible funding organisations'.

⁵ Committee Notes, *ATCAL Newsletter* 6, June 1982, 1.

References

Alleyne, Brian. *Radicals Against Race: Black Activism and Cultural Politics*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002.

Bailkin, Jordanna. "The Sounds of Independence? Lessons from Africa and Beyond at the Transcription Centre Archive." *History Workshop Journal*, 78 (2014): 229-245.

Bradley, Sir Kenneth. "The New Commonwealth Institute." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 111 (1963): 403-411.

Brathwaite, Kamau. "John the Conqueror" in *Foundations of A Movement*, edited by John La Rose Tribute Committee, 20-23. London: John La Rose Tribute Committee, 1992.

Breiner, Laurence. *Black Yeats: Eric Roach and the Politics of Caribbean Poetry*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008.

Craggs, Ruth. "The Commonwealth Institute and the Commonwealth Arts Festival: Architecture, Performance and Multiculturalism in Late-Imperial London." *The London Journal* 36, no.1 (2011): 247-68.

Davies, Caroline. *Creating Postcolonial Literature*. Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Griffith, Glyne A. *The BBC and the Development of Anglophone Caribbean Literature, 1943-1958*. London, New York and Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Kalliney, Peter J. *Commonwealth of Letters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Lamming, George. *The Pleasures of Exile*, London: Michael Joseph, 1960.

Low, Gail. *Publishing the Postcolonial*, London and New York, 2011

----- (2015) "Publishing and Prizes" in *The History of British Women's Writing 1970-Present*, edited by Emma Parker and Mary Eagleton, 81-95. Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Moore, Gerald. "The Transcription Centre in the Sixties: Navigating in Narrow Seas."

-
- Research in African Literatures* 33, no.3 (2002): 167-181.
- Owusu, Kwesi. *The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain*, London: Comedia, 1986.
- Pinto, Samantha. "Decolonizing the Radio: Africa Abroad in the Age of Independence." December 17, 2012. <https://soundstudiesblog.com/tag/the-transcription-centre/> <accessed 16 January 2017>.
- Poynting, Jeremy. "Untitled" in *Foundations of A Movement*, edited by John La Rose Tribute Committee, 20-23. London: John La Rose Tribute Committee, 1992.
- Potter, Simon J. *Broadcasting Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Thomson-George, Desrie . "The Legacy of Black Ink", November 7, 2016 <http://thebookseller.com/blogs/legacy-black-ink-426351> <accessed 10 January 2017>.
- Walmsley, Anne. *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972*, London and Port-of-Spain: New Beacon Books, 1992.
- White, Sarah, Harris, Roxy, and Beezmohun, Sharmilla, eds. *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books - Revisited* (London: New Beacon and George Padmore Institute, 2005.
- Wintle, Claire. "Decolonising the Museum: the Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes." *Museum & Society*, 11, no. 2 (2013): 185-201.